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COVER IMAGE:

URUGUAY

Two sisters share a timely message with a store owner in Montevideo, capital of Uruguay

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Let God's Laws and Principles Train Your Conscience

For our conscience to be an effective guide, it must be trained. Jehovah has lovingly provided both laws and principles to help us fine-tune our conscience and view things the way he does. This article discusses how we can apply Bible principles in a practical way.

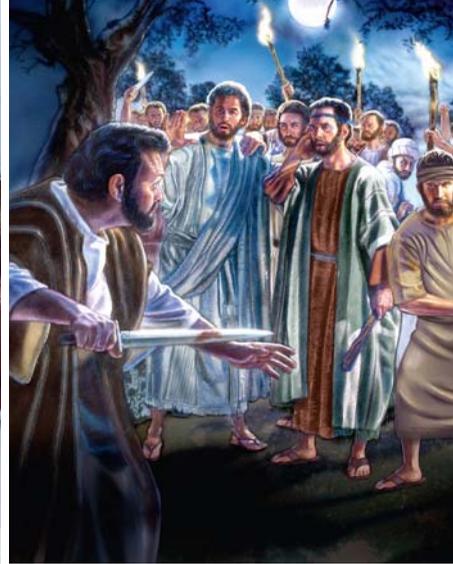
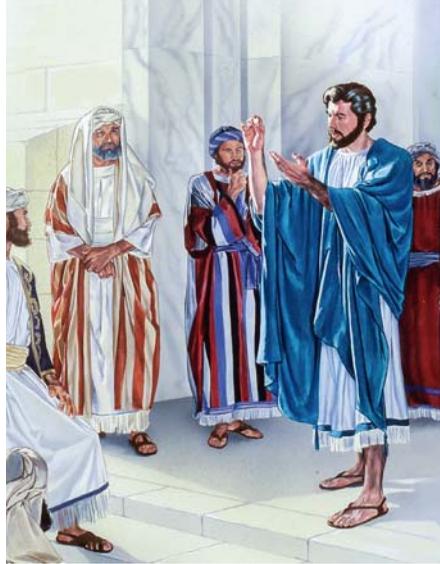
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SONGS:

15, 74

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How did Jesus show that he had no interest in political movements?

What balanced position on taxation did Jesus recommend?

What is the Christian's position on the use of violence?

“My Kingdom Is No Part of This World”

“For this I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.”—JOHN 18:37.

“FROM an early age, I saw only injustice,” recalls a sister in southern Europe, who was reflecting on her past. **“So I rejected the political system in my coun-**

1, 2. (a) How is the world becoming more divided? (b) What questions will we answer in this study?

try, and I supported what many viewed as radical ideas. In fact, for many years I was the girlfriend of a terrorist.” A brother in southern Africa had also previously justified violence. “I believed that my tribe was superior to all others, and I joined a political party,” he says. “We were taught to kill our opponents with spears—even those of our own tribe who supported other political parties.” A sister living in central Europe admits: “I was prejudiced, and I hated anyone who was of a different nationality or who had a religion that was different from mine.”

² A growing trend in today’s world is reflected in the attitudes that those three once had. Violent independence movements flourish, political divisions become more entrenched, and in many countries, foreigners are subjected to growing animosity. As the Bible foretold, people of all sorts are “not open to any agreement” during these last days. (2 Tim. 3:1, 3) While the world becomes more divided, how can Christians safeguard their unity? We can learn much by examining how Jesus handled a situation in the first century when the land was unsettled by political turmoil. Let us consider three main points: Why did Jesus refuse to get involved in separatist movements? How did he demonstrate the need for God’s servants to avoid taking sides on

political issues? And how did Jesus teach us that violence against others is not justified?

JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARD INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS

³ Many Jews to whom Jesus preached longed for independence from Rome. Jewish Zealots, or nationalists, stirred up these feelings among the people. Many of those extremists followed the ideas of Judas the Galilean. He was a false messiah in the first century who misled a large number. Jewish historian Josephus states that this Judas “incited his countrymen to revolt, upbraiding them as cowards for consenting to pay tribute to the Romans.” The Romans had Judas executed. (Acts 5:37) Some of the Zealots even resorted to violence to further their goals.

⁴ Apart from those extremists, ordinary Jews were keenly awaiting the arrival of a political Messiah. That is, they expected that when the Messiah appeared, he would bring glory to their nation and freedom from the yoke of Rome. (Luke 2:38; 3:15) Many believed that the Messiah would establish a kingdom on earth in Israel. When that occurred,

3, 4. (a) What political expectations did the Jews have in Jesus' day? (b) How did those sentiments affect Jesus' disciples?

millions of Jews scattered abroad would return to their homeland. Recall that John the Baptist once asked Jesus: “Are you the Coming One, or are we to expect a different one?” (Matt. 11:2, 3) John may have wanted to know whether someone else would fulfill all the hopes of the Jews. The two disciples who met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus also had unfulfilled hopes about the Messiah. (Read Luke 24:21.) Soon thereafter, Jesus’ apostles asked him: “Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”—Acts 1:6.

⁵ Such expectations about the Messiah doubtless led the people of Galilee to want Jesus to become their king. We can imagine that they were thinking that Jesus would be an ideal leader. He was an outstanding speaker; he could cure the sick; he could even supply food for the hungry. After Jesus fed about 5,000 men, he sensed the mood among the people. “Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and seize him to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain all alone.” (John 6:10-15) The following day on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, the enthusiasm may have died down some. Jesus then explained to the crowd the true nature

-
5. (a) Why did the people of Galilee want Jesus to be their king?
(b) How did Jesus correct their thinking?

of his work. He had come to bring spiritual, not material, benefits to the nation. “Work, not for the food that perishes, but for the food that remains for everlasting life,” he told them.—John 6:25-27.

⁶ Shortly before his death, Jesus realized that some of his followers were expecting him to set up an earthly kingdom centered in Jerusalem. He corrected that idea by giving them the illustration of the minas. It showed that Jesus, the “man of noble birth” would have to go away for a long time. (Luke 19:11-13, 15) Jesus also stated his neutral position to the Roman authorities. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus: “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33) Perhaps the governor feared that Jesus could cause political unrest, a principal concern throughout Pilate’s rule. Jesus answered: “My Kingdom is no part of this world.” (John 18:36) He would not get involved in politics, for his Kingdom was to be a heavenly one. He told Pilate that his work on earth was to “bear witness to the truth.”—Read John 18:37.

⁷ When we understand our assignment as clearly as Jesus understood his, we will avoid even lending

6. How did Jesus make clear that he did not seek political power on earth? (See opening picture.)

7. Why may it be a challenge to avoid giving tacit support to independence movements?



Is your focus on the world's problems or on God's Kingdom?
(See paragraph 7)

tacit, or unspoken, support for political independence movements. This may not be easy. “People in our area are becoming more and more radical,” notes one traveling overseer. “A nationalistic spirit has taken over, and many take for granted that political independence will improve their lives. Thankfully, the brothers have safeguarded their Christian unity by concentrating on preaching the good news of the Kingdom. They look to God to solve injustice and the other problems we face.”

HOW DID JESUS FACE DIVISIVE POLITICAL ISSUES?

⁸ Injustice often inflames political passions. Taxation was a hot political issue in Jesus' time. In fact, the rebellion of Judas the Galilean, mentioned earlier, was sparked by a registration to ensure that the people paid tribute to Rome. Subjects of Rome, including those who listened to Jesus, were required to pay many taxes, such as on goods, land, and houses. And the corruption of the tax collectors increased the sense of being under a heavy burden. Tax collectors might purchase a position of authority at a public auction and then profit from what was collected. Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho, had become rich by extorting money from the people. (Luke 19:2, 8) His course was probably typical of that of many.

⁹ Jesus' enemies tried to trap Jesus by getting him to take sides on a taxation issue. The tax in question was the "head tax," a tax of one denarius levied on Roman subjects. (Read Matthew 22:16-18.) The Jews especially resented this tax. It repre-

8. Give an example of the burden faced by first-century Jews.

9, 10. (a) How did Jesus' enemies try to get him involved in a political issue? (b) What do we learn from Jesus' response? (See opening picture.)

sented their subjection to Rome. The “party followers of Herod” who raised this issue hoped that if Jesus denounced the tax, he might be accused of sedition. If Jesus said that taxation was a necessary burden, he could lose the support of his followers.

¹⁰ Jesus was careful to remain neutral on the taxation issue. “Pay back . . . Caesar’s things to Caesar, but God’s things to God,” he said. (Matt. 22:21) Of course, Jesus knew that corruption was common among tax collectors. But Jesus did not want to get sidetracked, diverted from the much more important issue. That was God’s Kingdom, which would be the real solution. He thereby set the example for all his followers. They should avoid becoming involved in political issues, no matter how right or just a certain cause might seem. Christians seek the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. They do that instead of forming strong opinions about, or speaking out against, certain unjust practices.—Matt. 6:33.

¹¹ Many of Jehovah’s Witnesses have succeeded in moving away from strong political views that they once held. “After taking social studies classes at the university, I developed radical views,” says a sister

11. How can we in a positive way channel our desire for justice?

in Great Britain. “I wanted to champion the rights of black people, since we had suffered so much injustice. Although I was good at winning arguments, I still ended up feeling frustrated. I did not realize that the causes of racial injustice had to be uprooted from people’s hearts. When I began to study the Bible, however, I realized that I had to start with my own heart. And it was a white sister who patiently helped me to make the journey. Now I am serving as a regular pioneer in a sign-language congregation, and I am learning to reach out to all kinds of people.”

“RETURN YOUR SWORD TO ITS PLACE”

¹² In Jesus’ day, religion was often mixed up in politics. The book *Daily Life in Palestine at the Time of Christ* notes that “the religious sects into which the Jews were divided corresponded more or less to what we term political parties.” So Jesus warned his disciples: “Keep your eyes open; look out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” (Mark 8:15) That reference to Herod likely refers to the party followers of Herod. Politically, the Pharisees supported Jewish independence. Matthew’s

12. What kind of “leaven” did Jesus tell his disciples to avoid?

account reveals that Jesus also mentioned the Sadducees in this conversation. They wanted to keep the status quo. Many of their members enjoyed political power under the Roman administration. Jesus emphatically warned his disciples to stay clear of the teachings, or leaven, that these three groups advocated. (Matt. 16:6, 12) Interestingly, this conversation took place not long after the occasion when the people wanted to make Jesus king.

¹³ When religion is mixed with politics, violence can easily erupt. Jesus taught his disciples that they must maintain neutrality in these circumstances. That is related to the reason why the chief priests and the Pharisees planned to kill Jesus. They saw him as a political and religious rival who threatened their position. “If we let him go on this way, they will all put faith in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation,” they said. (John 11:48) Thus, High Priest Caiaphas took the lead in plotting Jesus’ death.—John 11:49-53; 18:14.

¹⁴ Caiaphas sent soldiers to arrest Jesus under the cover of night. Jesus was aware of this shameful

13, 14. (a) How did political and religious issues lead to violence and injustice? (b) Why does injustice not justify violence? (See opening picture.)

strategy, so during his final meal with the apostles, he asked them to get some swords. Two would be sufficient to teach them a vital lesson. (Luke 22:36-38) Later that night, Peter used a sword to attack a member of the mob. No doubt, he was incensed at the injustice of Jesus' nighttime arrest. (John 18:10) But Jesus told Peter: "Return your sword to its place, for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword." (Matt. 26:52, 53) This powerful lesson was in harmony with what Jesus prayed about earlier that night—they must be no part of the world. (Read John 17:16.) Fighting injustice was something to be left to God.

¹⁵ The sister in southern Europe mentioned earlier learned this same lesson. "I have seen that violence does not bring justice," she observes. "I saw that those who resort to violence often end up dead. And many others become embittered. I was so happy to learn from the Bible that only God can bring true justice to the earth. For the last 25 years, that is the message I have been preaching." The brother in southern Africa has replaced his spear with "the sword of the spirit," God's Word, as he

15, 16. (a) How has God's Word helped Christians to avoid conflict? (b) What contrast does Jehovah see when he observes today's world?

preaches a message of peace to his neighbors, whatever their tribe. (Eph. 6:17) And after becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses, the sister in central Europe married a brother from an ethnic group she formerly hated. All three made these changes because they desired to be like Christ.

¹⁶ And how important these changes are! The Bible likens humanity to a sea that tosses and turns, a sea that knows no peace. (Isa. 17:12; 57:20, 21; Rev. 13:1) While political issues stir people up, divide them, and provoke senseless violence, we maintain our peace and unity. And as Jehovah observes our divided world, it must warm his heart to see the unity that exists among his people.—**Read Zephaniah 3:17.**

¹⁷ We have seen that we can promote Christian unity in three ways: (1) We put our trust in God's heavenly Kingdom to correct injustice, (2) we refuse to take sides in political issues, and (3) we reject violence. Sometimes, however, our unity can be threatened by prejudice. The following article will look at how we can successfully face this challenge, as Christians did in the first century.

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17. (a) What are three ways in which we can promote unity?
(b) What will we consider in the following article?



SONGS:

24, 99

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What sort of prejudices did Jesus' early disciples have to overcome?

What first-century examples prove that people can overcome disunity?

What can we do to promote more unity among God's people today?

May We All Be One as Jehovah and Jesus Are One

"I make request . . . that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in union with me."—JOHN 17:20, 21.

JESUS was concerned about unity during his final supper with his apostles. When praying with them, he spoke of his desire that all his disciples be one, just

1, 2. (a) What request did Jesus make in his final prayer with his apostles? (b) Why might Jesus have been concerned about unity?

as he and his Father are one. (Read John 17:20, 21.) Their unity would give a powerful witness, offering clear evidence that Jehovah had sent Jesus to the earth to do God's will. Love would be a mark of Jesus' true disciples that would contribute to their unity.—John 13:34, 35.

² Jesus' emphasis on unity is understandable. He had noticed a lack of unity or harmony among the apostles, such as during his final meal with them. As had happened before, a dispute arose over "which one of them was considered to be the greatest." (Luke 22:24-27; Mark 9:33, 34) Another time, James and John requested that Jesus give them prominent places alongside him in his Kingdom.—Mark 10:35-40.

³ Desire for prominence, however, was not the only potential cause of disunity among Christ's disciples. The people of the land were divided by animosity and prejudice. Jesus' disciples would need to overcome those feelings. In this article, we will consider the following questions: How did Jesus deal with prejudice? How did he help his followers learn to treat others impartially and be truly united? And how will his teaching help us to keep united?

3. What factors may have contributed to a lack of unity among Christ's disciples, and what questions will we consider?

PREJUDICE THAT JESUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS FACED

⁴ Jesus himself was subjected to prejudice. When Philip told Nathanael that he had found the Messiah, Nathanael replied: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) Apparently, Nathanael knew of the prophecy at Micah 5:2 and considered Nazareth too insignificant to be the Messiah’s hometown. Similarly, prominent Judeans despised Jesus because he was a Galilean. (John 7:52) Many Judeans viewed the people of Galilee as inferior. Other Jews sought to insult Jesus by calling him a Samaritan. (John 8:48) The Samaritan people were ethnically and religiously distinct from the Jews. Both Judeans and Galileans had little respect for the Samaritans and avoided them.—John 4:9.

⁵ Jewish leaders likewise heaped scorn on Jesus’ followers. The Pharisees classed them as among the “accursed people.” (John 7:47-49) Yes, they considered anyone who had not studied at the rabbinic schools or who did not keep their traditions to be contemptible and ordinary. (Acts 4:13, ftn.) The prejudice that Jesus and his disciples suffered was

-
4. Give examples of prejudice shown toward Jesus.
 5. What prejudice did Jesus’ followers experience?

rooted in religious, social, and ethnic divisions. The disciples too were affected by prejudice. To be united, they would have to change their mind-set.

⁶ Today, most of us are surrounded by prejudice. We could be victims, or we ourselves might hold some prejudices. “My hatred for white people grew as I focused on the injustice that was inflicted on the Aboriginal people—past and present,” explains a sister who is now a pioneer in Australia. “This hatred was also fueled by the abuse I had personally experienced.” A Canadian brother mentioned the prejudice he once had concerning language. “I thought French-speaking people were superior,” he admits. “And I developed animosity toward English-speaking people.”

⁷ Feelings of prejudice in our time can be deeply ingrained, just as they were in Jesus’ day. How did Jesus deal with them? First, he rejected prejudice, being totally impartial. He preached to rich and poor, Pharisees and Samaritans, even tax collectors and sinners. Second, by his teaching and example, Jesus showed his disciples that they must overcome suspicion or intolerance toward others.

6. Use examples to show how prejudice can affect us.

7. How did Jesus deal with prejudice?

CONQUERING PREJUDICE WITH LOVE AND HUMILITY

⁸ Jesus taught his followers a fundamental principle that underlies our unity. “All of you are brothers,” he said. (Read Matthew 23:8, 9.) Of course, one sense in which we are “brothers” is that all of us have descended from Adam. (Acts 17:26) But there is more. Jesus explained that his disciples were brothers and sisters because they recognized Jehovah as their heavenly Father. (Matt. 12:50) In addition, they had become members of one large spiritual family, united by love and faith. Thus in their letters, the apostles often referred to fellow disciples as ‘brothers and sisters.’—Rom. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:17; 1 John 3:13.*

⁹ After making it clear that we should view one another as brothers and sisters, Jesus stressed the

* The term “brothers” can include female members of the congregation. Paul addressed his letter to the “brothers” in Rome. That clearly included sisters, several of whom he mentioned by name. (Rom. 16:3, 6, 12) *The Watchtower* has long described Christian believers as ‘brothers and sisters.’

8. What fundamental principle underlies Christian unity? Explain.
9, 10. (a) Why did the Jews not have reason for racial pride?
(b) How did Jesus teach a lesson in overcoming racial prejudice?
(See opening picture.)

need for humility. (Read Matthew 23:11, 12.) As noted, undue pride among his apostles led to some disunity. And pride of race could also have been a problem. Did the Jews have reason to be proud because they were descendants of Abraham? Many Jews had that deep-seated conviction. But John the Baptist told them: “God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.”—Luke 3:8.

¹⁰ Jesus condemned racial pride. He used an opportunity to do so when a scribe asked: “Who really is my neighbor?” In answer, Jesus gave an illustration of a Samaritan who kindly cared for a traveler—a Jew—who had been beaten by thieves. Passing Jews ignored this unfortunate man, whereas the Samaritan took pity on him. Jesus concluded his story by telling the scribe to be like that Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus showed that a Samaritan could teach the Jews the meaning of true neighborly love.

¹¹ To fulfill their commission, Jesus’ disciples needed to conquer the pride and prejudice they had. Before ascending to heaven, he assigned them to bear witness to “all Judea and Samaria, and to the most distant part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Jesus had

11. Why did the disciples of Christ need to view foreigners impartially, and how did Jesus help them understand that?

earlier prepared them for such an extensive assignment by drawing their attention to good qualities in foreigners. He praised a foreign army officer for his outstanding faith. (Matt. 8:5-10) In his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus spoke of how Jehovah had favored foreigners, such as the Phoenician widow from Zarephath and the Syrian leper Naaman. (Luke 4:25-27) And Jesus not only preached to a Samaritan woman but he spent two days in a Samaritan town because of the people's interest in his message.—John 4:21-24, 40.

FIGHTING PREJUDICE IN THE FIRST CENTURY

¹² It was not easy, however, for the apostles to put aside their prejudice. They were surprised to see that Jesus was willing to teach a Samaritan woman. (John 4:9, 27) Jewish religious leaders would not talk to a woman in public, let alone a Samaritan woman with a questionable reputation. The apostles urged Jesus to eat. But his reply indicated that he was so absorbed in the spiritual discussion that his hunger could be ignored. Preaching—even to a Sa-

12, 13. (a) How did the apostles react when Jesus taught a Samaritan woman? (See opening picture.) (b) What shows that James and John did not fully get the point?

maritan woman—was the will of his Father, and it was like food for him.—John 4:31-34.

¹³ James and John did not grasp this lesson. When journeying with Jesus through Samaria, the disciples sought overnight lodging in a Samaritan village. The Samaritans refused to receive them, so James and John angrily suggested calling down fire from heaven to destroy the entire village. Jesus firmly rebuked them. (Luke 9:51-56) We may wonder if James and John would have reacted the same way if the inhospitable village had been in their home region of Galilee. It seems likely that prejudice had kindled their animosity. It could be that the apostle John felt embarrassed about his rash outburst when he later enjoyed a successful preaching campaign among the Samaritans.—Acts 8:14, 25.

¹⁴ Not long after Pentecost 33 C.E., an issue of discrimination arose. When distributing food to needy widows, Greek-speaking widows were overlooked. (Acts 6:1) Prejudice about language may have been a factor. The apostles quickly rectified matters by appointing qualified men to handle the food distribution. All these spiritually qualified men had Greek names. This may have made them more acceptable to the offended widows.

14. How was an issue that may have involved language resolved?

¹⁵ In 36 C.E., the disciple-making work became much more international. The apostle Peter had a custom of associating only with Jews. But after God made it clear that Christians should not be partial, Peter preached to Cornelius, a Roman soldier. (Read Acts 10:28, 34, 35.) Thereafter, Peter enjoyed food and association with Gentile believers. Years later, though, Peter stopped eating with non-Jewish Christians in the city of Antioch. (Gal. 2:11-14) In that case, Paul gave Peter a fitting reproof, which he evidently accepted. When Peter wrote his first letter to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, he spoke warmly about the *whole* association of brothers.—1 Pet. 1:1; 2:17.

¹⁶ Clearly, the apostles did learn from Jesus' example to love "all sorts of men." (John 12:32; 1 Tim. 4:10) Although it took time, they adjusted their way of thinking. The early Christians gained a reputation of loving one another. Tertullian, a second-century writer, quoted non-Christians as saying: "They love one another . . . They are ready even to die for one another." Putting on "the new personality," the early Christians came to view

15. How did Peter make progress in showing impartiality to everyone? (See opening picture.)

16. What reputation did early Christians gain?

all people as equal in the sight of God.—Col. 3: 10, 11.

¹⁷ Today, we too may need time to uproot prejudice from our heart. A sister in France describes her battle: “Jehovah has taught me what love means, what sharing means, what loving people of all kinds means. But I am still learning to overcome prejudice toward others, and it is not always easy. That is why I continue praying about it.” A sister in Spain faces a similar battle: “I sometimes struggle with my feelings of animosity toward a certain ethnic group, and I succeed most of the time. But I know that I need to keep on fighting. Thanks to Jehovah, I am happy to belong to a united family.” Each of us can make a sincere self-analysis. Might we personally need to fight some feelings of prejudice, as do these two sisters?

PREJUDICE WITHERS AS LOVE GROWS

¹⁸ It is good to remember that at one time we were all “strangers,” or foreigners, not close to God. (Eph. 2:12) But Jehovah drew us to him “with the cords of love.” (Hos. 11:4; John 6:44) And Christ

17. How can we uproot prejudice from our heart? Give examples.

18, 19. (a) What reasons do we have to welcome everyone?
(b) How can we do this in practical ways?

welcomed us. He opened the door, as it were, so that we could become part of God’s family. (Read Romans 15:7.) Since Jesus has kindly accepted us, as imperfect as we are, it should be unthinkable for us to reject anyone else!

Servants of Jehovah seek the wisdom from above and are united in love
(See paragraph 19)



¹⁹ Divisions, prejudice, and hostility will doubtless increase in the world as we approach the end of this wicked system. (Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:13) As servants of Jehovah, though, we seek the wisdom from above, which is impartial and promotes peace. (Jas. 3:17, 18) We rejoice as we forge friendships with people from other lands, accepting cultural differences and possibly even learning the languages of others. When we do this, peace flows just like a river, and justice like the waves of the sea.—Isa. 48:17, 18.

²⁰ “The floodgates of true knowledge were opened to me,” says the Australian sister mentioned earlier. She acknowledges how a study of the Bible affected her, saying: “I was molded with a new heart and mind. So all the ingrained prejudice and hatred melted away before my eyes.” And the Canadian brother says that he now realizes that “ignorance is often the mother of racism and that people’s qualities do not depend on their place of birth.” He married an English-speaking sister! Such changes in attitude are a testimony to the fact that Christian love can and does conquer prejudice. It unites us with an unbreakable bond.—Col. 3:14.

20. What happens when love molds our minds and hearts?



SONGS:
127, 88

**HOW WOULD YOU
ANSWER?**

How can your conscience serve as a moral compass?

Why is it important that we grow to love God's laws?

How is our progress toward maturity related to our conscience?

Let God's Laws and Principles Train Your Conscience

"I ponder over your reminders."
—PS. 119:99.

ONE thing that makes humans superior to animals is the fact that humans have been endowed with a conscience. That has been true ever since man has been on the earth. After Adam and Eve broke Jehovah's law, they hid them-

1. What is one thing that makes humans superior to animals?

selves. This indicates that their conscience was both-
ering them.

² Those with a poorly trained conscience can be likened to a ship that is navigating with a defective compass. Setting off on a journey without an accurate compass can be treacherous. The winds and currents of the ocean can easily throw a ship off course. A properly calibrated compass can help the captain to keep the ship on course. Our conscience can be likened to a moral compass. It is an inner sense of right or wrong that can guide us in the right direction. But in order for our conscience to be an effective guide, it must be properly adjusted, or calibrated.

³ When a person's conscience is not properly trained, it does not act as a restraint from wrongdoing. (1 Tim. 4:1, 2) Such a conscience might even convince us that "bad is good." (Isa. 5:20) Jesus warned his followers: "The hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he has offered a sacred service to God." (John 16:2) That was true of those who murdered the disciple Stephen, and it has been true of others like them. (Acts 6:8, 12; 7:54-60)

2. How can our conscience be like a compass? (See opening picture.)

3. What can result when a conscience is not properly trained?

How ironic that in committing such evil crimes as murder, religious fanatics violate the very laws of the One whom they claim to worship! (Ex. 20:13) Clearly, their consciences are treacherous guides!

⁴ How can we prevent our conscience from becoming ineffective? The laws and principles contained in God’s Word are “beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness.” (2 Tim. 3:16) Therefore, by diligently studying the Bible, meditating on what it says, and applying it in our lives, we can train our conscience to be more sensitive to God’s thinking, and it can thus serve as a reliable guide. Let us consider how Jehovah’s laws and principles can help us to train our conscience.

LET GOD’S LAWS TRAIN YOU

⁵ In order to benefit from God’s laws, we need to do more than simply read them or become acquainted with them. We must grow to love and respect them. God’s Word says: “Hate what is bad, and love what is good.” (Amos 5:15) But how do we actually do that? A key is to learn to view things the way Jehovah views them. To illustrate: Imagine that you

-
4. How can we prevent our conscience from becoming ineffective?
5, 6. How do we benefit from following God’s laws?

are having difficulty sleeping well. Your doctor prescribes a program involving diet, exercise, and lifestyle changes. After trying the program, you find that it works! You probably would greatly appreciate your doctor for helping you to improve the quality of your life.

⁶ In like manner, our Creator has given us laws that can protect us from the damaging effects of sin and thus improve our life. Think about how we benefit from following the Bible's laws about lying, scheming, stealing, sexual immorality, violence, and spiritism. (Read Proverbs 6:16-19; Rev. 21:8) When we experience the rich rewards that come from doing things Jehovah's way, our heart naturally grows in love and appreciation for both Jehovah and his laws.

⁷ Thankfully, we do not need to suffer the consequences of breaking God's laws to learn valuable lessons. We can learn from the mistakes of others whose transgressions are recorded in God's Word. Proverbs 1:5 says: "A wise person listens and takes in more instruction." Indeed, we receive the very best instruction from God, such as when we read and meditate on real-life Bible accounts. For

7. Reading and meditating on real-life Bible accounts can help us to do what?

example, think of the pain that King David experienced after he disobeyed Jehovah's command and committed adultery with Bath-sheba. (2 Sam. 12:7-14) While reading and meditating on this account, we might ask ourselves: 'How could King David have avoided the heartache he suffered because of his adulterous act with Bath-sheba? If I faced a similar temptation, would I have the strength to turn away? Would I flee like Joseph, or would I give in like David?' (Gen. 39:11-15) By reflecting on the bad consequences of sin, we can strengthen our heart to "hate what is bad."

⁸ We may well stay far away from practices that God hates. Yet, there are other activities or aspects of life about which the Scriptures provide no specific command. In such areas, how can we determine what is acceptable and pleasing to God? That is where our Bible-trained conscience comes into play.

⁹ Jehovah has lovingly given us principles that work in conjunction with our Bible-trained conscience. He himself says: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One guiding you in the way you should walk." (Isa. 48:17, 18) By using our mind and heart to reason on Bible

8, 9. (a) What purpose does our conscience serve? (b) How do Jehovah's principles and our conscience interact?

principles, we correct, direct, and mold our conscience. That, in turn, helps us to make wise decisions.

LET GOD'S PRINCIPLES GUIDE YOU

¹⁰ A principle is a fundamental truth or doctrine that is used as a basis of reasoning or action. To understand a principle includes understanding the thinking of the Lawgiver and the reasons why he gave certain laws. Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught basic truths to help his disciples recognize the consequences of certain attitudes or actions. For example, he taught that resentment can lead to violence and that lust can lead to adultery. (Matt. 5: 21, 22, 27, 28) To help us have a conscience that is properly trained, we should let godly principles guide us and thus bring glory to God.—1 Cor. 10:31.

¹¹ On certain matters, two different Christians with Bible-trained consciences might come to opposite conclusions. Consider the use of alcoholic beverages. The Bible does not condemn the moderate use of alcohol. It does, however, warn against the excessive use of alcohol, as well as drunkenness. (Prov. 20:1; 1 Tim. 3:8) Does this mean that a

10. What are principles, and how did Jesus use them effectively?

11. How may consciences differ?



A mature Christian is sensitive to the conscience of others
(See paragraphs 11, 12)

Christian has no other factors to consider as long as his use of alcohol is moderate? Not at all. While he may be at peace with his own conscience, the Christian must also consider the conscience of others.

¹² Regarding the need for a Christian to be sensitive to the conscience of others, Paul wrote: “It is best not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything over which your brother stumbles.” (Rom. 14:21)

12. How can the words found at Romans 14:21 move us to respect the conscience of others?

Would you be willing to forgo things that are within your right if you could thus avoid stumbling a brother whose conscience differs from yours? No doubt you would. Before they came to a knowledge of the truth, some of our brothers abused alcohol, but now they are determined to abstain from it. Surely, none of us would want to contribute to a brother's falling back into a course that would cause him great harm! (1 Cor. 6:9, 10) Therefore, it would be unloving for a host to pressure a brother to drink alcohol if he has declined to do so.

¹³ While likely in his late teens or early 20's, the young man Timothy submitted to painful circumcision in order to avoid stumbling Jews to whom he was going to preach. His attitude was similar to that of the apostle Paul. (Acts 16:3; 1 Cor. 9:19-23) Like Timothy, are you willing to make personal sacrifices for the good of others?

“PRESS ON TO MATURITY”

¹⁴ All Christians should want to move “beyond the primary doctrine about the Christ” and to “press on

13. How did Timothy set a good example in promoting Kingdom interests?

14, 15. (a) What is involved in growing to maturity? (b) In what way is demonstrating love for others related to Christian maturity?

to maturity.” (Heb. 6:1) This does not happen automatically. We need to “press on,” or keep working at it. Growing to maturity involves advancing to an increased level of knowledge and insight. That is why we have repeatedly been encouraged to read a portion of the Bible daily. (Ps. 1:1-3) Have you made that a personal goal? Doing such reading can give you greater insight into Jehovah’s laws and principles and a deeper understanding of God’s Word.

¹⁵ The foremost law for Christians is the law of love. Jesus told his disciples: “By this all will know that you are my disciples—if you have love among yourselves.” (John 13:35) Jesus’ half brother James called love “the royal law.” (Jas. 2:8) Paul said: “Love is the law’s fulfillment.” (Rom. 13:10) This emphasis on love is not surprising, since the Bible tells us that “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) God’s love is not reflected merely in sentiment. John wrote: “By this the love of God was revealed in our case, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we might gain life through him.” (1 John 4:9) Yes, God’s love moved him to action. To the extent that we demonstrate love for Jehovah and his Son, for our Christian brothers, as well as for others of mankind, we give evidence of our Christian maturity.—Matt. 22:37-39.



As we reason on godly principles,
our conscience becomes a more reliable guide
(See paragraph 16)

16 As you advance toward Christian maturity, you will find that principles become more important to you. That is because laws may apply to a specific situation, whereas principles are far broader

16. As we progress spiritually toward maturity, why do principles become more important to us?

in application. For example, a young child does not understand the dangers of bad associations, so a discerning parent will set rules to protect him. (1 Cor. 15:33) But as the child matures, his thinking ability develops, and he is able to reason on Bible-based principles. Thus, he can increasingly make wise decisions in choosing his associates. (Read 1 Corinthians 13:11; 14:20.) When we reason on godly principles, our conscience increasingly becomes a more reliable guide, attuned to God’s thinking.

¹⁷ Do we have everything we need to make wise decisions that please Jehovah? Yes. By making skilled use of the laws and principles found in God’s Word, we will be “fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) Therefore, search for Scriptural principles in order to ‘perceive what the will of Jehovah is.’ (Eph. 5:17) Make good use of study aids provided through the Christian congregation, such as the *Watch Tower Publications Index*, the *Research Guide for Jehovah’s Witnesses*, the *Watchtower Library*, the *Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY*, and the *JW Library* app. These tools are designed to help us get the most out of our personal and family study.

17. Why can we say that we have what we need to make wise decisions?

A BIBLE-TRAINED CONSCIENCE BRINGS BLESSINGS

¹⁸ Blessings result from observing Jehovah’s laws and principles, as we read at Psalm 119:97-100: “How I do love your law! I ponder over it all day long. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, because it is with me forever. I have more insight than all my teachers, because I ponder over your reminders. I act with more understanding than older men, because I observe your orders.” We can increasingly act with wisdom, insight, and understanding if we take the time to “ponder over” God’s laws and principles. With diligent effort, we can attain “the measure of stature that belongs to the fullness of the Christ” as we let God’s laws and principles train our conscience.—Eph. 4:13.

18. What blessings result when we act in harmony with Jehovah’s laws and principles?



SONGS:
77, 59

**HOW WOULD YOU
ANSWER?**

In addition to engaging in the ministry, in what other ways can we let our light shine?

How is Christian unity involved in drawing attention to the truth?

Why is keeping on the watch so important today?

“Let Your Light Shine” to Glorify Jehovah

“Let your light shine before men, so that they may . . . give glory to your Father.”—MATT. 5:16.

HOW thrilling it is to hear of increases that Jehovah’s people are experiencing! Last year we regularly conducted over 10,000,000 Bible studies. This certainly indicates that God’s servants are letting their light shine! And think of the millions of interested ones

1. What special cause for joy do we have?

whom we welcomed at the Memorial. They could thus learn of the love that God expressed when he provided the ransom.—1 John 4:9.

² Worldwide, Jehovah’s people speak many different languages. However, this does not prevent us from offering united praise to our Father, Jehovah. (Rev. 7:9) No matter what our mother tongue is or where we live, we can shine “as illuminators in the world.”—Phil. 2:15.

³ The increase we observe, the unity we enjoy, and the watchful attitude that we strive to maintain all contribute to our bringing glory to Jehovah. In this article, we will discuss how that is accomplished.—Read Matthew 5:14-16.

EXTEND THE INVITATION

⁴ “No one could be faithful and true to the Lord in these remaining days . . . unless he would avail himself of the opportunity of letting his light shine.” That was a comment in the article “Light in the Darkness,” published in *The Watch Tower* of June 1,

2, 3. (a) What obstacle does not prevent us from “shining as illuminators”? (b) In view of Jesus’ words recorded at Matthew 5:14-16, what will we consider?

4, 5. (a) In addition to preaching, how can we let our light shine? (b) What benefits may come from our kind demeanor? (See opening picture.)

1925. The article then explained: “He must do this by telling the good news to the peoples of the earth, and by conforming himself to the ways of light.” Clearly, one way we let our light shine is by preaching the good news and making disciples. (Matt. 28: 19, 20) In addition, we can glorify Jehovah by our Christian conduct. Householders and passersby observe our behavior. Our friendly smile and warm greeting say much about who we are and what kind of God we worship.

⁵ “When you enter the house,” Jesus told his disciples, “greet the household.” (Matt. 10:12) In the area where Jesus and the apostles often preached, it was not unusual for people to invite strangers into their homes. Today, this is not the custom in many places. Still, your positive, friendly manner as you explain why you are there can often allay a householder’s concern or ease his irritation. A pleasant smile is often the best introduction. That has also proved true when brothers and sisters engage in public witnessing using a literature cart. As you share in that form of service, you may find that people often react favorably to a pleasant smile and greeting. It may move them to approach us and take one of our publications. Your kind demeanor can also help you to start a conversation.

⁶ An elderly couple in England have health issues that severely limit their house-to-house ministry. They decided to let their light shine right outside their home. They display some Bible publications on a table at the time when parents come to pick up their children from a nearby school. Curiosity has prompted many to obtain copies of *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volumes 1 and 2, as well as brochures. A pioneer sister from their congregation joined them in their witnessing initiative. Her friendly manner and the couple’s genuine, sincere efforts prompted one of the parents to accept a Bible study.

⁷ In recent years, many countries have experienced an influx of refugees. What can you do to help such ones come to know Jehovah and his purpose? For a start, why not learn a greeting in the languages commonly spoken by newcomers in your area? The *JW Language* app is a tool that can help you do that. Additionally, why not learn a few phrases that may capture their interest? You might then be able to direct them to jw.org and show them the variety of videos and publications available in their language.—Deut. 10:19.

6. How did one elderly couple expand their ministry?

7. What help can you offer to newcomers in your area?

⁸ Jehovah lovingly provides the Life and Ministry Meeting so that we can become more effective in the field ministry. The practical instruction we receive at this meeting helps many of us feel more confident about making return visits and conducting Bible studies.

⁹ Many newcomers have observed that our children participate at meetings. Parents, help your children to let their light shine by teaching them to comment in their own words. Their simple, heartfelt expressions have sometimes prompted newly interested ones to recognize the ring of truth.—1 Cor. 14:25.

PROMOTE UNITY

¹⁰ Another way to let your light shine is by promoting unity in your family and in your congregation. One way parents can do so is by arranging for a regular Family Worship program. Many include watching JW Broadcasting sometime during the month. After viewing the program, why not take time to discuss how to apply the points that were

8, 9. (a) What practical help do we receive at our midweek meetings? (b) How can parents help their children to participate at meetings?

10. What role does family worship play in promoting unity?

featured? When presiding over family worship, the parent should remember that the guidance a young child needs may well differ from that of a teenager. Make suitable application of the study material so that each member of the family benefits.—Ps. 148: 12, 13.

¹¹ How can young ones promote unity in the congregation and thus encourage others to let their light shine? If you are a Christian youth, why not make it your aim to take an interest in older ones? You might respectfully ask them to relate an experience from their years of service. You will find this very upbuilding, and both you and they will be even more motivated to let the light of truth shine. And all of us can make it a point to welcome those who attend meetings at the Kingdom Hall. Your doing so will promote unity and may move visitors to want to share in letting their light shine. Your efforts can include greeting visitors with a friendly smile, perhaps even helping new ones to their seats. Try to introduce them to others, thus making newcomers feel at home.

¹² If you are assigned to handle a meeting for field service, you can do much to help older ones to have

11-13. How can all promote unity in the congregation and help others to let their light shine?

a share in the ministry. Do they have suitable territory? In some cases, you may choose to assign them to work with a younger companion who can provide physical support. You can also show understanding to those whose health and circumstances limit what they can do. Yes, your consideration and discernment can help young and old, experienced and less experienced, to preach the good news with zeal. —Lev. 19:32.

¹³ The psalmist was moved to exclaim: “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Read Psalm 133:1, 2.) By being together, the Israelites benefited greatly from the good influence of others who worshipped Jehovah. It was like



Taking an interest
in older ones is
very upbuilding
(See paragraph 11)

anointing oil that was both pleasant and refreshing. Why not be resolved to have a positive influence, promoting unity among your brothers and sisters? If you are already doing so, that is commendable. Could you “widen out,” that is, do it to a greater extent and more consistently?—2 Cor. 6:11-13, ftn.

¹⁴ What about increasing your efforts to let the light of Bible truth shine in your neighborhood? Your kind words and deeds may well attract a neighbor to the truth. Ask yourself: ‘How do my neighbors view me? Do I keep my home and property tidy, thus reflecting well on the neighborhood? Do I take the initiative to be helpful to others?’ When you are in conversation with other Witnesses, why not draw them out on how their kindness and good conduct have affected relatives, neighbors, workmates, or schoolmates? It is quite likely that you will hear positive experiences.—Eph. 5:9.

KEEP ON THE WATCH

¹⁵ Our attitude comes into the picture as we strive to increase the extent to which we let our light shine. Jesus repeatedly exhorted his disciples: “Keep on the watch.” (Matt. 24:42; 25:13; 26:41) Obviously, if

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14. What can you do to let your light shine in the neighborhood?
 15. Why is keeping on the watch vital?

we believe that the “great tribulation” is a long way off, that it will come sometime but not in our lifetime, we will lack a sense of urgency with regard to the preaching work. (Matt. 24:21) Instead of shining brilliantly in our neighborhood, our light will flicker and could even go out.

¹⁶ As these critical times worsen, all of us need to keep on the watch. When Jehovah acts, it will be at the right time. There is no question about that. (Matt. 24:42-44) Meanwhile, exercise patience, being ever watchful. Read God’s Word each day, and be vigilant with a view to prayers. (1 Pet. 4:7) Take note of sterling examples of brothers and sisters whose lives reflect their joy in keeping on the watch as well as letting their light shine. One fine example is the experience recounted in the article “Seventy Years of Holding On to the Skirt of a Jew,” published in *The Watchtower* of April 15, 2012, pages 18-21.

¹⁷ Fill your life with upbuilding activity and association. That will bring you great joy, and it will seem to you that time is passing quickly. (Eph. 5:16) A century ago, our brothers were busy and accomplished much. But we are accomplishing much more today under Jehovah’s guiding hand. We are letting

16, 17. What can you do to maintain a watchful attitude?



Shepherding visits offer us the opportunity
to seek wisdom from God's Word
(See paragraphs 18, 19)

our light shine to an extent that could not have been imagined previously.

¹⁸ It is faith-strengthening to know that our imperfection does not stop us from serving Jehovah acceptably. Consequently, appreciate Jehovah's provision of "gifts in men," congregation elders. (Read Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12.) The next time an elder visits you, take advantage of the opportunity to draw on his wisdom and benefit from his advice.

18, 19. How can congregation elders help us to be vigilant and active? Illustrate.

¹⁹ Two elders in England responded to a call from a married couple who were having problems. The wife felt unevenly yoked spiritually. Her husband admitted that he was not the best teacher and did not arrange for regular family worship. The elders directed the couple's attention to Jesus' example. He took care of his disciples and considered their needs. The elders urged the husband to imitate Jesus. They encouraged the wife to be patient. The elders also gave the couple some practical suggestions on how they could work together to have family worship with their two children. (Eph. 5:21-29) Later the elders commended the husband for his efforts. They encouraged him to persevere and to rely on holy spirit to help him become a good spiritual head. Their loving interest and support have helped this family to let their light shine.

²⁰ "Happy is everyone who fears Jehovah, who walks in His ways," sang the psalmist. (Ps. 128:1) When you let your light shine—by inviting others to serve God, by conducting yourself in a way that promotes unity, and by maintaining a watchful attitude—you will find increased happiness. Others will see your fine works, and many will be moved to give glory to our Father.—Matt. 5:16.

20. What can you expect as you let your light shine?

He Could Have Had GOD'S FAVOR



WE SERVE Jehovah and want his favor, do we not? But to whom will God grant his favor and blessing? Some in Bible times enjoyed his approval even though they had formerly committed grave sins. Others who had admirable qualities failed to win God's approval. So we might ask, "What is Jehovah primarily looking for in each of us?" The example of Rehoboam, king of Judah, can help us find the answer.

A SHAKY START

Rehoboam's father was Solomon, who reigned in Israel for 40 years. (1 Ki. 11:42) Solomon died in 997 B.C.E. Then Rehoboam traveled north from Jerusalem to Shechem to be anointed as king. (2 Chron. 10:1) Do you imagine that he was apprehensive about following in the footsteps of

Solomon, who was known for his extraordinary wisdom? How could Rehoboam foresee that soon his own ability to resolve complex issues would be tested?

Rehoboam must have found the atmosphere in Israel thick with tension. In time, representatives of the people came to him and set their concerns squarely before him: “Your father made our yoke harsh. But if you make the harsh service of your father easier and you lighten the heavy yoke he put on us, we will serve you.”—2 Chron. 10:3, 4.

Rehoboam may have felt trapped! If he met the people’s demands, he, his family, and those of his court might have to cut back on some luxuries and make fewer demands on the people. On the other hand, if he refused, the people might rebel. What would he do? The new king first consulted with the older men who had been counselors to Solomon. However, then Rehoboam sought advice from younger men, those of his own age. Following their advice, Rehoboam decided to treat the people harshly. He answered: “I will make your yoke heavier, and I will add to it. My father punished you with whips, but I will do so with scourges.”—2 Chron. 10:6-14.

Do you see a lesson for us? Clearly, there is often wisdom in listening to older, spiritually mature

ones. Having the benefit of experience, they may perceive the likely outcome of a decision and thus give us good advice.—Job 12:12.

“THEY OBEYED THE WORD OF JEHOVAH”

In response to the revolt, Rehoboam mustered his army. But Jehovah intervened through the prophet Shemaiah, saying: “You must not go up and fight against your Israelite brothers. Each one of you must return to his house, for I have caused this to happen.”—1 Ki. 12:21-24.*

Not even put up a fight? You can imagine how that would have troubled Rehoboam! What would people think of the king who threatened to punish his subjects “with scourges” yet soon yielded to this flagrant rebellion? (Compare 2 Chronicles 13:7.) Nevertheless, the king and his armies “obeyed the word of Jehovah and went back home, as Jehovah had told them.”

What is the lesson for us? It is wise to obey God even if doing so might expose us to some ridicule. Obedience to God leads to his favor and blessing.—Deut. 28:2.

* Because of Solomon’s unfaithfulness, God had already indicated that the kingdom would be split.—1 Ki. 11:31.

What was the result for Rehoboam? Obediently abandoning his plan to fight the newly established nation, he turned his attention to building cities in the tribal territories of Judah and Benjamin over which he still reigned. He reinforced a number of cities “to a very great degree.” (2 Chron. 11:5-12) More important, for a time he adhered to Jehovah’s laws. As the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam sank into idolatry, many from there “supported Rehoboam” by traveling to Jerusalem to take their stand for true worship. (2 Chron. 11:16, 17) Thus, Rehoboam’s obedience strengthened his kingship.

SIN—AND A MEASURE OF REPENTANCE

When his kingship was firmly established, however, Rehoboam did something unexpected. He abandoned the law of Jehovah in favor of pagan worship! But why? Was he acting under the influence of his mother, who was an Ammonitess? (1 Ki. 14:21) Whatever his reasons, the nation as a whole followed him. Jehovah therefore allowed King Shishak of Egypt to capture many Judean cities, despite Rehoboam’s having fortified them! —1 Ki. 14:22-24; 2 Chron. 12:1-4.

Matters came to a head when Shishak reached Jerusalem, where Rehoboam reigned. At this point,

Shemaiah the prophet delivered God's message to Rehoboam and his princes: "You have abandoned me, so I have also abandoned you to the hand of Shishak." How did Rehoboam respond to that message of discipline? Commendably! The Bible reports: "The princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said: 'Jehovah is righteous.'" Hence, Jehovah rescued Rehoboam and Jerusalem from destruction.—2 Chron. 12:5-7, 12.

Thereafter, Rehoboam continued to reign over the southern kingdom. Before his death, he generously distributed gifts among his many sons, evidently to discourage any revolt against their brother Abijah, his successor. (2 Chron. 11:21-23) In this, Rehoboam showed a measure of insight that he did not display earlier.

GOOD OR BAD?

His merits notwithstanding, Rehoboam failed to gain God's favor. The Bible sums up his reign, saying: "He did what was bad." Why? Because "he had not resolved in his heart to search for Jehovah."—2 Chron. 12:14.

Think of the implications: Rehoboam obeyed God sometimes. And he did some good things in behalf

of Jehovah's nation. But he failed to cultivate a close bond with Jehovah or a fervent desire to please him. Thus, he fell into wrongdoing and false worship. You might wonder: 'When Rehoboam did respond to divine correction, was he acting primarily under the influence of others rather than out of heartfelt repentance and a desire to please God?' (2 Chron. 11:3, 4; 12:6) Later in life he returned to doing what was bad. How different he was from his grandfather, King David! Yes, David made mistakes, but his life was characterized by love for Jehovah, devotion to true worship, and genuine repentance over his transgressions.—1 Ki. 14:8; Ps. 51:1, 17; 63:1.

We certainly can learn a lesson from Rehoboam. It is commendable when people provide for their families and strive to accomplish something worthwhile. But to enjoy divine favor, we must first and foremost support true worship and stick to it.

This we will likely do if we strive to maintain a deep love for Jehovah. Just as we stoke a fire to keep it alive, we need to keep our love for God burning by regularly studying his Word, meditating on what we read, and persevering in prayer. (Ps. 1:2; Rom. 12:12) Our love for Jehovah will, in turn, ignite our desire to please him in all that we do. It will

move us, if at times it is needed, to genuine repentance. Unlike Rehoboam, we will remain steadfast in true worship.—Jude 20, 21.



Unlike King David, Rehoboam failed to cultivate a close bond with Jehovah



THE POWER OF A GREETING

“HELLO! How are you today?”

No doubt you have often used a greeting such as that. You may even have accompanied your greeting with a handshake or a hug. Customs and words used may differ from place to place, but the basics of a greeting are much the same. In fact, not offering or responding to a greeting may be taken as unloving or as evidence of bad manners.

But not all people are inclined to greet others. Some hesitate to extend a greeting out of shyness or low self-worth. Some find it difficult to greet others who are of a different race, culture, or social standing. However, even a brief greeting can have very positive effects.

Ask yourself: ‘What can a greeting accomplish? And what can God’s Word teach me about greetings?’



GREET “MEN OF ALL SORTS”

When the apostle Peter welcomed the first Gentile, Cornelius, into the Christian congregation, he said: “God is not partial.” (Acts 10:34) Later, Peter wrote that God “desires all to attain to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9) We might initially associate those texts with a person who is learning the truth. But Peter also exhorted Christians: “Honor men of all sorts, have love for the whole association of brothers.” (1 Pet. 2:17) Would it not, then, be good for us to greet others irrespective of their race, culture, or background? That would be part of showing them honor and love.



The apostle Paul urged those in the congregation: “Welcome one another, just as the Christ also welcomed you.” (Rom. 15:7) Paul took special note of brothers who had proved to be “a strengthening aid” to him. How much more so do brothers and sisters today need strengthening as we face Satan’s intense attack against God’s people.—Col. 4:11, ftn.; Rev. 12:12, 17.

Scriptural examples show that greetings can do more than make others feel welcome.

REASSURANCE, ENCOURAGEMENT, LOVE

When it came time for the Son of God to have his life transferred to the womb of Mary, Jehovah sent



an angel to speak to her. “Greetings, you highly favored one,” the angel began, “Jehovah is with you.” Mary was “deeply disturbed,” uncertain why an angel was speaking to her. Seeing this, the angel said: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” He explained that it was God’s purpose for her to give birth to the Messiah. Rather than remain disturbed, Mary obediently replied: “Look! Jehovah’s slave girl! May it happen to me according to your declaration.”—Luke 1:26-38.

It was a privilege for the angel to act as Jehovah’s messenger; yet, he did not consider it beneath him to address an imperfect human. He started off with a greeting. Can we learn from that example? We

should be ready to greet others and encourage them. With just a few words, we can help others and give them confidence that they are really a part of Jehovah's people.

Paul came to know many in congregations throughout Asia Minor and Europe. His letters contain many specific greetings. We see this from Romans chapter 16. Paul sent greetings to many fellow Christians. He mentioned Phoebe, "our sister," and urged the brothers to "welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the holy ones and give her whatever help she may need." Paul greeted Prisca and Aquila, "to whom not only I but also all the congregations of the nations give thanks." He greeted some who are essentially unknown today—"my beloved Epaenetus" as well as "Tryphaena and Tryphosa, women who are working hard in the Lord." Yes, Paul readily greeted his brothers and sisters.—Rom. 16:1-16.

Imagine the joy it brought them to know that they were remembered fondly. How their love for Paul and one another must have deepened! And hearing those loving greetings surely encouraged other Christians, helping them to remain firm in the faith. Yes, greetings that express genuine personal

interest and commendation fortify friendships and unite loyal servants of God.

When Paul landed at the port of Puteoli and headed up toward Rome, local Christians came south to meet him. Upon seeing them from a distance, Paul “thanked God and took courage.” (Acts 28:13-15) At times, we may be able only to smile or wave as a greeting. Yet, even that can uplift a person, perhaps one who is depressed or sad.

A COMMON GROUND

The disciple James needed to give strong counsel. Some Christians were becoming spiritual adulteresses by having friendship with the world. (Jas. 4:4) But take note of how James began his letter:

“James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes that are scattered about: Greetings!” (Jas. 1:1) His readers no doubt found it easier to accept his advice when they saw from his greeting that they had the same standing before God. Yes, a humble greeting can open the way even for a discussion of serious matters.

A truly effective greeting, however short, should be sincere and reflect genuine love. That is so even if it seems to go unnoticed. (Matt. 22:39) A sister in Ireland once arrived at the Kingdom Hall just as

the meeting was about to start. As she hurried in, one brother turned, smiled, and said: “Hello. It’s really good to see you.” The sister simply took her seat.

A few weeks later, she approached the brother and mentioned that for some time she had been coping with a distressing situation at home. “I felt so upset that evening,” she said, “that I almost did not come to the Kingdom Hall. I cannot remember much of the meeting, except your greeting. It made me feel really welcome. Thank you.”

That brother had been unaware of the powerful effect of his brief greeting. “When she told me what those few words meant to her,” he observes, “I was so glad I made the effort. It made me feel good too.”

Solomon wrote: “Cast your bread on the waters, for after many days you will find it again.” (Eccl. 11:1) By being conscious of the value of our greetings, especially to fellow Christians, we enrich others as well as ourselves. So let us never underestimate the power of a greeting.



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