



THE FOUNDATION SERIES

"The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all."
Psalm 103:19



The Sovereignty of God

Making Sense of God's Plan in the Circumstances of Life

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY

WILLIAM COWPER (1731-1800)

This book is dedicated to my dear brothers and fellow laborers Steve Nemetz and Craig Cummings, whose souls have been knitted to mine as David's was to Jonathan's (*1 Samuel 18:1*).

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FEATURES



Singing Under the Sovereignty of God

John Piper once wrote, *"Singing is one of the most immediate actions we can take to stoke our God-centered affections...singing is to be undergirded by a deep, biblical theology of God's sovereign goodness."* **David Mathis** affirms this truth when he wrote, *"You were made to sing. God created music, and designed humans to sing along...singing helps us to feel the Gospel."*

In this study, we will learn a hymn of the faith connected with the truth of God's sovereignty in our lives. Our aim is to achieve the true end of theology which is doxology.



Serving Under the Sovereignty of God

If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.—JOHN 12:26

This study will also include a **principle to practice** related to *serving God under His sovereignty*. Serving God is not only a means of *personal sanctifying grace*, it is also a *powerful witness to others* of the sustaining grace at work in our lives. However, serving the Lord is not easy. In his farewell address to the elders of the church in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul described how he served the Lord with, *"humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews."* Yet he did not let it deter him, for he said, *"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Acts 20:19-21).

To the Corinthians, Paul said, *"For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."* (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Serving your *family*, your *church*, your *co-workers* or *employees*, and even your *lost neighbors* and *friends* is part and parcel of serving God and His purposes for your life. You don't have to choose one over the other. God does not require that of you. But what He does require is that whether, *"you eat or drink...do all to the glory of God."* (1 Corinthians 10:31)

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What Is the Sovereignty of God?

Making Sense of God's Plan in the Circumstances of Life



Memory Verse

"For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains."

PSALM 50:10-12



Discussion starter:

- If God is sovereign (in control) *over all things*, does that mean He is sovereign over my choices also?

“God has an eternal purpose which depends on nothing except what He has decided within Himself. Being God, He orders all events everywhere in such a way that His purpose is served and His name is glorified. By His Word alone He created from nothing the entire universe to be the stage for these events, and He personally controls everything and everyone on that stage.”—STUART OLYOTT

Sovereignty Defined

Read Psalm 103:19. The biblical idea of God’s sovereignty includes all that is involved in the divine kingship and this means at least three things:

1. **Ownership**—All things are God’s: the earth, the heavens, the silver, the gold, every human soul, and, above all, Christians themselves.
2. **Authority**—God has an absolute right to impose His will on all His creatures. But His commands are never arbitrary (based on random choice). They express His own character as righteous, holy, and loving. They accord fully with His relationship to us as redeemer and Father. Yet His authority is categorical and people have no right to negotiate—let alone disobey—when confronted with it.
3. **Control**—God is Master of His universe. At times, He is displeased with it and, at times, angry. But it never baffles, frustrates, or threatens Him.

God Does What He Pleases

- A. According to 1 Chronicles 29:10-12, David’s prayer emphasized God’s right to rule over several areas.

What are they? _____

- B. According to Daniel 4:35, where does God exercise His sovereignty?

- C. Why can God do what He pleases with mankind? (*Read Ezekiel 18:4*)

D. According to the following verses, what else belongs to God? (See also *Psalm 24:1*)

1. Haggai 2:8: _____

2. Psalm 50:10: _____

3. Psalm 50:11: _____

4. Psalm 50:12: _____

Since God is the Creator, He has creator rights. He exercises the divine prerogative to do whatever He pleases with His creation (*Psalm 115:3; 135:6; Job 23:13*).

Sovereignty and the Kingdom of God

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus told a parable to help us understand something about the kingdom of heaven which, in this context, refers to the Person who rules the kingdom (v.1).

A. Interpreting the parable:

- Who is the landowner? *God*
- What is the vineyard? *The church*
- Who are the laborers? *The saved*
- Who are the laborers hired at different hours of the day? *All whom God saves, whenever He chooses to save them*

B. Key principles in the parable:

- God's *grace* always gives us more than we ever hoped for. (v.9)
- God's *justice*, with rewards, will always be based upon that which is right. (v.4)
- God's *position/status*, as the owner, gives Him the right to do what He wills with His own affairs. (v.15)

C. **Main point:** *God is sovereign in all matters and will do whatever He pleases that is in line with His character.*

Review 1.1

Question 1 of 2

What three ideas does the biblical idea of the sovereignty of God involve? (Check one)

- Truth, Righteousness, and Love
- Control, Fear, and Obedience
- Ownership, Authority, and Control



What Does God’s Sovereignty Involve?

Earlier we explained that sovereignty involves *ownership, authority, and control*. Another way of categorizing these truths is by the two P’s: *Preservation* and *Providence*.

Preservation

Preservation speaks of *God’s continuous activity in maintaining the existence of all things that He has created*.

A. According to Nehemiah 9:6, how far does God’s work of preservation extend?

B. According to Colossians 1:17, how does the universe continue to operate with order?

C. According to Hebrews 1:3, how does the Lord hold all of the universe together?

D. Read the following verses and indicate the specific things that God preserves:

- Psalm 36:6: _____ (See also Psalm 104:29; 66:9)
- Proverbs 2:8: _____ (See also Psalm 37:28; John 10:28)
- Acts 17:28: _____

Providence

Providence speaks of the continuous activity of God whereby He makes all the events of the physical, mental, and moral realms work out for His purpose.

A. According to Isaiah 45:7, how far does God's providence extend?

B. According to Job 42:2, can the will of man or the schemes of the devil change God's purpose?

C. There are four areas where God exercises His providence:

1. **Over the physical universe**—Read the following verses and indicate what God controls in the physical universe:

- Matthew 5:45: _____
- Psalm 147:18: _____
- Psalm 147:16: _____
- Psalm 148:8: _____
- Job 38:25, 35: _____
- Job 38:26: _____
- Job 37:10: _____
- Job 37:6: _____
- 1 Samuel 7:10: _____
- Acts 14:17: _____

2. **Over plant and animal life**

- How did God show His providence over plant life and animal life in Jonah 1:17, 4:6?

- What does Job 12:10 tell us about God's providence over plant and animal life?

3. **Over the nations of the earth**—How is God's providence seen over the nations?

- Psalm 22:28: _____
- Job 12:23: _____
- Psalm 66:7; 75:7: _____
- Daniel 2:37-39: _____
- Acts 17:26: _____

4. Over all areas of man's existence

- Over the _____, _____, and _____ of men (*Psalm 139:16; 1 Samuel 16:1; John 21:19*)
- Over the _____ and _____ of men (*Psalm 75:7; 1 Samuel 2:6-8*)
- Over the most _____ of circumstances (*Matthew 10:29ff; Esther 6:1*)
- Over the _____ of the saved and unsaved (*Psalm 73:24; 37:23ff; 11:6*)
- Over the _____ of His people (*1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 4:8; 121:3; Philippians 4:19; Isaiah 64:4*)
- Over the _____ of men (*Exodus 12:36; 1 Samuel 24:18; Proverbs 21:1; 16:1*)

Discussion: If God is going to accomplish His purpose regardless of the will of man or the schemes of the devil, then does that mean that I can do *whatever I want* and still fulfill God's plan for my life? Why or why not?

How Do Our Will and God's Providence Work Together?

God's providence can be better understood by viewing His rule in these four ways:

- A. **Preventative Providence**—This is when *God prevents man from the sin that he intends to do.* (*Genesis 20:6; Psalm 19:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13*)
- B. **Permissive Providence**—This is when, instead of actively restraining man from doing evil, *God permits the evil to take its course.* (*Acts 14:16; 2 Chronicles 32:31; Psalm 81:12; Romans 1:24, 26, 28*)
- C. **Directive Providence**—This is when God allows evil, but *directs the way that it goes.* (*Acts 2:23; 4:27ff*)
- D. **Restrictive Providence**—This is when *God determines the limits to which evil and its effects may go.* (*Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Corinthians 10:13*)

Discussion: If God can control everything, then why doesn't He control my failures against Him? Why does He still judge me if He is the One who is ultimately in control of all things?

What Does God Use to Exercise His Divine Providence?

- A. God uses several things inside and outside of us to carry out His providence:
 1. God uses the _____ of nature. (*Genesis 8:22*)
 2. God uses _____. (*Exodus 14:21-31*)
 3. God uses the uttering of His powerful _____. (*Psalm 33:9, 105:31, 34; Matthew 8:8, 15; 2 Thessalonians 2:8*)
 4. God uses the _____. (*Colossians 3:16*)
 5. God appeals to man's _____. (*Acts 6:1-2*)
 6. God uses _____ through His servants. (*2 Corinthians 5:20*)
 7. God uses outward _____. (*1 Corinthians 16:9; Revelation 3:7*)
 8. God will also incline the _____ of men (both saved and unsaved) in one direction or another. (*1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 119:36; Proverbs 21:1; 2 Corinthians 8:16*)

- B. God also uses special agents, like angels, in His providential work, as well as the Holy Spirit.

Review 1.2

Question 2 of 2
What are the four areas where God exercises His providence (fill in the answers)

Over the _____ universe
Over plant and _____ life
Over the _____ of the earth
Over all areas of _____ existence



What Responses to God's Sovereignty Are We to Avoid?

- A. Read Isaiah 45:9-10. What does the Prophet Isaiah warn us about?

- B. Read Lamentations 3:19-40. What does Jeremiah tell us not to do in light of God's sovereignty? (v.39)

What Should Our Response Be to God's Sovereignty?

- A. What does He tell us to do? (v.40) _____

- B. Read Job chapters 38-42. God answers Job's indignant questioning; what is Job's response? (Job 42:6)

- C. Read Psalm 46:10. What does the Psalmist tell us to cease from?

- D. What are we also told to do? (v.10) _____



Application

Skillful application of divine truth for the glory of God

Based upon 2 Timothy 3:16—which states, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”*—Scripture is useful for four things:

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- Teaching—what is right
- Reproof—what is not
- Correction—how to get right
- Training—how to stay right

Here are four questions to help us apply what we learned in this lesson:

1. What did I learn (“teaching”)?
2. Where do I fall short (“reproof”)?
3. What do I need to do about it (“correction”)?
4. How can I make this a consistent part of my life (“training”)?

How have you been responding to God’s sovereignty lately?

How can these truths help you to respond appropriately in any situation or circumstance?

When a trial comes and the waves of that situation seem to overtake you, remember these truths of God’s sovereignty in and over that situation. If you have not been responding appropriately, do as Job did and repent.



Serving Under the Sovereignty of God

What does it really mean to serve God?

Principle to practice: Warren Wiersbe offers this definition of ministry: *“Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the glory of God.”*

Memorize it.



Singing Under the Sovereignty of God

Hymns to help you worship

Profile: STUART K. HINE (1899-1989)

- Born in England
- Missionary with his wife in West Ukraine and Russia in early adult life
- Returned home to conduct Gospel campaigns throughout Britain
- Upon retirement, wrote hymns and donated the proceeds to missionaries

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HOW GREAT THOU ART

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed



Do you consistently recognize and verbalize God's goodness and greatness?

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
How great Thou Art! How great Thou Art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee;
How great Thou Art! How great Thou Art!

When thro' the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze;

And When I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.



Does your life exemplify that your ultimate purpose is to please God and bring Him glory?

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim: my God, how great Thou art!

TAKEAWAY FOR TODAY:

The first two stanzas remind us that all of creation testifies to the greatness of our Creator. All that has been made is not only for our pleasure, but that we might gaze upon the beauty and majesty of what He has made and give glory to Him. Ask God to help you see His sovereign hand in all that has been made that your soul might truly sing, "How great Thou Art!"

Answer Key

God Does What He Pleases

- A. heaven, earth, our giving, over all of our lives
- B. heaven and earth
- C. He created all souls and all souls belong to Him
- D.
 - 1. silver and gold
 - 2. beasts and cattle
 - 3. everything that moves in the field
 - 4. the world and all it contains

Sovereignty and the Kingdom of God

Review 1.1

Question 1 of 2: Ownership, Authority, and Control

What Does God's Sovereignty Involve?

Preservation

- A. all of creation
- B. Christ upholds the universe
- C. by the power of His Word
- D.
 - Psalm 36:6: man and beast
 - Proverbs 2:8: His children
 - Acts 17:28: all people's lives

Providence

A. it extends over creation—light, darkness, well-being, and calamity

B. no

C.

1. Over the physical universe

- Matthew 5:45: sun rising, setting, rain
- Psalm 147:18: heat and water
- Psalm 147:16: snow, frost
- Psalm 148:8: fire, hail, snow, frost
- Job 38:25, 35: floods, lightning
- Job 38:26: rain
- Job 37:10: ice
- Job 37:6: snow, rain
- 1 Samuel 7:10: thunder
- Acts 14:17: rain

2. Over plant and animal life

- God caused a fish to swallow him and plant to grow up over him
- they exist and live because of Him

3. Over the nations of the earth

- Psalm 22:28: He rules over the nations
- Job 12:23: He builds them up and brings them down
- Psalm 66:7; 75:7: He always rules them, watches them, and judges them
- Daniel 2:37-39: He rules over the nations
- Acts 17:26: He determines their point in time and their boundaries

4. Over all areas of man's existence

- birth, life, and death
- humiliation and exultation
- trivial
- actions
- well-being
- hearts/plans

What Does God Use to Exercise His Divine Providence?

A.

1. cycles
2. wind and sea
3. Word
4. Scriptures
5. needs and gifts
6. preaching
7. social conditions
8. heart

Review 1.2

Question 2 of 2:

physical
animal
nations
man's

What Responses to God's Sovereignty Are We to Avoid?

- A. quarreling with the Creator and questioning His actions
- B. complain

What Should Our Response Be to God's Sovereignty?

- A. examine yourself
- B. he repents
- C. striving
- D. know that He is God