



## **The Sovereignty of God**

*Authentic Fellowship Conference March 10, 2018*

Sermon by Pastor Brad Bigney, Grace Fellowship Church, Florence, Kentucky ([www.gfcky.org](http://www.gfcky.org))

(used with permission)

Presented by Hunter Mayo

(Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible.)

### **Theme: God limits, orders, and controls all things for His glory and our good.**

- Proper understanding of and deep appreciation of the sovereignty of God will change your life, the way you view the world around you, and the way you respond to what happens to you.
- God is in control. He has absolute rule and control over everything in this universe. Everything happens either because He directly causes it or consciously allows it.
- Nothing that enters history has happened apart from the complete control of our God.
- If God isn't sovereign over every molecule in the universe, He ceases to be God.
- •We don't naturally like the sovereignty of God—we resist it—because we don't want to be under the authority of God.
- Root issue: We want to be in control of our lives because of our sinful, fallen flesh nature. Our natural attitude is, "Don't mess with my life! I want to make my own decisions, choices, and plans—and I want to work those plans out." We want to be free and autonomous (self-governing and independent). When we try to control our own lives, we find ourselves in opposition to God's sovereignty.
- In reality, we are free, and we have a free will. We are not God's puppets. However, without God, we would always choose sin over righteousness. In His grace, He chose us and saved us from what we would naturally do—sin.
- God's sovereignty should be a great comfort to us as we go through life. In contrast, an ignorance / misunderstanding / disbelief in God's sovereignty can hurt and hinder Christians. Without it, we can't respond well to life's hurts, pains, troubles, sorrows, and difficulties.

---

*Hunter Mayo has been attending FBC since 2000. He and his wife, Sheri, have six kids and reside in Berryville. Hunter works in Project Management Consulting in Ashburn and is part of the Biblical Counseling Leadership Team.*

### Three life-changing truths flow out of the doctrine of God's sovereignty:

#### 1. God's sovereignty means that God does whatever He pleases – so your plans have limits.

- God is not hindered, limited, or restrained at all by people and their free will.
  - **Job 23:12-14** - "I have not departed from the commandments of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does. For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things as are with Him."
  - **Job 42:2** - "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You." Another translation says, "No purpose of Yours can be thwarted."
  - **Psalms 115:3** - "But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases."
  - **Psalms 135:6** - "Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all the deeps."
  - **Ecclesiastes 7:14** - "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other." [Notice that it isn't "allowed" but "appointed."]
  - **Lamentations 3:37-38** - "Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?"
  - **Amos 3:6** - "If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is a calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?"
  - What about September 11, 2001? We can't lay blame at the feet of God for that. The terrorists are responsible for what they did, and God will judge them for every bit of it. However, we cannot say that God couldn't control it. What comfort would that be? What kind of God would we have who is good and loving, but He is so impotent that He couldn't stop it? Although unexplainable, somehow God in His purposes, wisdom, and goodness allowed 9/11, and it could not have happened apart from His permission, purposes, plans, and decrees. God is not the author of evil or sin.
  - **Isaiah 45:6-7** - "I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create calamity. I, the Lord, do all these things."
- The Bible teaches that all things, both good and tragic, ultimately come from God. They usually come to us via secondary sources, such as people and circumstances, but God (not Satan, evil forces, or people) is the One who ultimately decrees what will and will not happen. Without being the author of evil, God determines all things while still leaving men and women responsible for their actions and choices.
  - **Isaiah 48:9-10** - "...I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not even yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'" [God is never frustrated.]
  - **Revelation 19:6** "The Lord God Almighty reigns!"
- God can do whatever He pleases without explanation, without permission, and without apology.
- God hasn't revised any of His plans since He created the universe.

- We don't know everything we would like to know about God's plans; much is hidden.
- **I Corinthians 13:12** – “Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.”
  - **Deuteronomy 29:29** – “The secret things belong to the Lord our God...”
  - **Psalms 131:1** – “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me.”
- We want explanations, but God gives revelation. Instead of explaining everything to us that happens each day, again and again, God reveals to us who He is.
  - In **Job 38-41**, God asks Job 72 “Where were you?” questions.
  - Job's responded to God in **Job 42:1-6** – “I have uttered what I do not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know...I have heard of You...but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
- Once we understand who God has revealed Himself to be, we carry that truth with us into the next troubles, pains, and sufferings we encounter.
- God gives us what we need, which is even more than what we are asking for.
- Therefore, our plans must be tentative and held loosely. The Bible encourages us to make plans, but we should not hold tightly to them.
  - **Proverbs 6:6-8** – “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which...provides her supplies in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest.”
  - **Proverbs 19:21** – “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.” (NIV)
  - **Proverbs 16:1** - “We may make our plans, but God has the last word.” (Good News Bible)
- God's love, wisdom, and sovereignty all go together. He is not a hard, cold, mechanical God that fires out purposes. He doesn't toy with us or delight in causing us pain.
- God's purposes are for our good. The problem is that our definition of good is “easy, comfortable, and fun,” while God's definition of good is “Christ-like.” The process of becoming like Christ is not necessarily easy, comfortable, or fun.
  - **Psalms 119:67-68** – “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word. You are good, and do good...”
  - **Psalms 119:71, 74-75** – “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes...Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word. I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.”
- “God willing” – see **James 4:13-16**. Don't be presumptuous. God calls the shots, not me.

## 2. God's sovereignty means that there are no accidents, so your pain has a purpose.

- There are no such things as accidents or luck for Christians.
- Example of Joni Eareckson Tada: See the attached copy of Jim Elliff's tract, "What Does Luck Have to Do with It?"
- This is not to say that we should seek afflictions—they will come into our lives without our asking for them. On the other hand, we don't need to be afraid, thinking that God is "all about" afflictions. But what a comfort it is, when afflictions come, to know that God measures it through His loving hand and purposes to use it for your good and His glory.
- Contrast Elliff with Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The book's conclusion can be summarized in two words: Stuff happens. Kushner believes that God is good and loving, but He's not all-powerful, so He can't stop some things from happening. He loves you and weeps with you, wishing the bad things hadn't happened. However, that is not the God as presented in Scripture. Yes, God weeps with us (Psalm 56:8 says, "Put my tears in Your bottle..."), but an impotent God such as Kushner portrays is not worthy of our worship or trust. The God of Scripture is bigger than what we can fathom in our minds.
  - **Isaiah 55:9-10** – "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts."
- Contrast Elliff with what [evolutionist and] atheist Richard Dawkins of Oxford University offers. He says, "In a universe of blind physical genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and some people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reasoning to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good—nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music."
- Rather than believing herself a victim, Joni radiates Christ because of her true, biblical understanding and trust of who God is. She stands on Him as her Rock.
- Since there is purpose behind our pain and a loving and wise God who measures it out, how should we respond?
  - **I Peter 1:6-7** – "At times you may be temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials; this is no accident." (J. B. Phillip's Translation of New Testament)
  - **Job 1:20-23** – After Job lost all his children, his property, and his health, "Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave [me everything I had], and the Lord has taken away. [They were His to take away.] Blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong." [We tend to think, "I worked for everything I have, and nobody better mess with it, including God!"]

- **Genesis 50:20** – When Joseph was a teenager, his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery in Egypt for 17 years. As the manager of Potiphar’s house, Joseph was falsely accused of rape by Potiphar’s wife. He went to prison. Instead of cursing or giving up on God, Joseph continued to trust God. Eventually he came to be in command of all Pharaoh’s food supplies during a widespread famine. When his brothers came to Egypt for food, Joseph didn’t respond to his brothers with revenge. Instead, he said to them, “But as for you, you meant it for evil against me; but God meant it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”
- **Romans 12:17, 19** – “Repay no one evil for evil... ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Get out of the way and let God take care of it.)
- We can be hurt by bosses, parents, siblings, husbands/wives, children, neighbors, and coworkers who do and say that they mean for evil in our lives, but God controls it all for our good, to bring about His purposes and accomplish what He has designed us to do.
- The key to our response is to see God in the problem. Keep God and His character central—not on the outside looking in. Keep God “framed” in your picture of suffering.
- It’s your choice how you respond to trials and problems. You decide the level of joy you will have in life by how you will respond to trials.
- Margaret Clarkson, who experienced a lifetime of physical suffering, wrote: “When we learn to rest in God’s sovereignty, we know great inner peace. Our pain may not grow less, our loss may not be restored, our grief may still be ours, but the power to harm us is broken. There is a vast difference between suffering in God’s will and suffering apart from that assurance. No Christian need do that. God’s peace of heart is ours for the taking. When trouble strikes, we must accept it as from God, bringing it to Him and telling Him that we love and trust Him. We must claim His promise to overcome our evil with His good, and trust Him to do it in this pain. Practical blessings, too, come with our acceptance of God’s sovereignty. When we resist our sufferings, we make life very much harder for ourselves. When we accept them and cast ourselves and our troubles on God, we suffer much less intensely.” (*Destined for Glory*, Margaret Clarkson, pages 34-35)
- We suffer much more intensely than necessary when we don’t accept our suffering as from God. We make it worse as we chafe under it, fight, and resist, thinking that bad things shouldn’t happen to us when we are doing all the “right” things.
  - **II Corinthians 4:16-17** – “This is the reason we never lose heart: these troubles, which are temporary, are winning for us a permanent, solid, and glorious reward out of proportion to our pain.” (unknown translation); or:
  - “So we’re not giving up. How could we? Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace.” (The Message)

- Don't be so focused on the pain that you blind yourself to God's daily unfolding grace. We must choose to dwell on, think about, look at, and embrace God's daily grace.

### 3. The sovereignty of God means that there are no misfits.

- God uniquely designed you, just as you are.
- God chose your parents, your place of birth, your physical features, and your time in history.
- God determined these things; they were not accidents or random chaos
  - **Acts 17:26** - "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation." The NIV states: "He has...determined the time set for them and the exact places where they should live."
- God's design includes what we call disabilities or handicaps.
- **John 9:1-3** - "As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened that the work [glory] of God might be displayed in his life.'" (NIV)
  - **Psalm 139:13** - "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb." (NIV)
  - **II Corinthians 12:9** - "[The Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"
    - **Exodus 4:10-11** - "Then Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?'"
    - **Isa. 45:9-12** - "Woe to him who strives/wrestles with/fights against his Maker!.. Shall the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?'...This what the Lord says, the Holy One of Israel and its Maker concerning things to come, do you question Me about My children, or give Me orders about the work of My hands? It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens..." (NIV)

### Summary: God limits, orders, and controls all things for His glory and our good.

- God does whatever He pleases, and what He pleases is good, wise, perfect, and acceptable.
- God does whatever He pleases, so that our plans have limits.
- God does whatever He pleases, so there are no accidents; your pain has a purpose.
- God does whatever He pleases, so there are no misfits.
- Sadly, in America and in the church, God is allowed to be everywhere but on His throne, and it's killing us. We're filled with fear, worry, anxiety, depression and confusion, because the God that we talk about in our culture and sometimes in our church bears little resemblance to the almighty, sovereign, wise, powerful, good, merciful God of the Bible that's on His throne, ruling and reigning from beginning to end. That's the God of Scripture that we want to come back to.

## What Does Luck Have to Do with It?

Jim Elliff

Joni Eareckson Tada is one of the most gracious and effective Christians in the world. She has lived with the results of a diving accident that broke her neck during her teen years. At 50 she continues to radiate Christ to a listening world. Joni is known by thousands of Christians, perhaps millions, through her books, radio program, and conference speaking.

Once my brother asked Joni how she made it through the difficult battle with her paraplegia. I later heard her give the same answer in a large conference in Orlando. Her reply will surprise you. “I suppose what helped me get through this more than any other thing” she said, “was reading Loraine Beottner’s Reformed Doctrine of Predestination.”

Now that caught you off guard, didn’t it?

What she was saying was that she came to understand through this book that God is in control. And if God is in control then her accident wasn’t just a fluke, but a purposeful arrangement by a loving God. She could trust a God like that. That accident cost her freedom and brought chronic suffering. But to Joni, that diving accident was a huge gift from God—a platform for speaking to the world about her favorite subject, Christ.

I know that it might seem insensitive to say that God is in control. But this is what the Bible teaches, like it or not. When we analyze national tragedy we sometimes recoil from the notion that God could be in control of His world. We seek to protect God from such an accusation. But the Scriptures don’t do this.

The Bible teaches that all good things, as well as all tragic things, come from God. (See Lam. 3: 37-38) They usually come via secondary sources, that is, they are delivered on your doorstep by other people or through the convergence of events and complex connections. Without being a tempter or evil (James 1:13), God determines all things, while still leaving men responsible for their actions.

Complicated? Sure. But true nonetheless.

A clear illustration of this can be seen in the death of Christ. Is the death of Christ a good thing? Of course. Did God just “hope” that everything would work out to accomplish the greatest event of the universe? Did God feel lucky that it all worked out as He projected?

The early Christians did not think it was luck that brought about Jesus’ redemptive death. Here’s the way they put it in a prayer meeting:

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27-28)

We can think of all events, tragic or good, under two categories. They are either for the punishment or for the benefit of the person, but they're all in the end for the glory of God.

Now think carefully. First, realize that everything that happens to a non-believer is a tragedy. Even mercies from God, if sinned against, work out for the worse to the non-believer. Every apparently good thing coming to a person who will finally reject God, only serves to make his judgment more severe. (See Rom. 2: 4-6)

But for the child of God, life works out exactly the opposite. The Bible says, "All things work together for the good of those who love God, the called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8:28).

So, when a difficult thing comes into the life of a believer, as in Joni's swimming accident, then the end result is good. It is for a loving purpose. Even discipline from God toward true believers is for the good. And when sinful people are involved, we can say with Joseph, "You meant it for evil; but God meant it for good." (Gen. 50:20)

As one theologian said, "Tragedy is anything that happens to a non-believer." And we can add, "Good is anything that happens to a true Christian."

This can only be said because God is in control. And luck, well, it isn't even there.

Copyright © 2013 Jim Elliff

Christian Communicators Worldwide, Inc. Permission granted for not-for-sale reproduction in unedited form including author's name, title, complete content, copyright and weblink.

[www.ccwtoday.org](http://www.ccwtoday.org)