

Monday, December 13

Pay constant attention to yourself and to your teaching. . . . By doing this you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.—1 Timothy 4:16.

When we conform our life to God's standards, our relatives may find it difficult to adjust to our new beliefs and lifestyle. Often, the first thing they notice is that we no longer join with them in celebrating religious festivals and no longer engage in political activities. Some relatives might initially be angry with us. (Matthew 10:35, 36) But we should not give up on them. If we stop trying to help them understand our beliefs, we have, in effect, judged them as being unworthy of gaining everlasting life. Jehovah has not given us the job of judging—he has assigned that task to Jesus. (John 5:22) If we are patient, our relatives may eventually be willing to listen to our message. We need to be firm but tactful, even if we must endure trials. (1 Corinthians 4:12b) It may take time before our relatives fully understand just how serious we are about serving Jehovah. *w19.08* 17 paragraph 10, 13; 18 paragraph 14

Tuesday, December 14

For all things I have the strength through the one who gives me power.—Philippians 4:13.

“When I think about the trial I have gone through, I know that I could not have faced it on my own.” Have you ever said something like that? Many of us have. Perhaps you said it after reflecting on how you were able to cope with a serious illness or the death of a loved one. Looking back, you feel that you were able to go on from day to day only because Jehovah’s holy spirit provided you with “power beyond what is normal.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-9) We also rely on holy spirit to deal with the influence of this wicked world. (1 John 5:19) In addition, we have to struggle against “wicked spirit forces.” (Ephesians 6:12) Jehovah’s holy spirit helps us by giving us the power, or strength, to fulfill our responsibilities despite trials. The apostle Paul felt that he was able to keep working and to accomplish his ministry despite his trials because he relied on “the power of the Christ.”—2 Corinthians 12:9. *w19.11* 8 paragraphs 1-3

Wednesday, December 15

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father also.—John 14:9.

The Bible is the only accurate record that explains what Jesus has done for you. Learn to love Jesus, and your love for Jehovah will grow. Why? Because Jesus reflects his Father's qualities perfectly. So the more you learn about Jesus, the better you will understand and appreciate Jehovah. Think of the compassion Jesus showed for those who were looked down on by others—the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable. Think, too, of the practical advice he gives you and how your life improves when you listen to him. (Matthew 5:1-11; 7:24-27) Your affection for Jesus is likely to become stronger as you think deeply about the sacrifice he made so that our sins can be forgiven. (Matthew 20:28) When you understand that Jesus was willing to die for you, you may feel moved to repent and seek Jehovah's forgiveness. (Acts 3:19, 20; 1 John 1:9) And as you come to love Jesus and Jehovah, you will naturally be drawn to others who feel the same way. w20.03 5-6 paragraphs 10-12

Thursday, December 16

*Though Jehovah is high, he takes note of the humble.—
Psalm 138:6.*

A Christian man could begin to think that he is the one who is most qualified for a certain assignment. Or a Christian wife might think, 'My husband is much more qualified than so-and-so!' However, if we are truly humble, we will avoid such a prideful spirit. We can learn from the way that Moses reacted when others received privileges. Moses appreciated his assignment of leading the nation of Israel. How did Moses react when Jehovah permitted others to serve alongside him? He was not jealous. (Numbers 11:24-29) As to judging the people, he humbly allowed others to share some of his workload. (Exodus 18:13-24) This meant better service for the Israelites whom he was appointed to judge. In that sense, Moses did not put his privileges ahead of the welfare of others. What a good example for us! We remember that if we are to be truly useful to Jehovah, our humility should exceed our ability. w19.09 5-6 paragraphs 13-14

Friday, December 17

Jehovah protects the faithful.—Psalm 31:23.

We do not know what reasons the nations might give to justify their attack on Babylon the Great. They might say that the world's religions are an obstacle to peace and that they constantly meddle in politics. Or they might say that those religious organizations have accumulated too much wealth and property. (Revelation 18:3, 7) It seems reasonable that this attack will not mean that all the members of those religions will be destroyed. Rather, it seems that the nations will get rid of the religious organizations. Once those organizations are gone, the former members will realize that their religious leaders failed them and will likely try to distance themselves from those religions. The destruction of Babylon the Great will take place within a relatively brief time. (Revelation 18:10, 21) Jehovah has promised that he will "cut short the days" of the tribulation so that his "chosen ones" and true religion will survive.—Mark 13:19, 20. *w19.10*
15 paragraphs 4-5

Saturday, December 18

*Advise the younger women . . . to love their children.—
Titus 2:4.*

Mothers, you may have been raised by parents who easily lost their temper and spoke harshly to their children. So you may have grown up thinking that this was a normal way to raise a family. Even after learning Jehovah's standards, you might find it a challenge to remain calm and patient with your children, especially if they misbehave when you are tired. (Ephesians 4:31) At such times, you need more than ever to rely on Jehovah in prayer. (Psalm 37:5) Some mothers find it difficult to express their love for their children. They may have been raised in a household where their parents did not have a warm relationship with their children. If that is how you were raised, you do not have to repeat your parents' mistakes. A mother who submits to Jehovah's will may have to learn how to express love for her children. It may be difficult for her to make the change. But it can be done, and it will benefit both her and her family.

w19.09 18-19 paragraphs 19-20

Sunday, December 19

No one can slave for two masters.—Matthew 6:24.

A person who worships Jehovah while also spending excessive time and effort trying to gain this world's riches would, in a sense, be trying to serve two masters. He would not be giving Jehovah exclusive devotion. Near the end of the first century C.E., members of the congregation in the city of Laodicea boasted: "I am rich and have acquired riches and do not need anything at all." But in the eyes of Jehovah and Jesus, they were "miserable and pitiful and poor and blind and naked." Jesus counseled them, not because they were wealthy, but because their love of riches was damaging their relationship with Jehovah. (Revelation 3:14-17) If we detect that a desire to pursue riches is growing in our heart, we must act quickly to correct our thinking. (1 Timothy 6:7, 8) If we do not, our heart will be divided and Jehovah will not accept our worship. He "requires exclusive devotion."—Deuteronomy 4:24. *w19.10 27 paragraphs 5-6*

Song 125 and Prayer | Opening Comments (1 min.)

 TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD

“Humility Is Better Than Pride”: (10 min.)

Spiritual Gems: (10 min.)

Jg 8:27—Did Gideon worship the ephod that he made? (*it-1* 753 ¶1)

What spiritual gems from this week’s Bible reading would you like to share regarding Jehovah, the field ministry, or something else?

Bible Reading: (4 min.) Jg 8:28–9:6 (5)

 APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

Return Visit: (3 min.) Use the sample conversation. (9)

Return Visit: (4 min.) Begin with the sample conversation. Offer the *Enjoy Life Forever!* brochure, and start a Bible study. (20)

Bible Study: (5 min.) *Iffi* lesson 02 point 4 (13)

 LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

Song 108

Organizational Accomplishments: (5 min.) Play the *Organizational Accomplishments* video for December.

Local Needs: (10 min.)

Congregation Bible Study: (30 min.) *rr* chap. 17 ¶9-14



Humility Is Better Than Pride

Humility helped Gideon to promote peace (Jg 8:1-3; *w00* 8/15 25 ¶3)

Humility caused Gideon to seek Jehovah’s glory rather than his own (Jg 8:22, 23; *w17.01* 20 ¶15)

Pride resulted in Abimelech bringing harm upon himself and others (Jg 9:1, 2, 5, 22-24; *w08* 2/15 9 ¶9)

How can humility help us when we respond to an irate householder?



125 *“Happy Are the Merciful!”*

(Matthew 5:7)

1. Our happy God is merciful,
His mercy not just dutiful.
He takes delight in kindly deeds
And freely grants our daily needs.
Repentant ones can be assured
Their plea for mercy will be heard.
Remembering that we are dust,
He’s merciful and kind and just.
2. When we have sinned and feel distressed,
When God’s forgiveness we request,
Our Lord, Christ Jesus, showed the way
To ask for mercy when we pray:
“Forgive our debts, we beg of you,
As we forgive our debtors too.”
We then can let resentment go,
And peace of mind and heart we’ll know.
3. When gifts of mercy we bestow,
The giving spirit we should show.
We give without desiring praise,
Content with joy our gift conveys.
Then God, who sees all things we do,
Will be the One repaying you.
Yes, happy are the merciful,
In God’s eyes they are beautiful.

JUDGES 8-9

8 Then the men of E'phra-im said to him: "What have you done to us? Why did you not call us when you went to fight against Mid'i-an?" And they quarreled bitterly with him. ² But he said to them: "What have I done compared with you? Are not the gleanings of E'phra-im better than the grape harvest of Abi-e'zer? ³ It was into your hand that God gave Mid'i-an's princes O'reb and Ze'eb, and what have I done compared with you?" When he spoke this way, they calmed down.

⁴ Gid'e-on then came to the Jordan and crossed it. He and the 300 men with him were tired, but they kept up the pursuit. ⁵ So he said to the men of Suc'coth: "Please give loaves of bread to the people following me, for they are tired and I am chasing after Ze'bah and Zal-mun'na, the kings of Mid'i-an." ⁶ But the princes of Suc'coth said: "Are the palms of Ze'bah and Zal-mun'na already in your hand so that we should give bread to your army?" ⁷ At this Gid'e-on said: "Just for that, when Jehovah gives Ze'bah and Zal-mun'na into my hand, I will give you a thrashing with the thorns and the briars of the wilderness." ⁸ And he went up from there to Pe-nu'el and made the same request, but the men of Pe-nu'el gave him the same answer as the men of Suc'coth. ⁹ So he said also to the men of Pe-nu'el: "When I return in peace, I will pull down this tower."

¹⁰ Now Ze'bah and Zal-mun'na were in Kar'kor with their armies, about 15,000 men. These were all who remained of the entire army of the Easterners, for 120,000 men armed with swords had fallen. ¹¹ Gid'e-on continued up by the way

of the tent dwellers east of No'bah and Jog'be·hah and attacked the camp, which was off guard. ¹² When Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na fled, he pursued and captured the two Mid'i·an·ite kings, Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na, throwing the whole camp into a panic.

¹³ Gid'e·on the son of Jo'ash then returned from the war by way of the pass that goes up to He'res. ¹⁴ En route he captured and interrogated a young man from Suc'coth. So the young man wrote out for him the names of the princes and elders of Suc'coth, 77 men. ¹⁵ With that he went to the men of Suc'coth and said: "Here are Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na about whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the palms of Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na already in your hand so that we should give bread to your exhausted men?'" ¹⁶ Then he took the elders of the city and with thorns and briars of the wilderness, he taught the men of Suc'coth a lesson. ¹⁷ And he pulled down the tower of Pe·nu'el and killed the men of the city.

¹⁸ He asked Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na: "What sort of men did you kill in Ta'bor?" To this they said: "They were like you, each one looked like the son of a king." ¹⁹ At that he said: "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As surely as Jehovah lives, if you had spared their lives, I would not have to kill you." ²⁰ Then he said to Je'ther his firstborn: "Get up, kill them." But the young man did not draw his sword; he was afraid, for he was still a young man. ²¹ So Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na said: "Get up yourself and slay us, for a man is judged by his mightiness." So Gid'e·on got up and killed

Ze'bah and Zal·mun'na and took the crescent-shaped ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.

²² Later the men of Israel said to Gid'e-on: “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson as well, for you saved us out of the hand of Mid'i-an.” ²³ But Gid'e-on said to them: “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. Jehovah is the one who will rule over you.” ²⁴ Gid'e-on continued: “Let me make one request of you: that each of you give me a nose ring from his spoil.” (For they had gold nose rings because they were Ish'ma-el-ites.) ²⁵ They replied: “We will surely give them.” With that they spread out a robe and each man threw a nose ring from his spoil on it. ²⁶ The weight of the gold nose rings that he had requested amounted to 1,700 gold shekels, besides the crescent-shaped ornaments, the pendants, the purple wool garments worn by the kings of Mid'i-an, and the necklaces from the camels.

²⁷ Gid'e-on made it into an eph'od and exhibited it in his city Oph'rah; and all Israel committed spiritual prostitution with it there, and it served as a snare to Gid'e-on and to his household.

²⁸ Thus Mid'i-an was subdued before the Israelites, and they did not challenge them again; and the land had rest for 40 years in the days of Gid'e-on.

²⁹ So Jer-ub-ba'al the son of Jo'ash returned to his home and stayed there.

³⁰ Gid'e-on became father to 70 sons, for he had many wives. ³¹ His concubine in She'chem also bore him a son, and he named him A-bim'e-lech. ³² And Gid'e-on the son of Jo'ash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Jo'ash his father in Oph'rah of the Abi-ez'rites.

³³ As soon as Gid'e-on died, the Israelites again committed spiritual prostitution with the Ba'als, and they appointed Ba'al-be'rith as their god. ³⁴ The Israelites did not remember Jehovah their God, who had rescued them from the hand of all their enemies around them; ³⁵ nor did they show loyal love toward the household of Jer-ub-ba'al, that is Gid'e-on, in return for all the good that he had done for Israel.

9 In time A-bim'e-lech the son of Jer-ub-ba'al went to his mother's brothers in She'chem, and he said to them and to all the family of his grandfather: ² "Please ask all the leaders of She'chem, 'Which is better for you, for all 70 sons of Jer-ub-ba'al to rule over you or for one man to rule over you? And remember that I am your own bone and flesh.'"

³ So his mother's brothers said this in his behalf to all the leaders of She'chem, and their hearts were inclined to follow A-bim'e-lech, for they said: "He is our own brother." ⁴ Then they gave him 70 pieces of silver from the house of Ba'al-be'rith, and A-bim'e-lech used it to hire idle and insolent men to accompany him. ⁵ After that he went to his father's house at Oph'rah and killed his brothers, the sons of Jer-ub-ba'al, 70 men, on one stone. The only survivor was Jo'tham, the youngest son of Jer-ub-ba'al, because he hid.

⁶ Then all the leaders of She'chem and all Beth-mil'lo gathered together and made A-bim'e-lech king, close by the big tree, by the pillar that was in She'chem.

⁷ When they reported it to Jo'tham, he at once went and stood on the top of Mount Ger'i-zim and called out in a loud voice to them: "Listen to me, you leaders of She'chem, and then God will listen to you.

⁸ "Once there were trees that went to anoint a king over them. So they said to the olive tree, 'Rule over us.' ⁹ But the olive tree said to them, 'Must I give up my oil, which they use to glorify God and men, to go and wave over the other trees?' ¹⁰ Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and rule over us.' ¹¹ But the fig tree said to them, 'Must I give up my sweetness and my good fruitage to go and wave over the other trees?' ¹² Next the trees said to the vine, 'Come and rule over us.' ¹³ The vine replied to them, 'Must I give up my new wine that makes God and men rejoice to go and wave over the trees?' ¹⁴ Finally all the other trees said to the bramble, 'Come and rule over us.' ¹⁵ At this the bramble said to the trees, 'If you are really anointing me as king over you, come and seek refuge under my shadow. But if not, let fire come out of the bramble and consume the cedars of Leb'a-non.'

¹⁶ "Now have you acted sincerely and honorably in making A-bim'e-lech king, and have you shown goodness toward Jer-ub-ba'al and his household, and have you treated him as he deserves? ¹⁷ When my father fought for you, he risked his life to save you from Mid'i-an's hand. ¹⁸ But today you have

risen up against my father's household and killed his sons, 70 men, on one stone. Then you made A·bim'e·lech, the son of his slave girl, king over the leaders of She'chem just because he is your brother. ¹⁹ Yes, if you are acting sincerely and honorably toward Jer·ub·ba'al and his household this day, rejoice over A·bim'e·lech and let him also rejoice over you. ²⁰ But if not, may fire come out of A·bim'e·lech and consume the leaders of She'chem and Beth-mil'lo, and may fire come out of the leaders of She'chem and Beth-mil'lo and consume A·bim'e·lech.”

²¹ Then Jo'tham fled and escaped to Be'er, and he lived there because of his brother A·bim'e·lech.

²² A·bim'e·lech ruled over Israel for three years. ²³ Then God let hostility develop between A·bim'e·lech and the leaders of She'chem, and they dealt treacherously with A·bim'e·lech. ²⁴ This was so that the violence done to the 70 sons of Jer·ub·ba'al might be avenged, so as to place responsibility for their blood on their brother A·bim'e·lech for killing them and on the leaders of She'chem for helping him to kill his brothers. ²⁵ So the leaders of She'chem set men to ambush him on the mountaintops, and they would rob everyone who passed by them on the road. In time it was reported to A·bim'e·lech.

²⁶ Then Ga'al son of E'bed and his brothers crossed over into She'chem, and the leaders of She'chem put their trust in him. ²⁷ They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards, trod them out, and held a festival, after which they went into the house of their god and ate and

drank and cursed A·bim'e·lech. ²⁸ Then Ga'al the son of E'bed said: "Who is A·bim'e·lech, and who is She'chem that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jer·ub·ba'al, and is not Ze'bul his commissioner? Serve the men of Ha'mor, She'chem's father! But why should we serve him? ²⁹ If only this people were under my command, I would depose A·bim'e·lech." Then he said to A·bim'e·lech: "Increase your army and come out."

³⁰ When Ze'bul the prince of the city heard the words of Ga'al the son of E'bed, his anger blazed. ³¹ So he secretly sent messengers to A·bim'e·lech, saying: "Look! Ga'al the son of E'bed and his brothers are now in She'chem, and here they are inciting the city against you. ³² Now come up by night, you and your men, and lie in wait in the field. ³³ As soon as the sun rises in the morning, you should get up early and attack the city; and when he and his men come out against you, do whatever you can to defeat him."

³⁴ So A·bim'e·lech and all the people with him rose up by night, and in four bands they lay in wait against She'chem. ³⁵ When Ga'al the son of E'bed went out and stood at the entrance of the city gate, A·bim'e·lech and the people with him rose up from the ambush. ³⁶ When Ga'al saw the people, he said to Ze'bul: "Look! There are people coming down from the mountaintops." But Ze'bul said to him: "You are seeing the shadows of the mountains as if they were men."

³⁷ Ga'al later said: "Look! People are coming down from the center of the land, and one band is coming by the way of

the big tree of Me·on'e·nim.”³⁸ Ze'bul replied to him: “Where now is your boast, ‘Who is A·bim'e·lech that we should serve him?’ Are these not the people you rejected? Go out now and fight against them.”

³⁹ So Ga'al went out at the head of the leaders of She'chem and fought against A·bim'e·lech.⁴⁰ A·bim'e·lech pursued him, and Ga'al fled from him, and many fell slain as far as the entrance of the city gate.

⁴¹ And A·bim'e·lech continued to dwell in A·ru'mah, and Ze'bul drove Ga'al and his brothers out of She'chem.⁴² The next day the people went out into the field, and A·bim'e·lech was told about it.⁴³ So he took the people and divided them into three bands and lay in wait in the field. When he saw the people going out of the city, he attacked them and struck them down.⁴⁴ A·bim'e·lech and the bands with him charged forward and took a position at the entrance of the city gate, while two bands attacked all who were in the field, and they struck them down.⁴⁵ A·bim'e·lech fought against the city all that day and captured it. He killed the people in it, and then he pulled the city down and sowed it with salt.

⁴⁶ When all the leaders of the tower of She'chem heard about this, they immediately went to the vault of the house of El-be'rith.⁴⁷ As soon as it was reported to A·bim'e·lech that all the leaders of the tower of She'chem had gathered together,⁴⁸ A·bim'e·lech and all the men with him went up Mount Zal'mon. A·bim'e·lech took an ax in his hand and cut off a tree branch and lifted it on his shoulder and said to the people with him: “What you saw me do, hurry and do the

same!” ⁴⁹ So all the people also cut off branches and followed A·bim'e·lech. Then they put the branches against the vault and set the vault on fire. So all the people of the tower of She'chem also died, about 1,000 men and women.

⁵⁰ A·bim'e·lech then went to The'bez; he camped against The'bez and captured it. ⁵¹ There was a strong tower in the middle of the city, and all the men and women and all the city leaders fled there. They shut themselves in and climbed onto the roof of the tower. ⁵² A·bim'e·lech made his way to the tower and attacked it. He approached the entrance of the tower to set it on fire. ⁵³ Then one of the women dropped an upper millstone on A·bim'e·lech's head and crushed his skull. ⁵⁴ He quickly called the attendant bearing his weapons and said to him: “Draw your sword and put me to death, so that they may not say about me, ‘A woman killed him.’” So his attendant ran him through, and he died.

⁵⁵ When the men of Israel saw that A·bim'e·lech was dead, they all went back home. ⁵⁶ Thus God repaid A·bim'e·lech for the evil that he had done to his father by killing his 70 brothers. ⁵⁷ God also made all the evil of the men of She'chem come back on their own heads. So the curse of Jo'tham the son of Jer·ub·ba'al came upon them.

Song 125 and Prayer | Opening Comments (1 min.)

 TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD

“Humility Is Better Than Pride”: (10 min.)

Spiritual Gems: (10 min.)

Jg 8:27—Did Gideon worship the ephod that he made? (*it-1* 753 ¶1)

What spiritual gems from this week’s Bible reading would you like to share regarding Jehovah, the field ministry, or something else?

Bible Reading: (4 min.) Jg 8:28–9:6 (5)

 APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

Return Visit: (3 min.) Use the sample conversation. (9)

Return Visit: (4 min.) Begin with the sample conversation. Offer the *Enjoy Life Forever!* brochure, and start a Bible study. (20)

Bible Study: (5 min.) *Iffi* lesson 02 point 4 (13)

 LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

Song 108

Organizational Accomplishments: (5 min.) Play the *Organizational Accomplishments* video for December.

Local Needs: (10 min.)

Congregation Bible Study: (30 min.) *rr* chap. 17 ¶9-14



Humility Is Better Than Pride

Humility helped Gideon to promote peace (Jg 8:1-3; *w00* 8/15 25 ¶3)

Humility caused Gideon to seek Jehovah’s glory rather than his own (Jg 8:22, 23; *w17.01* 20 ¶15)

Pride resulted in Abimelech bringing harm upon himself and others (Jg 9:1, 2, 5, 22-24; *w08* 2/15 9 ¶9)

How can humility help us when we respond to an irate householder?



December 13-19 / Judges 8-9

Song 125 and Prayer

Opening Comments (1 minute)

Treasures From God's Word

"Humility Is Better Than Pride": (10 minutes)

Humility helped Gideon to promote peace

Judges 8:1-3: Then the men of Ephraim said to him: "What have you done to us? Why did you not call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they quarreled bitterly with him. But he said to them: "What have I done compared with you? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abi-ezer? It was into your hand that God gave Midian's princes Oreb and Zeeb, and what have I done compared with you?" When he spoke this way, they calmed down.

w00 8/15 25 paragraph 3

Gideon, heavily involved in battle against Midian, called on the tribe of Ephraim to help. However, after the battle was over, Ephraim turned on Gideon and complained bitterly that

he had not called on them at the outset of the fighting. The record states that "they vehemently tried to pick a quarrel with him." Gideon said in response: "What now have I done in comparison with you? Are not the gleanings of Ephraim better than the grape gathering of Abiezer? It was into your hand that God gave Midian's princes Oreb and Zeeb, and what have I been able to do in comparison with you?"

(Judges 8:1-3) By his well-chosen, calming words, Gideon avoided what could have been a disastrous intertribal war. Those of the tribe of Ephraim may have had a problem with self-importance and pride. However, that did not stop Gideon from working to bring about a peaceful outcome. Can we do similarly?

Humility caused Gideon to seek Jehovah's glory rather than his own

Judges 8:22, 23: Later the men of Israel said to Gideon: "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson as well, for you saved us out of the hand of Midian." But Gideon said to them: "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. Jehovah is the one who will rule over you."

w17.01 20 paragraph 15

Gideon is an excellent example of modesty in action. When Jehovah's angel first appeared to him, Gideon readily acknowledged his modest background and credentials. (Judges 6:15) After he accepted Jehovah's assignment, Gideon made sure that he thoroughly understood what was required, and he looked to Jehovah for guidance. (Judges 6:36-40) Gideon was bold and courageous. Yet, he acted with caution and shrewdness. (Judges 6:11, 27) He did not seize upon his assignment to gain prominence. Rather, as soon as he could, he gladly returned to his former place.—Judges 8:22, 23, 29.

Pride resulted in Abimelech bringing harm upon himself and others

Judges 9:1, 2: In time Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to his mother's brothers in Shechem, and he said to them and to all the family of his grandfather: "Please ask all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, for all 70 sons of Jerubbaal to rule over you or for one man to rule over you? And remember that I am your own bone and flesh.'"

Judges 9:5: After that he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the sons of Jerubbaal, 70 men, on one stone. The only survivor was Jotham, the youngest son of Jerubbaal, because he hid.

Judges 9:22-24: Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years. Then God let hostility develop between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and they dealt treacherously with Abimelech. This was so that the violence done to the 70 sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged, so as to place responsibility for their blood on their brother Abimelech for killing them and on the leaders of Shechem for helping him to kill his brothers.

w08 2/15 9 paragraph 9

To be God's friends, we must be "humble in mind." (1 Peter 3:8; Psalm 138:6) The importance of humility is shown in Judges chapter 9. Gideon's son Jotham said: "Once upon a time the trees went to anoint a king over them." The olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine were mentioned. They represented worthy individuals who did not seek to rule over their fellow Israelites. But the bramble—useful only as fuel—represented the kingship of proud Abimelech, a murderer

eager to dominate others. Though he 'played the prince over Israel three years,' he met an untimely death. (Judges 9:8-15, 22, 50-54) How much better it is to be "humble in mind"!

How can humility help us when we respond to an irate householder?

[Image:] An irate householder yelling at a couple who tried to preach to him.

Spiritual Gems

Judges 8:27—Did Gideon worship the ephod that he made?

Judges 8:27: Gideon made it into an ephod and exhibited it in his city Ophrah; and all Israel committed spiritual prostitution with it there, and it served as a snare to Gideon and to his household.

***it-1* 753 paragraph 1**

In spite of Gideon's good intentions to commemorate the victory Jehovah had given Israel and to honor God, the ephod "served as a snare to Gideon and to his household,"

because the Israelites committed spiritual immorality by worshiping it. (Judges 8:27) However, the Bible does not say that Gideon himself worshiped it; on the contrary, he is specifically named by the apostle Paul as one of the 'great cloud' of faithful pre-Christian witnesses of Jehovah.— Hebrews 11:32; 12:1.

What spiritual gems from this week's Bible reading would you like to share regarding Jehovah, the field ministry, or something else?

Bible Reading: (4 minutes) Judges 8:28–9:6 (*th* study 5)

Song 125 and Prayer | Opening Comments (1 min.)

 TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD

“Humility Is Better Than Pride”: (10 min.)

Spiritual Gems: (10 min.)

Jg 8:27—Did Gideon worship the ephod that he made? (*it-1* 753 ¶1)

What spiritual gems from this week’s Bible reading would you like to share regarding Jehovah, the field ministry, or something else?

Bible Reading: (4 min.) Jg 8:28–9:6 (5)

 APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

Return Visit: (3 min.) Use the sample conversation. (9)

Return Visit: (4 min.) Begin with the sample conversation. Offer the *Enjoy Life Forever!* brochure, and start a Bible study. (20)

Bible Study: (5 min.) *Iffi* lesson 02 point 4 (13)

 LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

Song 108

Organizational Accomplishments: (5 min.) Play the *Organizational Accomplishments* video for December.

Local Needs: (10 min.)

Congregation Bible Study: (30 min.) *rr* chap. 17 ¶9-14



Humility Is Better Than Pride

Humility helped Gideon to promote peace (Jg 8:1-3; *w00* 8/15 25 ¶3)

Humility caused Gideon to seek Jehovah’s glory rather than his own (Jg 8:22, 23; *w17.01* 20 ¶15)

Pride resulted in Abimelech bringing harm upon himself and others (Jg 9:1, 2, 5, 22-24; *w08* 2/15 9 ¶9)

How can humility help us when we respond to an irate householder?





INCREASE YOUR JOY IN THE MINISTRY

Accept Jehovah's Help Through Prayer

It is Jehovah who makes the seed of truth take root and grow in someone's heart. (1Co 3:6-9) Therefore, in order to succeed in the ministry, we must rely on Jehovah to help us and our Bible students.

Ask Jehovah to help your students to endure pressures and to overcome obstacles. (Php 1:9, 10) Be specific. Pray for holy spirit to guide your thoughts and actions. (Lu 11:13) Teach your Bible students how to pray, and urge them to do so. Pray with and for your Bible students, using their name.

WATCH THE VIDEO DRAMATIZATION *EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF DISCIPLE-MAKING—ACCEPT JEHOVAH'S HELP—PRAYER, AND THEN ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:*

- What challenge did Neeta encounter in her study with Jade?

- How did 1 Corinthians 3:6 help Neeta?

- How was Neeta's challenge resolved?



SAMPLE CONVERSATIONS

Initial Call November (Special Campaign)

Question: Is an end to violence and war realistic?

Scripture: Ps 37:10, 11

Link: What Bible promise gives us hope?

- ▶ FIND THIS SCRIPTURE IN THE TEACHING TOOLBOX:
 - wp21.2 5

Initial Call December*

Question: How do you view the Bible?

Scripture: Ro 15:4

Link: What Bible promise gives us hope?

- ▶ FIND THIS SCRIPTURE IN THE TEACHING TOOLBOX:
 - Iffi 5

Return Visit*

Question: What Bible promise gives us hope?

Scripture: Re 21:3, 4

Link: How can we understand the Bible?

- ▶ FIND THIS SCRIPTURE IN THE TEACHING TOOLBOX:
 - Iffi 7; wp21.2 14

* You may adjust the question and link according to local circumstances.



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Apply Yourself to the Field Ministry

Bible Study: (5 minutes) *lffi* lesson 02 point 4 (*th* study 13)

4. The Bible offers the hope of everlasting life in perfect conditions

Look at the following list of promises found in the Bible. Which ones especially appeal to you? Why?

Read the scriptures cited next to those promises, and consider these questions:

- Do you feel that these scriptures give hope? Could they give hope to your family and friends?

Picture living in a world where **no one will . . .**

- feel pain, weaken with age, or have to die.—Isaiah 25:8.

Isaiah 25:8: He will swallow up death forever, And the

Sovereign Lord Jehovah will wipe away the tears from all faces. The reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, For Jehovah himself has spoken it.

- get sick or live with a disability.—Isaiah 33:24; 35:5, 6.

Isaiah 33:24: And no resident will say: "I am sick." The people dwelling in the land will be pardoned for their error.

Isaiah 35:5, 6: At that time the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. At that time the lame will leap like the deer, And the tongue of the speechless will shout for joy. For waters will burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert plain.

- experience injustice.—Isaiah 32:16, 17.

Isaiah 32:16, 17: Then justice will reside in the wilderness, And righteousness will dwell in the orchard. The result of true righteousness will be peace, And the fruitage of true righteousness will be lasting tranquillity and security.

- suffer as a result of war.—Psalm 46:9.

Psalm 46:9: He is bringing an end to wars throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the military wagons with fire.

- be plagued by troubling thoughts or memories.—Isaiah 65:17.

Isaiah 65:17: For look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be called to mind, Nor will they come up into the heart.

Picture living in a world where **everyone will . . .**

- see dead loved ones resurrected, brought back to life on earth.—John 5:28, 29.

John 5:28, 29: Do not be amazed at this, for the hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who did good things to a

resurrection of life, and those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.

- enjoy good health and youthful energy.—Job 33:25.

Job 33:25: Let his flesh become fresher than in youth; Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor.'

- have plenty to eat, a comfortable home, and satisfying work.—Psalm 72:16; Isaiah 65:21, 22.

Psalm 72:16: There will be an abundance of grain on the earth; On the top of the mountains it will overflow. His fruit will flourish as in Lebanon, And in the cities people will blossom like the vegetation of the earth.

Isaiah 65:21, 22: They will build houses and live in them, And they will plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build for someone else to inhabit, Nor will they plant for others to eat. For the days of my people will be like the days of a tree, And the work of their hands my chosen ones will enjoy to the full.

- experience complete peace.—Psalm 37:11.

Psalm 37:11: But the meek will possess the earth, And they will find exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.

- live forever in ideal conditions.—Psalm 37:29.

Psalm 37:29: The righteous will possess the earth, And they will live forever on it.

[Image:] Collage: Contrasting scenes compare conditions that people experience today with conditions that the Bible promises for the future. The scenes are repeated below.

[Image:] A boy who was sick is healthy and hugging his mother.

[Image:] A man who was elderly is young and pushing a wheelbarrow full of vegetables.

[Image:] Children who were starving and were victims of forced labor are now planting a garden and playing soccer.

[Image:] A woman who was curled up and depressed is now standing tall and smiling.

1. Loyal love! God is love.

We can sense his care from above.
 God by means of his precious Son
 Paid the ransom for ev'ryone,
 Giving hope that we might possess
 Life eternal and happiness.

(CHORUS)

*Hey there, all you thirsty ones,
 Come and drink life's water free.
 Yes, come drink, you thirsty ones;
 God's loyal love you'll see.*

2. Loyal love! God is love.

All his works give proof of his love.
 Love Jehovah has further shown,
 Giving Jesus the kingly throne.
 God's own purpose has come to pass.
 See! His Kingdom is here at last!

(Chorus)

3. Loyal love! God is love.

May his spirit move us to love.
 As we loyally help the meek,
 God's commandments they learn to keep.
 We are serving with godly fear,
 Preaching boldly for all to hear.

(Chorus)

Song 125 and Prayer | Opening Comments (1 min.)

 TREASURES FROM GOD'S WORD

“Humility Is Better Than Pride”: (10 min.)

Spiritual Gems: (10 min.)

Jg 8:27—Did Gideon worship the ephod that he made? (*it-1* 753 ¶1)

What spiritual gems from this week’s Bible reading would you like to share regarding Jehovah, the field ministry, or something else?

Bible Reading: (4 min.) Jg 8:28–9:6 (5)

 APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

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Bible Study: (5 min.) *Iffi* lesson 02 point 4 (13)

 LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

Song 108

Organizational Accomplishments: (5 min.) Play the *Organizational Accomplishments* video for December.

Local Needs: (10 min.)

Congregation Bible Study: (30 min.) *rr* chap. 17 ¶9-14



Humility Is Better Than Pride

Humility helped Gideon to promote peace (Jg 8:1-3; *w00* 8/15 25 ¶3)

Humility caused Gideon to seek Jehovah’s glory rather than his own (Jg 8:22, 23; *w17.01* 20 ¶15)

Pride resulted in Abimelech bringing harm upon himself and others (Jg 9:1, 2, 5, 22-24; *w08* 2/15 9 ¶9)

How can humility help us when we respond to an irate householder?



king of the north”—each of them having changed identity over the centuries as various earthly nations have fought for supremacy. Regarding the final campaign of the king of the north in “the time of the end,” Daniel said: “He will go out in a great rage to annihilate and to devote many to destruction.” Jehovah’s worshippers are the primary target of the king of the north.*^[3] But like Gog of Magog, the king of the north comes “to his end” after failing in his attack on God’s people.

9 ***“The kings of the entire inhabited earth.”*** (Read Revelation 16:14, 16; 17:14; 19:19, 20.) The book of Revelation foretold an attack by “the kings of the earth” on the “King of kings,” the heavenly Jesus. But unable to reach into the heavens, the rebels attack the earthly supporters of the Kingdom. The kings of the earth then find themselves on the losing side in the

*[3] Daniel 11:45 indicates that the king of the north will target God’s people, for it says that this king “will plant his royal tents between the grand sea [Mediterranean] and the holy mountain of Decoration [where God’s temple once stood and where God’s people worshipped].”

9. What similarity is there between what happens to Gog of Magog and what happens to “the kings of the entire inhabited earth”?

battle at Armageddon. Notice that they come to their end after attacking Jehovah's people. This is similar to what is said about Gog of Magog.*^[4]

¹⁰ In view of the foregoing, what may we conclude about the identity of Gog? First, Gog is not a spirit creature. Second, Gog refers to earthly nations that will attack God's people in the near future. Those nations will undoubtedly form a coalition, that is, they will band together somehow. Why? Since God's people are found earth wide, the nations will need to be united in purpose and action to attack them. (Matt. 24:9) Make no mistake, Satan will be the evil mastermind behind the attack. He has long influenced worldly nations to oppose true worship. (1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:17) But Ezekiel's prophetic words about Gog of Magog focus on the role of the *earthly nations* that will attack Jehovah's people.^{#[5]}

*^[4] The Bible also speaks of an attack by the modern-day "Assyrian," who will seek to wipe out God's people. (Mic. 5:5) The four attacks foretold to come upon God's people—by Gog of Magog, by the king of the north, by the kings of the earth, and by the Assyrian—may refer to the same attack under different names.

^{#[5]} See Chapter 22 of this publication for a discussion about the identity of the "Gog and Magog" mentioned at Revelation 20:7-9.

10. What may we conclude about the identity of Gog of Magog?

“The Land”—What Is It?

¹¹ As we learned in paragraph 3, Gog of Magog will provoke Jehovah’s great rage by invading a land that is precious to Jehovah. What land is this? Let us return to Ezekiel’s prophecy. (**Read Ezekiel 38:8-12.**) It says that Gog will “invade the land whose people have been restored” and “regathered from the nations.” Note, too, what it says about the restored worshippers who reside in this land: They “dwell in security”; their settlements are “unprotected by walls, bars, or gates”; and they “are accumulating wealth.” This is the land in which Jehovah’s pure worshippers earth wide reside. How can we identify it?

¹² It is helpful to consider the restoration that happened in ancient Israel, the land where God’s chosen people lived, worked, and worshipped for centuries. When the Israelites proved unfaithful, Jehovah through Ezekiel foretold that their land would be devastated and left desolate. (Ezek. 33:27-29) But Jehovah also prophesied that a repentant remnant would later return from exile in Babylon and restore pure

11. How does Ezekiel’s prophecy describe “the land” that Gog will invade?

12. What restoration happened in the land of Israel in Bible times?

worship in the land. With Jehovah's blessing, the land of Israel would be transformed, flourishing "like the garden of Eden." (Ezek. 36:34-36) That restoration took place starting in 537 B.C.E. when Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem to restore true worship in their beloved homeland.

¹³ In modern times, God's pure worshippers experienced a similar restoration. As we learned in Chapter 9 of this publication, by 1919, God's people were freed from the long captivity in Babylon the Great. In that year, Jehovah brought his restored worshippers into a spiritual land. That land is the spiritual paradise—the secure, spiritually prosperous environment, or realm of activity, in which we worship the true God. In this land, we dwell together in security, with peace of mind and heart. (Prov. 1:33) We receive an abundance of spiritual food, and we have plenty of satisfying work to do in proclaiming God's Kingdom. Indeed, we experience the truth of the proverb: "It is the blessing of Jehovah that makes one rich, and He adds no pain with it." (Prov. 10:22) No matter

13, 14. (a) What is the spiritual land? (b) Why is this land precious to Jehovah?

where we may live on this earth, we are in this land—the spiritual paradise—as long as we are actively supporting pure worship in word and in deed.

¹⁴ This spiritual land is precious to Jehovah. Why? In his eyes, its inhabitants are “the precious things of all the nations,” individuals whom he has drawn to pure worship. (Hag. 2:7; John 6:44) They are earnestly endeavoring to put on a new personality, one that reflects God’s own lofty qualities. (Eph. 4:23, 24; 5:1, 2) As pure worshippers, they offer themselves fully in his service, doing so in ways that glorify him and prove their love for him. (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 John 5:3) We can only imagine the joy that must fill Jehovah’s heart as he sees his worshippers working hard to beautify the spiritual land. Just think: By giving pure worship priority in your life, you not only beautify the spiritual paradise but also make Jehovah’s heart rejoice!—Prov. 27:11.

The Land—When, Why, and How Will Gog Invade It?

¹⁵ It is sobering to think that soon a coalition of earthly nations will invade our precious spiritual land. Since this foretold attack will involve us

15, 16. When will Gog of Magog invade our restored spiritual land?

The Kingdom Is in Place —Let It Come!

(Revelation 11:15; 12:10)

1. Jehovah, you always have been,
And always you will be.
You've given the throne to your Son;
He rules by your decree.
The Kingdom has been brought to birth;
His rulership will fill the earth.

(CHORUS)

*For now have come to pass
Salvation and kingdom and might.
The Kingdom is in place.
We pray: "Let it come, Let it come!"*

2. The time for the Devil is short;
We know what this will mean.
Though living in times of distress,
We see the things unseen.
The Kingdom has been brought to birth;
His rulership will fill the earth.

(Chorus)

3. The angels in heaven rejoice
And sing with joyful cries.
The heavens above are relieved
From Satan and his lies.
The Kingdom has been brought to birth;
His rulership will fill the earth.

(Chorus)

OCTOBER 2021

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

LARGE PRINT EDITION



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
DECEMBER 6, 2021–JANUARY 2, 2022

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Rebuilding Your Friendship With Jehovah	30
Study Article 42: December 20-26 Hold Fast to the Truth With Strong Conviction	38
Study Article 43: December 27–January 2 Do Not Give Up!	51

COVER PICTURE:

Although Noah preached faithfully for many years, no one joined him in the ark except for his immediate family. Even so, Noah was successful in obeying God! (See study article 43, paragraph 11)

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

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44 *A Prayer of the Lowly One* (Psalm 4:1)

1. Jehovah God, I call to you and ask you:

“Hear my prayer.”

My wounds are deep and slow to heal;
my load is hard to bear.

Despondent thoughts and disappointed hopes
have left me weak.

O God of comfort, care for me;
your favor I do seek.

(CHORUS)

Do raise me up; help me endure.

When I'm in doubt, make my hope sure.

From deep despair, I turn to you.

Jehovah God, my strength renew.

2. Your Word has been my comfort and
a refuge when I'm weak,

Expressing feelings dear to me
in words I cannot speak.

Please build in me the faith and trust
that your Word does impart.

And help me always know your love
is greater than my heart.

(Chorus)

We Serve the God Who Is “Rich in Mercy”

“Jehovah is good to all, and his mercy is evident in all his works.”—PS. 145:9.

SONG 44

A Prayer of the Lowly One

PREVIEW

Mercy is one of Jehovah’s most appealing qualities, and it is one that each of us needs to cultivate. In this article, we will examine why Jehovah shows mercy, why we can say that his discipline is merciful, and how we can show this beautiful quality.

WHEN we think of a merciful person, we may picture someone who is kind, warmhearted, compassionate, and generous. The story Jesus told about the neighborly Samaritan may come to mind. That man of another nation “acted mercifully toward” a Jew who had fallen among thieves. The Samaritan “was moved with pity” for the injured Jew and lovingly arranged for his care. (Luke 10:29-37) This illustration highlights a beautiful quality of our God—mercy. That quality is a facet of God’s love, and he displays it each day in the way that he deals with us.

² There is another aspect of mercy that may come to mind. It involves holding back punishment when there is a basis for doing so. In that sense, Jehovah has certainly been merciful toward us. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins,” the psalmist said. (Ps. 103:10) At other times, though, Jehovah may provide firm discipline to an erring one.

³ In this article, we will address three questions: Why does Jehovah show mercy? Is there a

-
1. What may come to mind when we think of a merciful person?
 2. What is another aspect of mercy?
 3. What questions will we examine?

connection between firm discipline and mercy? And what can help us to show mercy? Let us see how God's Word answers these questions.

WHY JEHOVAH SHOWS MERCY

⁴ *Jehovah loves to be merciful.* The apostle Paul was inspired to write that God is "rich in mercy." In this context, Paul was referring to God's mercy in offering the hope of heavenly life to his imperfect, anointed servants. (Eph. 2:4-7) But Jehovah's mercy is even more extensive than that. The psalmist David wrote: "Jehovah is good to all, and his mercy is evident in all his works." (Ps. 145:9) Because Jehovah loves people, he extends mercy whenever he sees a basis for doing so.

⁵ More than anyone else, Jesus knows how much Jehovah loves to show mercy. This Father and Son were together in heaven during the course of thousands of years of human history. (Prov. 8:30, 31) On many occasions, Jesus saw how his Father showed mercy to sinful humans. (Ps. 78:37-42) In his teaching, Jesus often highlighted this endearing quality of his Father.

4. Why does Jehovah show mercy?

5. How did Jesus learn about Jehovah's mercy?



The father did not humiliate his wayward son; he welcomed him home
(See paragraph 6)



⁶ As mentioned in the preceding article, Jesus used a parable about a lost son to paint a heart-warming picture of how much Jehovah loves to show mercy. The son had left home and “squandered his property by living a debauched life.” (Luke 15:13) Later, he repented of his immoral course, humbled himself, and returned home. How did his father respond? The young man did not have to wait long to find out. Jesus said: “While [the son] was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was moved with pity, and he ran and embraced him and tenderly kissed him.” The

6. What picture did Jesus paint of his Father’s mercy?

older man did not humiliate his son. Rather, he mercifully forgave the young man and welcomed him back to the family. The lost son had sinned greatly, but on the basis of his repentance, his father forgave him. The merciful father in the illustration represents Jehovah. In this touching way, Jesus illustrated his Father's willingness to forgive sinners who sincerely repent.—Luke 15:17-24.

⁷ *Jehovah shows mercy because of his matchless wisdom.* Jehovah's wisdom is not merely some cold, intellectual quality. Rather, the Bible says that "the *wisdom* from above" is "full of *mercy* and good fruits." (Jas. 3:17) Like a loving parent, Jehovah knows that his mercy benefits his children. (Ps. 103:13; Isa. 49:15) Divine mercy gives them hope despite their imperfections. So Jehovah's infinite wisdom moves him to extend mercy whenever he sees any basis for doing so. At the same time, Jehovah's mercy is perfectly balanced. Wisely, he never crosses the line from mercy to permissiveness.

⁸ Suppose that a servant of God deliberately sets out to follow a course of sin. What then? "Stop keeping company with" him, Paul wrote under in-

7. How does Jehovah's wisdom relate to the mercy he shows?

8. What action is necessary at times, and why?

spiration. (1 Cor. 5:11) Unrepentant wrongdoers are disfellowshipped from the congregation. That action is necessary in order to protect our faithful brothers and sisters and to reflect Jehovah's holy ways. Some, though, may find it hard to view disfellowshipping as an expression of God's mercy. Is it? Let us see.

CAN FIRM DISCIPLINE BE MERCIFUL?

⁹ When we hear an announcement made at a Christian meeting that someone we know and love "is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses," we are deeply saddened. We may wonder if it was necessary to disfellowship our loved one. Is disfellowshipping really an expression of mercy? Yes, it is. To withhold discipline from someone who needs it is not wise, merciful, or loving. (Prov. 13:24) Can getting disfellowshipped help an unrepentant sinner change his course? It can. Many who have fallen into serious sin have found that the firm action the elders took gave them the very jolt they needed to come to their senses, change their course of action, and return to Jehovah's warm embrace. —Read Hebrews 12:5, 6.

9-10. In line with Hebrews 12:5, 6, why can we say that disfellowshipping is a merciful provision? Illustrate.

¹⁰ Consider an illustration. A shepherd notices that one of his sheep is ailing. He knows that treating this particular illness requires that he isolate the sick sheep from the rest of the flock. However, sheep are social creatures. They long to be with the flock, and they may become agitated when kept apart. Does this mean, though, that the shepherd is being harsh or cruel in choosing this treatment? Of course not. He knows that if he allows the sick sheep to mingle with the rest of the flock, the illness will spread. By isolating the sick one, he protects the whole flock.—Compare Leviticus 13:3, 4.

¹¹ When a Christian is disfellowshipped, we might think of him as being like that ailing sheep. He is

11. (a) In what ways might a disfellowshipped person be compared to an ailing sheep? (b) What provisions and help are available to disfellowshipped ones?



A sheep may be isolated when it is ailing, but it still benefits from the shepherd's care
(See paragraphs 9-11)

sick in a spiritual sense. (Jas. 5:14) Spiritual sickness, like some forms of physical illness, can be quite contagious. So it is necessary in some cases to isolate a spiritually sick individual from the congregation. This discipline is an expression of Jehovah's love for faithful members of His flock, and it may reach the wrongdoer's heart and lead him to repentance. While disfellowshipped, the individual may be able to attend meetings, where he can be fed and built up spiritually. He is also free to receive literature for his personal use and to watch JW Broadcasting®. And as the elders observe his progress, they may from time to time offer personal counsel and direction to help him regain his spiritual health so that he can be reinstated as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.*

¹² It is important to remember that only unrepentant sinners are disfellowshipped. The elders know that this is a serious matter, one that they do not take lightly. They know that Jehovah disciplines "to the proper degree." (Jer. 30:11) They

* To learn how reinstated ones can restore their relationship with God and how the elders can help them, see the article "Rebuilding Your Friendship With Jehovah" in this issue.

12. What is the loving and merciful thing that elders can do for an unrepentant sinner?

love their brothers, and they do not want to do anything that will cause them spiritual harm. At times, though, the loving and merciful thing to do is to remove a wrongdoer from the congregation for a period of time.

¹³ Consider how the apostle Paul dealt with an unrepentant sinner in the first century. A Christian in Corinth was living immorally with his father's wife. How shocking! In this regard, Jehovah had told the ancient Israelites: "A man who lies down with his father's wife has exposed his father to shame. Both of them should be put to death without fail." (Lev. 20:11) Of course, Paul could not order the death penalty for the man. But he did direct the Corinthians to disfellowship him. That man's immoral conduct was affecting others in the congregation, some of whom were not even ashamed of his outrageous behavior!—1 Cor. 5:1, 2, 13.

¹⁴ Sometime later, Paul learned that real changes had taken place. The sinner was truly repentant! Although the man had brought shame on the con-

13. Why did a Christian in Corinth need to be disfellowshipped?

14. How did Paul show mercy toward the disfellowshipped man in Corinth, and why? (2 Corinthians 2:5-8, 11)

gregation, Paul told the elders that he did not want “to be too harsh.” He directed them: “Kindly forgive and comfort him.” Note Paul’s reason: “So that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sadness.” Paul felt pity for the repentant man. The apostle did not want to see the man so overwhelmed, so crushed, by what he did that he would give up on seeking forgiveness.—Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-8, 11.

¹⁵ In imitation of Jehovah, the elders love to show mercy. They show firmness when *necessary* but mercy when *possible* if there is a real basis for it. Otherwise, it is not mercy but permissiveness. Are elders the only ones, though, who need to show mercy?

WHAT CAN HELP ALL OF US TO SHOW MERCY?

¹⁶ All Christians seek to imitate Jehovah’s mercy. Why? One reason is that Jehovah will not listen to those who fail to show mercy to others. (Read Proverbs 21:13.) None of us would want Jehovah to refuse to listen to our prayers, so we carefully

15. How do elders balance firmness with mercy?

16. According to Proverbs 21:13, how does Jehovah respond to those who fail to show mercy?

avoid developing a hard-hearted spirit. Rather than turn a deaf ear to a fellow Christian in pain, we must always be ready to listen to “the cry of the lowly one.” Similarly, we take to heart this inspired counsel: “The one who does not practice mercy will have his judgment without mercy.” (Jas. 2:13) If we humbly remember how much we *need* mercy, we are more likely to *show* mercy. We especially want to show mercy when a repentant wrongdoer returns to the congregation.

¹⁷ Bible examples can help us to embrace mercy and to avoid harshness. For instance, consider King David. He often showed heartfelt mercy. Though Saul wanted to kill him, David was merciful toward God’s anointed king, never vengeful or vindictive.—1 Sam. 24:9-12, 18, 19.

¹⁸ However, David was not always merciful. For example, when Nabal, a harsh man by nature, spoke disrespectfully and refused to provide David and his men with food, David was enraged and decided to kill the man and all the men in his household. Thanks to quick action on the part of Nabal’s

17. How did King David show heartfelt mercy?

18-19. What are two instances when David showed a merciless spirit?



King David showed a merciless spirit when approached by Nathan
(See paragraphs 19-20)

long-suffering wife, Abigail, David avoided incurring bloodguilt.—1 Sam. 25:9-22, 32-35.

¹⁹ On another occasion, the prophet Nathan told David about a rich man who robbed a poor neighbor of a beloved sheep. Enraged, David responded: “As surely as Jehovah is living, the man who did this deserves to die!” (2 Sam. 12:1-6) Now, David knew the Mosaic Law. A thief who stole a sheep was to make compensation for it, four times over. (Ex. 22:1) But a death sentence? That was a harsh judgment. It turned out that Nathan was using that hypothetical case only as an illustration for a far worse series of crimes—those that David himself had committed! And Jehovah proved to be far more merciful toward David than David would have been toward the sheep stealer in Nathan’s illustration!—2 Sam. 12:7-13.

²⁰ Note that when David gave in to his rage, he judged Nabal and all his men as deserving of death. And later, David was ready to judge the man in Nathan's illustration as worthy of death. In this second instance, we might wonder why a normally warmhearted man would pronounce such a harsh judgment. Consider the context. At the time, David had a guilty conscience. A harsh, judgmental spirit is not a sign of good spiritual health. Quite the opposite, in fact. Jesus strongly warned his followers: "Stop judging that you may not be judged; for with the judgment you are judging, you will be judged." (Matt. 7:1, 2) So let us keep on guard against harshness and strive to be "rich in mercy," like our God.

²¹ Mercy is more than just a feeling. In fact, mercy has been defined as "compassion in action." All of us, then, can look carefully at the needs in our family, our congregation, and our community. Surely there are many opportunities to show mercy! Is someone in need of comfort? Can we offer practical help, perhaps providing some food or doing some thoughtful deed? Might a reinstated

20. What can we learn from David's example?

21-22. What are some practical ways in which we can show mercy?

Christian need some comforting, upbuilding association? Can we share the comforting message of the good news with others? This is one of the best ways to show mercy to everyone we meet.—Job 29: 12, 13; Rom. 10:14, 15; Jas. 1:27.

²² If we are alert to such needs, we will see that there are opportunities all around us to show mercy. When we show mercy, how we must delight our heavenly Father, the God who is “rich in mercy”!

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 19: From the roof of his house, the father sees his wayward son returning home and rushes out to embrace him. **Page 27:** Stressed by guilt, King David overreacts to Nathan’s illustration and angrily says that the rich man deserves to die.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- Why does Jehovah show mercy?
- What shows that even firm discipline can be merciful?
- What will help us to be merciful?

A Prayer of Thanks

(Psalm 95:2)

1. Gracious Jehovah, we praise you and thank you.
Father, we make these expressions in prayer.
Trusting in you, we will serve you completely,
Knowing we thrive under your tender care.
Daily our errors reveal imperfection.
For our transgressions forgiveness we seek.
Thankful we are that our lives have been ransomed.
Thankful we are that you know we are weak.
2. Grateful we are that you show love and kindness.
Thank you for drawing us closer to you.
Teach us to know you, and help us to serve you.
Show us the way to be loyal and true.
Thankful we are for your powerful spirit.
Grateful we are for the courage to speak.
May we be humble and happy to serve you;
May we give thanks, for you favor the meek.