



THE WATCHTOWER
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

JULY 1, 2012

When
You
Pray,
WHO
LISTENS?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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FROM OUR COVER

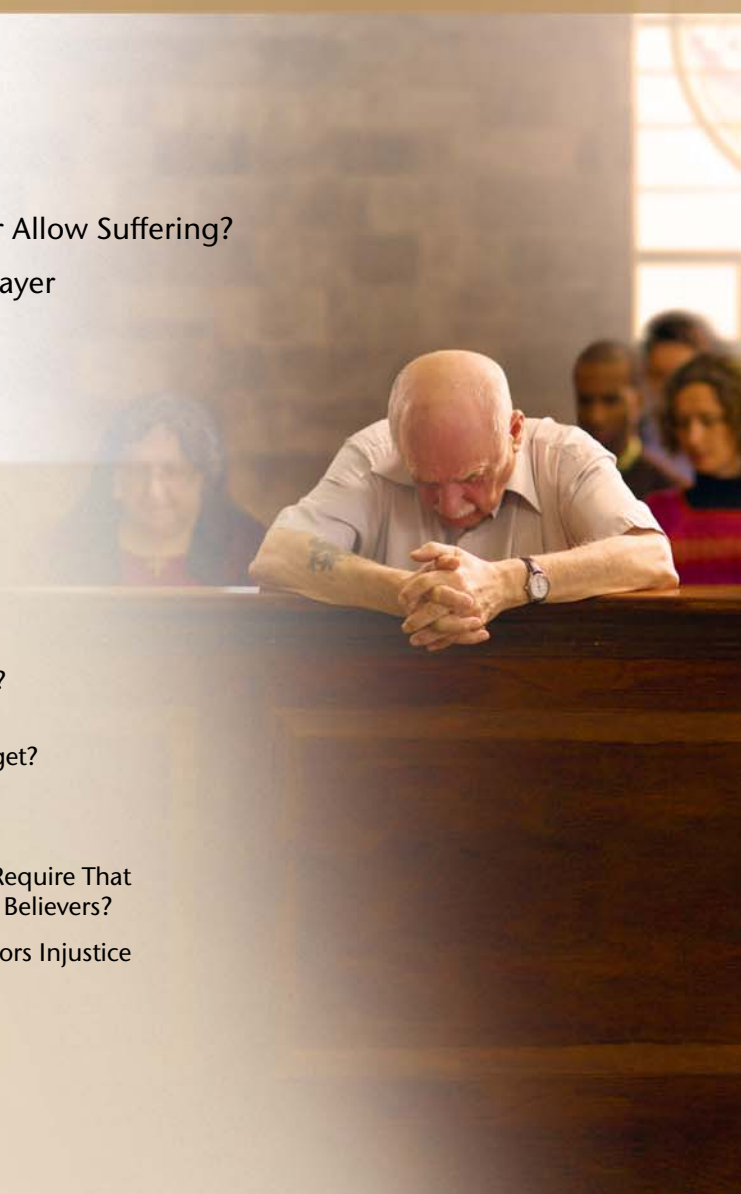
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Does Anyone Hear Prayers?

"I used to have doubts about God's existence.

Yet, sometimes I would pray anyway. I was unsure if anyone was listening, but I must admit that I did hope that someone was out there. I was unhappy and had no purpose in life. I was afraid to believe in God because I thought that only weak people believed in God."—PATRICIA,* IRELAND.

CAN you relate to Patricia's feelings? Do you pray even if you have doubts about whether God exists? If so, you are far from alone. Consider the following.

- A poll of 2,200 British people revealed that only 22 percent believe that there is a personal God who created the world and who hears prayers. Yet, of those polled, 55 percent pray at least occasionally.

- A survey of 10,000 people on four continents showed that of the respondents who describe themselves as atheists, almost 30 percent pray.

Why Do They Doubt?

An Englishman named Allan says: "I used to say that I didn't believe in God because I thought that religion was invented to control people and to make money. Also, if there were a God, I reasoned, then there would not be so much injustice. Yet, sometimes I would sit quietly and talk to 'something.' I would also ask myself, 'How did I get here?'"

Each person with such feelings has his own reasons for doubting whether prayers are answered. In many cases, the doubts may be fueled by unanswered questions, such as the following:

- Is there a Creator?
- Why is religion so often an influence for bad?
- Why does God allow suffering?

If you could know the answers to those questions, would you feel more confident about praying?

* Some names in this series of articles have been changed.



Who is the Hearer of Prayer?

IF THERE is a Hearer of prayer, logically he must be the Creator. Who else but the One who designed the human brain could read your thoughts? Who else could respond to prayers and provide mankind with the help they need? But you may wonder, 'Is it rational to believe in a Creator?'

Many people think that to believe in a Creator, you have to deny the evidence of modern science. But the assumption that belief in God is incompatible with science is simply not true. Consider the following.

■ A recent study of 1,646 professors of science at 21 elite universities in the United States found that only a third chose the statement "I do not believe in God" to describe their view.

The fact is that a number of scientists believe in the existence of God.

Evidence of a Creator

Do we have to accept without proof that the Hearer of prayer exists? Not at all. The idea that faith means believing without evidence is a mistaken notion. The Bible defines faith as "the *evident* demonstration of realities though not beheld." (Hebrews 11:1) Another translation says that faith "makes us certain of realities we do not see." (*The New English Bible*) For example, you cannot see radio waves, but your cell phone clearly demonstrates the reality of those invisible waves that transmit voices; so you accept that such waves exist. Similarly, although we cannot see the Hearer of prayer, we can review available evidence that can give us the conviction that he must exist.

Where can we find evidence that God exists? We need only look around us. The Bible

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reasons this way: “Of course, every house is constructed by someone, but he that constructed all things is God.” (Hebrews 3:4) Do you agree with the logic of that statement? Perhaps when you contemplate the order of the universe, the origin of life, or the design of that most complex of all structures on earth, the human brain, you reason that something higher than humans must exist.*

But there is a limit to what nature can teach us about God. Observing evidence of God in creation is like hearing the footsteps of someone approaching behind a closed door. You know that someone is there, but who is it? To find out, you need to open the door. We need to do something similar in order to identify the Someone behind creation.

The Bible is a door to knowledge about God. When you open that door and consider some of its detailed prophecies and their fulfillment, you will find evidence that God exists.[#] But more than that, the record of God’s dealings with people shows the very personality of the Hearer of prayer.

What Is the Hearer of Prayer Like?

The Bible reveals the Hearer of prayer to be a person—one whom you can know. Surely only a person can listen with understanding.

* For a more detailed discussion of the evidence of God’s existence, see the brochure *The Origin of Life—Five Questions Worth Asking* and the book *Is There a Creator Who Cares About You?* both published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

[#] The brochure *A Book for All People* and the book *The Bible—God’s Word or Man’s?* are published by Jehovah’s Witnesses to help you to consider evidence that the Bible is inspired of God.

Sadly, it is religion that causes many to doubt that there is a compassionate Hearer of prayer. Religion’s involvement in war, terrorism, and the toleration of child abuse has led even prayerful people to say, “I don’t believe in God.”

Why is religion often an influence for bad? Put simply: Bad people have done bad things in the name of religion. The Bible foretold that Christianity would be hijacked and used for evil ends. The apostle Paul told Christian

overseers: “From among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves.”—Acts 20:29, 30.

Does Religion Make You Doubt?

God is disgusted with false religion. In fact, God’s Word, the Bible, holds false religion responsible for “the blood . . . of *all* those who have been slaughtered on the earth.” (Revelation 18:24) Because false religion has failed to teach people about the true God, whose very essence is love, those religions are bloodguilty in God’s eyes.—1 John 4:8.

The Hearer of prayer feels for the victims of oppressive religion. Soon, God’s love for mankind will move him to judge all religious hypocrites by means of Jesus. Jesus said: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?’ . . . Yet then I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness.”—Matthew 7:22, 23.

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[#] Braille also available.

^o CD also available.

^{oo} MP3 CD-ROM also available.

^o Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

It is reassuring to read: “O Hearer of prayer, even to you people of all flesh will come.” (Psalm 65:2) He hears those who pray to him in faith. And he has a name. The Bible says: “*Jehovah* is far away from the wicked ones, but the prayer of the righteous ones he hears.”—Proverbs 15:29.

Jehovah has feelings. He is “the God of love” and is called “the happy God.” (2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Timothy 1:11) Concerning his reaction at a time when evil was especially rampant, the Bible says: “He felt hurt at his heart.” (Genesis 6:5, 6) The claim that God causes suffering in order to test people is untrue. The Bible says: “Far be it from the

true God to act wickedly.” (Job 34:10) Nevertheless, you may wonder, ‘If God is the almighty Creator, why does he allow suffering to continue?’

Jehovah has granted mankind the ability to exercise free will, and that tells us something about what God is like. Do we not treasure our freedom to choose how we will live? But sadly, many people misuse their freedom and cause suffering for themselves and others. Now here is a question worth thinking long and hard about: How could God eliminate suffering without taking away man’s freedom? We will examine this question in the next article.

Why Does the Hearer of Prayer **Allow Suffering?**

EVEN though they may pray, some people have doubts that God exists. Why do they doubt? Perhaps it is because they see so much suffering in this world. Have you ever wondered why God allows suffering?

Did God really make humans as they are now—imperfect and subject to suffering? We could hardly respect a god who would purpose for humans to suffer. But consider this: If you walked admiringly around a new car only to find that the far side was damaged, would you assume that the manufacturer made it that way? Of course not! You would conclude that the manufacturer made it “perfect” and that someone or something else caused the damage.

Similarly, when we admire the marvelous order and design in the natural world and

then notice the chaos and corruption that blight the human family, what conclusion should we draw? The Bible teaches that God made the first human pair perfect but that later they caused themselves to become damaged. (Deuteronomy 32:4, 5) The good news is that God has promised to repair the damage—to restore obedient humans to perfection. Why, though, has he waited so long?

Why So Long?

The reason has to do with the question of who should rule mankind. Jehovah never intended that humans should rule themselves. He was to be their Ruler. The Bible itself says: “It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step.” (Jeremiah 10:23) Sadly, the first humans chose to rebel against God’s rulership. Their lawless act made them



sinners. (1 John 3:4) As a result, they lost their perfection and caused damage to themselves and their offspring.

For thousands of years, Jehovah has allowed humans to rule themselves, and history has demonstrated that humans do not have the ability to do so. It shows that all human governments cause suffering. Not one has ever eliminated war, crime, injustice, or disease.

How Will God Undo the Damage?

The Bible promises that God will soon bring about a righteous new world. (2 Peter 3:13) Only those who choose of their own free will to show love to one another and to God will be allowed to live in it.—Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, 19, 20.

The Bible also says that in “the day of judgment” that is fast approaching, God will eliminate suffering and those who cause it. (2 Peter 3:7) Thereafter, God’s appointed Ruler, Jesus Christ, will govern obedient humans. (Daniel 7:13, 14) What will Jesus’ rulership achieve? The Bible says: “The meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.”—Psalm 37:11.

As heavenly King, Jesus will undo the damage—including sickness, aging, and death—that resulted when humans rebelled against Jehovah, “the source of life.” (Psalm 36:9) Jesus will cure all those who accept his loving rulership. Under his rule, these Bible promises will come true:

■ “No resident will say: ‘I am sick.’ The people that are dwelling in the land will be those pardoned for their error.”—Isaiah 33:24.

■ “[God] will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”—Revelation 21:4.

Is it not comforting to know that soon God will fulfill his promise to end all suffering? Meanwhile, we need not lose confidence that he hears our prayers just because he presently allows suffering.

God is there. He can hear you, even your expressions of pain and sorrow. And he is eager to see you live to enjoy the time when all your doubts and pain will be gone.

Draw Close to the Hearer of Prayer

MANY who claim to believe in God cannot give a sound basis for their faith. Nor can they explain why religion is often bad or why God allows suffering. At best, they can pray only to a God they do not comprehend.

You, however, can draw closer to God than that. You can build your faith on an understanding of God that makes you love and appreciate him. Genuine faith is based on evidence. (Hebrews 11:1) If you learn the truth about God, you can know him and speak to him as a friend. Consider the experiences of some who used to pray even though they had doubts about God’s existence.

■ *Patricia, mentioned in the opening article.* “One day I was with a group of about ten friends when they began discussing religion. I had told them that I walked out of the house to escape the discussion between my dad, who was an atheist, and one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, who had called at our home. ‘Maybe Jehovah’s Witnesses have something,’ said one of my friends.

“‘Why don’t we go to one of their meetings to find out?’ said another. And that is just what we did. Although we were skeptical, some of us continued attending simply because the Witnesses were so friendly.

“However, one Sunday I heard something that changed my attitude. The speaker explained why people suffer. I had never before appreciated that man was originally made perfect and that sin and death started with one man and then spread to all mankind. The speaker also explained why Jesus’ death was necessary to restore mankind to what the first man had lost.* (Romans 5:12, 18, 19) Suddenly, everything made sense to me. ‘There really is a God who cares about us,’ I thought. I continued studying the Bible and soon, for the first time in my life, I found that I could pray to someone who is real.”

■ *Allan, also mentioned in the opening article.* “One day Jehovah’s Witnesses called at

* For more information about the ransoming value of Jesus’ death, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Genuine faith is based on evidence and a desire to know the truth about God

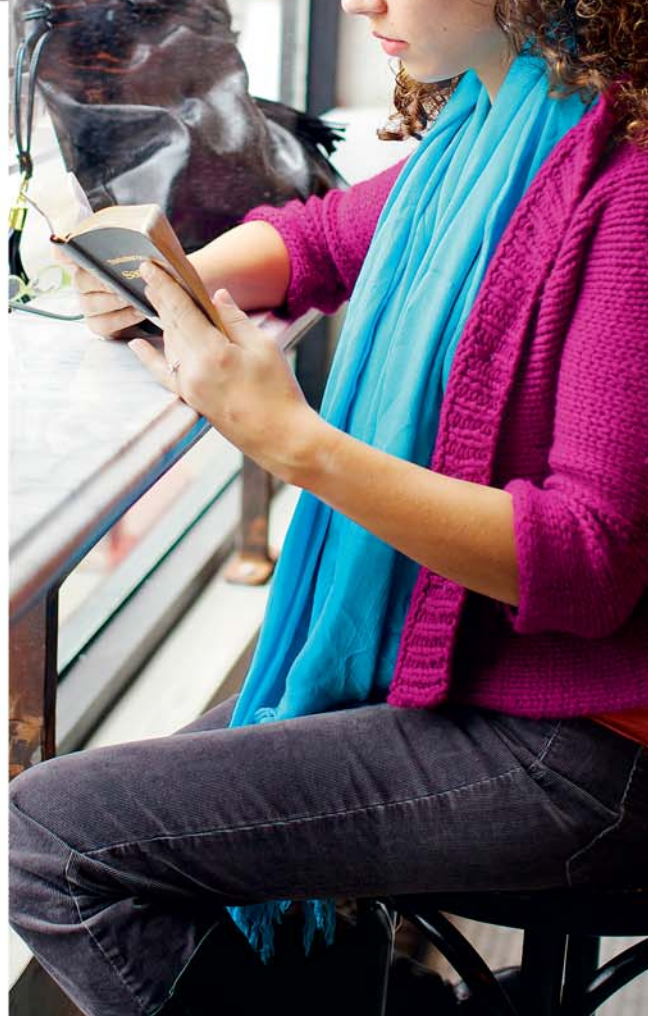


our home, and my wife invited them in because she was interested in what they said about living forever on earth. I was annoyed. So, leaving the visitors in the front room, I got my wife into the kitchen and told her, 'Don't be foolish. You can't believe things like that!'

"'Well, then, you just go in there and prove them wrong,' she replied.

"Of course, I could not prove anything. But they were very kind and left me a book about whether life originated by means of creation or evolution. Its logic was so clear and well supported that I decided I ought to know more about God. I began studying the Bible with the Witnesses, and soon I realized that what it says is very different from everything I had previously assumed about religion. As I learned about Jehovah, I began to pray to him more specifically. I had some attitudes that were not very nice, so I prayed for help. I feel sure that Jehovah answered my prayers."

■ *Andrew, who lives in England.* "Although I had strong opinions and a keen interest



in science, I believed the theory of evolution merely because other people said it was proved. I rejected belief in God because of all the bad things that happen.

“Yet, sometimes I would think: ‘If there is a God up there, then I want to know what it all means. Why is there so much crime and war?’ When in difficulty, I sometimes prayed for help, but I did not know whom I was speaking to.

“Then someone gave my wife the tract published by Jehovah’s Witnesses entitled *Will This World Survive?* I had often pondered that exact question. The tract made me wonder about the Bible, ‘Might its answers

“As I came to understand Jehovah’s purpose, I felt that I knew him as a real person, someone I could freely speak to in prayer”

be worth considering?’ Later, while I was on holiday, someone gave me the book *The Bible—God’s Word or Man’s?** When I realized that the Bible is in harmony with true science, I felt that I needed to learn more about the Bible. So when one of Jehovah’s Witnesses offered to study it with me, I accepted. As I came to understand Jehovah’s purpose, I felt that I knew him as a real person, someone I could freely speak to in prayer.”

■ *Jan, who was brought up as a Protestant in London.* “The hypocrisy in religion and the prevalence of suffering led me to give up religion. I also gave up college and began singing and playing the guitar for money. That was when I met Pat. He had been raised as a Catholic and had become a disbeliever like me.

“We lived in an abandoned house along with several other dropouts who were in-

* Published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

terested in Eastern religions. Late into the nights, we spent hours in intense discussions about the meaning of life. Although Pat and I didn’t believe in God, we felt that there must be some ‘life force.’

“After we moved to northern England in search of work as musicians, our son was born. One night he got sick, and I found myself praying to the God I didn’t believe in. Soon afterward, the relationship between Pat and me deteriorated, and I took our baby and walked out. Again, I prayed for help, just in case there was someone listening. I didn’t know it, but Pat did the same.

“Later that day, two of Jehovah’s Witnesses knocked on Pat’s door and showed him some of the Bible’s practical advice. Pat called me and asked if I would agree to study the Bible with him and the Witnesses. Soon we learned that to please God, we would have to legalize our marriage. It seemed a tall order in view of our precarious relationship.

“We wanted to know more about the fulfillment of Bible prophecies, the reason for suffering, and the meaning of God’s Kingdom. Gradually, we realized that God does care, and we wanted to do as he says. We got married. The wisdom of God’s Word has helped us to raise our three children. We feel sure that Jehovah listened to our prayers.”

Examine the Evidence for Yourself

Like millions of others, those quoted in this article saw through the deception of false religion and discovered why God allows suffering. Did you notice that in each case it was an accurate understanding of the Bible that convinced these individuals that Jehovah really does hear prayers?

Would you like to examine the evidence that God exists? Jehovah’s Witnesses will be pleased to help you to learn the truth about Jehovah and how you can draw close to the “Hearer of prayer.”—Psalm 65:2.



DID YOU KNOW?

Why did people in Bible times use bitumen as mortar?

■ Regarding the builders of the tower of Babel, the Bible says that “brick served as stone for them, but bitumen served as mortar.”—Genesis 11:3.

Bitumen occurs naturally. It comes from petroleum, and it is readily found in Mesopotamia, where it wells up out of the earth and coagulates. Its efficiency as an adhesive was noted in Bible times. Bitumen was “suitable for buildings constructed of baked bricks,” says one reference work.

An article in the magazine *Archaeology* describes a recent visit to the remains of a ziggurat in the ancient city of Ur, in Mesopotamia. “The bitumen mortar—one of the first uses of south-

ern Iraq’s vast oil fields—is still visible between the burnt bricks,” says the author. “The sticky black substance, today a source of the region’s instability and violence, once literally bound this civilization together. The use of bitumen as mortar and pavement has helped waterproof the otherwise fragile Sumerian mud-bricks, ensuring that the structures endured for millennia.”

What kind of “paper” was available in Bible times?

■ The question naturally arises because of a remark made by the Bible writer John: “Although I have many things to write you, I do not desire to do so with paper and ink.”—2 John 12.

The Greek word *khar'tes*, here rendered “paper,” refers to the paper made of papyrus, which is an aquatic plant. One reference work describes the technique used to make sheets of writing material from the stems of this plant as follows: “Stems, sometimes ten feet [3 m] long, were peeled and cut into narrow strips which in their turn were pasted to one another in layers, the grain in these layers going first one way and then the other; these sheets

were then beaten with a wooden mallet and finally smoothed with a scraper.”

Archaeologists have recovered many ancient papyrus documents in Egypt and in the area around the Dead Sea. Some Scriptural papyri found in these areas date back to the time of Jesus or even earlier. It is quite possible that this was the material on which Biblical letters, such as those by the apostles, were originally written.



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THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES

WHAT helped a woman in the Philippines to break free from alcohol abuse and improve her family life? Why did a karate enthusiast in Australia become a peaceable minister of religion? Read what these people have to say.



“The changes didn’t happen overnight.”

—CARMEN ALEGRE

YEAR BORN: 1949

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: THE PHILIPPINES

HISTORY: HEAVY DRINKER



MY PAST: I was born in San Fernando, a town in the province of Camarines Sur. For most of my adult life, though, I have lived in Antipolo, Rizal Province. Situated in a mountainous and grassy area with a lot of trees, Antipolo was a quiet little town when I first moved here. I rarely saw anyone walking outside after dark. Now, however, Antipolo has developed into a large city with many people.

Some time after moving to Antipolo, I met a man named Benjamin, and in time we were married. I found married life to be more difficult than I had anticipated. In an effort to escape my problems, I began to drink heavily. I developed a difficult personality, which was evident in the way I treated my husband and my children. I had very little self-control

or patience in dealing with them. I showed no respect to my husband. Needless to say, our family life wasn’t pleasant.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED

MY LIFE: My husband’s sister, Editha, is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and she recommended that Benjamin and I study the Bible with the Witnesses. We accepted the offer, hoping it would help to improve our family life.

As we studied the Bible, we learned a number of beautiful truths. The words of Revelation 21:4 especially touched my heart. Regarding those

who will live in the future earthly paradise under God’s Kingdom, that verse says that God “will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore.” I wanted to be among the people who would enjoy those blessings.

I came to realize that I needed to make some major changes in my attitude and habits. The changes didn’t happen overnight, but eventually I succeeded in breaking free from alcohol abuse. I also learned to be kind and patient in dealing with my family. Moreover, I learned to respect my husband, cooperating with him as he took the lead in our family.

When Benjamin and I began to attend meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses, we were deeply impressed by what we saw. Among the Witnesses, there is no gambling, no overdrinking, and no partiality. They treat everyone with dignity and respect. We were convinced that we had found the true religion.—John 13:34, 35.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: Our family life has improved dramatically. Benjamin and I have a happy marriage, and we enjoy teaching the Bible to others. Our two grown sons and their wives have also begun to study the Bible. We hope that in time they will join us in serving Jehovah. This really is the best way of life.



“I felt invincible.”

—MICHAEL BLUNSDEN

YEAR BORN: 1967

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: AUSTRALIA

HISTORY: KARATE ENTHUSIAST



MY PAST: I grew up in Albury, a beautiful, prosperous city in New South Wales. Like most cities, it has its share of crime. In general, though, Albury is known as a safe place to live.

My upbringing was comfortable. Although my parents divorced when I was seven, they saw to it that my brother and two sisters and I never lacked anything. I received a good education, attending the best private school in the area. My father wanted me to have a career in business when my schooling was complete. However, I was more interested in the sporting sector, where I excelled at

cycling and karate. I ended up taking a job at an automotive repair shop, which allowed me more time to focus my energy on my sporting interests.

I took pride in keeping myself in fit physical condition. At times, I felt invincible. I could easily have used my strength to take advantage of others. But my karate master, knowing that I was struggling not to misuse my strength, instilled strict discipline and morals in me. He constantly stressed the importance of obedience and loyalty.

HOW THE BIBLE CHANGED MY LIFE: When I began to study the Bible, I learned that Jehovah hates violence. (Psalm 11:5) At first, I reasoned that karate isn't violence but is a sport practiced in a safe manner. I felt that the virtues and high standards it promotes were much in line with what the Bible teaches. The Witness couple who studied with me were very patient. They never told me that I had to give up martial arts; they simply continued to teach me Bible truth.

As my Bible knowledge grew and my friendship with Jehovah deepened, I began to see things from a different perspective. I was impressed when I learned of the example set by Jehovah's Son, Jesus. Although Jesus was very powerful, he never resorted to physical violence. His words recorded at Matthew 26:52 really hit home: "All those who take the sword will perish by the sword."

The more I learned about Jehovah, the more my love and respect for him grew. To think that our Creator, so wise and so powerful, could care about me personally moved me deeply. I was touched to learn that even when I let Jehovah down or when I felt that it was all too hard and I just wanted to throw in the towel, he would never give up on me

"To think that our Creator, so wise and so powerful, could care about me personally moved me deeply"

as long as I kept on trying. I found great comfort in his promise: "I, Jehovah your God, am grasping your right hand, the One saying to you, 'Do not be afraid. I myself will help you.'" (Isaiah 41:13) When I realized that I'd been shown that sort of love, I wasn't about to let it go.

I knew that giving up karate would be the hardest thing I had ever done. But I also knew that it would please Jehovah, and I was convinced that serving him was worth any sacrifice. I think the clincher for me was when I read Jesus' words recorded at Matthew 6:24: "No one can slave for two masters." I realized that it would be impossible to serve Jehovah fully and keep practicing karate, as my priorities would inevitably drift back to karate. The time had come to choose my master.

It wasn't easy to give up karate. I struggled with many conflicting emotions. I felt a measure of joy in knowing that I was making Jehovah happy. But I also felt as if I were betraying my karate master. Those who practice martial arts often view betraying someone as an unforgivable sin. Some will even opt to commit suicide rather than deal with the shame.

I could not bring myself to explain to my karate master why I was leaving. Instead, I simply walked away, ceasing all communication with him and my other karate associates. I knew that I had done the right thing in giving up karate. Yet I also felt guilty for not explaining my new beliefs, having missed an opportunity to share my faith with others. I felt as if I let Jehovah down before I even began serving him. All of this was quite tormenting. There were many times when I tried to pray to Jehovah but ended up crying in pain.

Jehovah must have seen something good in me, for he moved the brothers and sisters in the congregation to rally to my side. Their love, comfort, and friendship were incredible. I also drew comfort from the Bible account of David and Bath-sheba. Even though David committed serious sins, Jehovah forgave him after he sincerely repented. When I reflected on that account, it helped me to put my own shortcomings in perspective.

HOW I HAVE BENEFITED: Before studying the Bible, I didn't care too much about anyone else—life was all about me. But with Jehovah's help and that of my beautiful wife of seven years, I have developed a lot more empathy. We've been blessed with the privilege of studying the Bible with a number of individuals, including some with tragic circumstances. Seeing Jehovah's love touch the lives of others has brought me more joy than being a powerful karate champion ever could.

“Thank You for This Wonderful Series!”

Did you enjoy reading the foregoing experiences? They are just 2 of over 50 such accounts published in *The Watchtower* since August 2008. The series “The Bible Changes Lives” has become a favorite among our readers. Why have many found it so appealing?

The individuals featured in these articles come from various backgrounds. Before learning about Jehovah God, some enjoyed a measure of success but lacked a real purpose in life. Others contended with major challenges, such as a violent temper or the abuse of drugs or alcohol. A few grew up knowing about Jehovah but strayed from his worship for a time. All such experiences illustrate that making changes in order to please God is possible. And doing so always brings benefits. What impact are these accounts having on our readers?

One reader explains how the article in the February 1, 2009, issue helped some inmates at a prison for women.

■ “Many of the inmates can relate to the individuals featured in the article,” she says. “The ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures, along with the profiles of each person’s past, were especially effective. Many inmates have similar backgrounds. After reading these accounts, two inmates started to study the Bible.”—C. W.

The experiences featured in this series have especially struck a chord with some. For example, the April 1, 2011, issue carried the experience of Guadalupe Villarreal, who gave up a homosexual lifestyle in order to serve Jehovah. Note just two of the many letters that came from our readers in response to his account.

■ “Guadalupe’s experience touched me to the core. It is so wonderful to see how love for



Jehovah and his Word can completely transform a person!”—L. F.

■ “In the past, I tried to share my faith with everyone, including homosexuals. Later, though, I’ve noticed that I tend to overlook such individuals or even avoid them. This article was just what I needed. It helped me to view such individuals as Jehovah does—as his potential worshippers.”—M. K.

Another experience that resonated with many readers was that of Victoria Tong, whose story appeared in the August 1, 2011, issue. Victoria described her tragic upbringing. She acknowledged that she has struggled to feel loved by Jehovah, even after years of serving him. And she related what has gradually helped her to accept Jehovah’s love. Notice what some readers said about her story.

■ “Victoria’s experience spoke directly to my heart. I’ve experienced a lot of tragedy in my life. I constantly battle negative thinking—even after years of being a baptized Witness. But Victoria’s experience makes me want to work even harder to see what Jehovah sees in me.”—M. M.

■ “When I was young, I fought an addiction to pornography. Recently, I suffered a relapse. I’ve sought the help of Christian elders, and I’ve made progress in overcoming my problem. The elders have assured me of God’s love and mercy. Yet, at times, I still feel worthless, as if Jehovah couldn’t possibly love me. Reading Victoria’s experience really helped. I now realize that when I think God couldn’t possibly forgive me, in essence I’m saying that his Son’s sacrifice is not enough to cover my sins. I’ve clipped out this article so that I can read and meditate on it whenever feelings of worthlessness well up within me. Thank you for this wonderful series!”—L. K.



LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

How Do Spirit Creatures Affect Us?

This article considers questions you may have raised and shows where you can read the answers in your Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to discuss these answers with you.

1. Who are the angels?

Angels are spirit creatures who live in heaven. They are a higher form of life than human life. The true God, who is himself a spirit, created the angels before he created the earth. (Job 38:4, 7; Matthew 18:10) Jehovah has surrounded himself with millions of loyal angels.—*Read Psalm 103:20, 21; Daniel 7:9, 10.*



2. Do angels help people?

Angels helped a righteous man named Lot. He lived in a city that God had determined to destroy because of the people's badness. Two angels warned Lot and his family to flee. Some people considered the warning a joke and ignored it. But Lot and his daughters survived because they obeyed the warning that

God had sent by means of angels.—*Read Genesis 19:1, 13-17, 26.*

According to the Bible, angels are helping people today by directing the work of those who faithfully preach the good news of God's Kingdom. (Matthew 24:14) The good news includes a warning. Like the warning given to Lot, it is no joke. It comes from God through angels.—*Read Revelation 1:1; 14:6, 7.*

God can use angels to strengthen us when we face trials. He used an angel to strengthen Jesus.—*Read Luke 22:41-43.*

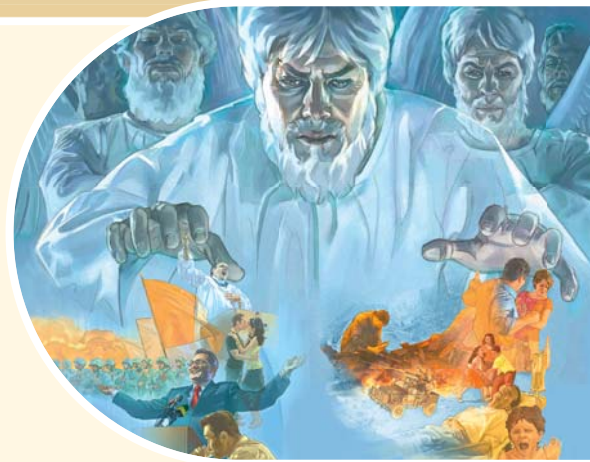
Soon God will use angels in another way—to eliminate wicked people who cause suffering. That will bring delightful relief to mankind.—*Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8.*



3. How do demons affect us?

Just as many people on earth have acted badly by disobeying God, so also in heaven many angels have rebelled against God. (2 Peter 2:4) Disobedient angels are called demons. Foremost among them is Satan, the Devil. Satan and his demons are misleading mankind.—*Read Revelation 12:9.*

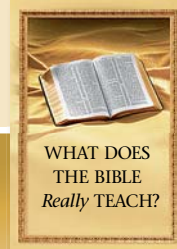
Satan has used corrupt businesses, human governments, and false religions to influence people and to turn them away from God. Thus, Satan is responsible for the injustice, violence, and suffering that afflict mankind.—*Read 1 John 5:19.*



4. How do demons mislead people?

Satan has deceived many people by teaching that the dead become spirits that can communicate with them. The Bible, however, says that the dead can do nothing at all. (Ecclesiastes 9:5) But demons often deceive people by imitating the voice of dead loved ones. (Isaiah 8:19) Demons mislead others through spirit mediums, fortune-tellers, and practitioners of divination and astrology. God’s Word warns us to avoid all such practices. So we should discard anything in our possession that is related to the demons and the occult.—*Read Deuteronomy 18:10, 11; Acts 19:19.*

If we love Jehovah, we do not need to live in fear of the demons. When we study God’s Word and do as it says, we oppose the Devil and draw close to God. Jehovah is more powerful than the demons. His faithful angels can strengthen us in time of need.—*Read Psalm 34:7; James 4:7, 8.*



For more information, see chapter 10 of this book, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



When God Forgives, Does He Forget?

THE answer, in a word, is yes. Concerning those whom he favors, Jehovah promises: “I shall forgive their error, and their sin I shall remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34) Jehovah thus assures us that when he forgives repentant sinners, he does not remember their sins anymore. But does that really mean that the Creator of the vast universe is unable to recall the sins he has forgiven? The words of Ezekiel shed light on how God forgives and forgets.—*Read Ezekiel 18:19-22.*

Using the prophet Ezekiel as a spokesman, Jehovah proclaimed judgment against unfaithful Judah and Jerusalem. The nation as a whole had abandoned Jehovah’s worship and filled the land with violence. Jehovah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. But in the midst of the judgment, Jehovah provided a message of hope. Each individual had a choice; each one was responsible for his own course of action.—Verses 19, 20.

What, then, if someone changed from doing bad to doing good? Jehovah said: “As regards someone wicked, in case he should turn back from all his sins that he has committed and he should actually keep all my statutes and execute justice and righteousness, he will positively keep living. He will not die.” (Verse 21) Yes, Jehovah was “ready to forgive” a sinner who turned back from his wayward course, manifesting true repentance.—Psalm 86:5.

What about the sins he had committed? “All his transgressions that he has committed—they

will not be remembered against him,” Jehovah explained. (Verse 22) Notice that the repentant one’s sins would “not be remembered *against him.*” Why is this significant?

In the Bible, the Hebrew word translated “remember” can mean more than just to recall the past. Regarding this word, one reference work says: “Quite often, in fact, [it] implies an action or appears in combination with verbs of action.” Thus, “to remember” can mean “to act.” Hence, when Jehovah says of a repentant sinner that his sins “will not be remembered against him,” He is saying that He will not thereafter *act against the individual* because of those sins, such as by accusing or punishing him.*

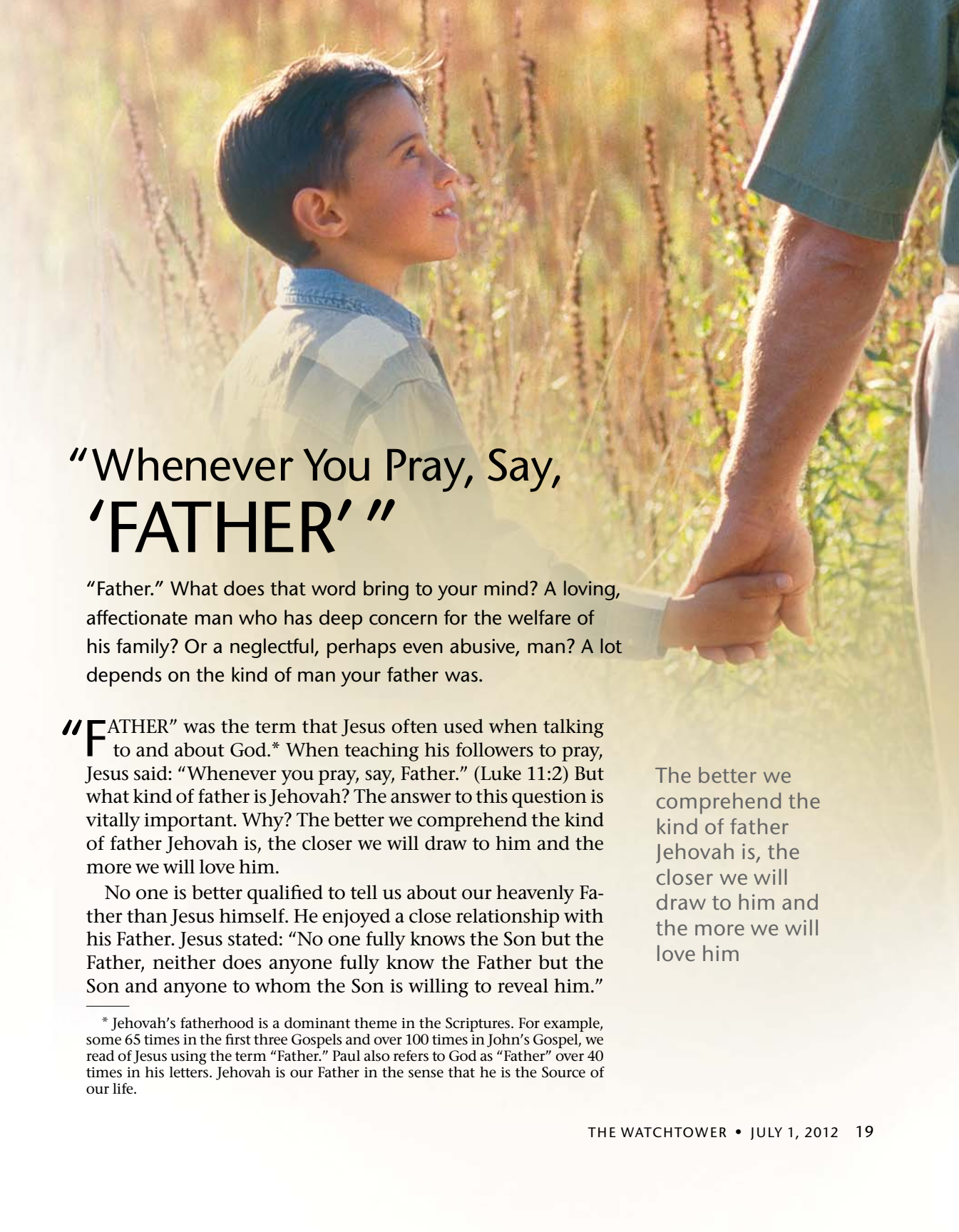
The words of Ezekiel 18:21, 22 paint a touching picture of the extent of God’s forgiveness. When Jehovah forgives our sins, he will never hold those sins against us in the future. Instead, he puts the sins of repentant ones behind him. (Isaiah 38:17) It is as if he wipes out the record of those sins.—Acts 3:19.

As imperfect humans, we need God’s mercy. After all, we sin many times. (Romans 3:23) But Jehovah wants us to know that if we are sincerely repentant, he is willing to forgive. And when he forgives, he forgets—that is, he will not rehash our sins in order to accuse or punish us ever again. What a comforting thought! Does God’s mercy move you to want to draw closer to him?

* Similarly, “to remember sins” can mean “to take action against sinners.”—Jeremiah 14:10.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR JULY:

■ Ezekiel 6-20



“Whenever You Pray, Say, ‘FATHER’ ”

“Father.” What does that word bring to your mind? A loving, affectionate man who has deep concern for the welfare of his family? Or a neglectful, perhaps even abusive, man? A lot depends on the kind of man your father was.

“**F**ATHER” was the term that Jesus often used when talking to and about God.* When teaching his followers to pray, Jesus said: “Whenever you pray, say, Father.” (Luke 11:2) But what kind of father is Jehovah? The answer to this question is vitally important. Why? The better we comprehend the kind of father Jehovah is, the closer we will draw to him and the more we will love him.

No one is better qualified to tell us about our heavenly Father than Jesus himself. He enjoyed a close relationship with his Father. Jesus stated: “No one fully knows the Son but the Father, neither does anyone fully know the Father but the Son and anyone to whom the Son is willing to reveal him.”

* Jehovah’s fatherhood is a dominant theme in the Scriptures. For example, some 65 times in the first three Gospels and over 100 times in John’s Gospel, we read of Jesus using the term “Father.” Paul also refers to God as “Father” over 40 times in his letters. Jehovah is our Father in the sense that he is the Source of our life.

The better we comprehend the kind of father Jehovah is, the closer we will draw to him and the more we will love him

(Matthew 11:27) Thus, the best way to know the Father is through the Son.

What can we learn from Jesus about our heavenly Father? Consider this statement that Jesus made: “God *loved* the world *so much* that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Jesus’ words here identify our heavenly Father’s dominant quality—love. (1 John 4:8) Jehovah manifests his love in various ways, such as by his approval, compassion, protection, and discipline, as well as by providing for our needs.

Assured of Our Father’s Approval

Children draw strength and courage from parental approval. Imagine how it must have encouraged Jesus to hear his Father say: “This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved.” (Matthew 3:17) Jesus, in turn, assures us of the Father’s love for and approval of us. “He that loves me will be loved by my Father,” Jesus said. (John 14:21) What comforting words! There is, however, someone who wants to rob you of that comfort.

Satan tries to create doubts in our minds regarding our heavenly Father’s approval. He seeks to convince us that we are not worthy of it. He often does this when we are most vulnerable—ill, frail, or elderly or when we are staggering under the weight of failures and disappointments. Consider the case of a young man named Lucas, who felt unworthy of God’s approval. Lucas relates that his parents changed drastically during his youth, abandoning many of the values that they had taught him. Perhaps as a result, he found it difficult to relate to his heavenly Father. Additionally, being impetuous by nature, Lucas often got into difficulties, especially in his relationships with others. Gradually, however, his patient and encouraging wife—whom Lucas calls “a special blessing, a gift from God”—

helped him to control his impetuous nature. Lucas came to recognize that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15) Lucas says that meditating on God’s love and approval has given him a sense of personal happiness and fulfillment.

If, at times, you find yourself doubting whether Jehovah could love you or approve of you, you might find it encouraging to read and meditate on Romans 8:31-39. The apostle Paul there lovingly assures us that nothing can “separate us from God’s love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

A Father of Tender Compassion

Our heavenly Father is sensitive to our suffering. He is a God of “tender compassion.” (Luke 1:78) Jesus reflected his Father’s compassion for imperfect humans. (Mark 1:40-42; 6:30-34) True Christians also endeavor to imitate their heavenly Father’s compassion. They heed the Bible’s admonition to “become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate.”—Ephesians 4:32.

Reflect on the experience of a man named Felipe. One day, on his way to work, he suddenly felt a terrible pain, as if he had been stabbed in the back. He was rushed to a hospital. After an eight-hour examination, the doctors finally concluded that the inner layer of his aorta had suffered a tear. They said that he had only 25 minutes to live and that there was no point in performing surgery.

Some of Felipe’s fellow worshippers were present, and their compassion moved them to spring into action. They quickly arranged for him to be transferred to another hospital, where an emergency operation was performed, and they stayed with him until the surgery was complete. Happily, Felipe survived the ordeal. Looking back on the experience,

* See chapter 24, “Nothing Can ‘Separate Us From God’s Love,’” of the book *Draw Close to Jehovah*, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



APPROVAL



COMPASSION



PROTECTION



DISCIPLINE



PHYSICAL
SUPPORT

JEHOVAH MANIFESTS HIS FATHERLY LOVE IN VARIOUS WAYS

rience, Felipe is thankful for the compassion expressed by his fellow worshippers. But Felipe is convinced that his heavenly Father was the motivating force behind their compassion. “It was as if God, like a loving father, were standing by my side to strengthen me,” says Felipe. Indeed, Jehovah often shows his compassion by moving his servants on earth to reflect that quality.

Our Father Provides Protection

When a little child senses danger, he may run to his father for protection. A child finds security in the loving embrace of his father. Jesus fully trusted in Jehovah as a protector. (Matthew 26:53; John 17:15) We too can find security under our heavenly Father’s protection. The protection Jehovah now provides is primarily spiritual. In other words, he protects us from spiritual harm by equipping us with what we need in order to avoid danger and to safeguard our friendship with him. One way he provides protection is through Bible-based counsel. When we receive such counsel, it is as if Jehovah were walking behind us, saying: “This is the way. Walk in it.” —Isaiah 30:21.

Consider the example of Tiago and his brothers Fernando and Rafael, who were members of a rock-and-roll band. They

were really excited when they were selected to play at one of the most famous music halls in São Paulo, Brazil. It seemed that success awaited them. A fellow worshipper, however, warned them about the dangers of keeping close company with those whose lifestyle shows disregard for God’s ways. (Proverbs 13:20) He underscored this Bible-based counsel by telling of his personal experience. His own brother had become involved in ungodly conduct as a result of associating with the wrong crowd. Tiago and his brothers decided to abandon their musical career. All three of them are now in the full-time Christian ministry. They believe that heeding the counsel of God’s Word protected them from spiritual harm.

Our Heavenly Father Disciplines Us

A loving father disciplines his children, for he cares about the kind of people they will become. (Ephesians 6:4) Such a father may be firm, but he is never harsh in correcting his children. Similarly, our heavenly Father may at times find it necessary to discipline us. But God’s discipline is always given in love and is never abusive. Like his Father, Jesus was never harsh, not even when his disciples were slow to respond to needed correction.—Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 22:24-30.

Take note of how a man named Ricardo came to appreciate that he was disciplined by Jehovah in love. Ricardo was abandoned by his father when he was only seven months old. When he got into his teens, Ricardo keenly felt the lack of a father. He got involved in bad practices, and his conscience began to torment him. Realizing that the life he was leading was not compatible with Christian moral standards, he decided to speak to the elders in the congregation he attended. The elders gave him firm but loving counsel based on the Bible. Ricardo appreciated the discipline, but he continued to suffer intensely because of what he had done—sleepless nights, tears, and depression. Finally, he came to realize that his being disciplined meant that Jehovah still loved him. Ricardo recalled the words of Hebrews 12:6, which says: “Whom Jehovah loves he disciplines.”

We can show that we look to Jehovah as *our* Father and that we view it as an honor to be his children

We do well to keep in mind that discipline involves more than punishment or reproof for wrongdoing. The Bible also associates discipline with training. So our loving heavenly Father may discipline us by permitting us for a time to suffer unpleasant consequences for our mistakes. Yet, the Bible indicates that his discipline is training us, helping us to pursue a right course. (Hebrews 12:7, 11) Yes, our Father is really concerned with our well-being and corrects us for our own benefit.

Our Father Provides for Our Physical Needs

A loving father seeks to care for the physical and material needs of his family. Jehovah

is no different. “Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things,” said Jesus. (Matthew 6:25-34) Jehovah promises: “I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you.”—Hebrews 13:5.

A woman named Nice came to appreciate the truthfulness of those words when her husband became unemployed. She had just left a well-paying job so she could dedicate more time to her two girls and to God’s service. Now what would they live on? She prayed to Jehovah. The very next day, her husband went back to his place of work to pick up his belongings. To his surprise, his boss told him that another job had just become available and offered him the position! So Nice’s husband lost his job one day, only to get it back the following day. Nice and her husband thanked their heavenly Father for the positive outcome. Their experience reminds us that as our loving Provider, Jehovah never forgets his faithful servants.

Appreciating Our Father’s Love

Truly, words do not suffice to describe the wondrous love of our heavenly Father! When we consider the various ways in which he manifests his fatherly love—by his approval, compassion, protection, and discipline, as well as by providing for our needs—surely we conclude that he is the best Father imaginable!

How can we demonstrate our appreciation for the love that our heavenly Father has shown to us? We can make the effort to learn more about him and his purpose. (John 17:3) We can bring our life into harmony with his will and ways. (1 John 5:3) We can reflect his love in our dealings with others. (1 John 4:11) In all such ways, we can show that we look to Jehovah as *our* Father and that we view it as an honor to be his children.



IMITATE THEIR FAITH

“Where You Go I Shall Go”

RUTH walked beside Naomi on a road that stretched across the high, windswept plains of Moab. They were alone now, two tiny figures in a vast landscape. Imagine Ruth noticing that the afternoon shadows had lengthened, then looking at her mother-in-law and wondering if it was time to find a place to rest for the night. She loved Naomi dearly and would do all she could to care for her.

Each woman bore a heavy burden of grief. Naomi had been a widow for years now, but she was mourning more recent losses—the death of her two sons, Chilion and Mahlon. Ruth too was grieving. Mahlon was her husband. She and Naomi were heading to the same destination, the town of Bethlehem in Israel. In a way, though, their journeys differed. Naomi was going home. Ruth was venturing into the unknown, leaving her own kin, her homeland, and all its customs—including its gods—behind her.—Ruth 1:3-6.

What would move a young woman to make such a drastic change? How would Ruth find the strength to make a new life for herself and to take care of Naomi? In learning the answers, we will find much to imitate in the faith of Ruth the Moabitess. First, let us see how those two women came to be on that long road to Bethlehem.

A Family Torn Apart by Tragedy

Ruth grew up in Moab, a small country that lay to the east of the Dead Sea. The region consisted mostly of high, sparsely wooded tablelands cut through by deep ravines. “The fields of Moab” often proved to be fertile farmland, even when famine

stalked Israel. That, in fact, was why Ruth first came into contact with Mahlon and his family.—Ruth 1:1.

A famine in Israel convinced Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, that he must move his wife and two sons away from their homeland and take up living in Moab as aliens. The move must have presented challenges to the faith of each family member, for Israelites needed to worship regularly at the sacred place Jehovah designated. (Deuteronomy 16:16, 17) Naomi managed to keep her faith alive. Still, she was grief-stricken when her husband died.—Ruth 1:2, 3.

She might well have suffered again later when her sons married Moabite women. (Ruth 1:4) Naomi knew that her nation’s forefather, Abraham, went to great lengths to procure a wife for his son, Isaac, among his own people, who worshipped Jehovah. (Genesis 24:3, 4) Later, the Mosaic Law warned the Israelites not to let their sons and daughters marry foreigners, for fear that God’s people would be led into idolatry.—Deuteronomy 7:3, 4.*

* See the article “Our Readers Ask—Why Did God Require That His Worshipers Marry Only Fellow Believers?” on page 29.

Nevertheless, Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women. If Naomi was concerned or disappointed, she evidently made sure that she showed her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, genuine kindness and love. Perhaps she hoped that they too would someday come to worship Jehovah as she did. At any rate, both Ruth and Orpah were fond of Naomi. The good relationship they had helped them when tragedy struck. Before either of the young women had borne children, both became widows. —Ruth 1:5.

Did Ruth's religious background prepare her for such a tragedy? It is hard to see how it could have. The Moabites worshipped many gods, the chief among them being Chemosh. (Numbers 21:29) It seems that the Moabite religion was not exempt from the brutality and horrors common in those times, including the sacrifice of children. Anything Ruth learned from Mahlon or Naomi about the loving and merciful God of Israel, Jehovah, surely struck her as a marked contrast. Jehovah ruled through love, not terror! (Deuteronomy 6:5) In the wake of her devastating loss, Ruth may have drawn



Ruth wisely drew close to Naomi during a time of grief and loss



even closer to Naomi and listened willingly to the older woman as she spoke about the almighty God, Jehovah, his wonderful works, and the loving, merciful way he dealt with his people.

Naomi, for her part, was eager for news of her homeland. One day she heard, perhaps from a traveling merchant, that the famine in Israel was over. Jehovah had turned his attention to his people. Bethlehem was again living up to its name, which means “House of Bread.” Naomi decided to return home. —Ruth 1:6.

What would Ruth and Orpah do? (Ruth 1:7) They had grown close to Naomi through their shared ordeal. Ruth in particular, it seems, was drawn to Naomi’s kindness and her steadfast faith in Jehovah. The three widows set off for Judah together.

The account of Ruth reminds us that tragedy and loss beset good, honest people as well as bad. (Ecclesiastes 9:2, 11) It shows us too that in the face of unbearable loss, we are wise to seek comfort and solace in others —especially those who seek refuge in Jehovah, the God whom Naomi worshipped. —Proverbs 17:17.

The Loyal Love of Ruth

As the miles stretched out behind the three widows, another concern began weighing on Naomi. She thought of the two young women at her side and of the love they had shown to her and her sons. She could not bear the thought of adding to their burdens now. If they left their homeland and came with her, what could she do for them in Bethlehem?

Finally, Naomi spoke up: “Go, return each one to the house of her mother. May Jehovah exercise loving-kindness toward you, just as you have exercised it toward the men now dead and toward me.” She also expressed a hope that Jehovah would reward them with new husbands and new lives. “Then she kissed them,” the account says, “and they began to raise their voices and weep.” It is not hard to see why Ruth and Orpah felt so attached to this kindhearted and unselfish woman. Both of them kept insisting: “No, but with you we shall return to your people.” —Ruth 1:8-10.

Naomi was not so easily persuaded, though. She reasoned forcefully that there was little that she could do for them in Israel,

*“Your people will be
my people, and your
God my God”*



since she had no husband to provide for her, no sons for them to marry, and no prospects of either. She revealed that her inability to care for them was a source of real bitterness to her.—Ruth 1:11-13.

With Orpah, Naomi's words hit home. She had family there in Moab, a mother, and a home that was waiting for her. It really did seem more practical to remain in Moab. So, with a heavy heart, she kissed Naomi goodbye and turned away.—Ruth 1:14.

What about Ruth? Naomi's arguments applied to her as well. Yet, we read: "As for Ruth, she stuck with her." Perhaps Naomi had resumed walking on the road but noticed that Ruth was trailing behind her. She remonstrated: "Look! Your widowed sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Return with your widowed sister-in-law." (Ruth 1:15) Naomi's words reveal a vital detail to the reader. Orpah had returned not only to her people but also to "her gods." She was content to remain a worshipper of

Chemosh and other false gods. Was that how Ruth felt?

As she faced Naomi on that lonely road, Ruth's heart was sure and clear. It swelled with love for Naomi—and for the God Naomi served. So she spoke: "Do not plead with me to abandon you, to turn back from accompanying you; for where you go I shall go, and where you spend the night I shall spend the night. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I shall die, and there is where I shall be buried. May Jehovah do so to me and add to it if anything but death should make a separation between me and you."—Ruth 1:16, 17.

Ruth's words are remarkable—so much so that they have long outlived her, echoing down through some 30 centuries. They perfectly reveal a precious quality, loyal love. The love that Ruth felt was so strong and so loyal that she would stick with Naomi wherever she went. Only death could separate them. Naomi's people would become her own people, for Ruth was ready to leave behind everything she knew in Moab—even the Moabite gods. Unlike Orpah, Ruth could wholeheartedly say that she wanted Naomi's God, Jehovah, to be her own God as well.*

So they traveled on, just the two of them now, on the long road to Bethlehem. By one estimate, the journey might have taken as long as a week. Surely, though, each found in the company of the other some measure of comfort in the face of grief.

There is no shortage of grief in this world. In our own times, which the Bible calls "critical times hard to deal with," we face all manner of losses as well as grief. (2 Timothy 3:1) So the quality we find in Ruth has be—

* It is noteworthy that Ruth did not use only the impersonal title "God" as many foreigners might; she also used God's personal name, Jehovah. *The Interpreter's Bible* comments: "The writer thus emphasizes that this foreigner is a follower of the true God."

A Masterpiece in Miniature

The book of Ruth has been described as a small gem, a masterpiece in miniature. Granted, the book has neither the sweep nor the scope of the book of Judges, which precedes it and provides the time setting for Ruth. (Ruth 1:1) Both books were evidently written by the prophet Samuel. Yet, as you read through the Bible, you may agree that the book of Ruth is beautifully placed in the Bible canon. After reading of the wars, raids, and counterraiders recorded in the book of Judges, you come to this little book that reminds us that Jehovah never loses sight of peaceful folk struggling with everyday problems. This simple domestic drama offers profound lessons about love, loss, faith, and loyalty that can benefit us all.

come more important than ever. Loyal love—the kind of love that holds on to its object and simply refuses to let go—is a powerful force for good in this darkening world. We need it in marriage, we need it in family relations, we need it in friendships, we need it in the Christian congregation. As we cultivate that kind of love, we are imitating the sterling example of Ruth.

Ruth and Naomi in Bethlehem

It is, of course, one thing to put loyal love into words; it is quite another to prove the quality in action. Ruth had before her the opportunity to show her loyal love not only to Naomi but also to the God she chose as her own, Jehovah.

The two women finally reached Bethlehem, a village about six miles (10 km) south of Jerusalem. Naomi and her family, it seems, had once been quite prominent in that little town, for the whole place was buzzing with the news of Naomi's return.

The women there would peer at her and say, "Is this Naomi?" Evidently, her sojourn in Moab had left her much changed; her countenance and bearing showed the mark of years of hardship and grief.—Ruth 1:19.

To those kinswomen and neighbors of years past, Naomi revealed how bitter her life had become to her. She even felt that her name should be changed from Naomi, which means "My Pleasantness," to Mara, which means "Bitter." Poor Naomi! Much like Job before her, she believed that Jehovah God had brought her hardships on her.—Ruth 1:20, 21; Job 2:10; 13:24-26.

As the two women settled into life in Bethlehem, Ruth began thinking about how best to take care of herself and Naomi. She learned that the Law that Jehovah had given to his people in Israel included a loving provision for the poor. They were allowed to go into the fields at harvesttime and follow the reapers, gleaning what was left behind as well as what grew at the edges and corners of

Ruth was willing to do hard, humble work to provide for herself and Naomi



the fields.*—Leviticus 19:9, 10; Deuteronomy 24:19-21.

It was the time of the barley harvest, likely in April by our modern calendar, and Ruth went to the fields to see who would let her work under the provision for gleaners. She chanced upon the fields of a man named Boaz, a wealthy landowner and a relative of Naomi's dead husband, Elimelech. Though the Law gave her the right to glean, she did not take it for granted; she asked the young man in charge of the harvesters for permission to work. He granted it, and then Ruth got right to work.—Ruth 1:22–2:3, 7.

Imagine Ruth following the harvesters. As they cut through the barley with their flint sickles, she stooped to pick up what they dropped or left behind, bundled the stalks into sheaves, and carried them off to a spot where she could beat out the grain later. It was slow, tiring work, and it got harder as the morning wore on. Yet, Ruth kept at it, stopping only to wipe the sweat from her brow and to eat a simple lunch in “the house”—likely a shelter set up to provide shade for the workers.

Ruth probably neither hoped nor expected to be noticed—but she was. Boaz saw her and asked the young foreman who she was. A remarkable man of faith, Boaz greeted his workers—some of whom may have been day laborers or even foreigners—with the words: “Jehovah be with you.” And they responded in kind. This spiritually-minded older man took a fatherly interest in Ruth.—Ruth 2:4-7.

Calling her “daughter,” Boaz advised Ruth to keep coming to his fields to glean and to stay near the young women of his house—

* It was a remarkable law, surely unlike anything Ruth knew in her homeland. In the ancient Near East in those days, widows were treated poorly. Notes one reference work: “After her husband’s death, normally a widow had to rely on her sons for support; if she had none, she might have to sell herself into slavery, resort to prostitution, or die.”

hold to avoid being harassed by any of the workmen. He made sure that she had food to eat at lunchtime. Above all, though, he sought to commend and encourage her. How so?—Ruth 2:8, 9, 14.

When Ruth asked Boaz what she, a foreigner, had done to deserve his kind favor, he replied that he had heard about all that she had done for her mother-in-law, Naomi. Likely Naomi had praised her beloved Ruth among the women of Bethlehem, and word had reached Boaz. He knew, too, that Ruth had turned to the worship of Jehovah, for he said: “May Jehovah reward the way you act, and may there come to be a perfect wage for you from Jehovah the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.”—Ruth 2:12.

How those words must have encouraged Ruth! She had, indeed, decided to take refuge under the wings of Jehovah God, like a young bird securely nestled against a protective parent. She thanked Boaz for speaking to her so reassuringly. And she kept on working until evening fell.—Ruth 2:13, 17.

Ruth's faith in action is a sterling example to all of us today who struggle in these difficult economic times. She did not think that others owed her anything, so she appreciated everything that was offered her. She felt no shame in working long and hard to care for one she loved, even though it was humble work. She gratefully accepted and applied wise advice about how to work safely and in good company. Most important, she never lost sight of where her true refuge lay—with her protective Father, Jehovah God.

If we show loyal love as Ruth did and follow her example in humility, industriousness, and appreciation, we will find that our faith too will become a sterling example for others. How, though, did Jehovah provide for Ruth and Naomi? We will discuss the matter in a future article in this series.

OUR READERS ASK . . .

Why did God require that his worshippers marry only fellow believers?

■ God's Law to the nation of Israel included this command concerning the people of the nations around them: "You must form no marriage alliance with them. Your daughter you must not give to his son, and his daughter you must not take for your son." (Deuteronomy 7:3, 4) What was the reason for such a prohibition?

On the broad scale, Jehovah knew that Satan wanted to corrupt His people by turning them to the worship of false gods. God thus went on to warn that the unbelievers "will turn your son from following me, and they will certainly serve other gods." A lot was at stake here. If the nation of Israel fell to serving other gods, they would lose God's favor and protection, becoming easy prey to their enemies. How, then, could the nation produce the promised Messiah? Clearly, Satan had reason to lure the Israelites into marrying unbelievers.

On a smaller scale, remember that God cared about his people as individuals. He knew that the happiness and welfare of each one of them depended on their having a close relationship with him as their God. Was Jehovah's concern about the dangerous influence of an unbelieving mate well-founded? Consider the example of King Solomon. He knew Jehovah's warning about unbelieving wives: "They will incline your heart to follow their gods." Because he was an outstandingly wise man, perhaps he had come to feel that he was above God's counsel, that it did not apply to him. He ignored it. With what result? "His wives gradually inclined his heart . . . to follow other gods." What a tragedy! Solomon himself lost Jehovah's favor, and his people were severely divided because of his unfaithfulness.—1 Kings 11:2-4, 9-13.

Some might reason that there were exceptions. For example, the Israelite Mahlon married

the Moabitess Ruth, and she became an outstanding believer. But marrying Moabite women was a risky choice. Mahlon is not commended for marrying a Moabite girl; he died young, likely even before Ruth called Jehovah her God. Mahlon's brother, Chilion, married the Moabitess Orpah, who remained attached to "her gods." Boaz, on the other hand, married Ruth some time after she became a believer. In fact, the Jews later regarded her as a "perfect proselyte." The marriage of Ruth and Boaz was a blessing for both of them.—Ruth 1:4, 5, 15-17; 4:13-17.

Is it wise, then, to reason that an example such as that of Mahlon and Ruth somehow argues against Jehovah's counsel to marry only fellow believers? Really, would reasoning that way not be a bit like pointing out a gambler who won a jackpot and then arguing that gambling must therefore be an acceptable way to earn a living?

The Bible urges Christians today to marry "only in the Lord." It warns against becoming "unevenly yoked with unbelievers." Such counsel is aimed at true Christians who are currently seeking a mate. For those already married to unbelievers, the Bible offers helpful counsel on how to make the best of a challenging situation. (1 Corinthians 7:12-16, 39; 2 Corinthians 6:14) All such counsel shows that Jehovah God, the Originator of marriage, wants us to be happy as his worshippers—whether single or married.



A God Who Abhors Injustice

Instructions: Do this exercise in quiet surroundings. As you read the scriptures, imagine that you are a bystander watching the events unfold. Visualize the scene. Hear the voices. Feel the emotions of the characters. Let the account come to life.

Main characters: Ahab, Jezebel, Naboth, and Elijah

Summary: Prompted by Jezebel, King Ahab commits murder to obtain a vineyard.

1 ANALYZE THE SCENES.—READ 1 KINGS 21:1-26.

In your mind's eye, how do you picture the four characters in this account?

Ahab _____

Jezebel _____

Naboth _____

Elijah _____

What tone do you detect in the voices of Jezebel and Ahab in verses 5-7? _____

Describe the commotion that arises in verse 13, as you imagine it. _____

What emotions do you detect in the voices of Elijah and Ahab in the confrontation described in verses 20-26? _____

2 DIG DEEPER.

What trait(s) does Jezebel manifest in verses 7 and 25? _____

What trait(s) does Ahab manifest in verse 4? _____

To obtain Naboth's vineyard, who else did Ahab have to put to death? (Read 2 Kings 9:24-26.) _____

What kind of man was Ahab in Jehovah's eyes? (*Reread verses 25 and 26. See also 1 Kings 16:30-33.*) _____

3 APPLY WHAT YOU LEARNED. WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT . . .

Jehovah's awareness of unjust acts. _____

Jehovah's concern for those who have been dealt with unjustly. _____

How Jehovah shows that he is a God of justice. (Read Deuteronomy 32:4.) _____

4 FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.

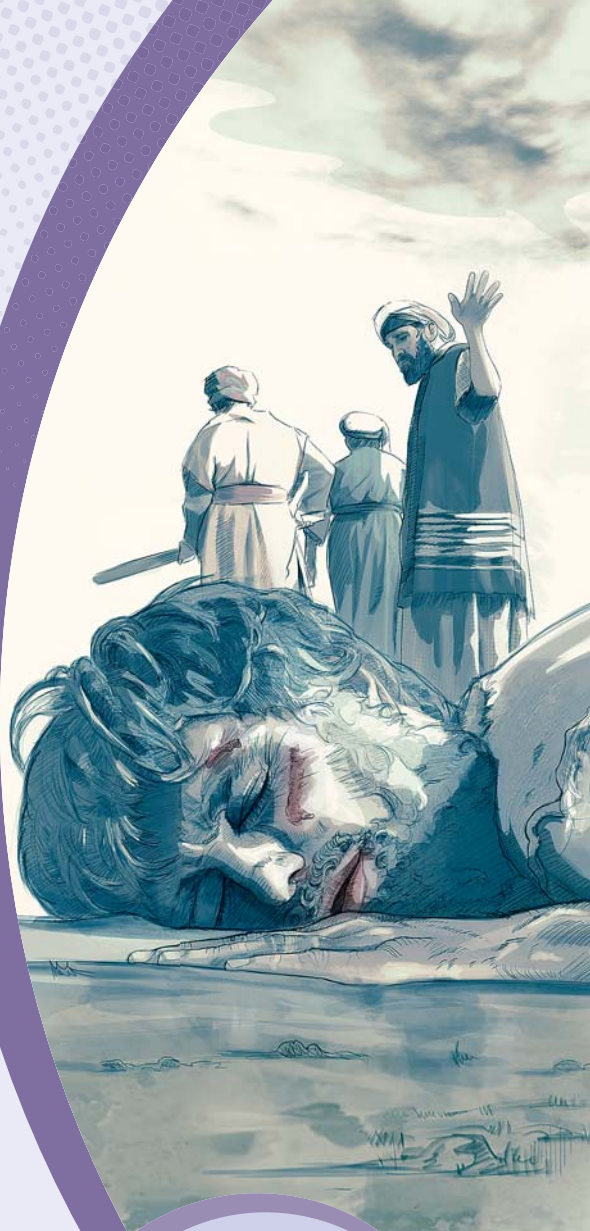
How might some people today manifest a spirit similar to that of Jezebel? (Read Revelation 2:18-21.) _____

In what situations might you need to show courage similar to that of Elijah? _____

Of what can you be assured when you observe or experience acts of injustice? _____

5 WHAT ASPECT OF THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY?

Suggestion: Turn this account into a news story. Report the event, and include imaginary interviews with the main characters and eyewitnesses.



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If God listens to our prayers, why does he allow suffering?

SEE PAGES 6-8.



What helped a woman in the Philippines to break free from alcohol abuse and improve her family life? SEE PAGES 12-13.



When Jehovah forgives, does he forget?

SEE PAGE 18.



What can we learn about love and loyalty from the faithful woman Ruth? SEE PAGES 23-28.

Would you welcome a visit?

Even in this troubled world, you can gain happiness from accurate Bible knowledge of God, his Kingdom, and his wonderful purpose for mankind. If you would welcome further information or would like to have someone visit you to conduct a free Bible study, please write to Jehovah's Witnesses at the appropriate address listed on page 4.