

Sovereign God

A word about this series...

There are few doctrines as precious and practical for Christian life the Sovereignty of God. We have such a privilege to look into these truths with our groups. Do we or our group members lack courage or hope or assurance? Do we feel guilty, anxious or fearful? The passages and truths we are looking at in these studies could be of real lasting benefit - please pray this would be the case! So let's go!

First up, what is the sovereignty of God? Here's a helpful definition...

"When we say God is sovereign, we mean he is powerful and authoritative to the extent of being able to override all other powers and authorities. ..Nothing can successfully stop any act or any event or design or purpose that God intends to certainly bring about." - John Piper *What is the Sovereignty of God*

(desiringgod.org)

Secondly, it is worth saying - please don't feel like you need to have all the answers. These are weighty things! There is some mystery in how some of these truths (e.g. human responsibility and God's sovereignty) fit together. Furthermore, there are a couple of ways we can misstep with this topic.

1. Firstly, we can narrow down sovereignty into *control* without *purpose*. God is working all things for his good purposes. Nothing can stop the plans of God! Imagine if God's plans to bless the whole world through Abraham could be stopped (Gen 12). Imagine if suffering could stop someone coming to faith (Rom 8). Imagine if something could take us from Jesus' hands (John 6). Terrifying. Death, the devil, suffering, even our sinful selves would have the last word. But thank God this is not the case.
2. Secondly, we separate God's sovereignty from *God*. The one who is sovereign is our loving father who is always good, holy, wise and just. We are skeptical of power and authority because we know it can be abused. But the only safe place for absolute power to be is in the hands of the loving, just God of the scriptures.

We have such a privilege to look into these truths with our groups. Each study invites the group to list all their questions - not so you answer them but to get discussion going and motivate people to grapple with what the bible says. Please make use of:

- These notes - best used with the study booklet open in front of you;
- the bonus resources (see email, one chapter excerpt per study);
- the sermons (which will follow the studies); and
- your team leaders & area leaders.

And remember, whatever happens...God is sovereign! He will use it :)

Study 1: Sovereign Creator

Big idea of the study: God is our sovereign creator. God is God and we are not.

Big prayer for our group: Each member sees that every human has God as their creator and the most fitting response is to turn back to his loving care.

“Sin is believing the lie that you are self-created, self-dependent and self sustained” Augustine.

Notes for the questions & verses

- Vs 28 - Paul is quoting the poetry of two greek poets (Empimenides and Aratus). He is emphasising that because God is creator, every human actually has a close connection with him (even if they go on to reject this relationship).
- Implications of God as creator? Every human was made by him, has a connection to him, is sustained by him, has lives planned by him, is utterly dependent on him and needs to repent of their rejection of him.
- What did Jesus' resurrection change: God announced that we are now counting down to final judgement day when Jesus will be the judge.

Study 2: Sovereign Sustainer

Big idea of the study: God sustains every detail of life and gives His kingdom to those who seek Him.

Big prayer for our group: Members would seek God's kingdom and depend on God in prayer instead of anxiously chasing other things.

“Just start thanking God in advance because no matter what is about to happen, you already know that God is in charge. You are not adrift in a sea of chaos” Elizabeth Elliott.

Notes for the questions

- From 16-21 we see the man seeking 'soul-security' without God in repetition of “I will...” “I will...” and in what he says to his soul in vs 19. He thinks his actions have made his soul safe.
- 12-21 and 22-34 are both about seeking treasure in this world rather than seeking God's kingdom. e.g. vs 21 & 34 (repetition of 'treasure').
- When we look at Luke 11:1-13, God teaches his followers to seek God's kingdom by praying 'your kingdom come', he is so so eager to answer our prayers that even what we ask for won't stop him giving what is best.

Study 3: Sovereign Saviour

Big idea for the study: God sovereignly saves, calls and keeps his people.

Big prayer for our group: Members rest in the assurance of their faith if they are Christian and boldly share the gospel.

“Your faith will not fail while God sustains it; you are not strong enough to fall away while God is resolved to hold you” - J I Packer.

Notes for the questions & verses

- Romans 8:31- the 'us' Christians (those predestined, called, justified, glorified from vs 30)
- 9:6-13. Question = Has God broken his word because not all of Israel has accepted Jesus but gentiles have and are now in the people of God? Answer: God's word has not failed. God's word has always said God's true spiritual people is not physical Israel, not physical descendants, rather it is those God has chosen.

- 9:14-18. Question = If God is sovereign in salvation and chooses who chooses him and rejects him, how can he still be righteous/just (vs14)? Answer: God can choose whom he has mercy on, and whom he will harden. NB: God stands behind both the mercy and the hardening, but in different ways. God's hardening maintains people in the state of sin that already characterises them. We are all sinners deserving judgment. 'God's mercy is given to those who do not deserve it; his hardening affects those who have already by their sin deserved condemnation' (Moo).
- 9:19-29. Question = If God has hardened people, doesn't this mean they are not responsible for their rejection of him? Answer: worth asking what is our position to judge the ways of our creator. God has withheld final judgment which rebellious creatures deserve to show mercy to those he has chosen. He is allowed to choose who he has mercy upon. We see this in his calling of both Jews and Gentiles (25-29).
- In our lives, we experience God's sovereignty in election in how we come to faith and are sustained in faith. Not all of Israel have chosen to trust Jesus (30-33), they have chosen to trust in their works instead.
- Romans 10:9-15 - God brings people to faith through the proclamation of the gospel by his people, such that they 'confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe he is risen from the dead'. Like looking at an archway that says 'repent and believe' those who choose to walk through it then look back and see on the other side the archway reads 'chosen before time'. It is our faith and repentance, but faith and repentance enabled entirely and predestined by God.
- God does not merely choose those who he foreknew would choose him. He is the instigator and complete saviour (Rom 8:30), even if in our experience that work manifests as people proclaiming and trusting. 'Predestination' is 'grace' spelt longer.

Study 4

Big idea for the study: God, while not the author of evil, uses even suffering for his good purposes (the cross is the ultimate proof of this).

Big prayer for our group: When suffering comes, or even in suffering now, they would take refuge in God's love and sovereignty.

"Suffering is actually at the heart of the Christian story." Tim Keller

Notes for the questions & verses

- suffering is a way to share in Christ now (vs 17), our sufferings will fade in comparison to the glory to come (18), God uses all things for our good - that good being us being made more like Jesus (28-29), suffering can't separate us from God's love, his love enables us to 'conquer' in suffering by keeping on trusting him (35-37).
- Our response to suffering: groan for the new creation (23) (lament is the answer-in-practice to the problem of evil - go to God with it), hope and wait patiently for the end of suffering (25), rely on the Spirit's interceding for us (26) i.e. even if we ask for the 'wrong thing' this will not stop God's good gifts coming to us because the Spirit speaks on our behalf asking for God's will be done.
- Suffering is not pointless - God uses it for his purposes. It is not dehumanising, God uses it to make us 'more human' - more like Christ in our dependance on him.

Study 5

Big idea for the study: God leads and guides as his Spirit-writ word is applied to the hearts and lives of his people.

Big prayer for our group: They would look deeply into God's word for God's leading - seeking to obey his commands and apply his wisdom to their lives.

"Our calling isn't to follow our hearts. Our calling is to have our hearts informed and directed by the clear and plain teaching of the word of God" R C Sproul

Notes for the questions & verses

This study is a bit different! When you look at each of the passages the aim is to learn what they say about guidance *and* draw questions from them to apply to decisions to help us follow God's lead. Each person will choose a decision/situation and then 'workshop' it - apply those questions to it.

Psalms 119:97-104.

- Psalm 119 is an alphabetic acrostic. Each paragraph starts with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of vv97-104 in Hebrew starts with the letter "mem" (roughly equivalent to our 'm').
- Possible questions we could draw from this passage to help guide our decisions (You'll probably come up with some other great ones, these are just to give you an idea...)
 - What parts of Scripture would be good to 'meditate' on as I make this decision? (Vs 97, 99)
 - What is an 'evil path' that I want to steer clear of in this situation? (Vs 101)
 - What does obeying God's word look like here? (Vs 101)

Romans 12:1-3

- The 'mercy' here is the great grace we've been learning about in Romans 1-11.
- We know God's will by not conforming to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our mind.
- We are not finding the 'right' path because our salvation depends on it, or to earn God's love, in his love he is renewing us and enabling us to live his way.
- Possible questions we could draw from this passage to apply to decisions:
 - What would it look like to make a sacrificial decision here? (12:1)
 - What would please God in this decision? (12:1)
 - How could you 'worship' God with this decision/ in this situation? (12:1)
 - In what ways does the gospel and God's word renew my mind to change what is most important in this situation?

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Possible questions we could draw from this passage to apply to decisions:

- Have godly Christians passed you down wisdom which applies to this situation? (14)
- What do the Holy Scriptures say about this decision/situation? (Vs15)
- What training do you need from the scriptures to make wise choices here?
- Is there a rebuke/correction from the Bible which you need to listen to in this situation?

	GG studies start week of... (sermon date)	Focus passage	Bonus Resource (Attached)	Could also look at...
Study 1 Sovereign God: Creator	18 August (24 August)	Acts 17:22-34	Chapter 2 of 'Everlasting God' by Broughton Knox.	Big God' by Orlando Saer - chapters 1-2
Study 2 Sovereign God: Sustainer (focus on how prayer fits with God's sovereignty)	25 August (31 August)	Luke 12:22-40	Chapter 9 of 'A Call to Spiritual Reformation' by Don Carson.	Chapter 6 of 'Big God' by Orlando Saer
EVENT with Dave Macca	Monday 1 Sept	God's sovereignty in his cancer journey		
Study 3 Sovereign God: Saviour	1 September (7 September)	Rom 8:31-9:29	Chapter 4 of 'Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God' by J I Packer	Chapter 4 of 'Big God' by Orlando Saer
Study 4 Sovereign God: Sufferer	8 September (14 September)	Romans 8:18-39	Chapter 11 in 'How Long O Lord' by Don Carson	Ch 3 of 'Big God' by Orlando Saer Ch 2 Knox 'Everlasting God'
Study 5 Sovereign God: Leader (focus on guidance)	15 September (21 September)	Hebrews 1:1-4 1 Tim 3:16 Romans 12:1-2	Chapter 5 of 'Big God' by Orlando Saer.	Just do something' Kevin de Young. 'Guidance and the Voice of God' Jensen