

TRUSTING GOD

By Mike Burnham

Psalm 32:10 *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.* (KJV)

This verse doesn't say that Christians will not have many sorrows. Mercy suggests misery, despair, and distress of the ones being shown mercy. The Throne of Grace is the place where one in misery and distress can find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

Can you trust God? There are two possible ways of looking at this question. First, can you **trust** God? Is He dependable in times of adversity? Second, can **you** trust God? Do you have such a relationship with God and such a confidence in Him that you believe He is with you in your adversity even though you do not see any evidence of His presence and His power? Do you really believe that a God who loved you and knew what was best for you, was in control of your situation? Could you trust Him even if you didn't understand?

Have you found that it is easier to obey God than to trust Him? That may be because the moral will of God given to us in the Bible is rational and reasonable, and we can see that it is for our good. The circumstances in which we must trust God often don't appear rational or reasonable and there is so much of the unknown, like, the extent, the duration, or the frequency of the painful, adverse circumstances. Another difficult unknown to deal with is the *reason* this circumstance has come upon you.

It is just as important to trust God as it is to obey Him. When we disobey God, we defy His authority and despise His holiness. When we fail to trust God, we doubt His sovereignty and question His goodness. In both cases we are questioning His majesty and His character.

Psalm 78:17-22 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. **18** And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. **19** Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? **20** Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? **21** Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; **22** Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: (KJV)

In order to trust God, we must always view our adverse circumstances through the eyes of faith, not of sense or experience. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17), so faith to trust God in adversity comes through the Word of God alone. It is only in the scriptures that we find an adequate view of God's relationship to and involvement in our painful circumstances. It is only from the Scriptures, applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that we receive the grace to trust God in adversity.

The scriptures teach us three essential truths about God---truths we must believe if we are to trust Him in adversity. We need:

- God is completely sovereign.
- God is infinite in wisdom.
- God is perfect in love.

Someone has expressed these three truths as they relate to us in this way: "God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty, He has the power to bring it about."

GOD IS IN CONTROL

Lamentations 3:37-38 (KJV) *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? 38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?*

This passage of scripture offends many people. They find it difficult to accept that both calamities and good things come from God. Christians as well as non-Christians frequently speak of misfortune and accidents, of circumstances beyond our (and presumable God's) control, of things happening by chance, of fate, of luck. But Jesus affirmed God's sovereignty in calamity when Pilate said to Him,

John 19:10-11 *Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? 11 Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.* (KJV)

Jesus acknowledged God's sovereign control over His life. Whatever our calamity or adversity may be, we can be sure that God has a loving purpose in it.

Again, Jesus said:

Matthew 10:29-31 *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.* (KJV)

According to Jesus, God does exercise His sovereignty in very minute events---even the life and death of an almost worthless sparrow. Jesus' whole point is: If God so exercises His sovereignty in regard to sparrows, most certainly He will exercise it in regard to His children. If God controls the circumstances of the sparrow, how much more does He control the circumstances that affect us.

Lamentation's 3:32 *But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. 33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.* (KJV)

Paul acknowledged what we must acknowledge if we are to trust God.

Romans 11:33 *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* (KJV)

God's plan and His ways of working out His plan are frequently beyond our ability to fathom and understand. His sovereignty is often questioned because man does not understand what God is doing. Because He *does not* act as we think He should, we conclude He *cannot* act as we think He would. We must learn to trust when we don't understand.

Isaiah 55:9 *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* (KJV)

Psalms 9:10 *And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.* (KJV)

In order to trust God, we must know Him in an intimate, personal way. To know God's name is more than just knowing facts about God. It is a deeper personal relationship with Him that comes from seeking Him in the midst of our personal pain and despair and discovering Him to be trustworthy. Experience confirms our faith.

God is involved in an invisible battle with Satan and the lives of God's people are often the battlegrounds as seen in the life of Job. But even then, Satan must get permission to touch God's people (Job 1:12; 2:6; Luke 22:31-32).

All people---believers as well as unbelievers---experience anxiety, frustration, heartache and disappointment. Some suffer intense physical pain and terrible tragedies. But that which should distinguish the suffering of believers from unbelievers is the confidence that our suffering is under the control of an all-powerful and all-loving God; our suffering has meaning and purpose in God's eternal plan, and He brings or allows to come into our lives only that which is for His glory and our good.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Psalm 33:10-11 *The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices (plans and purposes) of the people of none effect. 11 The counsel (plans) of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts (purposes) of his heart to all generations.* (KJV)

James 4:13-15 *Go to now (now listen), ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

(KJV)

Nothing is done apart from God's will. God is in control; He is sovereign. He does whatsoever pleases Him and determines whether we can do what we have planned. This is what sovereignty is; His absolute independence to do as He pleases, and His absolute control over the actions of all His creation. No creature, person, or empire can thwart either His will or act outside the bounds of His will. (Exo. 1:10-12; Psa. 2:1-4; Prov. 21:30; Isa. 7:5-7).

Many Christian writers make the mistake of limiting God's sovereignty and power by saying that *God limited himself*. That He made Himself dependent on what man would do and that man by his prayers would

determine what God could do in some cases.

But confidence in the sovereignty and power of God in *all* that affects us is crucial to our trusting Him. *If there is one single event in all of the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control, then we cannot trust Him.* His love may be infinite, but if His power is limited and His purpose can be thwarted, we cannot trust Him.

God permits, for reasons known only to Himself, people to act contrary to and in defiance of His revealed will. But He never permits them to act contrary to His sovereign will.

Prov. 16:9 *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth (determines) his steps.* (KJV)

Prov. 19:21 *There are many devices (plans) in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.* (KJV)

Prov. 21:30 *There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.* (KJV) (No insight, no plan can succeed against the LORD).

Eccl. 7:13 *Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?* (KJV)

Lam. 3:37 *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?* (KJV) (Who can speak and have it happen if the LORD has not decreed it?)

We make plans, but these plans can succeed only when they are consistent with God's purpose.

Thousands of Christians have experienced injustices or malicious acts at the hands of fellow workers, and supervisors at work. We have suffered because of the mistakes and failures of other people. All circumstances are under the controlling hand of our sovereign God, who is working them out in

our lives for our good.

The Roman governor Felix left Paul in prison for more than two years. Felix committed a totally *unjust* act because he wanted to grant a favor to the Jews (Acts 24:27).

Joseph was left in prison for two years because Pharaoh's cupbearer *forgot* him (Genesis 40:14,23; 41:1). But both of these circumstances were under the sovereign control of an infinitely wise and loving God. The insignificant sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His will; the mighty Roman empire cannot crucify Jesus Christ unless that power is given to it by God (Mat. 10:29; John 19:10-11). Nothing so small or so great escapes the attention of God's sovereign control and power.

We are not at the mercy of tragic accidents, bad luck, stalled cars, or people who are in a position to do us harm and are intent on doing it. We are in the hands of a sovereign God who controls every circumstance of our lives.

GOD DOES AS HE PLEASES

In His perfect wisdom and perfect love God does only as He pleases as He works out every event to bring about the accomplishment of His will, and all that pleases Him is for His glory and the good of His people. This means that God has a purpose and a plan for each of us and *that He has the power* to carry out that plan.

Job 42:2 *I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.* (KJV) (that is, no plan of can be thwarted).

Psalms 115:3 **But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.** (KJV)

Isaiah 14:27 *For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it (thwarted His purpose)? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?* (KJV)

Isaiah 43:13 *Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?* (who shall stop or reverse it). (KJV)

Isaiah 46:10 *Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:* (KJV)

Dan. 4:35 *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?* (KJV)

Eph. 1:11 *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:* (KJV)

Psalms 138:8 *The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.* (KJV)

John 15:2 *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.* (KJV)

Phil. 1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:* (KJV)

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS NOT ALWAYS APPARENT

One of our problems with the sovereignty of God is that it is frequently

does not appear that God is in control of the circumstances of our lives. It is when we do not see God's direct intervention---when God is, so to speak, working entirely behind the scenes through ordinary circumstances and ordinary actions of people---that it is even more important to believe that God is in control, because that is the way God usually works.

God uses many circumstances and ordinary actions of people to bring affliction into the lives of His people. But by the same token, How many times have we been unknowingly spared from adversity or tragedy by the unseen hand of God? (Teamsters plot). The Psalmist says:

Psalm 121:3-4 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. 4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. (KJV)

The Book of Esther helps us to see the sovereign hand of God at work behind the scenes caring for His people. It's interesting that the name of God is never mentioned in this Book. And yet an observant reader can see the hand of God in every circumstance, bringing about the deliverance of His people, just as surely as He brought about their deliverance from Egypt through mighty miracles centuries before. God sovereignly used ordinary circumstances and customs in the time of Esther instead of miracles.

A series of events recorded in Esther chapter 6 (the pivotal point of the book) reveals how God uses the most ordinary circumstances to accomplish His purpose. Read Esther 5:14 - 6:11

Consider what had to happen to save Mordecai from the gallows. Why could the king not sleep that fateful night? Why did he ask for an uninteresting register of facts to be read to him rather than soothing music to lull him to sleep? Why did the reader happen to read from the particular section of the book where Mordecai's actions were recorded? What are the chances of picking out this section of all the portions of the annals of the Persian empire?

The king heard about Mordecai's service and asked how he was rewarded. Why had the king not rewarded Mordecai at the time he had saved the king's life? Why did he suddenly determine to do something? And why did Haman appear at that moment to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai? Why did the king ask Haman what should be done to honor the man in such a way as to conceal the man's identity whom he favored, causing Haman to think he himself was the one to be honored?

The answer to all these questions was that God was sovereignly in control of all events and actions.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* (KJV)

God is in control doing as He pleases, not apart from those events and actions of our lives, or in spite of them, but *through* them. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, which was a malicious act on their part, but in due time Joseph recognized that through his brothers' actions God was acting.

Gen. 45:8 *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* (KJV)

Gen. 50:20 *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* (KJV)

You and I may never see in this life the outcome of God's plan for us, as Joseph did. But God's plan for us is no less firm and its outcome no less certain than was God's plan for Joseph. God gave us Joseph's story so that we might be encouraged:

Rom. 15:4 *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort*

(encouragement) of the scriptures might have hope. (KJV)

Do you ever think? "If only I had done this," or "if only that had not happened." But God has no "if only." God never makes mistakes; He never has regrets.

Psalm 18:30 As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. (KJV)

Just as the book of Esther showed us God's sovereign care for His people, the short book of Ruth shows us God at work to fulfill His plan for one of His people. Ruth was the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi, who said:

Ruth 1:16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: (KJV) Read 2:1-10.

In the end Ruth marries Boaz, becomes the great-grandmother of King David and one of the four women listed in Matthew's record of genealogy of our Lord (Matt. 1:1-16).

Notice in the passage we read, four key events that all had to come together to begin the process of Ruth's becoming Boaz's wife. As Ruth went out to glean in the fields, she could have ended up in anyone's field. Verse three says, "As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz." God guided her to the right field. But she still must meet Boaz, so verse four says, "Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem." God, who controlled Ruth's direction so that she happened to go to Boaz's field, controlled Boaz's timing so that he happened to go to check on his harvest at just the time Ruth was there.

But still Ruth must gain Boaz's attention and favor. This gleaning of the field was a common event in life of the poor in Israel because it was part

of the Mosaic law (Lev. 19:9-10). We could conclude that a landowner such as Boaz would not normally notice one poor woman gathering up leftover grain. But Boaz Notices Ruth, Verse 5. Finally, we see Boaz responding favorably to Ruth, verses 8-10.

The right location, the right timing, being noticed, and gaining Boaz's favors were all key links in the chain of events that eventually resulted in Ruth's marriage to Boaz. None of the events are extraordinary and all give the appearance of "just happening," nothing more than a coincidence in a romantic story. But by careful reading one can see the hand of God working. Naomi herself, though not at the time aware of God's future plan for Ruth and Boaz, ascribes the events to the hand of God (Ruth 2:20).

These stories of Esther and Mordecai and of Ruth and Boaz both had happy endings. But what about when the ending isn't so happy. Is God still in control then? For example, the two stories recorded in Act 12 of James and Peter. They were friends before they were called to be apostles. They were partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:10). They were called by Jesus to leave their fishing business and to follow Him at the same time (Matt. 4:18-22). Both were part of Jesus' inner circle --- Peter, James and John. But in Acts 12 completely different events happen to them. James is put to death and Peter is miraculously delivered from death (Acts 12:1-11).

Think about the families of these two men. One is grieving over the murder of a loved one, and the other is rejoicing over the miraculous deliverance of a loved one. Peter's family rejoices in the sovereignty of God, but what does James family do? Was God any less sovereign in the death of James than He was in the deliverance of Peter? Is God Sovereign only in the "good" circumstances of our lives? Is He not also sovereign in the bad circumstances?

Eccl. 7:14 *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other,*

to the end that man should find nothing after him. (KJV)

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. (KJV)

Lam. 3:38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? (KJV)

From these three passages we can conclude that God controls both the good and the bad. Trusting God does not mean we will not suffer grief, pain, or heartache. What it does mean is that when in the midst of these feelings we can say, "God, I know you were in control of this event. I do not know why You allowed it to happen but I trust You that it was for Your purpose and my good."

Trusting God is not a matter of my feeling but of my will. I will never "feel" like trusting God when bad things happen, but I can choose to do so even when I don't feel like it. This act of will must be based on belief, and belief must be based on truth. By this we honor and glorify God.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER PEOPLE

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. (KJV)

Charles Bridges, in his exposition of Proverbs, states, "The general truth of God's sovereignty over the hearts of all people is taught by the strongest illustration---his uncontrollable sway upon the most absolute of all wills---the *king's* heart." In Solomon's time the king was an absolute monarch. His word was law. His authority over his realm was unconditional and unrestrained. Yet God controls the king's heart. If God controls the king's heart surely, He controls everyone else's.

I'm sure you remember how Israel was a cruelly oppressed people in the beginning of the Book of Exodus. Suddenly God intervenes in their lives and the Pharaoh says, "Leave!" But the Israelites had no resources to start a new life; they were poverty-stricken. But God had foreseen this problem and we read this in

Exodus 3:21-22 *And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: 22 But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians.* (KJV)

Exodus 12:35-36 *And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: 36 And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.* (KJV)

The Egyptians did something completely contrary to normal human behavior. They voluntarily and freely gave these slaves what they asked for, so much so that it's said the Israelites "plundered" the Egyptians. The word plunder means to rob or seize or take by force; yet the Egyptians actually plundered themselves. They did this because God had **made** them favorably disposed toward the Israelites.

How did God do this? God in some mysterious way moved in their hearts so that they, of their own free choice, did exactly what He planned for them to do. God sovereignly intervened in the hearts, the desires and wills, of the Egyptians to accomplish His purpose for the Israelites.

We have all found ourselves and our futures seemingly in the hands of other people. Their decisions or their actions determine whether we get a good grade or a poor one, whether we are promoted or fired, whether our

career blossoms or folds. I am not overlooking our responsibility in these matters, but even when we have done our best, we are still dependent upon the favor or frown of the other person. So, from a human point of view, we are often at the mercy of other people and their decisions or actions.

Sometimes their decisions or actions are good; sometimes they are wicked or careless. How are we to respond when we find ourselves seemingly in the hands of someone else? Can we trust God that He can and will work in the heart of that individual to bring about His plan for us?

How about when someone's out to harm us, to ruin our reputation, or jeopardize our career? Can we trust God to intervene in the heart of that person so that he does not carry out his evil intent? According to the Bible, the answer in these instances is yes.

We have already seen this to be true with the Egyptians toward the Israelites. We see it also in the account of Cyrus, king of Persia, when he issued a proclamation to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, (KJV)

The destiny of God's people was, humanly speaking, in the hands of the most powerful monarch of that day. In reality, though, their destiny was completely in the hand of God, because He had the ability to sovereignly control the decisions of that monarch. This goes for others as well:

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which

is in Jerusalem. (KJV)

Cyrus could issue a proclamation, but there must still be a response of the Jews.

Isaiah 45:4-5 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: (KJV)

We saw here that God not only moved his heart toward the Israelites, but He also put him in office. We also see that it is not necessary for a person to acknowledge God's sovereign control in his heart or to even acknowledge the existence of God.

Ezra 6:22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. (KJV)

This was a later king, King Darius. So, God moved in the hearts of two kings, one to start the project and another to keep it going.

Another illustration of God's control over the heart of man is found in the life of Daniel:

Daniel 1:9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. (KJV)

Daniel's request to the prince of eunuchs was a difficult one. So difficult that the man at first feared for his life (verse 10). But he granted it because God first moved in his heart to show favor and love to Daniel.

GOD RESTRAINS PEOPLE

This is another side of God's sovereignty over the hearts of man. *God restrains people.* In fear of his own life, Abraham lied about his wife, Sarah, saying she was his sister. As a result, Abimelech moved to take Sarah as his wife. God, however, kept Abimelech from carrying out his plan.

Genesis 20:6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.
(KJV)

God did not physically or by using circumstances restrain Abimelech. He restrained him through his mind. Was Abimelech conscious that God was restraining him? No, the Scripture simply says that he had not gone near her (verse 4). Abimelech chose of his own free will not to be with Sarah, but his choosing was under the sovereign control of God. This incident is even more amazing when we consider that Abraham had put Sarah in this difficult position through his own unbelief and sin. But Abraham's sin did not stop God from intervening to prevent sin.

When Jacob set out with his family to move from Shechem to Bethel because two of his sons, Simeon and Levi, had just committed a terrible act against the Hivites by slaying all the men, he was afraid the people of the land would seek revenge.

Genesis 34:30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. (KJV)

But Genesis 35:5 says:

Genesis 35:5 And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after

the sons of Jacob. (KJV)

There doesn't appear from scriptures that there were any external circumstances that would cause this terror, which is usually the cause. There was no reason why the Canaanites should not have swooped down upon Jacob and his family except that God restrained them through a terror He put in their minds.

Another illustration is:

Exodus 34:23-24 Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year. (KJV)

We can see how vulnerable and defenseless their land would be when all the males went to appear before the LORD three times a year. Yet that's what God commanded them to do, and also promised them that none of the nations round about them at those times would covet their land.

Covetousness is an evil desire for something that belongs to another, and it is one of the most deeply rooted emotions in the human heart. Paul, who as a Pharisee could speak of his faultless outward observance of God's Law (Phil. 3:6), is finally exposed as a sinner by the command, "You shall not covet" (Rom. 7:7-8). He could refrain from stealing but he could not of himself refrain from coveting.

Yet God said that no other nation would covet the land of the Israelites, during their vulnerable and defenseless times. God can restrain not only people's actions, but even their most deeply rooted desires.

GOD PERMITS EVIL

God does not always restrain the wicked and harmful actions of others toward His people. The story of Joseph illustrates this truth. When his brothers decided to sell him into slavery, God did not restrain them. Neither did He restrain Potiphar's wife when she maliciously and unjustly accused him. But God was using the evil acts of man to accomplish His purpose through Joseph. In the end Joseph could look back over all the different circumstances and troubles he went through and say to his brothers:

Genesis 50:20 *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* (KJV)

We can look at circumstances two ways; from man's point of view, and from God's point of view. What man may do sinfully to the injury of God's people, God uses that same evil work for the good of his people. It is man's work, yet from another point of view it is God's work in the same circumstance.

Sometimes God even moves in the hearts of some people to act stubbornly.

Deut. 2:30 *But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day.* (KJV)

Joshua 11:20 *For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.* (KJV)

God doesn't worry that man will not cooperate with Him in carrying out His plan. He moves in their hearts, whether they are believers or nonbelievers, that they willingly, of their own free will carry out His plans.

Do you feel that your life is in the hands of others?

Psalm 75:6-7 *For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.* (KJV)

1 Chr 29:11-13 *Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12 Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.* (KJV)

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S FREEDOM AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

While the Scriptures speak of both God's sovereignty and man's freedom and moral responsibility, it never attempts to explain their relationship. As we look into this subject, there are three truths we need to consider.

The first is that God is infinite in His ways as well as His being. A finite mind simply cannot comprehend an infinite being beyond what He has expressly revealed to us. Because of this, some things about God will always remain a mystery to us. This subject is one of those mysteries. One of our problems in dealing with this subject is that we tend to view the interaction between God and man on the same level as the interaction between man and man.

Psalm 50:21 *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will*

reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. (KJV)

While the context does not deal with our subject, the statement is true of it. We tend to think of God as being like us.

The second truth we must keep in mind is that God is never the author of sin. Though man's sinful intents and actions serve the sovereign purpose of God, we must never conclude that God has induced anyone to sin.

James 1:13-14 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* (KJV)

Scriptures show us that God uses the sinful acts of men to accomplish His purposes.

Gen. 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but *God meant it unto good*, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (KJV)

Acts 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For *to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined* before to be done. (KJV)

Rev. 17:17 For God *hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will*, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. (KJV)

The third truth to keep in mind is that the Scripture consistently portrays men as making real choices of their own free will. Scripture does not even suggest that man is a mindless puppet moved by divine strings.

Furthermore, they are held accountable by God for the choices they make.

Rom. 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.
(KJV)

God's sovereignty and man's freedom of moral choices are both taught in the Bible. But just as we must not misconstrue God's sovereignty so as to make people mere puppets, so we must not press man's freedom to the point of limiting God's sovereignty. It is impossible for our minds to reconcile these two truths.

HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND?

How are we to respond to the fact that God is able to and does in fact move in the minds and hearts of people to accomplish His will? First of all, we should trust Him, because all those people, humanly speaking, that are in a position to affect our lives and futures are under the mighty hand of God, who will not allow them to act in anyway that is not for our good, for they cannot act apart from the sovereign will of God.

Next, we should pray. When Queen Esther was to go before King Xerxes without being summoned, an act that would normally result in her being put to death, she asked Mordecai to gather all of the Jews together to fast (and I assume to pray) that the king would grant her favor. Esther did not presume to know God's will, she said:

Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days,

night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. (KJV)

Obviously we do not always know how God will answer our prayers, or if He will move in the heart of another individual, but it should be enough to know that our destiny is in His hands, not those of other people.

Confidence in God's sovereignty in the lives of people should also keep us from becoming resentful and bitter when we are treated unjustly or maliciously by others. Bitterness usually stems not so much from the other person's actions as from the *effects* of those actions on our lives.

For instance, you have just been unjustly fired from your job for some reason entirely unrelated to your performance. After a couple of months of fruitless job hunting, you find yourself standing in the unemployment line. As you stand there you brood over the injustice perpetrated on you by your former boss. You are resentful and bitter.

Now suppose on the day you were unjustly fired, as you walk out the door, you meet a man looking for someone with your skill and experience who offers you a better job at twice the salary. There is one additional qualification: you must have had the experience of being unjustly fired. You gladly accept the job and thoroughly enjoy your new position. Do you become bitter? No, you probably think something like; "I'm sure glad so and so fired me. If he hadn't, I would never have gotten this job." You see, it's the *effect* of your being fired, not the act itself that determines whether you are tempted to become bitter

Rom. 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? (KJV)

God will never allow any action against you that is not in accord with

His will for you. And His will is always directed to our good.

We tend to live by two agendas; ours and God's, and that the tension between them sets up stress. We tend struggle with resentment and bitterness when someone else's action or decision adversely affects us because it is *our agenda*, our plans, that have been affected, or our pride has been wounded. To lead a less stressful life we must learn to live with one agenda, God's agenda.

GOD'S RULE OVER THE NATIONS

2 Chronicles 20:6 And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? (KJV)

God's sovereignty over nations is usually not apparent. We see this demonstrated in the life and death of our Lord. Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken. This required Joseph and Mary to go to the town of Bethlehem to register at just the right time for the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Micah's prophecy:

Micah 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (KJV)

Caesar certainly did not intend to be an instrument to fulfill any Jewish prophecy, yet that is exactly what he was.

Matthew records several instances in the early life of Jesus where

governmental action directly Jesus, and in each instance makes the observation that through those actions certain prophecies were fulfilled.

Matthew 2:14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 And was there until the death of Herod: *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, *Out of Egypt have I called my son.*

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17 *Then was fulfilled* that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, *Rachel weeping for her children*, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of

Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by the prophets, *He shall be called a Nazarene.* (KJV)

In each case, the people involved acted freely, doing what they intended to do; yet, in each instance, they did exactly what God planned for them to do.

Acts 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. (KJV)

Obviously Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish leaders did exactly what they wanted to do, yet they did exactly what God planned that they do.

What Solomon said of individuals applies when men act not only in their private capacities, but also when they act as officials and rulers of nations.

Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. (KJV)

God rules in the affairs of nations today just as He did in the days of the prophets or the apostles, although we may not perceive His hand. The reason we see it so prominently in scripture is because God has shown us by revelation.

GOD ORDAINS RULERS

God has established government for the good of all people

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. (KJV)

God determines who rules those governments

Daniel 4:17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

It's hard for us to understand God's wisdom when we look at some of the evil tyrants, and dictators that have been at the head of governments, as well as some of the weak and foolish men who have held high office. But Psalm 76 gives us a view from God's perspective:

Psalm 76:10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. (KJV)

God will allow dictators and weak and foolish politicians to do only what ultimately results in His glory.

God determines their time of ruling

Isaiah 40:23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. (KJV)

We see this illustrated in the life of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. At the height of his power, Nebuchadnezzar's sanity was taken from him, he was driven away from his people, and ate grass like cattle. Seven years later his sanity was restored to him, his advisors and nobles sought him out, and he was restored to his throne and became even greater than before.

Daniel 4:33 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from

generation to generation:

35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

36 At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.

From the most power king of his time, to a madman living like a wild animal, to an even greater king, all in just seven years, is something that could be done by a sovereign God. On top of that no one usurped his kingdom during those seven years. The same God who ruled absolutely in the life and fortunes of the most powerful king of that time still rules in the fortunes and destinies of governments today.

God controls decisions

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.(KJV)

The practice of casting lots was often used to determine important decisions of state. Officials were chosen, tasks determined, dates selected, and disputes were settled by casting lots

1 Chronicles 24:5 Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of the house of God, were of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar.

(KJV)

Esther 3:7 In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar. (KJV)

Proverbs 18:18 The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty. (KJV)

Luke 1:9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. (KJV)

The king of Babylon determined military strategy by casting lots:

Ezekiel 21:18 The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying,

19 Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come: both twain shall come forth out of one land: and choose thou a place, choose it at the head of the way to the city.

20 Appoint a way, that the sword may come to Rabbath of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the defenced.

21 For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver.

22 At his right hand was the divination for Jerusalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the voice with shouting, to appoint battering rams against the gates, to cast a mount, and to build a fort. (KJV)

According to Solomon, God controlled the decisions that kings and government officials made through the casting of lots.

Some decisions are made after seeking advice and counsel from others. God also controls the advice and counsel given at these times.

When Absalom went against his father, David, he asked advice from Ahithophel and Hushai, who were secretly still loyal to David. After hearing contradictory advice from both of these men, Absalom and his men chose the advice of Hushai, which was secretly intended to favor David. Scripture tells us that Ahithophel's advice was the best:

2 Samuel 16:23 And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom. (KJV)

Yet Absalom chose to follow Hushai's advice instead of Ahithophel's. Why?

2 Samuel 17:14 And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. *For the LORD had appointed* to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom. (KJV)

A similar event occurred in the life of David's grandson, Rehoboam. When he came to the throne, the men of Israel asked him to lighten the harsh labor and the heavy taxes Solomon, his father, had put on them. Rehoboam first consulted the elders who had served his father. They advised him to do as the people requested. But Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders and consulted the young men who had grown up with him. They advised him to make their yoke even heavier. As a result, ten tribes of Israel revolted against Rehoboam, splitting the kingdom.

Why did Rehoboam make such a foolish decision?

1 Kings 12:15 Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; *for the cause was from the LORD*, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat. (KJV) (1 Kings 11:11,30-31).

Why does it appear that foolish men often seem to rule in our country and others, making foolish and naive decisions? Because God has appointed the rejection of good counsel in order to bring on nations punishment for their crimes against God and His people.

Psalm 33:10 The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. (KJV)

God determines Military victories and defeats

Proverbs 21:31 The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD. (KJV)

Safety refers to deliverance, rescue, or victory.

Judges 7:2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many *for me to give* the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, *and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow*, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath. (KJV)

1 Samuel 14:6 And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.

15 And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.

20 And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great discomfiture. (KJV)

Because of the scriptures clear statements about God's sovereignty in battle, we as Christians should put our trust in God, not in our nations armaments.

Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. (KJV)

Psalm 33:16 There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.

17 An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.

18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon

them that hope in his mercy;

19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.
(KJV)

This doesn't mean that our country should get rid of our military, ships, and tanks. It means we should not trust in them.

Psalm 44:6 For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. (KJV)

He did not trust in his bow or sword but neither did he throw them away. There is going to be fighting, but we need to recognize that God gives the victory in warfare to whomever He wills. Even the smallest detail does not escape Him.

Isaiah 5:26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss (whisper) unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:

27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, *nor the latchet of their shoes be broken*: (KJV)

GOD'S POWER OVER NATURE

Jeremiah 14:22 Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou he, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all

these things. (KJV)

Christians tend to think, like nonbelievers, that earthquakes, snowstorms, tornados, hurricanes, or even the gentle rain and snow, are just impersonal happenings of nature. Whether it is trivial, like rain, or traumatic, like an earthquake that kills thousands of people, we tend to think of them as “just happening” and ourselves as the “unlucky” victims of whatever nature brings forth. But the scriptures attribute to God control over all weather, not just His divine intervention on specific occasions.

Job 37:3 He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth.

6 For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength.

9 Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north.

10 By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened (or frozen). **11** Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud:

12 And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth.

13 He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy. (KJV)

Psalms 147:8 Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.

16 He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.

17 He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?

18 He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. (KJV)

Jeremiah 10:13 When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. (KJV)

Amos 4:7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. (KJV)

Notice that all these Scriptures attribute all expressions of weather---good or bad---to the direct controlling hand of God. Whether the weather is good or bad, we are never the victims or even the beneficiaries of the impersonal powers of nature. It is not "mother nature" who is in control, but God.

Matthew 5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (KJV)

Physical Afflictions

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses protested his inadequacy, including the fact that he was slow of speech. God's reply to Moses is very instructive to us in this area of physical

affliction.

Exodus 4:11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? (KJV)

When Jesus encountered a man blind from birth, His disciples asked Him,

John 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? (KJV)

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (KJV)

Jesus didn't say it was merely a birth defect that caused the man's blindness. Rather, it happened in the plan of God so that God might be glorified. Illness and afflictions do not "just happen," God is in control even over these that His plan and purpose will be fulfilled. We may not understand, but we know that a loving God is in control who is working for our well-being, and we can trust Him.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (KJV)

Even Jesus, God's Son, went through great affliction, pain, suffering, humiliation, even death for the purpose of God's plan and our good. And through it all Jesus trusted God, knowing He was in control. So must we even when we don't understand.

Lamentations 3:31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. (KJV)

God always has a purpose for whatever He does or allows to come into our lives. Most often we do not know what that purpose is, but it should be enough to know that His infinite wisdom and perfect love have determined that it is best for us.

Habakkuk 3:17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. (KJV)

God's Sovereignty, our responsibility, and Prayer

Nehemiah 4:7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

9 Nevertheless *we made our prayer* unto our God, and *set a watch* against them day and night, because of them. (KJV)

We have looked at God's sovereign control over man, the nations, nature, and the weather. We need to be careful that we do not abuse or misuse the teaching of God's sovereignty. If we are not careful we can fall into a *fatalistic attitude* about the sovereignty of God. A student who fails an exam tries to excuse himself by saying, "Well, God is sovereign and He determined that I should fail that exam." A driver can cause an auto accident and, in his own mind, evade his carelessness by attributing the accident to the sovereignty of God. Both attitudes are unbiblical and foolish, yet we can easily fall into them.

Notice that the Jews not only prayed but also set guards along the wall to watch and warn them if the enemy attacked. They did not presume to know God's will, but prayed and then set about to do all that they had the power to do to safeguard themselves and Jerusalem. It wasn't that they didn't trust God to deliver them, but that they took up *their responsibility* and acted prudently.

Nehemiah 4:16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with

those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. (KJV)

Nehemiah trusted in the sovereignty of God. He said, "Our God will fight for us!" (Verse 20). But he also used all available means, believing that God would bless those means.

God usually works through means, and He intends that we use the means He has placed at our disposal. And we are to use all legitimate biblical means at our disposal to avoid harm to ourselves or others. One of the basic of those means is *prayer*. We are not to consider God's sovereignty a reason to neglect our duty or an excuse to shirk the duties that He has commanded in the Scriptures.

Another illustration of this is seen in the life of David as he continually evaded Saul while Saul was determined to kill him. David had already been anointed to succeed Saul as king and he was confident that God would fulfill His purpose for him:

Psalm 57:1 Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

2 I will cry unto God most high; unto God that *performeth all things for me*. (KJV)

Yet David took all the precautions he could to avoid being killed by Saul. He did not presume upon the sovereignty of God but rather prayed and acted prudently in dependence upon God to bless his efforts.

Prayer is the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and of our dependence upon Him to act on our behalf. Prudence is the acknowledgment of our responsibility to use all legitimate means. We cannot separate these two.

1 Chronicles 5:18 The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, of valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war, were four and forty thousand seven hundred and threescore, that went out to the war.

19 And they made war with the Hagarites, with Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab.

20 And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them: for they cried to God in the battle, and he was intreated of them; because they put their trust in him. (KJV)

The warriors described in this passage were able-bodied and well-trained. They were prudent; they had taken all precautions to be able to fight when they needed to. But they did not trust in their ability and training. They cried out to God, and He answered their prayers because they trusted Him. God sovereignly intervened and He handed all their enemies over to them.

Knowledge of God's sovereignty is meant to be an encouragement to pray. The Scripture says that we are not to be careful (anxious) for nothing. Why? Because God is in control. But the scripture goes on to say:

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; *but in every thing by prayer and supplication* with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto

God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (KJV)

Peter and John, after being threatened by the Jewish Sanedrin and commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, told the church all that was said unto them. And right away the believers began to pray.

Acts 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, (KJV)

The Jews believed in the sovereignty of God and acknowledged His sovereign purpose in past events (i.e., the Crucifixion), but they did not presume to know His purpose about the future. So they prayed. Prayer is the expression of our trust in God because we are assured He is *able* to answer our prayers.

All of our plans, all of our efforts, and all of our prudence is of no avail unless God prospers those means.

Psalm 127:1 Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh (stands guard) but in vain. (KJV)

Unless God enables us to do what we must do for ourselves they are in vain. It is the LORD who builds the house, but he accomplishes this by enabling them that labor to build it. It's the LORD that watches over the city, but He does so through the watchman whom He has enabled to see.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (KJV)

Our Failures and God's Sovereignty

We have seen that God's sovereignty does not do away with our duty to act responsibly and prudently on all occasions. But what about the other side of the question? Does failure on our part to act prudently frustrate the plan and purpose of God? No! In God's infinite wisdom, His plan and purpose include our failures and even our sins.

When Mordecai asked Queen Esther to intercede with the king on behalf of the Jews, she answered with the explanation that she could enter the king's presence unbidden only on the threat of death.

Esther 4:10 Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden

sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

Then Mordecai sent word back to her saying;

14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement (*relief*) and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

The key phrase in Mordecai's response is "enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place."

God is not limited to Esther's response. He did not literally need Esther's cooperation. But in this instance, He chose to use her. Mordecai's closing argument to Esther, "and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" assumes that God uses people and means to accomplish His sovereign purpose. He had indeed raised up Esther up to accomplish His purpose. He cannot be frustrated by our failure to act or by our actions.

THE WISDOM OF GOD

Romans 11:33 O the depth of the riches (resources) both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments (decisions), and his ways (methods) past finding out! (KJV)

The chief end of all God's plans and purposes are His own glory and in His infinite wisdom He selects the best possible means for the accomplishment of this end.

Romans 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (KJV)

Wisdom is commonly defined as good judgment, or the ability to develop the best course of action, or the best response to a given situation. All of us from time to time agonize over some important decisions, trying to determine the best course of action.

But God never has to agonize over a decision, or consult with others outside of Himself.

Psalms 147:5 Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. (KJV)

The word understanding here includes intelligence and wisdom which are all infinite.

God's infinite wisdom is displayed in bringing good out of evil, beauty out of that which is ugly. It is displayed in turning all the forces of evil that rage against His children into good for them. But the good that He brings about is often different from the good we envision.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

This verse is often quoted but we fail to note that the following verse helps us understand what the "good" of verse 28 is. Verse 29 begins with the word *for*, indicating that it is a continuation and amplification of the

thought of verse 28.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (KJV)

The good that God works for in our lives is conformity to the likeness of His Son. It is not necessarily comfort or happiness but conformity to Christ in ever-increasing measure in this life and in its fullness in eternity.

We see this same thought in:

Hebrews 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. (KJV)

To share in God's holiness is the equivalent to being conformed to the likeness of Christ. God knows exactly what He intends we become and He knows exactly what circumstances, both good and bad, are necessary to produce that result in our lives.

Notice the contrast the author draws between the finite wisdom of human parents and the infinite infallible wisdom of God. He says, "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best." Often while we are raising our children we, who are or were parents, agonized over the proper discipline, both in kind and amount. And even when we thought, we knew what was best. There were many times when we were wrong.

But, the writer says without qualification, God disciplines us for our good. There is no agonizing by God. He knows infallibly with infinite wisdom what combination of good and bad circumstances will bring us more and more into sharing His holiness. His blending of adversity and blessing is always exactly right for us. God not only knows what we need but when we

need it. The purpose of God's discipline is not to punish us but to transform us. David said:

Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. (KJV)

He was speaking of experiential learning. We can learn God's will for our character intellectually through reading and studying the Scriptures, and we should do that for that's where change begins, as our minds are renewed.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)

But real change is produced as what the Scriptures teaches are worked out in real life. This usually involves adversity. For instance, *patience*, which means to suffer long, comes through adversity.

Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: (KJV)

The kind of *love* that gives freely of itself at great cost can only be learned when we are confronted with situations that call forth a sacrificial love.

God's wisdom is greater than that of our adversaries

Proverbs 21:30 There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD. (KJV)

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD. Satan or other people may plan and scheme to treat us unjustly, to take advantage of us, or to use us for their own selfish ends, but they can only accomplish what God has sovereignly ordained for us and in His infinite wisdom brings to pass.

Joseph's brothers thought they were getting rid of their brother of whom they were terribly envious. But God planned all along to use their scheme to send Joseph ahead of them to be their provider during the seven years of famine. They intended their actions for evil but God intended them for good.

Satan thought that by getting God to allow him to afflict Job, he would thereby get Job to curse God to His face. But he succeeded only in being an instrument to bring Job into a deeper and more reverent relationship with God. So we can say with Paul:

Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? (KJV)

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S LOVE

1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (KJV)

Because God is love, it is an essential part of His nature to do good and show mercy to His creatures.

Psalms 145:7 They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.

8 The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

9 The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. (KJV)

Even in His role of Judge of rebellious men, He declares:

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (KJV)

When we are going through trouble or when we see or hear of catastrophes happen where people die we can be tempted to doubt God's love. In our right mind such thoughts are unthinkable to us, but in time of emotional stress we can begin to entertain such thoughts.

Even righteous Job, who at the beginning of his calamities was able to say:

Job 1:21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. (KJV)

He eventually came to the place where he too questioned the goodness of God.

Job 34:5 For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away (denied) my judgment. **9** For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God. (KJV) (or when he tries to please God)

We need to store up in our hearts some truths to use as weapons against temptations to doubt His love.

God's Love at Calvary

One of the most convincing evidences of God's love is His giving His Son to die for our sins.

1 John 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (KJV)

John said that God is love, and this is how He showed His love, by sending His Son to die for us. Our greatest need is not freedom from adversity. All the possible calamities that could occur in this life cannot in any way be compared with the absolute calamity of eternal separation from God, God's eternal judgment in hell.

So when John said that God showed His love by sending His Son, he was saying God showed His love by meeting our *greatest need*, a need so great that no other needs can even come close to it in comparison. When we need proof of God's love then we must first look at the Cross where God offered up His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

Consider the *great cost* to Himself His love extracted. He gave His only begotten Son. The Great God and Creator of the Universe, gave up His glory to humble Himself and become what He Himself had created, to be rejected, humiliated, scorned, spit upon, beaten, made sin, accepting the wrath against that sin, and finally dying the shameful death of the cross. If

this isn't the greatest expression of love, there never will be. (Jn. 3:16; Phil. 2:6-8; Mat. 27:26-50).

One of the essential characteristics of love is the element of self-sacrifice, and this was demonstrated by both the Father and the Son.

Also consider the miserable and wretched condition of those that God set His love upon.

Roman's 5:8 But God commandeth (exhibited, established) his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (KJV)

Paul describes us as spiritually dead in our transgressions and sins before we were saved (Eph. 2:1). Ezekiel's vision in chapter 37 of Israel as a valley of very dry bones would be an apt description of all of us before we were saved. We have absolutely no claim on His love. We didn't before we were saved and we don't now deserve one bit of God's goodness to us. It's all by His grace and according to the good pleasure of His will.

Ephesians 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (KJV)

When we begin to doubt God's love, we must use our minds to reason through these truths, which will turn our emotions to the truth. Paul tells us

that if God loved us so much to give us the greatest conceivable gift at such a great cost, then surely He will not withhold any lesser blessing from us.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (KJV)

If God's love was sufficient for my greatest need, my eternal salvation, surely it is sufficient for my lesser need, the adversities I encounter in this life.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (KJV)

This infinite, measureless love of God is poured out upon us, not because of who we are or what we are, but because we are in Christ Jesus. Just as God's love to His Son cannot change, so His love to us cannot change, because we are in union with the One He loves. God's love to us can no more waver than His love to His Son can waver.

John 17:20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in

thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.
(KJV)

So here is another truth to reason in our minds; *God's love to us cannot fail any more than His love to Christ can fail.* Because we are in Christ Jesus, *God's* glory and *our* good are linked together. Because we are united with Christ, whatever is for His glory is also for our good. And whatever is for our good is for His glory.

David said, "In my alarm I said, 'I am cut off from your sight.'" (Psalm 31:22). Isaiah speaks of God's people (called Zion) as questioning God's love and gives God's response,

Isaiah 49:14 But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.

15 Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (KJV)

Not merely will God not forget, He cannot forget. Isaiah describes the inconceivable carefulness with which God unceasingly watches over us, that we may be fully convinced that He will never forsake us.

After the destruction by the Babylonian army the nation of Judah was feeling great misery and alienation from God. But they are brought out of it when something is brought to their mind.

Lamentations 3:19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

22 It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. (KJV)

Judah turned from the circumstances at hand and reflected on the love, the compassion, and the faithfulness of the Lord. He was not cut off from God. Even the nation in the depth of its sin was not cutoff from God's love. God disciplined the nation severely, but He did not cease to love it.

We need to do that too. That is why we need to store up in our hearts some of these great passages on the love of God, so we have them ready to use when adversity strikes and when doubts and temptations to unbelief arise in our hearts.

Trusting God Because of Who You Are

Psalm 139:13 For thou hast possessed (by virtue of creation) my reins: thou hast covered (protected) me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret (unseen), and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth (in darkness).

16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect (in embryonic form); and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. (KJV)

Which in continuance, refers to days or period of time. So David is saying that all *his days were ordained for him and written in God's book before one of them came to be*. God not only created us as He intended us to be, He also sovereignly determines how long we live, the family and social setting into which we were born, and all the seemingly chance or random happenings, and all the sudden and unexpected turns of events, both good and bad that occur in our lives. All these situations and circumstances, though they may appear only as happenstance to us, were written in God's book before one of them came to be.

Psalm 56:8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? (KJV)

Job 14:5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; (KJV)

The book, I believe, is the *Book of the living*, which includes God's providence;

Isaiah 4:3 And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: (KJV)

Acts 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him I declare unto you.

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25 Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and *hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;* (KJV)

Exodus 32:32 Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. (KJV)

Psalms 69:28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. (KJV)

Psalms 109:13 Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. (KJV)

Psalms 139 teaches me that God made me who I am. In verse 13 David says to God, "You knit me together in my mother's womb." The word "covered" can be taken two ways, one, To hedge about, and two, To weave together. God is directly involved in our birth, as involved as He was when He created Adam out of the dust of the earth, protecting and superintending the growth process, fashioning each one of us into the person He wants us to be.

"Reins" literally means "kidneys," a word used by the Jews to express the seat of longings and desires. It's the center of emotions and of moral sensitivity. David, is essentially saying that God created his personality.

David was who his was physically, mentally, and emotionally because God made him that way. David praised God instead of fretting over the way God made him;

Psalm 139:14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. (KJV)

You are the result of God's creative work. Your personality, your sex, your height, your features, are what they are because God made them precisely that way. He made you the way He did because that is the way He wants you to be.

Job 10:8 Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me.

9 Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?

10 Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?

11 Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. (KJV)

Psalm 119:73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. (KJV)

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. (KJV)

I may like to be taller, handsome, smarter, gifted, etc. but I need to accept myself as God made me in my physical, mental, and emotional makeup. This doesn't mean I don't have to change insofar as my sin nature

has distorted that which God has made. I don't accept myself as I am, but as God has made me.

Some are born blind, or with hearing or physical disabilities, and it's not easy to accept that God made them that way, but that's what I understand the scriptures to say, and it is to fulfill His plan and purpose. God did not give His own Son handsome features in His human body;

Isaiah 53:2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he *hath no form nor comeliness*; and when we shall see him, *there is no beauty* that we should desire him. (KJV)

The low condition he submitted to, and his appearance in the world, was not agreeable to the ideas the Jews had formed of the Messiah. It was expected that he should come in pomp; instead of that,

Ver. 2. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, &c.] Which springs out of the earth without notice; low in its beginning, slow in its growth, liable to be crushed with the foot, or destroyed with the frost. The figure denotes the low and unpromising appearance of Christ at his incarnation; which is the reason given why the Jews in general disbelieved, rejected, and despised him; for this phrase of "growing up" does not picture his exaltation, or rising up from a low to a high estate; but his low entrance into the world, like that of the springing up of a low and insignificant plant or shrub out of the earth. The phrase "*before him*" refers to God the Father, by whom he was taken notice of, though not by men; and the manner of it, and his low appearance, were all before the Lord, and according to his will.

he hath no form nor comeliness; in his appearance there was no majesty or honor, or signs of it. He did not look like a prince in Israel, much

less the Messiah; he was born of lowly parents; brought up in a contemptible part of the country; lived in a town out of which no good is said to come; and worked as a common carpenter.

and when we shall see him: that is, the Jews that would live in Christ's time, who would see his person, hear his doctrines, and be witnesses of his miracles, and yet say,

there is no beauty, that we should desire him; He was nothing special to look upon, nothing grand and majestic, or like a king; they only viewing him in his outward appearance and circumstances made their estimate of him; they expected the Messiah as a temporal prince, appearing in great pomp and state, to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and restore their nation to its former splendor and glory; and being disappointed desired Him not, who is the desire of all nations.

Self-acceptance is basically trusting God for who I am. If we have physical or mental disabilities or impairments, it's because God in His wisdom and love created us that way. We may not understand why God chose to do that, but that is where our trusting Him is to begin.

John **9:1** And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (KJV)

Think about what Jesus said. A man was born blind and lived in

blindness all the way into adulthood, so that God's work might be displayed in his life. That hardly seems fair, does it? Why should that man suffer blindness all those years merely to be available to display God's works on a certain day? Is God's glory worth a man's being born blind?

We would probably all agree that the glory of God is worthy of a man's being born blind. But what about our own physical disabilities or inadequacies or even our appearance problems? Is God's glory worthy of those also? Can we tell God that He is worthy of our infirmity? Can we say, "I believe You created me just the way I am because You love me and You want to glorify Yourself through me. I will trust You for who I am"?

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? (KJV)

Trusting God for Guidance

Since God has a plan for my life can I trust Him to guide me in that plan? What if I make a mistake, the wrong decision, and miss the way?

David said of God;

Psalms 23:2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (KJV)

The imagery is that of the shepherd leading his sheep. The initiative is with the shepherd. He determines the watering places and guides the flock

as he thinks best. As our shepherd, God is guiding us in the ways that He knows to be best for us.

As we travel on the road of life, we come to many forks in the road that call for decisions. We worry about making the right decisions and being in God's will, but the biblical emphasis seems to be on God's guiding US.

Psalm 31:3 For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. (KJV)

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. (KJV)

Psalm 48:14 For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death. (KJV)

Psalm 73:24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. (KJV)

We have a responsibility to make wise decisions or to discover the will of God. But God's plan is not contingent upon our decisions, in fact it's not contingent at all. God's plan is sovereign and it includes our foolish decisions as well as our wise ones.

Many years ago Fanny Crosby penned these words, which are so appropriate to the topic of trusting God for guidance.

All the way my Savior leads me---

What have I to ask beside?

Can I doubt His tender mercy,

Who through life has been my guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me,
Jesus oeth all things well.

All the way my Savior leads me---
O the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised
In my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed immortal,
Wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song through endless ages:
Jesus led me all the way.

We can trust God to guide us. And when we stand before His throne we will not be saying anything about successfully discovering God's will. Rather with Fanny Crosby we to will sing, "Jesus led me all the way."

Growing through Adversity

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; (trials of many kinds)

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. (Developes perseverance).

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect (Mature) and entire (complete), wanting nothing. (KJV)

There is a story told of someone who watched a moth go through this struggle. In an effort to help, and not realizing the necessity of the struggle, the viewer snipped the shell of the cocoon. Soon the moth came out with its wings all crimped and shriveled. But as the person watched, the wings remained weak. The moth, which in a few moments would have stretched those wings to fly, was now doomed to crawling out its brief life, never being the beautiful creature God created it to be.

What the person in the story did not realize was that the struggle to emerge from the cocoon was an essential part of developing the muscle system of the moth's body and pushing the body fluids out into the wings to expand them. By seeking to cut short the moth's struggle, the watcher had actually crippled the moth.

Adversities of life are much like the cocoon of the moth. God uses them to develop the spiritual "muscle system" of our lives. They are what makes us grow to maturity and strengthens us. But when adversities come we cry out for God to snip the cocoon of adversity we often find ourselves in and release us. But God has more wisdom and love for us than we do for ourselves. He won't remove the adversity until we have profited from it and developed in whatever way He intended in bringing or allowing it into our lives, just like Job.

Both Paul and James speak of rejoicing in our sufferings:

Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: (KJV)

Most of us, if we are honest with ourselves, have difficulty with that idea. Endure them perhaps, but rejoice? But Paul and James both say that we should rejoice in our trials because of their beneficial results. It is not the adversity considered in itself that is to be the ground of our joy. Rather, it is the expectation of the results, the development of our character, that should cause us to rejoice in adversity. God tells us to rejoice because we believe He is in control of those circumstances and is at work through them for our ultimate good.

It was said of Jesus that He could see joy while being crucified.

Heb. 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (KJV)

Christ's death on the cross with its intense physical agony and infinite spiritual suffering of bearing God's wrath for our sins was the greatest calamity to ever come upon a human being. Yet Jesus could look beyond that suffering to the joy set before Him. We too are to look beyond our adversity to what God is doing in our lives and what we have to look forward to.

2 Corinthians 4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; (KJV)

14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (KJV)

God Works Through Adversity

Fortunately God does not ask us how or when we want to grow. He is, in the words of Jesus, the Gardener who prunes the branches of His vine.

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I

in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (KJV)

Healthy branches need nourishment and pruning. Through the Word of God we are nourished.

Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (KJV)

But through adversity we are pruned. Both Hebrew and Greek languages express discipline and teaching by the same word. God intends that we grow through the disciplines of adversity as well as through instruction from His Word.

Psalm 94:12 Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; (KJV)

God is working in us and will continue until we are completed.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: (KJV)

Philippians 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (KJV)

Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, (KJV)

21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(KJV)

Every adversity that comes across our path, whether large or small, is intended to help us grow in some way. If it were not beneficial, God would not allow it or send it,

Lamentations 3:33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. (KJV)

We Learn From Adversity

Deuteronomy 8:2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. (KJV)

The “word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” in this passage is not the Word of Scripture but the word of God’s providence (Psalm 33:6,9; 148:5 for similar usage). God wanted to teach the Israelites that they were dependent upon Him for their daily bread. He did this, not by incorporating this truth into the law of Moses, but by bringing adversity in the form of hunger into their lives.

Holiness

Hebrews 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. (KJV)

God chastens us with adversity. Adversity reveals the corruption of our sinful nature. We look at the fruit of the Spirit and agree that we would like those things in our lives; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22-23). We even begin to think we are making good progress in growing in them.

But then adversity strikes. We find we are unable to love, from the depths of our hearts, the person who is the instrument of the adversity. We find we don't want to forgive that person. The growth in our Christian character we thought had occurred in our lives seems to vanish like a vapor.

We find out we are not longsuffering and meek in our dealings with that person. No one is humbled and repents until they are exposed to the evil and corruption of his own heart. But we often resist God's work in our lives.

We shrink from His discipline instead of seeking to profit from it. We are more desirous of relief from the adversity than we are of its profit unto holiness. But we can be sure that in due time His discipline will produce:

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (KJV)

Dependence on God

Another area of our lives that God must continually be at work on is our tendency to rely on ourselves instead of on Him. Jesus said,

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me,

and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for **without me ye can do nothing.** (KJV)

Apart from our union with Christ and a total reliance upon Him we can do nothing that glorifies God. God as to teach us through adversity to rely on Him instead of ourselves.

2 Corinthians 1:8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: (KJV)

Here Paul describes his difficulties in Asia as being “far beyond our ability to endure,” and that they occurred so “that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” God allowed Paul and his friends to be brought into a situation so desperately that they were afraid for their lives. They had no place to turn except to God. Later Paul says:

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (KJV)

Apart from Christ we can do nothing, but trusting in Christ we can do all things as He give us strength to endure and be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

As we lay hold on the truths of the sovereignty, wisdom, and love of God and find comfort and encouragement from them in our adversities, we will be able to minister to others in their times of distress.

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to

comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (KJV)

So adversities also equips us for God's service.

Perhaps the most valuable way we profit from adversity is in the deepening of our relationship with God. Through adversity we learn to bow before His sovereignty, to trust His wisdom, and to experience the consolations of His love, until we come to the place where we can say with Job,

Job 42:5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. (KJV)

For the believer all pain has meaning and all adversity is profitable. We don't always see the profit of but we can be sure that in some way God intends it for our profit and His glory.

Choosing To Trust God

Psalm 56:3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. (KJV)

David admitted he was afraid. Despite the fact that he was a warrior of great skill and courage, there were times when he was afraid. The occasion of this Psalm is when the Philistines had seized him in Gath;

1 Samuel 21:10 And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul,

and went to Achish the king of Gath.

11 And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

12 And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. (KJV)

David choose to trust God despite all appearances. A few verses later he said;

Psalms 56:9 When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.

10 In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.

11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. (KJV)

Trusting God is an act of our will. But our choice must be based on knowledge. We must *know* that God is sovereign, wise, and loving; and that is why we have been studying. We now have to choose whether to believe the truth about God, which He has revealed to us, or whether to follow our feelings.

But even in our choosing we cannot leave God out, for it is the Holy Spirit that makes His Word come alive in our hearts and creates faith, but we can choose to look to Him to do that. Choice, prayer, and the Word of God are crucial elements to our being helped to trust God.

God is Trustworthy

Another help in trusting God is to lay hold of some of the great

promises of His constant care for us.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (KJV)

A Puritan preacher, Thomas Lye, said of this passage, the Greek has five negatives that can be rendered, "I will not, not leave thee; neither will I not, not forsake thee." Five times God emphasized to us that He will not forsake us.

Sometimes we may lose the sense of God's presence and help but He has not forsaken us. Job, in his distress, could not find God. He said:

Job 23:8 Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him:

9 On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him:

10 But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. (KJV)

The sense of God comforting presence had left Job. But he believed, even though he couldn't sense Him, that God was watching over him, and would bring him through that trial as purified gold.

1 Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (KJV)

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (KJV)

Not only will God never leave you, but He cares for you. Notice that the verse says “casting” not laying, your cares upon Him. This suggests that this requires an effort; and experience teaches us that it is no easy matter to throw off our anxieties and cares. So we are back to the matter of choice, seeking God’s help to enable us to cast our cares upon Him and leave them there.

Giving Thanks

1 Thessalonians 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (KJV)

We are to give thanks in everything, the good and the bad, because we know that *in all things* God is at work for our good. Rom. 8:28