

God Is...

Sovereign

When you bow your head to pray, are you aware of who you're talking to? The one to whom you pray has power over the entire universe, over every single atom, and yet He is infinitely loving and He cares about you. That's who you're talking to. *Chip Ingram*

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God Is In Control

Read your Bible: [Romans 11:33–36](#)

Spotlight Verse:

Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. [1 Chronicles 29:12](#)

The Los Angeles Times recently ran this headline: “Sleeping pill use grows as economy keeps people up at night.”⁵¹ The article reports prescriptions have jumped 54% in five years. I think that’s one indication anxiety is definitely on the rise.

There are others.

A dog-fancier told me the other day that poodles and Chihuahuas *used* to be the most popular dog breeds. Now? German shepherds, dobermans, and huskies!

A dentist said recently he has even observed that teeth-grinding is on the rise!

Anxiety’s amped up. Serenity’s in short supply.

So how do you deal with those increasing worries?

Remind yourself of the truths you’ve been investigating so far in this study: Is anything too hard for God? No. Does God promise to be with you at all times? Yes. Does God love you infinitely? Yes. Does God know all about your troubles? Absolutely.

And here’s the one that brings it home. The attribute of God you’ll dig into this week. *Sovereignty*. Saying God is *sovereign* means God reigns. He’s the King. God is in control.

If you’re looking for a job, God is in control.

If you are waiting for a child, God is in control.

If you don’t know what the doctor’s test results will be, God is in control.

That means you can relax. You don’t have to worry. God’s in the front seat driving. He might not take you exactly where you want to go, but (after what may look like a series of detours) He’ll take you to a place that’s best.

That’s awesome.

However. Sovereignty also makes my head hurt.

It raises obvious questions:

Does *sovereignty* mean everything that happens is in God’s perfect will?

It must not, or why would Jesus tell us to pray “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) If God’s will is always done on earth as it is in heaven, why do I need to pray for it?

But... if His perfect will is *not* always done on earth, then does that mean He is *not* really sovereign?

Some theologians have resolved this by distinguishing between God’s *permissive* will and God’s *perfect* will. God permits some things that are not in his perfect design. But ultimately His perfect design will always prevail.

This may not work for you, but here's an analogy that helps me:

God is like the captain of a cruise ship.

He is piloting the vessel. He is in charge of the crew. The ship will get to wherever He wants it to go, when He wants it to get there.

We're like the passengers.

We can choose to hit or help fellow passengers, to enjoy the cruise or complain, to make a mess or keep it clean, to swim in the pool or, inexplicably, to play bingo. And the captain permits that freedom. But ultimately my choice is not going to change what the captain will do with all of us on that boat. He has our destiny in His hands.

Another metaphor: You're playing chess. With God. You are free to make all kinds of moves, to try all sorts of strategies. But since you are playing God, He will ultimately win the game.

Of course these are both imperfect analogies, but they help me work out the problem a little, and seem to match what the Bible says: The Scripture says God holds me responsible for my decisions. My choices do have consequences. Yet it says that in the end, God's purposes always prevail.

I appreciate the way John Morren puts it:

I read the many teachings of the Bible regarding God's election, predestination, His chosen, and so on. I read also the many teachings regarding "whosoever will may come" and urging people to exercise their responsibility as human beings. These seeming contradictions cannot be reconciled by the puny human mind. With childlike faith, I cling to both ropes, fully confident that in eternity I will see that both strands of truth are, after all, of one piece.[52](#)

Most importantly, God apparently gives us all a choice to follow Him or not.

But why? Why should a sovereign God leave me free to choose this? Why not just make us all his puppets?

I'm not sure why, but I think it has to do with the fact that God is love, and desires a loving relationship with you and me. And it seems to me that for true love to exist, a true choice must exist. Even if those choices hurt. And they might. My choices can bring healing or they can bring suffering — not only to myself, but to others as well.

In fact, the age-old choice of humans to rebel against God so shook the foundations of God's perfect creation that it was like an atomic bomb detonation. The consequence of human rebellion against God has had an impact not only on every human's nature, but on nature itself. So now we're all living in the fallout of the sin bomb, so to speak, living with sin's consequences in a broken world.

But! Even in this world marred by sin, God's sovereign will ultimately prevails. Not only does the Bible promise that He will one day restore the earth to its perfect glory; even now God works through every tragedy to bring good. I'll have lots of examples in the devotions this week.

Wonder and Humility

I'll admit it — trying to comprehend the twin truths of human responsibility and divine sovereignty will hurt your head!

But again, if it's true, and it's about God, then that's to be expected.

That's why after three chapters of talk about God's sovereign plan in the book of Romans, Paul has to throw his hands in the air and say,

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?
For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen. Romans 11:33–36*

In all of my God-thoughts, I need to maintain an attitude of wonder and humility like that.

Let's talk about those implications of sovereignty this week.

God is... in control.

Questions For Reflection

What tends to make you anxious or worried? What are you anxious or worried about right now?

How does trust in God's sovereignty help overcome anxiety about these things?

God Is Sovereign In the Good and Bad

Read your Bible: [Isaiah 45](#)

Spotlight Verse:

*I am the LORD, and there is no other.
I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do
all these things. [Isaiah 45:6b-7](#)*

There's an old story from India about a king with an advisor who has the annoying habit of responding to any event by saying, "That's good!"

The king loses his toe in a hunting accident. The advisor says, "That's good!"

So the king fires him from his job. Keeping it consistent, the advisor says, "That's good!"

A month later the king is captured by a group of villagers who plan to use him in a sacrificial ceremony. When they find his toe is gone, they declare him unclean and let him go. Back at the palace he reinstates the advisor.

"You were right," the king says, "It was good that I lost my toe, for it saved my life today. But why did you say it was good when I fired you from your job?"

The advisor answers, "Your Highness, I cannot see the future, but I have learned to trust that some good comes from each event. Today I see what that was for me. Had you not fired me, I would have remained with you when you were captured by the tribesmen. And because I am in possession of all my fingers and toes, I would have been next in line for the sacrifice!"

Sovereignty in the Calamity

It is impossible for me, at the human level, to predict what good God can bring out of any calamity. But contained within the concept of His *sovereignty* is a promise that He will!

One weekend I left after our final church service to catch a flight to a conference. And the whole freeway to the airport was completely shut down. I had to drive surface streets. A 40-minute trip took me 2 hours. I missed the flight. Then a storm blew in, and other flights were cancelled. The only seat I could find was on another airline to another airport, from which I'd have to rent a car to drive to my destination. It was a mess, or so I thought.

I finally sat down on this late flight, and the young guy sitting next to me was from a town near our church, and we had a long conversation for the entire trip. I always wonder how people will react when I tell them I'm a pastor, but when I told him, he said, "Pastor?! I've been trying to find a pastor in town to meet with, but I didn't know anybody! Can I get your name and number so I can call you?"

And I said, "Forget it."

No, of course I didn't! I gave him my contact info. Now—do you think God worked that out? He is sovereign.

In fact, I can look back at every long-ago catastrophe in my life, including the tragic death of my father when I was just 4, and see now how God worked through those tragedies.

Can I see God's hand in every one of my more recent tough times? Not yet, but I trust that one day I will.

I don't mean to say here that God does evil things, or that evil is somehow actually good; I mean that God in His sovereignty brings really good things even out of really bad things.

He Is the Potter, We're the Clay

God can work in the weirdest ways.

That's the point, really, of today's Bible reading.

When we pick up the story, the Israelites have been captives in Babylon for decades. Then the Persians invade and conquer Babylon. Now they're still captives, only under a totally new system of government. All their old connections, their language skills, are all useless. Everything seems to be going from bad to worse.

Then in Isaiah 45, God says He has an announcement to make: He will... judge the Persians? Set the Israelites free? No, God says He will...

...bless the new Persian ruler, King Cyrus, even though Cyrus does not even believe in God, keep the commandments, or know the Jewish law! In fact, God says Cyrus will be His "anointed," His Chosen One for that generation.

Talk about a potentially confusing message.

Anticipating complaints, God says,

"Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, 'Stop, you're doing it wrong!'"

Isaiah 45:9b (NLT)

From my perch 2,600 years later, I can see how God used Cyrus in the history of Israel in some very profound ways. It was far better for them to be under Persian rule than Babylonian. In fact, Cyrus helped restore Jerusalem to its former glory.

But in the moment, the people of Israel were frustrated that God was taking the confusing step of blessing an enemy.

What tough situations do you look at in your life now — situations where you cannot imagine how anything good could ever emerge?

God essentially says, relax. In the long run this produces benefits you cannot now imagine. Just wait.

God is... working it out.

Questions For Reflection

What tough situations do you look at in your life where you cannot now imagine how anything good could ever emerge?

How have you seen God, in His sovereignty, bring good from bad situations in your past?

Write out at least two verses from Isaiah 45 that are an encouragement to you, and be ready to share them with others:

God Is Sovereign Over Injustice

Read your Bible: [Psalm 75](#)

Spotlight Verse:

It is God alone who judges; he decides who will rise and who will fall. [Psalm 75:7](#)

Millions were captivated recently by the story of Jaycee Lee Dugard. A California girl kidnapped when she was just 11 years old, Jaycee was found alive 18 years later, living in virtual slavery in the backyard of the man who abducted her.

I knew her family.

The kidnapping happened when I was a pastor in South Lake Tahoe, and I spoke several times afterward to her stepfather and mother. People in our church helped organized meals and marches for the community group “Jaycee’s Hope.” A small group of us would go to coffee after letter-mailing or marching with Jaycee’s mom, doing our best to encourage her and to assure her of our prayers.

One day I asked her, “How are you holding up through all of this?”

I will never forget her response. She told me, “I am clinging to the idea that ultimately God is in charge of justice here. Either He will answer our prayers and bring Jaycee back, or if that doesn’t happen, He will make sure justice gets done, here or in the hereafter.” She held my gaze for a moment, and then said, “I would go crazy if I did not believe that.” This was many years before she was reunited with Jaycee.

The justice of God is one of the implications of his sovereignty. If I believe He rules, then I believe He will bring a fair and just resolution to all that I now see left undone. He will right every wrong, punish the evildoers, mete out retribution.

Among other things, this means I do not need to be a vigilante. He promises, “At the time I have planned, I will bring justice against the wicked.”

Free From Revenge

This became personal for me when I realized I still struggled with hatred against the piano teacher who molested me when I was a child. As far as I know there was never any legal action taken against him. I had long forgotten his name, but not my intense feelings of anger and fantasies of vengeance.

Finally one night, while taking the last freeway exit on the drive home, I realized I had to do something. I noticed I had a white-knuckle grip on the steering wheel and was once again imagining torturing this man in quite graphic detail.

I pulled over and said, “God, You are sovereign. I don’t even know this man’s name anymore. I don’t know how I could possibly pursue legal action against him. I have been spinning my wheels in this patch of filth for years. I hate him so much. But You are in control. You have the authority to punish, and You promise to do what is fair. I release him to You. Please let me live in hatred no longer.”

Usually when I turn something I am struggling with over to God, growth is gradual and slow. But in this instance I can say that I felt an immediate relief that has endured to this day.

I'm not saying your sense of relief will be that instant. Maybe it will; maybe the struggle to forgive will take longer. You are no worse than I am if it does take longer; I was blessed in this case with what I believe to be a miracle of healing.

But if vengeance fantasies and hatred have been plaguing you, I want to encourage you to begin to give that longing for revenge to the sovereign God. At least tell Him, "I don't want to give this to You, so please help me."

Of course, if there is a way to seek legal recourse, I encourage you to do that as well — our society needs to be protected against these predators — but even then do it without hatred or vengeance.

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. Romans 12:19

God is... the ultimate Judge.

Questions For Reflection

What is the advantage to letting God avenge, in His time and in His way, rather than taking vengeance into your own hands?

Have you had any situations like René's, where you had to let go of bitterness and release the injustice to God's control? What happened? Is there a situation you're currently struggling with?

How can you apply what you've learned and begin to release that situation?

God Is Sovereign When I'm Overwhelmed

Read your Bible: [2 Chronicles 20:1–12](#)

Spotlight Verse:

“You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you!” [2 Chronicles 20:6b NLT](#)

God is bigger.

That is a sentence that is always true.

No matter what you are talking about or comparing Him to, God is bigger. God is bigger than your opponents. God is bigger than your worries. God is bigger than the problem you are facing.

But you might not always live like this is true.

Ever feel outnumbered by problems and stresses?

Then you'll relate to the king in today's Scripture reading. It's part of a fascinating story: Three nations, enemies of Israel, band together to bring down King Jehoshaphat. Ironically, these are the very three countries that the Israelites had been ordered by God to treat well — to never fight against. And now they're paying the Israelites back for their kindness with treachery of the worst sort.

You may relate. You may feel like problems are ganging up on you. You may be terrified, like Jehoshaphat.

What's been your strategy so far? Lying awake at night worrying? Lashing out in anger? Thinking non-stop about your problems? Trying to escape from them through amusement or substances?

How are those strategies working out for you?

Why not try Jehoshaphat's strategy?

The king of Israel is terrified, and calls a giant prayer meeting. In front of everyone, he admits his fear. And he appeals to one thing: God's sovereignty.

There was a lot of hoopla a couple years ago over the intriguing prayer of Jabez in the Bible, and I do love that biblical character's apparent godly ambition. But I find the prayer of Jehoshaphat much more compelling. It's just more relevant to my life! He says, *God, we cannot handle this. But you are in control.*

What You Do With Fear

As someone said, the problem is not your fear. Your problem is what you *do* with your fear.

When you feel overwhelmed, do you let that destabilize you, depress you, and discourage you? Or like Jehoshaphat, do you admit your fear and lay it at the feet of the sovereign God?

I like what Rick Warren wrote on a Facebook post:[53](#)

Never let an impossible situation intimidate you. Let it motivate you. Let it motivate you to pray more. Let it motivate you to trust more.

After Jehoshaphat prays, the Spirit of the Lord gives a pep talk through one of the guys in the crowd, quite unexpectedly. A man named Jahaziel stands up and says,

This is what the LORD says: "Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's!" 2 Chronicles 20:15 (NLT)

The people are so inspired that they end up putting together a worship service rather than a battle plan. And as it turns out, the three enemy armies end up destroying each other, for reasons that remain a mystery to the Israelites. When all is said and done, they do not have to lift a single weapon in battle!

The Prayer of Jehoshaphat

If you feel outmatched and outnumbered today, do a Jehoshaphat: Remind yourself that *God is bigger*. Say with the king...

You alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you! Your faithful love endures forever!

Tomorrow: More stories of how God helped someone surrounded by enemies!

God is... bigger.

Questions For Reflection

What intrigues, inspires, or interests you about 2 Chronicles 20:1–12?

Can you relate to Jehoshaphat? Is there an area in your life where you are afraid and feel overwhelmed?

Is there an area where you hesitate to trust God's sovereignty over your life?

Today pray the prayer of Jehoshaphat!

God is Sovereign When I'm Surrounded

Read your Bible: [Psalm 23:5-6](#)

Spotlight Verse:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. [Psalm 23:5](#)

In Billy Graham's autobiography *Just As I Am* there are so many great stories of our sovereign God working through the most disheartening events.

Graham writes about his first big campaign in England.

He received antagonistic press coverage from the very start. The newspapers decided to rip into Billy Graham, painting him as a lunatic.

They were led by a wildly popular, cynical columnist for a London newspaper whose pen name was Cassandra. He tricked Graham into getting his picture taken in a bar. Although Graham was just drinking apple juice, Cassandra printed the photograph and wrote a caption that made him look like a horrible, sleazy, money-grubbing evangelist lush.

The campaign had reserved an auditorium that would seat 12,000 people for a span of six weeks. After Cassandra's column, one by one all the supporting churches dropped out. They called Graham's office and essentially said, "We can't be associated with this lunatic."

Everything looked bleak. Nothing but embarrassment and financial ruin seemed ahead.

What happened next?

All the controversy kept away the wimpy Christians who didn't want to be seen in the company of someone with a bad reputation and instead brought out all the cynics, all the hard-bitten, hard-hearted people. They were attracted to controversy, and wanted to see Billy Graham fail so they could make fun of him. The possibility of a train wreck will always attract spectators.

On the opening night, the first several rows were filled with press people who showed up at the last minute. The reporters came for a whole week waiting for him to do something flamboyant or crazy.

Then something funny happened. Some of these guys started finding their hearts softened instead.

There were stories like this: A couple of tough, jaded guys were sitting in the back row. One of them said, "I don't want you to think I'm religious; I just showed up to make fun of this guy." The other man said, "Me too."

At the end of the meeting the first guy turned to the second and said, "I don't know about you, but I'm going forward. I want to learn more about Jesus." The other man said, "Me too. By the way, here's your wallet. I'm a pickpocket."

Members of the press started coming to Jesus — and giving Billy Graham unexpected positive publicity! Even though the church people were still staying away, others came to see what the newspapers were writing about. The meetings grew larger and larger.

At the end of six weeks they had to extend the campaign another six weeks.

At the end of three months they had to rent the 122,000-seat Wembley Stadium — the largest stadium in England — for their final night. Then demand grew so large, they decided to rent another soccer stadium that seated 65,000 people right next to it. A total of 187,000 people came out in one night to hear Billy Graham— the largest single religious gathering in the history of England!

After that last night, Winston Churchill phoned Billy Graham and said, “I need to talk to you.” Graham came to his house to find Churchill with the three evening newspapers spread out in front of him. He said, “If I and Marilyn Monroe went to Wembley Stadium, we *together* couldn’t fill that place. What’s going on?”

Billy Graham said, “I’m talking about hope. People need hope in war-torn Britain.”

Churchill replied, “I look at these newspapers, and I have no hope for the future.”

And Graham answered, “Let me tell you about the hope of Christ.”

Churchill let Graham go on; even after Churchill’s secretary came in and said, “Sir there’s another appointment waiting for you,” Churchill said, “Let ‘em wait!”[54](#)

I don’t know what Churchill did with what he heard. But to me that whole story is an example of the sovereign God moving in powerful ways.

Billy Graham was slandered and maligned and painted unfairly. But God had a plan to use even *that* to reach people.

And God can do the exact same thing for you.

God is... the One Who brings good out of chaos.

Questions For Reflection

What situation in your life right now makes you feel surrounded by enemies, as Billy Graham was in today’s story? Pray that God will somehow, in His sovereignty, bring good even out of that — and trust that He will!

Write down a brief, encouraging memory of how God worked in and through a tough situation in your life:

God Is Sovereign and God is Good

Read your Bible: [Romans 8:28–31](#)

Spotlight Verse:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. [Romans 8:28](#)

Terry was one of the most beautiful women I've ever met.

In a previous book, *Thrill Ride*, I told the story of how I ran into her. I was speaking at a family camp when I first witnessed her enthusiastically greeting people walking into the chapel. Here's what I saw: A young woman with symptoms of very severe cerebral palsy. Both legs and her right arm were tied to her wheelchair — apparently because she could no longer control them. Even her left arm flailed wildly in the air as she said hello to the camp guests.

When I heard Terry speak, I could barely understand her because of the thick cerebral palsy "accent." She'd smile her crooked smile at each person who entered as she said, "G-G-G-G-GOOD M-M-M-M-ORNING!!! H-H-HOW A-A-A-RE Y-Y-Y-YOU?" Every sentence was laborious for her.

Yet, along with everyone else at the camp, I fell in love with this young woman who radiated a rare joy in Christ.

But then came the talent show. The second-to-last night of camp, anyone who signed up could perform on the auditorium stage. Little kids played piano. A teenager showed off some amazing musical skill on the viola. There was an adorable preschool dance troupe. And finally the emcee introduced the last act:

"Will you please welcome our friend Terry, who will wrap it all up for us with a song!"

And my heart sank. I thought, "Oh, no. Poor Terry. She's just going to embarrass herself and make this a very awkward moment for all of us."

The host continued, "And her talent is... she will lead us in worship!" My heart sank even further. How could Terry, who could barely speak, possibly do this? I say this to my shame, because I was being very shallow.

So Terry was wheeled up on stage. The emcee adjusted a microphone on a boom so it aimed at her mouth. She shouted "OK-K-KAY!!!" to the sound man, who started a musical background track for the tune she was about to sing.

And I could tell from the melody what song it was.

"God is so good."

And I thought, *this?* Of all the songs she could have chosen, *Terry* is singing *this?* I'd always associated this old chorus with a somewhat superficial view of life. How can she possibly sing these lyrics with any enthusiasm after all the hard knocks she's had?

But as the music played, she tilted back her head to heaven, looked up, and as tears streamed down her face she sang with gusto,

“G-G-G-G-G-G-G-OD IS S-S-S-O G-G-G-G-OOD!
G-G-G-G-G-G-G-OD IS S-S-S-O G-G-G-G-OOD!
HE’S S-S-S-O G-G-G-GOOD T-T-TO M-M-M-ME!!!!!!”

And in an instant, everyone who could stand, stood. Those who couldn’t stand, lifted hands to heaven, and those who couldn’t do that, tilted their faces back like Terry. And also like her, we were all weeping. With pure joy. At the goodness of God.

I’ve been in a lot of worship services in my life, but never one that rocketed the whole congregation directly into a sense of the presence of God like the one led by Terry.[55](#)

How could she sing “*God is so good*”? Because she knew an important truth about God.

He is sovereign. But that alone is not necessarily comforting — there have been evil sovereigns. Terry knew: God is good.

God promises her, and you, too, that although you may never see it in this lifetime, He will redeem every one of your trials on earth, and will one day restore you, both physically and spiritually.

Walk through today’s key verse with me:

“We know...” This is a truth we can cling to with certainty.

“...God works...” He’s the one who makes it happen. I don’t need to worry if I don’t have a plan. He’s the one who turns it around.

“...all things...” Even a divorce? Even an infant death? Even something that was my own stupid mistake? Yes, even that. I’m not saying He caused all of it directly. But I am saying He permits it, and can work through it.

“...for good... according to His purpose.” God has a purpose: Romans 8:28 doesn’t really make sense without Romans 8:29, which explains that God’s plan is to make you like Jesus.

If you really *believe* this — that your loving God is in control — it’ll make your confidence soar!

Because there’s nothing God can’t turn into gold.

No mistake He can’t turn into a masterpiece.

No problem He can’t turn around and use for good.

In fact, I believe your *greatest ministry* will come from your *greatest pain*. Terry was the most effective worship leader I have ever experienced, and she can barely speak! It was her pain that gave her testimony such credibility.

But how exactly does the Romans 8:28 promise happen, even when everything seems to be going wrong? We’ll spend some more time in Romans 8 tomorrow!

God is... sovereign, and God is good.

Questions For Reflection

How can there be so much suffering if God truly exists? Some believe there are only two explanations: Either God is not sovereign, or God is not good. How would you respond to that argument?

Give to God your pain and worries and shame now; ask Him to help you trust that He will, by His grace, work together all things, even these things, for good.

God's Sovereignty Leads to Hope

Read your Bible: [Romans 8:32–39](#)

Spotlight Verse:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? [Romans 8:35](#)

He thought he was going to die.

Jeff Miller is a computer salesman who was reading a book on a flight home when there was a muffled thump. The rear engine in the tail of the DC-10 had exploded and the jet was now rudderless; it couldn't be steered anymore. It swayed violently from side to side.

The pilots tried for an emergency landing in Sioux City, Iowa. Some passengers were sobbing. Some were shaking. Some were screaming. They were heading toward a plane crash. And almost certain death.

Can you imagine being in that plane?

You may remember seeing news footage of the plane, cartwheeling on the runway. It exploded in flames.

Miller braced himself for a violent death but it never came. After the spinning landing, he found himself upside down, in a corn field, still strapped in his seat, not a mark on him. Amazing! He was one of a few passengers who miraculously survived.

Lee Strobel, a prize winning Chicago journalist who is now a pastor, interviewed Miller. Most people don't survive a plane crash from 35,000 feet. What did it feel like?

Jeff told him, "I tell you the truth, it was scary, but at the same time I felt like I was full of hope."[56](#)

Full of hope.

He went on,

There was hope if I lived; and the hope that if I died I'd be with Christ. Like it says in the Bible, what can anybody do to you if your hope is in the Lord?[57](#)

Full of hope.

The Cure for Hopelessness

The Bible's all about hope. There are 86 references to hope in the Old Testament. 80 references to hope in the New Testament. Four references to it in Romans 8 alone. You think God wants you to have hope?

Absolutely. Because hopelessness is the biggest source of stress in life. And a rock-solid belief that God is sovereign is the cure.

After church last week a very serious eleven-year old boy approached me. He was so grim for someone his age. I could tell something was really bothering him.

He told me in a surprisingly world-weary tone, “I am really struggling with anxiety. I hear people talking about the future, and the end of the world, and wars and terrorism, and late at night I can’t sleep and I worry about all of this and get really scared.”

I opened the Bible to the end of Romans 8, and asked him to read me those verses out loud. I could see the stress just rolling off him, his shoulders going from tense to relaxed as he read Paul’s inspired words.

And I gave him an assignment: I put together a list of verses about God’s sovereignty, and asked him to write those verses out onto 3×5 cards and read them several times a day for an entire week. He got it: “So I can replace my anxious thoughts with the truth?” “That’s exactly right!” I said.

Greater Than Any Power

In Romans 8, Paul gives a list that sounds like the ingredients for a nightmare: Death, angels, demons, the future... yet, he proclaims, not one of these powers can ever separate us from God’s loving plan.

This does not mean life is smooth all of the time.

But even if things look bleak; even if, as Paul puts it, “we are like lambs to be slaughtered” (which certainly was the experience of many first-century persecuted Christians, and many today); even in those circumstances, God’s sovereign love ultimately holds me tight and brings me home to Him.

Do I Need To Think About Sovereignty?

I’ll admit it: Because God’s sovereignty is so *other*, so outside of my ability to comprehend, at times I feel like a puppy, head cocked to one side, trying desperately to understand what my Master is trying to say.

That doesn’t mean the Master’s voice is spouting nonsense. It means I’m encountering Someone different than me.

Remember, the Bible is describing a Being who is not just a bigger version of you, ruling a bigger version of a human kingdom; it’s describing a reality far beyond your comprehension. The Roman or Norse gods are a lot easier to understand. But they’re not real.

In the end, when I consider the sovereignty of God, I must concede that if there is a God, He is simply not possible for me to fully understand.

So why did God even mention some of these hard-to-understand attributes, like sovereignty? Why not just leave them for us to appreciate in heaven, when we can comprehend these mysteries better?

God wanted to reveal the truth of His sovereignty to you and me for a reason:

It makes a difference in your life now.

It means you can let go of your revenge fantasies.

It means there is a place to put your fears.

It means you can sleep better tonight.

A suggestion: Do what that eleven-year old did.

Put some of the key verses from the daily readings in this book onto index cards, and carry them around with you every day for the rest of this study, starting today. Read them when you wake up, when you go to bed, and perhaps at lunchtime or during breaks.

If you believe He is ultimately in control, what is there to fear?

Nothing.

God is... the One who gives hope.

Questions For Reflection

Of Paul's list of scary things in Romans 8:35, which scares you the most?

How does a belief in God's sovereignty build hope and reduce fear?

What practical, emotional benefits do you see to a faith in a God who is sovereign over all?