

## CHAPTER 10

# GOD

# Is

# SOVEREIGN

People around the world are fascinated with royalty. Pictures of the late Princess Diana, Prince Charles, and other British royalty fill the tabloids and television screens. Why does their every appearance captivate our attention? Perhaps it is the grandeur in which they live.

Since we live in a democracy in a time in which sovereigns do not rule grand empires, it is hard for us to understand the depth of feeling that people have toward their kings and queens. When King Hussein of Jordan died in February 1999, his entire country mourned. Nearly a million people lined up to see the funeral procession—almost one-sixth of Jordan’s population! Hundreds of Jordanians broke through the security barrier to get near the coffin.

As the coffin reached Raghadan Palace, it was placed on a cannon carriage, accompanied by the king’s favorite Arabian stallion. A pair of boots were placed backward in the stirrups in remembrance of the fallen leader. All over Jordan, black flags waved from doorposts and car antennas. The country was almost shut down for a week for official mourning.

From earliest days, kings and queens have received honor and respect. One

example is in 1911 when the former Indian rulers' courts paid homage to King George V and Queen Mary of England on the Delhi plain. The royal couple sat on a dais while the princes advanced according to protocol and did their salutes. The first prince gave the king a necklace that held a ruby the size of a pigeon's egg. His Highness of Panna presented the king with a twelve-inch umbrella made from a single emerald. Dressed in gold and silver brocade, Sir Tukoji Rao of Indore came with a

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gold stick that had jeweled engravings and a hilt carved from a single ruby.

One of the rulers' dearest treasures are their titles. This was the title of the Seventh Nizam:

Lieutenant-General His Exalted Highness Seventh in Line Equal to the Rank of Asaf Jah, Victor of the Realm and the World, Regulator of the Realm, Regulator of the State, Viceroy Sir the Honourable Osman Ali Khan, the Brave, Victorious in Battle, Faithful Ally of the British, Grand Commander of the Star of India,

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Knight Grand Cross of the British Empire, Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar.

English royalty held lavish ceremonies to establish their positions, often spending months on elaborate preparations. When Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in Westminster Abbey in London, she rode in a gold coach pulled by eight magnificent grays. Anne Edwards describes a portion of the 1953 coronation ceremony:

The Queen was next garbed in the gold Robe Royal and one by one was given the symbols of authority. The Sceptre was placed in her right hand and the Rod in her left. "Be so merciful that you be not too remiss," prayed the Archbishop, "so execute justice that you forget not mercy. Punish the wicked, protect and cherish the just, and lead your people in the way wherein they should go."

. . . A great gust of sound raised up through the Abbey, "God Save the Queen." Trumpets sounded, drums rolled, and then the great guns of the Tower and in

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Hyde Park were shot off.

The Queen was crowned with the large solid-gold, pearl- and ruby-studded St. Edward's Crown worn at all coronations in the 20th century. Then the peers of her realm performed the Act of Homage by kneeling before her and swearing allegiance to the crown. Even the Queen's husband, Prince Phillip, performed the Act of Homage.

## THE GREATEST SOVEREIGN

Yet, there exists another Royal King whose majesty, splendor, and awesomeness are almost indescribable. Compared to Him, no other ruler or reign is even a blip on the screen of eternity. He does not need ceremony or to drape Himself in grandeur to appear more regal. Jewels and wealth mean nothing to Him. Yes, this divine Ruler is none other than the Sovereign God. His throne is far above the universe in heaven; He rules over all.

David, himself a king, asked, “Who is this King of glory?” Then he answers his own question, “The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, invincible in battle...The LORD

Almighty—He is the King of glory.”<sup>4</sup> In one of the final chapters in the Bible, John identifies Him as “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” John describes how he heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven shouting, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God...Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty

reigns.”<sup>5</sup>

As John continues to describe his vision of God’s throne, he tries to convey what cannot be adequately described in words. I want to quote a portion here:

I saw a throne in heaven and Someone sitting on it! The One sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled His throne like a rainbow. Twenty-four thrones surrounded Him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. And from the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder...In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.

In the center and around the throne were four living beings...Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty—the One who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the One sitting on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the One who lives forever and ever. And they lay their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy, O Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power.  
For You created everything,

and it is for Your pleasure that they exist

and were created.”<sup>6</sup>

The throne of an earthly king or queen, however grand it may be, cannot compare to the glories of God. If we took away the royal trappings from any human sovereign, he would look just like one of us. His honor is derived from ceremonies and the homage paid him by other people, which can be removed in a moment. He may have the power of an army behind him, but in himself, he is a sinful, imperfect human just like you and me.

God’s reign is different. God does not derive His right to rule from anyone or anything. No title was bestowed on Him by another, and there is no higher authority anywhere than His. The great I AM always does what He knows is best and answers to no one. His reign is so magnificent that we cannot even comprehend any part of it.

God’s rule is supreme, paramount, and absolute. He has power to do anything that needs to be done. He is present everywhere so no one can hide from Him or escape His scrutiny. He is all-knowing, so there is nothing about which He is unaware. Amazingly, this great God loves you and me unconditionally, caring for the smallest need of the least of us.

### **THE GREAT PUZZLE OF LIFE**

Submitting to God’s sovereignty can be compared to putting together a billion-piece picture puzzle. History is like that giant picture. Only by looking at the photograph on the box cover can you see what everything will look like once all the pieces are in place.

Now imagine that you are given one piece of the puzzle. This is where you fit into God’s great plan for the universe. What can you do with this piece? You have never seen the picture on the outside of the box. All you know is that your piece has a little dark color here and a few bright spots there. So you run around trying to match what you are doing with someone else’s puzzle piece. The chances of finding one other person who has a piece that matches yours is almost zero. Therefore, there is no way you could ever understand what the completed picture will look like.

From a human standpoint, it is impossible to understand the many puzzles in life. But if you let God direct you, He will help you place your puzzle piece in the right place. He is not only big enough to see the whole picture, He created it.

We can see part of the picture of where God is taking history by reading the Bible. God gives us clues as to what His purposes are for us. In His sovereignty, He will

fulfill all He has promised in His Word. We will look at three truths about the scope of God's sovereignty.

### **GOD SOVEREIGNLY RULES THE UNIVERSE**

God reigns so supremely above His creation that we cannot question any of His actions. Whatever God wants to have happen will happen; His will cannot be thwarted. Daniel explains, "He determines the course of world events; He removes

kings and sets others on the throne."<sup>7</sup>

God's creative actions set the stage for His sovereignty. He was able to create because He was in absolute control of every particle of material even before He brought it into being. Once He formed something, no matter how simple or complex, He remained in absolute authority.

Jeremiah reminded God's people of how completely God is in control. Because of their disobedience, they wanted to escape the judgment of the God they had spurned. God sent Jeremiah to the house of a potter. As the potter worked on a piece of clay, he skillfully shaped it with his hands into a beautiful vessel. But when another pot he was making was marred, he tossed it aside and began a new pot. He did what seemed best to him.

Through this illustration, God pointed out His limitless sovereignty. "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand,

so are you in My hand."<sup>8</sup> As Creator, God could do whatever He wanted with His creation. No matter how much the clay complained or rebelled, it was shaped by the strong hand of the potter. Centuries later, Paul points out: "Shall what is formed say to

Him who formed it, 'Why did You make me like this?'"<sup>9</sup> Norman Geisler explains God's sovereignty this way:

If it is a power that you can manipulate, it is not God. If it is a power that created the universe that chooses to express itself one way this time, and another way at another time, for our good and His glory, then it is God.

### **GOD SOVEREIGNLY WORKS THROUGH HIS LAWS OF NATURE**

Stephen Charnock writes, "We cannot suppose God a Creator, without supposing a

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sovereign dominion in Him.” God dominates nature to accomplish His purposes:

He directs the snow to fall on the earth and tells the rain to pour down...God’s breath sends the ice, freezing wide expanses of water. He loads the clouds with moisture, and they flash with His lightning. The clouds turn around and around under His direction. They do whatever He commands throughout the earth. He causes things to happen on earth, either as a punishment or as a sign of His

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unfailing love.”

God established the scientific laws that regulate the universe; only He can overrule their effect. For God, miracles are “routine.”

I am amazed when I hear from Christians who doubt God’s supernatural intervention in their lives. God did mighty miracles through Noah, Moses, and other Old Testament characters. He spoke through the prophets. He personally invaded our time and space in the form of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus performed miracles, died for our sins, rose from the grave, and ascended bodily into heaven. His resurrection is the greatest miracle of all. Now His Spirit lives in the hearts of millions of believers around the world. We sometimes take these miracles for granted.

God still suspends His natural laws today. I love the story told by former Campus Crusade staff members Dick and Carolyn Edic:

In 1967,...300 staff and 300 selected students converged on the [University of California] Berkeley campus for a week of intense evangelism in every facet of the campus. We would meet as a group every morning for prayer, Bible study, and challenge before going out with our particular assignment on campus. Our plan was to culminate the week with a large rally in the Greek Outdoor Theatre with Billy Graham as the speaker. The Amphitheatre held about 8,000 people.

Friday morning, we met as a group as usual. Billy Graham spoke to us. It was raining very heavily, so we feared that the heavy rain would prevent our final evangelistic outreach with Billy Graham. So we got on our knees as a group and prayed for about 45 to 60 minutes, asking God to stop the rain and prepare the way for the outreach.

When we finished praying at about 11:30 a.m. and looked outside, the sun was shining! By meeting time, the seats had dried enough to attract 8,000 students, and Billy Graham’s preaching went forward. After the rally, at about 2 p.m., it started raining again!

This was the highlight of an exciting week of outreach to a tough crowd. During that week, 23,000 of the 27,000 students received a direct witness of the

Lord Jesus Christ personally, in small groups, or in the mass meetings. We saw miraculous answers to prayer that demonstrated God's power to change lives and

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control the weather.

Yet sometimes God chooses to let it rain and to work despite the floods or sloshing through mud as at Campus Crusade's EXPLO '72 in Dallas and EXPLO '74 in Korea. God is in the business of turning tragedy into triumph and sorrow into joy—at His choosing.

### **GOD SOVEREIGNLY FULFILLS HIS ETERNAL MASTER PLAN**

God actively directs His creation toward a pre-determined conclusion. Therefore, He controls all other authorities. The psalmist Asaph wrote, "It is God who judges: He

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brings one down, he exalts another." Let me give you one example from Scripture.

God chose to use King Nebuchadnezzar as His instrument of judgment upon

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Judah's wicked kings and rebellious people. Nebuchadnezzar's armies seemed unstoppable as they captured a vast empire including Jerusalem and took most of Judah's residents into captivity in Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar began to boast about what *he* had accomplished, God removed him from the throne until he was humbled.

Seventy years later, in keeping with God's prophecy that He would bring His captive people back to Judah, God raised up another king. As prophesied, Cyrus sent

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the captives back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. This was all a part of God's magnificent plan to eventually send His Son, the Messiah, who would be born of a Jewish girl living near Jerusalem.

Someone has aptly said that God's master plan on earth is to:

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1) Make sinners sons (spiritual children of God).

17  
2) Make sons like Jesus.

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3) Help the sons share the good news of eternal life through Jesus.

Scriptural evidence supports the fact that God’s work on earth is primarily of a spiritual, eternal nature. <sup>19</sup> Such a spiritual kingdom is in vast contrast to the material,

physical, and temporal kingdom that occupies most people’s efforts today. <sup>20</sup>

## **RESPONDING TO THE REIGN OF THE KING OF KINGS**

We do not live under the jurisdiction of a dictatorial ruler who is out to deprive us of all the fun and happiness in life. The King of kings and Lord of lords has our best interest at heart at all times. He orchestrates events to enable us to praise Him and glorify His name. When times get tough, we can remind ourselves of the conditions under which He reigns. The following paragraphs describe several ways in which He reigns in our lives.

### **God reigns through His omniscient wisdom.**

As a young businessman I made great plans for my business and my future. I had carefully considered what I wanted out of life and what I would have to do to achieve my objectives. Then I met the Son of God! As I discovered the attributes of God—His love, holiness, wisdom, sovereignty, power—I began to realize I could trust His wisdom much more than I could trust my own intelligence.

### **God’s sovereignty operates through righteousness.**

In the 20th century, many men have held tremendous power and used it for evil—Stalin, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, and Pol Pot, the vicious head of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. These few men, responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of innocent people, reigned in unrighteousness. But God sits on a throne of righteousness because He is holy. We never need to fear that He will act out of evil intentions. Submitting to His sovereignty will always be best for us.

### **God’s sovereignty reveals His goodness.**

Because God is good, He is a gracious Sovereign and obliging Benefactor rather than an arbitrary tyrant. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to “come boldly to the throne of our gracious God” because we have a High Priest who “understands our

weaknesses, for He faced all the same temptations we do, yet He did not sin.” <sup>21</sup> God

has bridged the gap of understanding between us and Him. We can count on His goodness when He deals with us.

### THE MOST ASTOUNDING CONTRAST

Can you imagine Queen Elizabeth II giving up her crown to live as a pauper? Putting aside her jewels and dressing in rags? That is unthinkable.

But that is exactly what God did. Reread the description of His throne at the beginning of this chapter. What majesty, perfection, honor, and glory envelops our great God and Savior! Heaven is a place of such beauty and peace, where no sin mars the atmosphere. Pain and hurt are unknown. Angels and all other beings continually praise God.

When God's Son, Jesus Christ, was voluntarily born in a humble manger in Bethlehem, the only people who worshipped Him were lowly shepherds. The stable must have been drafty and not very private. What kind of place was this for the Sovereign of the universe? Where were His crown and His scepter?

Jesus did not live like a king either. He became tired and hungry, was ridiculed, beaten, spit upon, humiliated. The soldiers ripped off His clothes, and He was taken to court before a cruel ruler named Herod. The crowd shouted that they wanted Him killed. All His friends ran away, afraid for their own lives. Then He was cruelly nailed to a cross in front of a jeering crowd. He could have shaken the world in defiance, but all He said was, "Forgive these people, because they don't know what they are

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doing."

Jesus did this because God loves us so much. His love motivated Him to communicate His love and salvation to us. To do this effectively, He had to become one of us—to walk, talk, eat, and look like us. Just the thought of our sovereign God putting aside His magnificent glory brings me to tears. How can we ever reach the depths of that love? How could we ever fear putting our lives into His hands?

Part of our problem with accepting God's authority and honoring Him is that we have lost our concept of majesty. With little sense of the majesty of God, we have trouble submitting to His sovereignty and worshipping Him. For most Christians, true worship is not something they practice very often or well. A. W. Tozer explains our dilemma:

The modern Christian has lost a sense of worship along with the concept of majesty [of God], and of course, reverence as well. He has lost his ability to withdraw inwardly and commune in the secret place with God in the shrine of his

own hidden spirit. It is this that makes Christianity, and we have all but lost it. Added numbers, yes, but lost fear. Multiplied schools, yes, but lost awareness of the invisible. Tons of literature being poured out, of course, but no consciousness of the divine Presence. Better communication, certainly, but nothing to communicate. Evangelistic organizations, yes, but the concept of majesty and

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worship and reverence has almost left us.

Understanding God's sovereignty causes us to focus on Him, not ourselves. Our response is to fall at His feet and give Him everything we are and own. If the royalty of England kneel before Queen Elizabeth II and pledge to submit to her reign, how much more important is it for us to kneel before God's throne and surrender ourselves to Him?

I urge you to recognize God's sovereignty right now by humbling yourself before Him. Totally and irrevocably submit to His lordship of your life. Worship Him by giving Him everything you own. Think of your life as a house with many rooms. Go through each "room" and surrender both the room and the contents to Him. If you have a closet full of fears, let Him control that part of your life. Invite Him into the room where you hide your insecurities and hurts. Let Him take down that monument of pride to your own abilities and talents that you have displayed in your living room. Ask Him to control your checkbook and bank account. Everything you "lose" by serving Him He will replace with something so much better. He controls the universe; He will without doubt enrich your life with joy, peace, happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, and rewards far beyond your wildest imagination!

# LIFE APPLICATION

**EXALT YOUR GOD**—Worship the sovereign Ruler of the universe with David’s song of praise. As you repeat his words, meditate on how secure you are in God’s care.

Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all . . . Now, our God, we give You thanks, and praise Your glorious name (1 Chronicles 29:10,11,13).

**REFLECT HIS IMAGE**—As we increasingly commit ourselves to our sovereign Creator, we reflect God’s image. Even the Son of God submitted to His Father. Jesus stated in John 8:28,29, “I do nothing on my own, but I speak what the Father taught me . . . I always do those things that are pleasing to Him.” Yield your will to God today and determine to make submission to God a consistent part of your character. As you do, you will show others that God controls your life.

**SHARE HIS MAJESTY**—Does someone you know need to be reminded that God is in control? Comfort them with the fact that our sovereign Lord rules over every circumstance. Challenge them with the truth that God will accomplish His plans through them.

## CHAPTER 11

# GOD

# DIRECTS

# OUR LIVES

As members of a democratic society rife with individualism, Americans have difficulty understanding God as an absolute ruler. Did we not reject living under a sovereign ruler when the American Colonies revolted against the king of England? Why should we be subject to anyone now? Yes, we Americans love our independence and freedom.

We do pay homage to our superstar heroes, especially in entertainment and sports, but only as long as they produce astonishing performances for us. Other great champions quickly replace them.

With the decline in the belief of absolute truth, we tend to argue and debate our points of view with everyone, even our leaders, to get our beliefs and agendas accepted. Today we negotiate to get our own way, and compromise—even on moral issues—is considered a virtue.

But we cannot argue, debate, or negotiate with God, the King of the universe. If He is truly the Lord of our lives, and we are His true disciples, we say, “Yes, Lord!” Saying “No, Lord” is a contradiction of terms for the true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Please, fellow believers, do not follow the teaching of some who say that if you

have enough faith in God, or if you repeat the name of Jesus, or quote a formula of phrases or Scripture verses, then you will get all your prayers answered. We cannot force God to do things our way. Sometimes in His wisdom and sovereign plan, His answer to our prayers is “no” or “wait.” Our position is to trust, believe, and obey, not to demand.

### **CHOICE VERSUS OBEDIENCE**

Does that mean we have no say with our sovereign God? Of course not! He does not consider us His puppets or slaves. He made us as free moral agents with minds, wills, and emotions. He will not force His love and plans upon us against our wills. Within the context of His master plan, God gives us the freedom to choose. This is a hard concept to grasp. Let me explain with an illustration. A few days ago, I flew to Dallas. I had complete freedom to get up and walk around on that jetliner. I could go get a magazine or talk to my fellow passengers. I could take a nap or make a telephone call. I had complete freedom—within limits. However, I could not alter the plane’s course. That plane was going to Dallas!

Our relationship with God is like that. We are not robots mechanically programmed to follow His decrees. God has a course for us that has been charted before the beginning of time. God assures us in His Word: “My purpose will stand,

and I will do all that I please.”<sup>1</sup> His master plan for history will be accomplished, whether we choose to work with Him or follow our own stubborn way. Although He allows us to choose and suffer the consequences of our choices, He never relinquishes control of the plans to accomplish His purposes. God turns the pages of history; we do not. As you read the following truths about God’s sovereignty, ask God to show you how you can restore His majesty in your life and what He wants you to do to obey Him.

### **GOD SOVEREIGNLY DIRECTS PEOPLE, CIRCUMSTANCES, AND EVENTS**

When you read the newspaper or look at events around you, do you sometimes wonder who is in control? More and more Christians see themselves as victims of a wicked society. Many feel overwhelmed by circumstances and struggle with hopelessness, defeat, and discouragement. But God has not abandoned them.

I can clearly see how God’s sovereignty has been at work throughout my life. When my mother was carrying me, she almost died many times. During that time, she asked God to spare her life. “Lord, if you will just give me time, and allow me to give birth

to this little child, I will dedicate him or her to you.” Not only did she survive, but she lived to be 93 years old and her godly example and powerful prayers were the greatest influence on my life. She dedicated me to the Lord and faithfully prayed that God’s will would be done in my life.

After completing my college degree, I spent one year on the faculty at Oklahoma State University Extension. Then I left Oklahoma to seek my fortune in California. Although my mother was still praying for me, I had no interest in the things of God. I wanted to be a successful businessman, a man of influence and significance. I was a self-made, happy pagan.

The first day I arrived in California, I picked up a hitchhiker who invited me to dinner at his friend’s house. I agreed and, as it turned out, his friend was Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators Ministry. After dinner, they said, “We’re going to a birthday party. Would you like to come?” That celebration was in the home of America’s top radio evangelist, Charles E. Fuller.

I am still awed by the fact that through God’s sovereignty, I spent my first night in California in the homes of two of the most famous Christian leaders of the 20th century. That did not just happen by chance. God was orchestrating events in my life—even though I was not a believer—in gracious answer to my saintly mother’s prayers.

God is sovereignly involved in directing each of our lives. Proverbs states, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.”<sup>2</sup> God carefully supervises all that happens. No event escapes His notice. No person is beyond His influence. No circumstance exists outside His control.

### **THERE IS NO ROOM FOR LUCK IN GOD’S SOVEREIGN PLANS**

“Good luck,” I heard a man recently say. What about luck? Anyone who understands the Bible and God’s revelation of Himself knows that there is no such thing as luck or chance, which implies a capriciousness of nature and the universe. When we use the word “luck,” we express our unbelief or a lack of knowledge of God’s attributes. With God in control, luck does not exist.

As believers, we live by faith in God and His Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit, not by luck or superstition. He also wants us to consciously acknowledge His sovereign control in the affairs of our lives. This means making our life’s plans—from our simplest decisions to our career choices or our retirement plans—follow God’s

will. James explains the attitudes that please or displease God:

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.<sup>3</sup>

God has a much greater agenda than ours. As we make plans through the power of His Holy Spirit, we must allow God to change those plans at a moment’s notice. We must seriously seek the will of God rather than our own will—and trust all our circumstances to His control.

### **GOD USES BAD THINGS FOR GOOD PURPOSES**

You may have wondered, *If God is in complete control of everything, why does He allow (or cause) birth defects, famines, and war? Why does He permit sin, evil, and suffering?* God’s very nature opposes these things. It was not His plan for Adam and

Eve, the first humans, to sin and bring sickness, disease, and death upon mankind.<sup>4</sup> God created a perfect world, but man chose to sin, and the penalty for sin was death—physical and spiritual. This curse of death has affected all of creation, not just humans, and all the bad things that exist are due to living in a world under judgment, a fallen world. Part of Adam and Eve’s punishment was pain and suffering in childbirth,<sup>5</sup> fighting against nature for food, and struggling to make a living before finally dying.

God does not initiate, cause, or authorize sin, or tempt anyone to sin. Yet He tolerates evil for a season to fulfill His righteous plans for people to respond by their own free will to His love.

Pastor Charles Stanley explains that God allows troubles, accidents, adversity, and similar problems to come into our lives for a purpose. Some of these purposes are:

- To get our attention
- To draw us to himself
- To help us get to know Him
- To see Him as He is

- To taste of His goodness
- To have an intimate, close relationship with Him
- To prevent distance from and avoidance of God<sup>6</sup>

Our disappointments are often God’s appointments. He is far more concerned about the quality of our eternal future than He is about our present comfort. In fact, difficulties and suffering are tools with which He shapes us into the image of Jesus Christ. It is never fun to be enrolled in the academy of adversity, but unless God takes us through the curriculum of trials, we will never become the quality person He wants us to be. Adversity is the touchstone of character.

Romans 8 promises, “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.”<sup>7</sup> God uses even the most disastrous situations for our good.

In the summer of 1976, thirty-five female Campus Crusade staff leaders—including my wife, Vonette—gathered in Colorado for a retreat. That night, they were trapped in the Big Thompson Canyon flood.

At about 1:30 in the morning, I was awakened and informed of the flood and of the rescue of one of the women, who was now in the hospital. About an hour later, another staff member was brought to the hospital by helicopter. By this time, we had good reason to believe that several of the women had drowned.

I did not know if Vonette was safe, struggling for her life in the floodwaters, or dead. But I had incredible peace because I knew that God is sovereign and ever-present. So even though I had no idea where Vonette was and could not help her, I knew God was with her and the other women. Because He is all-powerful, God could save all the women whose lives were in danger. But God is also all-knowing. If it was best for Vonette to be taken home to heaven, I could completely trust my loving Father to do the right thing.

Soon I sadly learned that seven of our staff women perished during the flood. I knew that each of these women was rejoicing in the presence of her Savior. I also learned that Vonette and twenty-seven other staff women had escaped the raging water.

In the weeks that followed, we mourned for those dear friends we had lost. But we also felt led by God to make their last moments on earth a tribute to our sovereign God. With full approval of the grieving families, friends of Campus Crusade ministry

placed full-page ads in most newspapers across the country featuring pictures of the seven women who died. The headline read, “These seven women lost their lives in the Colorado flood, but they are alive and they have a message for you.” The advertisement gave readers an opportunity to read the gospel and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Approximately 150 million people read those ads. The response was phenomenal. Only God knows the full extent of what happened, but many thousands wrote to say that they had received Christ that week as a result of the tragic deaths of those seven women. A foreign ambassador told us that his life was changed by the ad, and later helped open the door for ministry in his country, which had previously been closed to the gospel.

We can give all our worries and cares to God, knowing that He cares about what

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happens to us. When tragedy strikes, take comfort in the fact that no difficulty will ever come into your life without God’s permission. Knowing this truth does not make adversity pleasant, but it gives us hope that the result will be worth whatever pain we endure.

## **GOD OVERRULES THE EVIL**

### **INTENTIONS OF PEOPLE**

What about the intentions of evil people? Is God’s hand present when they devise evil against us? Throughout the Bible we see incidents of God intervening to thwart the evil intents of humans.

Sometimes it seems as if following God’s will makes us more vulnerable to the evil intentions of others. That simply is not true. Yes, since Lucifer rebelled against God, and Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, wars have existed between God and Satan, good and evil, light and darkness. God still has His plan, and He will execute it. We just do not always see His working at the beginning, in the middle of the warfare, or even at the end.

As a 19-year-old, Bruce Olsson went into the jungles on the border of Colombia and Venezuela to bring the gospel to the Bari people. God protected him from these aboriginal people who had never let a white man into their territory, and as they came to love him and his Lord, they affectionately called him *bruchko*. Then in 1988 Bruce was captured by Colombian guerrillas and held secretly in the jungle. It looked as if his ministry had been disrupted and maybe even ended.

Once the Colombian armed forces realized that the guerrillas had kidnapped Bruce, they tried to enlist the Baris, once a fierce, warlike tribe, to help rescue their

beloved *bruchko*. The Bari refused, saying, “Violence only engenders violence.”

Meanwhile, things were happening in the jungle. After five months in captivity, Bruce had so gained the confidence of the guerrillas that they gave him a Bible. Eventually he was able to hold Bible studies with his captors. During nine months of captivity, including one firing squad escape, Bruce led about half the guerrillas assigned to him to faith in Christ. He was so successful that the guerrilla leaders finally released him.

As the years passed after the kidnapping, these Christian guerrillas won others to faith in Christ. Finally, the entire Christian group broke away from the larger guerrilla group and surrendered themselves to the Colombian government. On April 6, 1994, Bruce Olsson wrote in a letter to his prayer and financial supporters:

Resurrection Sunday also meant “conversion” to a great many members of the former guerrilla forces. In their camps [during my captivity] I witnessed more than a hundred break before the Lord in repentant tears, attentive to His Word and surrender their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This action is prelude to the celebration of the 9th of April [when]...descendants from the “Armed Forces for National Liberation” (ELN) and “Armed Forces for Colombian Revolution” (FARC), representing about half of the violent revolutionary forces in Colombia, will reincorporate themselves into national life at the surrendering of their arms and signature of the negotiated “Peace Plan.”

God in His sovereignty protected Bruce despite the evil intentions of guerrilla leaders—and turned the whole incident into a great victory for Jesus Christ. Bruce writes, “The Bari had no doubt in God’s sovereignty and trusted in His intervention in the lives and affairs of His creation. The relinquishing of arms [by the guerrillas] in the presence of Bari leaders was significant. It was vindication of the Bari’s endurance and persuasion.” God was sovereign through the actions of Bruce, the Bari, *and* the guerrillas! Does that give you hope in a situation you may face right now? God will sovereignly use you, too, as you follow His will.

### **OUR REDEMPTION AND GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY**

The entire gospel is a declaration of God’s sovereign pleasure concerning Christ. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul explained:

God’s secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to His good pleasure. And this is His plan: At the right time He will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in

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heaven and on earth.

Satan plotted to defeat God's purpose by arranging circumstances so that the Son of God would be crucified. His plots were successful—at first sight. Consider all the evil intentions of men that God used to bring about our redemption:

- The religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus. They succeeded in their malicious intent.
- The court crowd asked Pilate to release Barabbas rather than Jesus. Pilate agreed to their hate-filled request.
- The soldiers beat Jesus and crowned Him with a crown of thorns. They were following the evil orders of their superiors.
- The rabble in front of the cross ridiculed Jesus as He was dying. Their purpose was to make Him look weak and insignificant. And they surely did.
- The government assigned soldiers to guard Jesus' tomb to thwart any claims that He had risen from the dead. They were successful for two days.

Today we know that all these evil intents were integral parts of God's plan. Jesus was just one man standing against the evil intentions of His physical world, and the spiritual world too, but His power was greater than anything anyone could throw at Him. We have available to us that same power, because as believers, the Holy Spirit lives within us. He will comfort us during times of trial, give us wisdom to accomplish God's will, and help us glorify God through every situation.

Do you feel as privileged as I do to be part of God's eternal plan, knowing that God has revealed to us His sovereign will for the grand scale of history? In fact, our sovereign God will ensure that grand finale! Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who seemed to be the "victim" of evil intentions, will reign supreme forever and ever. One more passage from John's Revelation gives us the panorama of the grand finale that will take place in the City of God:

All the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter—no one who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And the angel showed me a pure river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing down from the throne of God and of the Lamb, coursing down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

No longer will anything be cursed. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will

be there, and His servants will worship Him. And they will see His face, and His name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign

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forever and ever.

When we choose to submit to God’s majesty and sovereignty, we are on the winning side. We will reign with the only One who is worthy of worship and who will be our comfort, guide, and friend throughout eternity! What a Savior! I can hardly wait for that moment!

I urge you to allow God to direct your life by surrendering your decisions, trials, hurts, and pain to Him. Give Him your joys, your accomplishments, your treasures. After all, if Indian princes chose to honor the king of England with their most precious and costly possessions, how much more should we honor God with every part of our lives! Unlike an earthly king, God will take what we give to Him and multiply blessings in our lives. We do not give up anything but pride, sin, and temporal possessions; He gives us back eternal life, joy, spiritual riches, and an eternal reign with Him! What a good God!

Now that we have some insight into the limitless abilities of God, we can turn our attention to His moral attributes. They are the basis of our laws, our justice system, and our ideas of fair treatment. In Part II, we will be examining God’s high moral character: His ability to judge fairly, truthfully, righteously, and with perfect justice. We will discover why He acts as He does and how that affects our relationship with Him. We will answer questions like: Can I trust God to be fair? How will He judge events when it seems like everything is stacked against me? What does He do when His people commit wrong acts? Is He swayed by those who are more “spiritual” or who hold power in the church?

For a person who has a wrong view of God or who does not know Him intimately, the answers to these questions are unsettling. But as we learn more about God’s moral attributes, we will be increasingly confident that we can put complete faith in our Perfect Judge and let Him preside over the courtroom of our lives!

# LIFE APPLICATION

**WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART**—Commit the following statement and verses to memory. Then as you encounter situations during this week where you need to remember that God is in control, claim these promises by faith.

- Because God is sovereign, I will submit to His will.
- Jeremiah 10:23—“I know, LORD, that a person’s life is not his own. No one is able to plan his own course.”
- Romans 8:28—“God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.”

**COUNT ON GOD**—Does the fact that God is sovereign scare you? When God is in control, that means you and I are not. That may invoke fear, but it should bring comfort. How much better that our all-powerful, all-knowing God controls every circumstance rather than we who are imperfect and limited. Trust God today by placing your current situation into the hands of your capable and loving heavenly Father.

**OBEY GOD**—Our sovereign God controls every breath and heartbeat in your life. How foolish it is for us not to obey Him. Ephesians 2:10 states, “We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.” You will realize your own full potential by obeying Him. Pursue the “good things” He has for you to do—today.