

Stepping Stones to Salvation Success

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Stepping Stones to Salvation Success

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At this point I need to express a very special thanks to all of the people who have contributed to my series of books, both directly and indirectly: First and foremost, His most wondrous of gifts--my wife Janet and the incredible blessings from the Lord as I continue to write this series of books. Next, all of the help and spiritual growth I received from attending and ministering in the Lord's non-instrumental churches: McPherson Church of Christ, Council Bluffs; Redline Church of Christ, Harlan, Iowa and Harlan Church of Christ. Also the instrumental churches: First Christian Church, Council Bluffs, Iowa; my home congregation--East Side Christian Church, Council Bluffs. And finally: my family, Kathleen Kachulas, and many other wonderful friends and brethren, and my nephew David West who offered his professional web design services. I truly appreciate all of their help and encouragement.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought no cease to yield fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

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Statement of Purpose

In mid-nineteen nineties I set out to research what took place when I first decided to obey the Gospel. The interest reaches back to 1978. This is when I first heard the gospel message from a preacher who served in a Council Bluffs, Iowa, Church of Christ – noninstrumental. My wife Janet had quietly and very effectively led me to attend this church and respond to the Lord’s call. Throughout our dating and engagement she consistently modeled a Christian woman, greatly influencing my interest in the Lord. She never stopped.

The minister taught me the basics of salvation and I chose to answer the Lord’s call. From this moment I became increasingly interested in learning what took place and began a systematic study of salvation. As I accumulated more knowledge and research information the thought occurred to me to share what I have learned. Thus my book began to take shape from a rough outline to a manuscript.

Through many years of writing I included other books, ending up with a series of books in various stages of completion. They speak about salvation, sin, the Lord’s work of salvation, the covenant, and an overview book.

The books include the integration of many different types of theology: theology – information about God, Christology – the work of Jesus, pneumatology – what the Holy Spirit is doing, ecclesiatology – about the Lord’s church, anthropology – mankind’s response and accountability to God, soteriology – the process of salvation, and eschatology – concerning the end of time and eternal life in the body of Christ.

This book is the overview which briefly looks at many differing aspects of salvation. It has nine sections which include basic steps of information leading to a greater insight about God, what takes place when responding to His free offer of salvation in Christ, and spiritual confidence.

The parts of each section are like stepping stones, one of many crossing a stream of spiritual water. As the reader progresses from one step to another he will begin to grow in a better understanding concerning his present fellowship with Jesus and knowledge of what lies ahead. Once he reaches the other side he is able to look back across the stream and see the wonders of God’s grace. He is better equipped to recognize his participation and partnership in the Lord’s eternal plan.

I sincerely hope this information becomes as useful to the reader as it is for me the writer. May God richly bless your efforts to understand the blessings of salvation which the Lord so lovingly gave to all humanity. I pray God will give you the confidence and faith to witness the wondrous grace of God to the lost and to fellow servant’s in the Lord.

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Section One: God

One God

God is one, yet He presents Himself to humanity through three distinct manifestations of His being. *Mark* recorded Jesus teaching the scribes the most important commandment of the Law of Moses. He said: God "is one Lord" (12:29). The Spirit inspired Moses to reveal, "then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (*Genesis* 1:26). The two identities are not contradictory.

Jesus revealed what is meant with the identity--"us" when He ordered His disciples to: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Matthew* 28:19). He knew God is one, yet He described God's manifestation to His creation as three distinct persons.

In his gospel, *John* quoted Jesus speaking about conditions of love toward God. How does a physical person express love towards God whom he is unable to sense? Loving God is basically very simple; all a servant needs to do is to obey His will and honor Him as Lord and Master, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me" (14:21a). In response to his expressed love, Jesus promised: "My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (14:23b). The "We" is a name identifying Jesus, God the Father and the Holy Spirit. And the servant who chooses to love Jesus is himself united with the One God because all believers who keep His word are "clothed themselves with Christ" and have received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (*Galatians* 3:27b; *Acts* 2:38b).

In his letter to the *Romans* Paul helped to explain how oneness works between physical people, their spiritual God, and the oneness of God, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (12:4-5). Later he wrote in *Ephesians*, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (4:4-6). With God, one plus one plus one equals one.

This may sound confusing and far beyond human understanding or acceptance. But what many people may think or believe doesn't change the reality of God. Nor, does God ask anyone to rationalize Him from wisdom learned from the human experience. God only asks for people to believe and faithfully obey Him, not to understand Him, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than yours ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (*Isaiah* 55:8-9).

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Section One: God

One God

Throughout history God revealed His reality in numerous ways. The fact no one has ever seen Him doesn't matter, "no man has seen God at any time" (*John 1:18a*). His subtle spiritual presence, power of creation, compassionate providential care for all people, covenants with His people, the internal law of "good and evil" given to all people, and the complete accuracy of the prophets of old should be enough to convince even the most unrighteous to recognize the presence of God. But greater than all of the other witnesses is Jesus. When He entered into His creation, "the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (*John 1:18b*). Jesus is Him. God is real and is intimately involved within His creation, regardless of what many people may say or preach.

In *Hebrews* the writer reminded his brethren how God communicated to His people through "prophets in many portions and in many ways" (1:1b). God became God the Father when He sent Jesus "his exact representation of His nature" to earth (1:3). He wanted to reveal Himself to mankind in an understandable way.

God the Father profoundly showed His love by sending "His only begotten Son" to save His people from sin and self destruction (*John 3:16a*). He wants mankind to understand they are loved by their God--Creator.

Luke quoted the conversation an angel had with Mary concerning Jesus, "behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus ... He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God" (1:31, 32a, 35b). Through Jesus, God the Father communicated exactly what He wanted His people to know. Many years later Paul said Jesus, "is the image of the invisible God" (*Colossians 1:15*). He is God. When looking upon Jesus, God the Father is seen. Jesus enabled physical man to see his spiritual God.

Jesus came to His people for many reasons, perhaps one of the most important: to remind them of whom they serve, God is the one true God and He alone is glorified as God. Jesus once said, "Not that any man has seen the Father, except the Son, who is from God; He has seen the Father" (*John 6:46*). Jesus has seen Him because He not only preexisted--one with the Father; He is always one with the Father. Since His resurrection He lives in human form, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God ... The Lord said to My Lord, 'sit at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for thy feet'" (*Acts 2:33a, 34b, 35*).

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Jesus set Himself apart from all other religious beliefs in gods, idols, created things, even faith in God. He is not a religion but a person, God in the flesh, the focus of belief and faith. He alone is the focus of faith. Without Jesus belief and faith in God the Father is meaningless, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father. But through Me" (*John 14:6b*). In Christ, religion doesn't seek for God; it is a spiritual and physical response to the will of God the Father, "If any one serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if any one serves Me, the Father will honor him" (*John 12:26*).

God actively seeks any person willing to answer His call through Jesus. While visiting Athens, Paul couldn't help but notice their great interest in many differing gods. He pointed out to them how religion per se doesn't bring anyone to God: He "does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as if He needed anything" (*Acts 17:24b-25a*). This is what Jesus had earlier prophesied concerning the transformation of religious practices when the New Covenant takes affect, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father" (*John 4:21b*). He requires people to "seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one" (*17:27b*). In the New Covenant age God will no longer manifest His presence in a Jewish temple; He was never or ever will be in a Gentile temple.

This is why belief and faith are so important. The two words are virtually identical in meaning – they both demand a physical response in order to prove sincerity and love towards Jesus, but there are subtle differences. Even though He is unseen by physical eyes a servant is able to see Him through belief in the integrity of His word. However, without obedience to His word belief is meaningless and empty. Faith works the same. A servant can feel and allow his heart to lead him into perceived worship of God but until he is willing to submit faith motivated obedience to the Lord's will his response is meaningless and empty.

Anyone seeking Him must be guided by His gospel. Different religions created by man and God's creation may reveal His presence; but only obedient belief and faith in Jesus will lead a servant of sin into God the Father's holy presence.

When a slave of sin chooses to answer the call of God he must do so through Jesus. God the Father requires him to express his newfound faith through obedience to the expressed will of Jesus which in turn honors Jesus, "For not even the Father judges any one, but He has given all judgment to the Son in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (*John 5:22-23*). As a result He gives to anyone willing to love and honor Him by loving and honoring Jesus, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

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One God

The Holy Spirit unites the believer with God, “if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love Him, and We will come to Him and make Our abode with Him” (*John 14:23*). He becomes one with God and fellowship is restored. Thus God is not only united in His three manifested personalities but with His holy saints of righteousness as well.

The blessing of the Spirit is unique, for He is given only to those who are willing to practice their belief and faith in Jesus for salvation. Jesus said the “world cannot receive” His indwelling presence because they do not “know Him” (*John 14:17a*). God the Father personally anoints those who express their love toward Him through Jesus Christ: “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our heart as a pledge” (*2 Corinthians 1:21-22*).

Questions

God is one.

Mark 12:29; Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19; John 14:21a, 23b

- 1) How do you picture God in your mind’s eye?
- 2) Why do you think Lord is connected with God?
- 3) Who do you think “us” refers to?
- 4) How does God reveal Himself to mankind?
- 5) Is God the same God who created everything so long ago?

All believers are united with God.

Galatians 3:27b; Acts 2:38, Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 4:4-6

- 1) As a Child of God, do you ever think about God living within you and experiencing your experiences and thoughts?
- 2) Do you go about with life with the constant knowledge of God experiencing what you experience?
- 3) How does unity with God affect your desire to serve Him?

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Questions

One God

4) How does unity with God motivate your desire to repent and live according to His standard of righteousness?

God does not ask anyone to understand Him.

Isaiah 55:8-9; John 1:18

- 1) Do you ever get upset about not knowing what God is doing?
- 2) Are you seeking signs from God to confirm His work in your life?
- 3) How do faith, signs, and doubt connect?

Jesus witnesses God.

John 1:18b; Hebrews 1:1-3; John 3:16; Luke 1:31, 32a, 35b; Colossians 1:15; John 6:46; Acts 2:33a, 34b, 35; John 14:6b; John 12:26; Acts 17:24b-25a; John 4:21b, 17:27b, 5:22-23; 14:23

- 1) Jesus is the source of all Scripture, but where do you source your information about God, from other people, books about Scripture, Scripture, or something else?
- 2) Jesus is God, how do you picture God His Father and the Spirit?
- 3) Does the Lord's service to His Father offer insight about God?

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Section One: God

His Promise to all of Mankind

God revealed His promise to mankind soon after Adam and Eve rationalized Satan's deception as truth and transgressed against His will. Thus what God warned of came to pass: "you shall surely die" (*Genesis 2:17b*). As a result of their sin they lost their holiness and received God's punishment. However, He promised them a very distant blessing: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel" (3:15). Sin and spiritual death—separation from God's personal presence, soon spread to all of mankind. From then on His promise began its relentless march through history offering life to the repentant.

As the years came and went sin progressively grew to the point of universal spiritual self-destruction, jeopardizing the promise. However, the promise restrained God from completely eliminating all of mankind in the flood. He allowed His only righteous saints--Noah and his family, to survive and restart the world, restoring the flow of the promise, "Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animal to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left together with those what were with him in the ark" (*Genesis 7:23*).

Many years later after the world recovered from the flood God again brought the promise to light, this time to Abraham and His seed, both its physical and spiritual sides, "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (*Genesis 12:3b*). Specifically, but clearly not understood by the Jews, God did not state, "and to seeds," which refers to many; rather, He stated: "and to your seed"—i.e, Jesus Christ (*Galatians 3:16*). Even though He spoke of the new upcoming nation of Israel through Abraham, God re-affirmed the spiritual side of the promise.

From then on He maintained the promise of the "seed" through His chosen but rebellious people. The nation of Israel facilitated the physical heritage of the Messiah. Their rebellion against His will ultimately helped to fulfill His will. Throughout the years leading up to the Messiah's birth the prophets of Israel offered a glimpse into the spiritual and physical sides of His life, death, burial, resurrection, restoration of mankind, reestablishment of His kingdom, Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple.

From Abraham up to the birth of Christ, and ultimately onward to His second coming, God guides human history as He brings about the fulfillment of the long awaited promise—the eternal restoration of direct fellowship with His people. Peter pointed out the final fulfillment of the promise by Jesus the Messiah. He reminded the Jewish people: "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (*Acts 3:25*).

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His Promise to all of Mankind

Even though the Jewish people had a very special purpose in the promise as a people providing the way for the Messiah to enter into His creation, the promised “seed” remained spiritual in nature. The spiritual side of the “seed” pointed exclusively to the Messiah.

Throughout the ages before the Lord’s birth, prophets constantly reminded the Israelites to honor the promise by being responsible, faithful servants, accountable to God. Luke recorded Paul revealing: “the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He has raised up Jesus” (*Acts* 13:32b-33a). The Lord’s ministry prepared anyone willing to listen for a radical spiritual change. Ages old physical worship entered into its final moments of life with the appearance of the Messiah. During His ministry Jesus introduced the prophesied spiritual worship of the coming New Covenant, “worship in spirit and truth” (*John* 4:24b).

The chosen children of future generations who God promised righteousness through the Messiah would no longer be exclusively Jewish. Physical ancestry, a physical nation, physical circumcision, and the Law will no longer matter. Gentiles who choose to hear and respond to His gospel call through Jesus will be allowed to enter into the grace of the promise as spiritual equals with the Jews. All will be one in one God.

In *Galatians* Paul reminded his brethren of the radical bonding of ethnic, national, racial, social, and sexual identities in the body of Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). Universal unity in Jesus became a spiritual reality catching the Jewish people completely off guard. In the New Covenant every righteous person who receives the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit is in one spiritual body as a result of being in Christ.

In the New Covenant God gives righteousness only through Jesus Christ, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham the believer ... in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles ... For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ ... And if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (3:6-9, 14a, 26-27, 29).

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His Promise to all of Mankind

Paul clearly stated: “the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (*Ephesians* 3:6). God offered the blessings of the promise to anyone willing to respond to the Lord’s gospel’s call, “and to your seed, that is, Christ” (*Galatians* 3:16b). Thus, both Gentile and Jewish peoples are joined as one in Christ and enter into the eternal flow of the promise.

In *Galatians* Paul revealed: “Scripture has shut up all men under sin; that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (3:22). Jesus fulfilled the promise, and the flow of the promise continues to include the righteous into the family of God until the second coming of Christ.

Questions

Sin caused a separation.

Genesis 2:17

- 1) How powerful do you think sin is in your life?
- 2) Do you think sin separated you from God’s presence?
- 3) When do you think this happened?

God promised to restore spiritual unity.

Genesis 3:15

- 1) Did God already know His mankind would rebel against His will?
- 2) Do you think God is interested in people who do not want anything to do with Him?
- 3) Even as a believer are you still a little rebellious?
- 4) How do you think God spiritually reunites an unholy being with His holiness?

The promise affects all of human history.

Genesis 7:23, 12:3b; *Galatians* 3:16; *Acts* 3:25, 13:32b-33a

- 1) Do you think God intimately intervenes in human history?

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Questions

His Promise to all of Mankind

2) Has God intervened in your life?

The promise led to radically changed worship.
John 4:24

1) Why do you think Jesus changed worship style so radically?

2) What are some of the worship changes which took place upon the Lord's death?

3) How do these changes affect your worship?

4) How do you feel about the new reality of being a living twenty-four-seven sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ?

5) Is it important to understand how worship and sacrifice are a singular response to serving God?

The promise led to worldwide unity.
Galatians 3:28; 3:6-9, 14a, 26-27,29; Ephesians 3:6; Galatians 3:16b, 3:22

1) How does knowing the Lord's body is one worldwide living organism affect your understanding of the church?

2) How do you fellowship with another assembly of believers?

3) Do you have a tendency to disassociate yourself from brethren in a different assembly of the Lord's body of believer's?

4) How does one assembly help and fellowship with one another love?

5) Are all assemblies united as one even though they are individual?

6) Do you think a single assembly of Christians is a microcosm of the Lord's body as a whole throughout the world?

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Section One: God

God's love

God's gift of grace, Jesus Christ, demonstrated His incomprehensible love for everyone. John noted this in his often quoted words, "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son" (*John* 3:16a). The love of God is a very real and vibrant part of the faith revealed to His people through the manifestation of Jesus Christ. God is not passively waiting for people to vainly approach Him through traditional ceremony or self-taught perceptions of religion, belief, and faith. He openly "demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (*Romans* 5:8). The one true God seeks out mankind. For mankind has never sought out the one true God or even admits His existence much of the time: "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (*John* 1:10). This is one thing which will never change.

Jesus expressed to His people a new type of love which clearly demonstrated how He worked in their best interest. Godly love is selfless love, it regards the spiritual welfare of every person as most important, even those who hate Him. *John* quoted Jesus revealing,

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for His friends" (15:13). His statement revealed at least three insights about Jesus:

- 1) Jesus expressed His love for mankind by allowing the sacrifice of His body on a cross.
- 2) Jesus redefined love by introducing to mankind God's standard of love. This is much different from the limited physical standard felt by men and women.
- 3) God expects anyone responding to His love to return the same type of love by offering his life to God, "he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal" (*John* 12:25b). In other words, love towards Jesus, and ultimately God the Father, is expressed by any person choosing to fulfill belief and faith, by obeying His gospel, and dying with Christ. A servant of sin must choose to spiritually separate his life from his present state of being – a slave of sin, in order to spiritually live. Godly love can only be practiced by a holy saint in Christ Jesus.

However serious one's sins may be his sin debt to God is never too much for Jesus to pay in full, "to Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood" (*Revelation* 1:5b). God is actively appealing to any person desiring freedom from slavery to sin and a certain destiny of eternal separation from His presence. Even though He is compelled by His holy nature to judge those who reject His offer of freedom He has no enjoyment in the condemnation of any person. *Peter* noted this fact in his *second* letter: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (3:9).

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God's love

But He will not force any one to serve Him against his will. If a servant of sin chooses to remain separated from His holy presence the separation will continue on into eternal existence. Dying in sin is the ultimate and final rejection of God's grace of love.

God expresses His love for the sinner through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and His church throughout the world. His love flows through His merciful care for all of physical creation including the most rebellious in sin, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (*Matthew 5:45b*).

However, God has a very special attentive and personal love for those redeemed into His family. Paul spoke of the confidence the Lord's children have in their loving savior: "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (*Romans 8:37*). Jesus doesn't just say He loves people; He has demonstrated it by His death.

Questions

Jesus demonstrated in person God's incomprehensible love.

John 3:16a; Romans 5:8; John 1:10, 15:13, 12:25; Revelation 1:5b; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 5:45b; Romans 8:37

- 1) Why do you think God loves people so much?
- 2) Why do you think God loves people who are comfortable living in sin, openly hostile to Him, and worship other god's?
- 3) Which is more reliable: to feel God's love or to know by faith God loves you?
- 4) Do you believe God loves you?
- 5) How does God practice love towards you and others?
- 6) Does God's love include discipline?
- 7) Will God save anyone simply because of His love?
- 8) What does God's love mean to you?

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Section One: God

Questions

God's Love

- 9) How does His love affect your lifestyle choices?
- 10) How does His love affect your worship?
- 11) Is worship the same as lifestyle?
- 12) Is your sin ever greater than God's love?
- 13) How is God's love connected with your willingness to acknowledge Him as God?
- 14) Do you think God's redemptive love is conditional upon obeying His commands?
- 15) How does God's love and self love connect?
- 16) What is the connection between God's redemptive love and one's response to His love? Is a response to His love necessary for salvation?
- 17) How patient is God's redemptive love?
- 18) In what ways is God's love expressed in the world?
- 19) How is God's redemptive love connected with assurance?