

## A Tool to Help Us Give an Answer

A number of the examples discussed in this article were adapted from articles that have been published in the series "A Conversation With a Neighbor." It appears occasionally in the public edition of The Watchtower.\*

Regarding the way this series has helped her in the ministry, one sister wrote: "From these articles, I'm learning how to steer a conversation in the right direction, how to ask thought-provoking questions, and how to respond properly to the person's answers. I've always been a 'show-me' kind of learner, and the 'Conversation' articles do just that."

This series is only one of the many spiritual provisions from Jehovah that help us to accomplish the vital work he has given us to do. (Ps. 32:8) How grateful we should be that he provides what we need to carry out our ministry!

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\* Thus far, these topics have been addressed: "What Is the Holy Spirit?" (October 1, 2010); "Is Jesus God?" (April 1, 2012); "Do All Good People Go to Heaven?" (August 1, 2012); "Does God Punish People in Hellfire?" (October 1, 2012); "Does God Care About Our Suffering?" (July 1, 2013); and "Why Does God Allow Suffering?" (January 1, 2014).

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"Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe in Jesus (May 1, 2014)



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## A Conversation With a Neighbor

# What Is the Holy Spirit?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Scott has called at the home of a man named Brad.

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### What Do You Mean by "Holy Ghost"?

**Brad:** I have heard that Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christians. You don't believe in the holy ghost.

**Scott:** First, let me assure you that we are Christians. My belief in Jesus Christ has brought me to your door this morning. After all, he is the One who commands his followers to preach. But may I ask, just what do you mean by "holy ghost"?

**Brad:** I mean the holy spirit, the third person in the Trinity, the helper that Jesus promised to send to us. That helper is very important to me. I want to feel the presence of the holy spirit in my life.

**Scott:** That's how many people understand the holy spirit. Some time ago, I had an opportunity to examine what the Bible

teaches on this subject. If you have a few minutes, I would be pleased to show you what I learned.

**Brad:** Yes, I have a few minutes.

**Scott:** By the way, my name is Scott. May I ask your name?

**Brad:** Brad. Nice to meet you.

**Scott:** Nice to meet you too, Brad. Out of respect for your time, let me focus on just one aspect of this subject. You mentioned that the holy spirit is the helper that Jesus promised us. I agree with you. But is it your understanding that the holy spirit is a person and equal to God?

**Brad:** Yes, that is what I was taught.

### Is the Holy Spirit a Person?

**Scott:** Let's look at a Bible passage that will help us to establish whether the holy spirit is a person or not. You may be familiar with these verses. At Acts 2:1-4, we read: "Now while the day of the festival of Pentecost was in progress they were all together at the same place, and suddenly there occurred from heaven a noise just like that of a rushing stiff

breeze, and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting. And tongues as if of fire became visible to them and were distributed about, and one sat upon each one of them, and they all became filled with holy spirit and started to speak with different tongues, just as the spirit was granting them to make utterance.”

**Brad:** I’m familiar with that account.

**Scott:** Now, Brad, can a person get filled with another person?

**Brad:** Of course not.

**Scott:** Let’s look a little further in the same chapter, at verse 17. The first part of the verse reads: “‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I shall pour out some of my spirit upon every sort of flesh.’” Let me ask you, Brad, could God pour out a portion of a coequal God?

**Brad:** Again, no.

**Scott:** John the Baptist used a different description for being filled with holy spirit. It’s found at Matthew 3:11. Would you like to read this verse, please?

**Brad:** “I, for my part, baptize you with water because of your repentance; but the one coming after me is stronger than I am, whose sandals I am not fit to take off. That one will baptize you people with holy spirit and with fire.”

**Scott:** Thank you. Did you notice what John the Baptist said would be done with holy spirit?

**Brad:** He talked about being baptized with holy spirit.

**Scott:** That’s right. Notice that he also mentioned being baptized with fire. Obviously, fire is not a person. Do you think this verse is saying that holy spirit *is* a person?

**Brad:** No.

**Scott:** So according to the scriptures we have considered, the holy spirit is not a person.

**Brad:** I guess not.

## How a “Helper”?

**Scott:** Earlier, though, you mentioned that expression “helper.” Jesus referred to the holy spirit as a “helper” at John 14:26. Let’s read that together: “The helper, the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name, that one will teach you all things and bring back to your minds all the things I told you.” Some feel that this scripture seems to support the idea that the holy spirit is a person, someone who will help and teach.

**Brad:** Right, that’s how I’ve always viewed it.

**Scott:** Is it possible, though, that Jesus was using a figure of speech? Now notice what Jesus said about wisdom, according to Luke 7: 35: “All the same, wisdom is proved righteous by all its children.” Would you say that wisdom is a person, that it really does have children?

**Brad:** No. That’s obviously a figure of speech.

**Scott:** I agree. Jesus’ point is that wisdom is demonstrated by results. The Bible often uses a figure of speech called personification—that is, speaking of something inanimate as if it were alive. We often use such figures of speech in our own conversations. For example, on this bright morning, it wouldn’t be unusual for someone to say, “Open the curtains, and let the sun in,” would it?

**Brad:** I would say that myself.

**Scott:** And would you be referring to the sun as a person who would come into your home as a guest?

**Brad:** No, obviously not. It’s a figure of speech.

**Scott:** So when Jesus spoke of the holy spirit as a helper, or teacher, could he have been using a figure of speech?

**Brad:** I suppose so. That would fit in with the scriptures you read about the spirit being poured out and about people being baptized with it. But if the holy spirit is not a person, what is it?

### What Is the Holy Spirit?

**Scott:** At Acts 1:8, Jesus tells us what the holy spirit is. Would you like to read that?

**Brad:** “You will receive power when the holy spirit arrives upon you, and you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth.”

**Scott:** Notice that Jesus associates the holy spirit with power. And from the previous verses we read, where do you think that power comes from?

**Brad:** From God the Father.

**Scott:** That’s right. The holy spirit is the same force that God used to create the universe. The second verse in the Bible refers to it. Genesis 1:2 says: “God’s active force was moving to and fro over the surface of the waters.” The Hebrew word here translated “active force” is also translated “spirit.” It is the invisible active force by means of which God accomplishes his purpose and expresses his will. Let me give you just one more scripture to consider. It is Luke 11:13. Would you read this verse, please?

**Brad:** “If you, although being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit to those asking him!”

**Scott:** If the Father in heaven controls the holy spirit, giving it to those who ask him, could the holy spirit be equal to the Father?

**Brad:** No. I see your point.

**Scott:** I don’t want to keep you, Brad. You mentioned that you have only a few minutes. But let me ask a question to summarize

our discussion. From the scriptures we considered, what would you say the holy spirit is?

**Brad:** It’s God’s active force.

**Scott:** That’s right. And according to John 14:26, when Jesus spoke of the holy spirit as a helper, or teacher, he was using a figure of speech called personification.

**Brad:** I never knew that.

**Scott:** There is something most reassuring to learn from Jesus’ words.

**Brad:** What’s that?

**Scott:** We can ask God for his holy spirit to help us in difficult circumstances. We can also ask for his spirit to help us learn the truth about him.

**Brad:** That is interesting. I’ll have to think about that.

**Scott:** Before I go, let me leave you with something else to think about. Since the holy spirit is God’s active force, then we’ll agree that God can use it to accomplish anything he chooses.

**Brad:** Absolutely.

**Scott:** Then why has he not yet used that limitless power to end all the misery and wickedness we see in the world around us? Have you ever wondered about that?\*

**Brad:** I have, actually.

**Scott:** How about if I come back next week at this same time and we discuss it?

**Brad:** I would like that very much. See you then.

\* For more information, see chapter 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.





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## A Conversation With a Neighbor Is Jesus God?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Karen has come to the home of a woman named Samantha.

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### Is It True That You Do Not Believe in Jesus?

**Samantha:** My pastor says that Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in Jesus. Is that true?

**Karen:** Let me assure you that we *do* believe in Jesus. In fact, we believe that exercising faith in Jesus is vital to salvation.

**Samantha:** I believe that too.

**Karen:** So this is something that you and I have in common. By the way, my name is Karen. May I ask your name?

**Samantha:** Samantha. Nice to meet you.

**Karen:** Nice to meet you too, Samantha. You may wonder, 'If Jehovah's Witnesses really do believe in Jesus, why do people say otherwise?'

**Samantha:** Yes, I'm curious about that.

**Karen:** In a nutshell, Samantha, we have very strong faith in Jesus, but we do not believe everything that people say about him.

**Samantha:** Can you give me an example?

**Karen:** Yes. Some people say that Jesus was simply a good man. But we do not agree with that idea.

**Samantha:** Neither do I.

**Karen:** So that's another thing that you and I have in common. A second example is that Jehovah's Witnesses do not agree with teachings that contradict what Jesus himself said about his relationship with the Father.

**Samantha:** What do you mean?

**Karen:** Many religions teach that Jesus is God. Perhaps that is what you have been taught.

**Samantha:** Yes, my pastor says that God and Jesus are the same.

**Karen:** Would you agree, though, that the best way to learn the truth about Jesus is to examine what he said about himself?

**Samantha:** Yes, I would agree with that.

### What Did Jesus Say?

**Karen:** Let's consider a Bible verse that sheds some light on the matter. Notice, please, what we read at John 6:38. Jesus said: "I have come down from heaven to do, not my will, but the will of him that sent me." Now, that statement would be a bit puzzling if Jesus were God.

**Samantha:** What do you mean?

**Karen:** Well, notice that Jesus said he did not come down from heaven to do his *own* will.

**Samantha:** Right, he said that he came to do the will of the One who sent him.

**Karen:** But if Jesus is God, who sent him down from heaven? And why did Jesus yield to the will of that One?

**Samantha:** I see what you're getting at. But I'm not sure that this one verse proves Jesus isn't God.

**Karen:** Consider, though, what Jesus said on another occasion. He made a similar statement in the next chapter of John. Would you please read John 7:16?

**Samantha:** Sure. "Jesus, in turn, answered them and said: 'What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me.'"

**Karen:** Thank you, Samantha. According to this verse, did Jesus teach his own ideas?

**Samantha:** No, he said that his teachings belong to the One who sent him.

**Karen:** That's right. Again, we have to wonder: 'Who sent Jesus? And who gave him the truths he taught?' Wouldn't that One be greater than Jesus? After all, the sender is superior to the one who is sent.

**Samantha:** That's interesting. I never read that passage before.

**Karen:** Consider, too, Jesus' words at John 14:28: "You heard that I said to you, I am going away and I am coming back to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going my way to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am." Based on that verse, how would you say Jesus viewed himself in relation to the Father?

**Samantha:** Well, he said that the Father is greater than he is. So I guess he viewed God as his superior.

**Karen:** Exactly. For another example, notice what Jesus told his disciples as recorded

at Matthew 28:18. That verse says: "All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth." So did Jesus say that he always had all authority?

**Samantha:** No, he said that it had been given to him.

**Karen:** But if Jesus is God, how could he be given more authority? And who gave it to him?

**Samantha:** I'll have to think about that.

### To Whom Was He Speaking?

**Karen:** There is something else that is rather puzzling if Jesus truly is God.

**Samantha:** What's that?

**Karen:** It's what we read about Jesus' baptism. Notice the account recorded at Luke 3: 21, 22. Would you please read those verses?

**Samantha:** "Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized and, as he was praying, the heaven was opened up and the holy spirit in bodily shape like a dove came down upon him, and a voice came out of heaven: 'You are my Son, the beloved; I have approved you.'"

**Karen:** Did you notice what Jesus was doing as he was being baptized?

**Samantha:** He was praying.

**Karen:** Yes. Of course, we might wonder, 'If Jesus is God, to whom was he praying?'

**Samantha:** That's a good question. I'll have to ask my pastor.

**Karen:** Along a similar line, note that after Jesus came up out of the water, someone spoke from heaven. Did you notice what that One said?

**Samantha:** He said that Jesus was His Son, that He loved him, and that He approved of him.

**Karen:** That's right. But if Jesus is God, who said those things from heaven?

**Samantha:** I never thought of it that way before.

## Why “Father” and “Son”?

**Karen:** Here’s something else to consider: We’ve read that Jesus spoke of God as his heavenly Father. And when Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven referred to Jesus as His Son. In fact, Jesus specifically called himself God’s Son. Now, if you wanted to teach me that two people are equal, what sort of family relationship might you use to illustrate the point?

**Samantha:** I might use two brothers.

**Karen:** Exactly—perhaps even identical twins. But Jesus referred to God as the *Father* and to himself as the *Son*. So, what message do you suppose Jesus was conveying?

**Samantha:** I see your point. Jesus is describing one individual as being older and as having more authority than the other.

**Karen:** Exactly. Think about this: You came up with such a fitting illustration of equality, that of brothers or twins. If Jesus really were God, don’t you think that Jesus, as the Great Teacher, would have thought of the same comparison—or an even clearer example of equality?

**Samantha:** Of course.

**Karen:** But, instead, he used the terms “Father” and “Son” to describe his relationship with God.

**Samantha:** You raise an interesting point.

### What Did Jesus’ Early Followers Say?

**Karen:** Before I leave, I’d like to consider one other aspect of this subject with you, if you have a moment.

**Samantha:** Yes, I have a few minutes.

**Karen:** If Jesus truly is God, wouldn’t you expect that Jesus’ disciples would have plainly said so?

**Samantha:** That seems reasonable.

**Karen:** Yet, nowhere in the Scriptures do we read of their teaching that. On the con-

trary, notice what one of Jesus’ early followers, the apostle Paul, wrote. At Philippians 2:9, he describes what God did after Jesus’ death and resurrection: “God exalted him [Jesus] to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name.” According to this verse, what did God do for Jesus?

**Samantha:** It says that God exalted him to a superior position.

**Karen:** Yes. But if Jesus were equal to God before he died and God later exalted him to a higher position, wouldn’t that put Jesus above God? How could anyone be superior to God?

**Samantha:** He couldn’t. It’s impossible.

**Karen:** I agree. Based on all this evidence, then, would you say that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God?

**Samantha:** No, it doesn’t seem that way. The Bible says that he is God’s Son.

**Karen:** That’s right. Let me assure you though, Samantha, that Jehovah’s Witnesses hold Jesus in very high regard. We believe that his death as the promised Messiah opened the way to salvation for all faithful humans.

**Samantha:** I believe that too.

**Karen:** You might wonder, then, ‘How can we show Jesus that we appreciate his giving his life in our behalf?’\*

**Samantha:** I have wondered about that.

**Karen:** Perhaps I could come back and share the Bible’s answer with you. Will you be home about this time next week?

**Samantha:** Yes, I will be here.

**Karen:** Great, I’ll see you then.

\* For more information, see chapter 5 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*





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## A Conversation With a Neighbor

# Do All Good People Go to Heaven?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Marcus has come to the home of a man named Robert.

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### What Will Those Who Go to Heaven Do There?

**Marcus:** When you consider the future, do you think that things are likely to improve, become worse, or stay the same?

**Robert:** I feel that things will improve. I look forward to going to heaven to be with the Lord.

**Marcus:** That's a wonderful hope. The Bible talks a lot about what heaven is like and the privilege of going there. Have you given much thought to what those who go to heaven will do there?

**Robert:** We will be with God and praise him forever.

**Marcus:** That's certainly an appealing prospect. Interestingly, the Bible talks not only about the *privileges* that those who go to heaven will receive but also about an important *responsibility* they'll have.

**Robert:** What's that?

**Marcus:** It's the responsibility mentioned here in Revelation 5:10. That verse says: "You [Jesus] made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth." Did you notice, Robert, what responsibility those who go to heaven will shoulder?

**Robert:** The verse says that they'll rule as kings over the earth.

**Marcus:** That's an interesting thought, isn't it?

### Over Whom Will They Rule?

**Marcus:** Now, would you not agree that if those who go to heaven will rule as kings, there must be people over whom they'll rule? After all, what's the point of a government without any subjects?

**Robert:** I see your point.

**Marcus:** So a logical question to ask is, Whom will they rule over?

**Robert:** I suppose we'll rule over the people on earth who haven't died and gone to heaven yet.

**Marcus:** That would seem reasonable—if *all* good people go to heaven. But here's another possibility to consider. Could it be that

some people—*some* good people—will not go to heaven?

**Robert:** I've never heard of any Christians who believe that.

**Marcus:** I raise the question because of what we read at Psalm 37:29. Would you please read this verse?

**Robert:** OK. It says: "The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it."

**Marcus:** Thank you. Did you notice where many good people will live?

**Robert:** The verse says they'll reside on the earth.

**Marcus:** Precisely—and not just for a short time. Notice that the verse says: "They will reside *forever* upon it."

**Robert:** Maybe that just means that there will always be good people on earth. When we die and go to heaven, we're replaced by other good people who have been born.

**Marcus:** Many would probably interpret the verse that way. But is it possible that the verse means something else altogether? Could it be saying that good people themselves will live forever on earth?

**Robert:** I'm not sure I follow you.

### A Future Earthly Paradise

**Marcus:** Well, consider what another portion of the Bible says about life on earth in the future. Let's read Revelation 21:4. Concerning people who will live at that future time, the verse says: "He [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." Isn't that an appealing prospect?

**Robert:** Yes. But I think that's talking about what life will be like in heaven.

**Marcus:** Well, it's true that those who go to heaven will experience similar blessings. But

look at the verse again. What does it say will happen to death?

**Robert:** It says that "death will be no more."

**Marcus:** Exactly. Now, I'm sure you would agree that for something to be no more, it had to exist in the first place.

**Robert:** Of course.

**Marcus:** But there has never been death in heaven, has there? It's only here on earth that people die.

**Robert:** Hmm. I'll have to think about that.

**Marcus:** You see, Robert, the Bible teaches that some good people will go to heaven but that many others will live forever here on earth. In fact, I'm sure you've heard the famous words: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."—Matthew 5:5, *King James Version*.

**Robert:** Yes, I've heard that passage read at church many times.

**Marcus:** If the meek inherit the earth, doesn't that imply that people will be living on the earth? Those who live on the earth will enjoy the benefits foretold here in Revelation. They will see our world completely change because God will do away with everything bad—even death.

**Robert:** I see what you're getting at, but I'm not sure that just one or two Bible verses prove your point.

**Marcus:** Of course not. Actually, there are a number of scriptures that talk about what life here on earth will be like in the future. Perhaps I can show you one of my favorite passages, if you have a moment?

**Robert:** Yes, I have a few minutes.

### "The Wicked One Will Be No More"

**Marcus:** Earlier we read verse 29 of Psalm 37. Let's go back to that psalm. This time, we'll read verses 10 and 11. Would you please read those verses?



**Robert:** Sure. “And just a little while longer, and the wicked one will be no more; and you will certainly give attention to his place, and he will not be. But the meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.”

**Marcus:** Thank you. Looking at verse 11, where will “the meek ones,” or good people, live?

**Robert:** It says they “will possess the earth.” However, I feel that this verse applies right now; after all, good people live on earth today.

**Marcus:** That’s true. However, notice that the verse also says that good people will enjoy an “abundance of peace.” We don’t see much peace in the world today, do we?

**Robert:** No, we don’t.

**Marcus:** So how will the promise be fulfilled? Maybe I could use this comparison: Imagine you own an apartment building. Some of the tenants are good people—they take care of their apartment and try to be good neighbors. You’re glad to rent an apartment to them. But others are bad tenants; they damage the property and make life miserable for their neighbors around them. Now, if those bad tenants refused to clean up their act, what would you do?

**Robert:** I’d evict them.

**Marcus:** That’s exactly what God is going to do to the bad people around us today. Look again at verse 10. It says: “The wicked one will be no more.” In other words, God will “evict” the people who make trouble for others. Then good people will be able to enjoy life on earth in peace. I realize that this idea of good people living forever on earth may be somewhat different from what you’ve been taught in the past.

**Robert:** Yes, I’ve never heard that idea at my church.

**Marcus:** And as you mentioned before, it’s not enough to consider just one or two verses on the subject. Really, we need to examine what the Bible *as a whole* says about the future of good people. But based on the scriptures we’ve read today, do you think it’s possible that some good people will go to heaven, while many other good people will live forever here on earth?

**Robert:** I’m not sure. But I have to admit that it does appear that way from the scriptures you just read. I’ll have to think about it some more.

**Marcus:** As you consider the subject further, there may be other questions that come to mind. For example, what about good people who have lived before us? Did they all go to heaven? If not, where are they now?

**Robert:** Interesting questions.

**Marcus:** Perhaps I can do two things for you. First, let me jot down a few scriptures that have a bearing on the topic.\* Second, I’d like to come back and discuss those scriptures after you’ve had a chance to read them and think about them. Would that be OK?

**Robert:** Yes, that sounds good. Thank you.

\* See Job 14:13-15; John 3:13; and Acts 2:34.



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## A Conversation With a Neighbor

# Does God Punish People in Hellfire?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Mauricio has come to the home of a man named Alejandro.

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### Will God Punish Wicked People?

**Mauricio:** It's good to see you again, Alejandro.

**Alejandro:** It's good to see you too.

**Mauricio:** I've been thinking about something you mentioned the last time I was here.

**Alejandro:** What's that?

**Mauricio:** You mentioned that you were surprised when you heard that Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in hellfire.

**Alejandro:** Yes, that did surprise me. And to be honest, it's hard for me to accept that you don't believe in it.

**Mauricio:** I appreciate your telling me that. I'm always interested in hearing the viewpoint of others. Since people have a lot of different ideas about hellfire, may I ask how you would explain what you believe about it?

**Alejandro:** Well, I've always believed that really bad people go to hell when they die and that they're tormented there forever.

**Mauricio:** That's a common viewpoint. Let me ask you, Alejandro, have you experienced some bad things in your life?

**Alejandro:** Yes. My sister was murdered five years ago.

**Mauricio:** I'm so sorry to hear that. You must really miss her.

**Alejandro:** I do. I think about her every day.

**Mauricio:** I've found that some people feel strongly about hellfire because they've been affected by the actions of wicked people. After all, innocent victims want to see bad people pay for their actions.

**Alejandro:** Exactly! I want the man who is responsible for my sister's murder to pay for what he did to our family.

**Mauricio:** Those feelings are certainly normal. The Bible teaches that God too is incensed when innocent people are victimized—and he promises that he will punish the wicked. Notice what is stated here at Isaiah 3: 11: "Woe to the wicked one!—Calamity; for

the treatment rendered by his own hands will be rendered to him!" So we can be confident that God *will* punish wicked people.

**Alejandro:** But how can that be if there's no hellfire, as you say?

**Mauricio:** That's a good question. In a nutshell, the answer is that God punishes the wicked with eternal destruction. Consider what the Bible says here at 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Would you please read that verse?

**Alejandro:** Sure. It says: "These very ones will undergo the judicial punishment of everlasting destruction from before the Lord."

**Mauricio:** So you see, Alejandro, there's no hope for wicked people because God punishes them with eternal death. They have no prospects for life in the future.

**Alejandro:** I see what the verse says, but it just doesn't seem fair. Everyone dies. Don't really bad people deserve a worse punishment?

### What Does Justice Require?

**Mauricio:** I can see that you're a person who cares about justice.

**Alejandro:** I do, very much.

**Mauricio:** That's commendable. The truth is, humans have a sense of right and wrong because God created us with it. He too cares a great deal about justice. But when religious leaders teach that God punishes people in hellfire, they are actually portraying God as very *unjust*.

**Alejandro:** What do you mean?

**Mauricio:** Well, let me show you an example. Are you familiar with the Bible account of Adam and Eve?

**Alejandro:** Yes. God told them not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, but they disobeyed.

**Mauricio:** Correct. Let's take a look at the Bible account together. It's found at Genesis 2:16, 17. Those verses say: "Jehovah God also laid this command upon the man: 'From every tree of the garden you may eat to satis-

faction. But as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die.'" So, what did God say would happen if Adam ate the forbidden fruit?

**Alejandro:** He said that Adam would die.

**Mauricio:** That's right. Just think: By his sin, Adam caused the entire human race to be born as sinners.\* And yet, even in this case, did God say anything about being punished in hellfire?

**Alejandro:** No.

**Mauricio:** But if Adam and Eve were in danger of being tormented forever, shouldn't God have warned them? Wouldn't that be the just and loving thing to do?

**Alejandro:** I would say so.

**Mauricio:** Consider, too, what God said to Adam and Eve after they sinned. Would you please read Genesis 3:19?

**Alejandro:** OK. It says: "In the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you will return."

**Mauricio:** Thank you. According to God's words, where was Adam headed?

**Alejandro:** He said that Adam would return to the dust of the ground.

**Mauricio:** Precisely. Now, wouldn't you agree that in order for someone to return to a place, he has to have been there before?

**Alejandro:** Of course.

**Mauricio:** And where was Adam before God created him?

**Alejandro:** He didn't exist.

**Mauricio:** That's right. And you'll notice that there's no mention of hellfire in God's judgment. Would it be fair for God to tell Adam that he was going back to the ground from which he had been made if he was really going to a fiery hell?

**Alejandro:** No, that wouldn't be fair.

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\* See Romans 5:12.

## Does the Devil Carry Out God's Will?

**Mauricio:** There's something else we might consider about the teaching of hellfire.

**Alejandro:** What's that?

**Mauricio:** Well, who do people usually say is "in charge" of hellfire? Who supposedly punishes the people that are in hell?

**Alejandro:** The Devil.

**Mauricio:** Yet, the Devil is God's worst enemy. If God sends people to a fiery hell to be tormented by the Devil, wouldn't that imply a level of cooperation between God and the Devil?

**Alejandro:** Hmm. I never thought of it that way before.

**Mauricio:** To illustrate the point—you're a father, correct?

**Alejandro:** Yes, I have a son. He just turned 15.

**Mauricio:** Imagine that your son becomes very rebellious. He does a lot of bad things that sadden you. What would you do?

**Alejandro:** I would try to correct him.

**Mauricio:** I'm sure you would repeatedly try to help him get back on the right track.

**Alejandro:** Absolutely.

**Mauricio:** Let's say that despite all your efforts, he rejects what you're telling him. Eventually, you may feel that you have no choice but to punish him in some way.

**Alejandro:** Yes.

**Mauricio:** But what if you found out that an evil man had been influencing your son, teaching him to do all those bad things?

**Alejandro:** I would be angry with that man.

**Mauricio:** Now, this is where I would appreciate your comment. Knowing that a wicked, immoral man had influenced your son against you, would you turn to *that man* and ask him to punish your son for you?

**Alejandro:** Of course not. That wouldn't make any sense.

**Mauricio:** Really, then, does it make sense that God would ask Satan the Devil—the very one who influences wicked people—to punish those same people?

**Alejandro:** No, I guess not.

**Mauricio:** For that matter, if God wanted the wicked to be punished, why would the Devil—God's archenemy—*comply* with God's wishes and torment them?

**Alejandro:** I never thought of it that way before!

## Jehovah Will End All Wickedness

**Mauricio:** Rest assured, though. God *will* take action against the incorrigibly wicked. Perhaps I could share one final scripture with you that drives this point home. The scripture is Psalm 37:9. Would you please read that verse?

**Alejandro:** OK. It says: "Evildoers themselves will be cut off, but those hoping in Jehovah are the ones that will possess the earth."

**Mauricio:** Thank you. Did you notice what Jehovah God will do to evildoers?

**Alejandro:** The verse says that God will cut them off.

**Mauricio:** That's right. In other words, he will destroy them permanently. But good people—"those hoping in Jehovah"—will enjoy life here on earth forever. Of course, this may bring some questions to your mind. For example, why doesn't God stop people from doing evil things in the first place? And if he really intends to punish wicked people, why hasn't he done so already?

**Alejandro:** Interesting questions.

**Mauricio:** Perhaps I can show you the Bible's answers the next time we talk.\*

**Alejandro:** I would like that.

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\* For more information, see chapter 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

# Does God Care About Our Suffering?



The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Michelle has come to the home of a woman named Sophia.

## HOW COULD HE LET THIS HAPPEN?

**Michelle:** Today I'm sharing this tract with everyone in the area. It's entitled *Would You Like to Know the Truth?* Here's your copy.

**Sophia:** Is this about religion?

**Michelle:** Yes. Notice the six questions listed on the cover. Which of these questions—

**Sophia:** Let me stop you there. You would be wasting your time talking with me.

**Michelle:** Why do you say that?

**Sophia:** The truth is, I'm not sure that I even believe in God.

**Michelle:** Well, I appreciate your being honest with me. May I ask, Have you always felt that way?

**Sophia:** No, I grew up attending church. But I stopped going a long time ago.

**Michelle:** I see. By the way, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Michelle.

**Sophia:** I'm Sophia.

**Michelle:** Nice to meet you, Sophia.

**Sophia:** You too.

**Michelle:** I'm not here to force my beliefs on you, Sophia. I am curious, though. Is there something in particular that caused you to doubt God's existence?

**Sophia:** Yes. My mother was involved in a car crash 17 years ago.

**Michelle:** I'm so sorry to hear that. Was she injured?

**Sophia:** Yes, she's been paralyzed ever since.

**Michelle:** That is so sad. You must be devastated.

**Sophia:** I am. I just can't help but wonder, If God exists, how could he let this happen? Why would God allow us to suffer like this?

## IS IT WRONG TO ASK WHY?

**Michelle:** Your feelings and questions are understandable. When we suffer, it's only normal to wonder why. In fact, even some faithful men and women in Bible times wondered about that!

**Sophia:** Really?

**Michelle:** Yes. Would it be all right if I showed you an example from the Bible?

**Sophia:** I would like that.

**Michelle:** Notice what the faithful prophet Habakkuk asked God, as recorded at Habakkuk, chapter 1, verses 2 and 3: "How long, O Jehovah, must I cry for help, and you do not hear? How long shall I call to you for aid from violence, and you do not save? Why is it that you make me see what is hurtful?" Do those questions sound similar to the ones you've been asking?

**Sophia:** They do.

**Michelle:** God never scolded Habakkuk for asking those questions, nor did he tell Habakkuk that he simply needed more faith.

**Sophia:** Interesting.

## JEHOVAH HATES SUFFERING

**Michelle:** The Bible teaches that God notices our suffering and that he cares about it.

**Sophia:** What do you mean?

**Michelle:** Let me show you an example here at Exodus 3:7. Would you mind reading that verse?

**Sophia:** All right. It says: "And Jehovah added: 'Unquestionably I have seen the affliction of

my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their outcry as a result of those who drive them to work; because I well know the pains they suffer.’”

**Michelle:** Thank you. Based on this scripture, does God notice when his people suffer?

**Sophia:** Yes, it seems that he does.

**Michelle:** And he’s not just vaguely aware of what happens. Look again at the last part of that verse. God said: “*I well know the pains they suffer.*” Do those sound like the words of a cold or aloof God?

**Sophia:** No, not really.

**Michelle:** Of course, it’s one thing to notice a situation, but to be moved by it—to have feelings about the situation—is something else altogether.

**Sophia:** True.

**Michelle:** With that in mind, let’s read about another instance when God’s people were suffering. It’s recorded at Isaiah 63:9. The first part of that verse says: “During all their distress *it was distressing to him.*” Would you say, then, that God was affected by the suffering of his people?

**Sophia:** Yes, it does sound that way.

**Michelle:** The truth is, Sophia, God cares a great deal about us, and he hates to see us suffer. When we hurt, he hurts with us.

#### WHY HAS HE WAITED?

**Michelle:** Before I go, there’s one other thought I would like to share with you.

**Sophia:** All right.

**Michelle:** Consider what the Bible teaches us about God’s power. The verse I have in mind is Jeremiah 10:12. Would you please read it?

**Sophia:** Sure. It says: “He is the Maker of the earth by his power, the One firmly establishing

the productive land by his wisdom, and the One who by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”

**Michelle:** Thank you. Let’s think about this verse for a moment. Would God have needed a lot of power to create the vast universe and everything in it?

**Sophia:** Definitely.

**Michelle:** Now, if God has the power to create everything around us, would we not expect that he also has the power to control his creation?

**Sophia:** Yes.

**Michelle:** Think again of your mother. Why does it bother you to see her suffer?

**Sophia:** Because I love her. She’s my mother.

**Michelle:** And if you had the power to heal her today, would you?

**Sophia:** Of course.

**Michelle:** Think of what that means. The Bible teaches that God notices our suffering, he feels for us, and he has a vast amount of power. Can you imagine, then, how much self-control it must take for God *not* to step in and immediately end our suffering?

**Sophia:** I never thought of it that way before.

**Michelle:** Could it be that he has good reason for not yet intervening to end our problems?\*

**Sophia:** Hmm, I suppose he might.

**Michelle:** I hear your telephone ringing, so let me come back another time, and we can discuss this topic further.

**Sophia:** Thank you. I would like that.<sup>#</sup> ■

\* For more information, see chapter 11 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

<sup>#</sup> A future article in this series will consider why God allows suffering.

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Do you have a particular Bible subject that you have wondered about? Are you curious about any of the beliefs or religious practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses? If so, do not hesitate to ask one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. He or she will be pleased to discuss such matters with you.

# Why Does God Allow Suffering?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Michelle has come to the home of a woman named Sophia.



## HOW DOES GOD FEEL ABOUT OUR SUFFERING?

**Michelle:** Hi, Sophia. I'm happy I found you at home.

**Sophia:** Me too.

**Michelle:** The last time I was here, we discussed how God feels about our suffering.\* You mentioned that this is something you have wondered about for a long time, especially after your mother was injured in a car crash. By the way, how has your mother been doing?

**Sophia:** She has good days and bad days. Today, she's doing OK.

**Michelle:** I'm glad to hear that. It must be a real challenge to keep your head up in a situation like this.

**Sophia:** It is. Sometimes I wonder how much longer she will have to suffer.

**Michelle:** That's a natural response. You may recall that at the end of our last visit, I left you with a question about why God has allowed suffering to continue if he has the power to end it.

**Sophia:** Yes, I remember.

**Michelle:** Before we consider the Bible's answer, let's review a few of the points we covered last time.

**Sophia:** OK.

\* See "A Conversation With a Neighbor—Does God Care About Our Suffering?" in the July 1, 2013, issue of this magazine. Also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

**Michelle:** For one thing, we learned that even a faithful man in Bible times wondered why God allows suffering. Yet, God never scolded him for asking about it, nor did God tell him that he simply needed more faith.

**Sophia:** That was a new thought to me.

**Michelle:** We also learned that Jehovah God hates to see us suffer. For example, the Bible says that when his people were going through distress, "it was distressing to him."\* Isn't it comforting to know that God feels for us when we suffer?

**Sophia:** Yes, it is.

**Michelle:** Finally, we agreed that considering the vast amount of power our Creator possesses, surely he has the ability to step in and end suffering at any moment.

**Sophia:** That's what I don't understand. Why does God let all these bad things happen when he has the power to stop them?

## WHO WAS TELLING THE TRUTH?

**Michelle:** We can start to find the answer to your question by turning to the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Are you familiar with the account of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit?

**Sophia:** Yes, I learned that story in Sunday school. God said not to eat from a certain tree, but they went ahead and ate from it anyway.

\* See Isaiah 63:9.

**Michelle:** That is correct. Now, let's focus on the events that led up to Adam and Eve's sin. Those events have a direct bearing on the question of why we suffer. Would you please read Genesis chapter 3, verses 1 through 5?

**Sophia:** OK. "Now the serpent was the most cautious of all the wild animals of the field that Jehovah God had made. So it said to the woman: 'Did God really say that you must not eat from every tree of the garden?' At this the woman said to the serpent: 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But God has said about the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden: "You must not eat from it, no, you must not touch it; otherwise you will die."' At this the serpent said to the woman: 'You certainly will not die. For God knows that in the very day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and bad.'"

**Michelle:** Thank you. Let's examine these verses for a moment. First, notice that a serpent spoke to the woman, Eve. Another part of the Bible shows that it was really Satan the Devil who was speaking to her through the serpent.\* Satan asked Eve about God's command regarding a certain tree. Did you notice what God had said the penalty would be if Adam and Eve ate from it?

**Sophia:** They would die.

**Michelle:** Correct. Then, with his very next words, Satan made a major accusation against God. Notice what he said: "You certainly will not die." Satan was calling God a liar!

**Sophia:** I never heard that part of the story before.

**Michelle:** And when Satan called God a liar, he raised an issue that would require time to settle. Can you see why?

**Sophia:** Hmm. I'm not sure.

\* See Revelation 12:9.

**Michelle:** Well, maybe I could illustrate the point this way. Let's say that one day I approach you and claim that I'm physically stronger than you are. How could you prove me wrong?

**Sophia:** I suppose with some sort of a test.

**Michelle:** Yes, exactly. Maybe we would choose a heavy object and then see which one of us was able to lift it. Actually, proving who is stronger is pretty straightforward.

**Sophia:** I see your point.

**Michelle:** But what if instead of saying that I'm stronger, I claimed to be more *honest* than you? That's a different matter, isn't it?

**Sophia:** Yes, I suppose so.

**Michelle:** After all, honesty is not something like strength, which can be proved with a simple test.

**Sophia:** No.

**Michelle:** Really, the only way to settle the challenge would be to let enough time pass for others to observe the two of us and see who really is more honest.

**Sophia:** That makes sense.

**Michelle:** Now, look again at this account in Genesis. Did Satan claim to be stronger than God?

**Sophia:** No.

**Michelle:** God could have quickly proved him wrong. Instead, Satan claimed to be more *honest* than God. In effect, he said to Eve, 'God is lying to you, but *I'm* telling you the truth.'

**Sophia:** Interesting.

**Michelle:** In his wisdom, then, God knew that the best way to settle the challenge would be to allow time to pass. Eventually, it would become clear who was telling the truth and who was lying.

## AN IMPORTANT ISSUE

**Sophia:** But as soon as Eve died, didn't that prove that God was telling the truth?

**Michelle:** In a sense, it did. But there was more to Satan’s challenge. Look again at verse 5. Do you notice what else Satan told Eve?

**Sophia:** He said that if she ate of the fruit, her eyes would be opened.

**Michelle:** Yes, and that she would become “like God, knowing good and bad.” So Satan claimed that God was withholding something good from humans.

**Sophia:** I see.

**Michelle:** And that too was a major challenge.

**Sophia:** What do you mean?

**Michelle:** By his words, Satan implied that Eve—and by extension, all humans—would be better off without God’s rulership. In this case too, Jehovah knew that the best way to address the challenge would be to let Satan try to prove his point. So God has allowed Satan to rule this world for a time. That explains why we see so much suffering around us—it’s because Satan, not God, is the real ruler of the world.\* But there is good news.

\* See John 12:31; 1 John 5:19.

**Sophia:** What’s that?

**Michelle:** The Bible teaches these two beautiful truths about God. First, Jehovah is there for us when we suffer. For example, consider the words of King David, as recorded at Psalm 31:7. David experienced a lot of suffering during his lifetime, but notice what he was able to say in prayer to God. Would you please read that verse?

**Sophia:** OK. It says: “I will rejoice greatly in your loyal love, for you have seen my affliction; you are aware of my deep distress.”

**Michelle:** So even though David experienced suffering, he found comfort in knowing that Jehovah saw everything he went through. Do you find that comforting—the thought that Jehovah is aware of everything, even our painful emotions that other humans may not fully understand?

**Sophia:** Yes, I do.

**Michelle:** The second beautiful truth is that God will not allow our suffering to go on indefinitely. The Bible teaches that he will soon bring an end to Satan’s wicked rulership. And he will completely undo all the bad things that have happened, including the things that you and your mother have suffered. May I come back next week and show you why we can be sure that God *will* soon end all suffering?\*

**Sophia:** That sounds good. ■

\* For more information, see chapter 9 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).



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# Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe in Jesus?

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Anthony has come to the home of a man named Tim.



## BELIEF IN JESUS ESSENTIAL

**Anthony:** Hi, Tim. It's good to see you again.

**Tim:** It is good to see you too.

**Anthony:** I brought the latest issues of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* for you. I think you will really enjoy the articles in these magazines.

**Tim:** Thank you. Actually, I'm glad you came by today because there is something I want to ask you.

**Anthony:** Sure, what is it?

**Tim:** The other day, I was speaking with a coworker. I told him about the pamphlets you gave me and how interesting they are. But he said that I shouldn't read them because Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in Jesus. Is that true? I told my coworker that I would ask the next time you visited.

**Anthony:** Well, I'm glad you asked me. It's good that you are going straight to the source. After all, what better way is there to find out what a person believes than to ask the person himself?

**Tim:** That's what I figured.

**Anthony:** The truth is, Jehovah's Witnesses most certainly believe in Jesus. In fact, we feel that exercising faith in Jesus is vital to salvation.

**Tim:** I thought you did, but when my coworker said that you don't believe in Jesus, it made me curious. I guess you and I never really discussed it before.

**Anthony:** May I show you some Bible verses

that highlight the importance of exercising faith in Jesus? These are verses that Jehovah's Witnesses often use in their ministry.

**Tim:** OK.

**Anthony:** A good place to start is with Jesus' own words recorded at John 14:6. These words are part of a conversation that Jesus had with one of his apostles. We read: "Jesus said to him: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" According to that verse, what is the only way to approach the Father?

**Tim:** Through Jesus.

**Anthony:** Correct. And Jehovah's Witnesses firmly believe that. Let me ask you this: From what you know about God's requirements, when a person prays, in whose name should he offer the prayer?

**Tim:** In the name of Jesus.

**Anthony:** I agree. And that's why every prayer I offer is said in Jesus' name. The same is true of all the prayers of Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Tim:** That's good to know.

**Anthony:** Another scripture we might consider is John 3:16. That verse is so important that it has been called the Gospel in miniature. The idea is that if you could take everything that was written about Jesus' earthly life and ministry and boil it down to one verse, this would be it. Maybe you would like to read this scripture.

**Tim:** OK. It says: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”

**Anthony:** Thank you. Are you familiar with this verse?

**Tim:** Yes, I’ve heard it a lot, and I often see it quoted on signs and billboards.

**Anthony:** It is a famous verse. Looking at it carefully, notice what Jesus said. He said that God’s love makes it possible for humans to enjoy everlasting life—but only if we do what?

**Tim:** Exercise faith.

**Anthony:** Yes. Specifically, faith in the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. And this point—that faith in Jesus opens the way to everlasting life—is made right here on page 2 of the magazine I brought you. Regarding the purpose of *The Watchtower*, it says that among other things, this magazine “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.”

**Tim:** Well, there you go. Right in your own magazine is proof that Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in Jesus.

**Anthony:** Precisely.

**Tim:** So, then, why do people say that you don’t believe in Jesus?

**Anthony:** There are probably a number of reasons why people say that. In some cases, people say it simply because they have heard other people say it. Or they may have been taught this misconception by their minister.

**Tim:** I’m just thinking here—maybe some people say that you don’t believe in Jesus because you call yourselves Jehovah’s Witnesses, not *Jesus’* Witnesses.

**Anthony:** That could be a reason too.

**Tim:** Why do you talk about Jehovah so much?

## “I HAVE MADE YOUR NAME KNOWN”

**Anthony:** For one thing, we believe that it is important to use God’s personal name, Jehovah—just as his Son, Jesus, did. Consider what Jesus said in prayer to his Father. It’s recorded at John 17:26. Would you please read that verse?

**Tim:** Sure. “I have made your name known to them and will make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in union with them.”

**Anthony:** Thank you. Notice that Jesus said he had made God’s name known. Why do you suppose he did that?

**Tim:** Hmm. I’m not sure.

**Anthony:** Well, maybe we could look at another scripture that sheds light on the matter. I am thinking of Acts 2:21. There we read: “Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.” Now, I’m sure you would agree that if calling on

## Exercising faith in Jesus is vital to salvation

the name of Jehovah is a requirement for salvation, Jesus was no doubt aware of this requirement.

**Tim:** Yes, of course.

**Anthony:** So the salvation of his followers is one reason why it was important to Jesus that they know and use God’s name. And it’s one of the main reasons why we talk about Jehovah so much. We feel that it is important to make known God’s personal name and help others call on that name.

**Tim:** But even if people don’t know God’s name or use it directly, they still know who they’re talking about when they refer to God.

**Anthony:** That may be true. Even so, by telling us his personal name, God has made it easier for us to draw close to him.

**Tim:** What do you mean?



**Anthony:** Think of it this way: We didn't need to know Moses' personal name. We could have known him simply as the man who parted the Red Sea or the man who received the Ten Commandments. Likewise with Noah—why know his name? He could have just been referred to as the man who built an ark and saved his family and the animals. For that matter, even Jesus Christ could have been known simply as the one who came from heaven and died for our sins. Right?

**Tim:** I suppose so.

**Anthony:** But God made sure that we knew the personal names of those individuals. There's nothing that adds that special touch like a personal name. Even though we have never met Moses, Noah, or Jesus, just knowing their name makes these men more real to us.

**Tim:** I never thought of it that way before, but that makes sense!

**Anthony:** And that's another reason why Jehovah's Witnesses use God's personal name so much. We want to help people build faith in Jehovah God as a real Person whom they can draw close to. At the same time, we place great emphasis on the role that Jesus plays in our salvation. Perhaps we could read one more scripture that drives home this point.

**Tim:** Sure.

**Anthony:** Earlier we read John 14:6. Remember, Jesus said that he is "the way and the truth

and the life." Let's go back a few verses and notice his words found at John 14:1. Would you please read what Jesus said in the last part of that verse?

**Tim:** OK. It says: "Exercise faith in God; exercise faith also in me."

**Anthony:** Thank you. Would you say, then, that true faith is an either-or matter? Is it a question of belief in Jesus versus belief in Jehovah?

**Tim:** No. Jesus said we need both.

**Anthony:** That's right. And I am sure you would agree that it's not enough just to *say* that we have faith in God and in Jesus. Really, we need to live our lives in a way that backs up that claim.

**Tim:** Definitely.

**Anthony:** But just how does a person demonstrate that he truly has faith in God and in Jesus? Maybe we can discuss that question another time.\*

**Tim:** I would like that. ■

\* For more information, see chapter 12 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses. It is also available on [jw.org](http://jw.org).

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