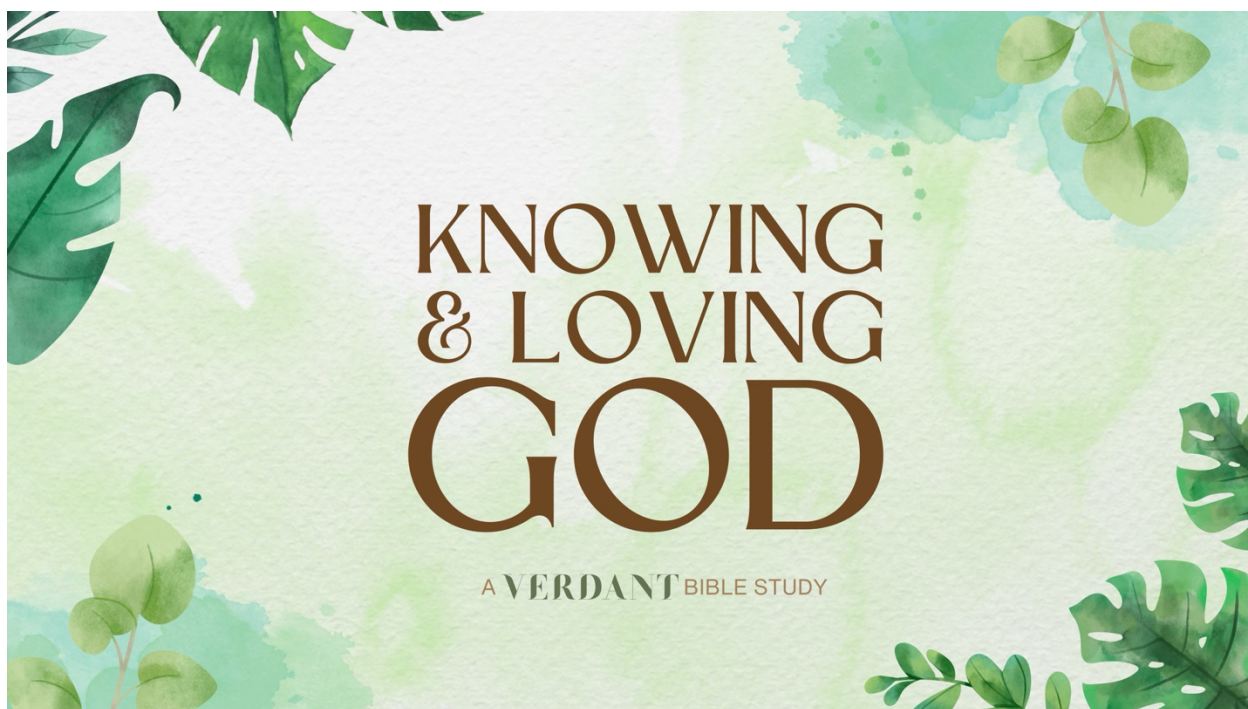




Lesson 5

The Sovereignty of God

God is sovereign and fully in control of all things—that is His character and His right. As the sovereign Creator of the universe, He holds all things together by the word of His power (Colossians 1:17). He doesn't merely *try* to govern; He possesses the ability, wisdom, and power to rule. There is nothing partial in His rule and reign. He is the owner. The Author. The Finisher. The Beginning and the End. He has purposes and plans from creation to eternity that will not be changed or thwarted. The title of sovereign belongs to God, who alone is King of kings and Lord of lords.

We often think of the term “sovereign” in relation to a king who rules with power over his kingdom—the word “reign” is part of it. A king has authority over every person and part of his dominion. He is free in every aspect. He doesn't pay duties or taxes, but others pay him. Everyone is subject to this sovereign, and the sovereign is subject to no one. So, the character of the one who rules (think of current world rulers, dictators, and kings) is of vital importance. As we approach the topic of sovereignty, we should keep this idea in mind.

*God's sovereignty is the attribute by which He rules His entire creation,
and to be sovereign, God must be **all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free.***

—A. W. Tozer

Believing in and acknowledging God's sovereignty affects how we live, think, and make choices. It impacts our worship of and trust in God. This is especially true when we face challenges or hardships that leave us asking, "Why?" If God is sovereign, then "why" did He allow this or that? This is the tension we must wrestle with, and because He is sovereign, we won't always understand His ways. But true peace comes from recognizing that even when I don't understand what God allows, I know the character of God's love, grace, and complete holiness that governs all His ways and purposes. He is good, and He is in control of all things, at all times, and nothing happens outside His will.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

—Isaiah 55:8–9 ESV

Yet, at the same time, He has given responsibility and free will to humanity. We can hold these truths in tension as we trust in God. Rather than trying to fully understand how it all works and looking for an easy explanation, we can humbly accept what Scripture reveals, even when it seems paradoxical. The sovereignty of God goes beyond human logic because it flows from His omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence.

There are truths we hold onto because God is sovereign:

He has unlimited power.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary says that "sovereignty has everything to do with power." True sovereignty is not shaken by your challenge. As Tozer points out, nothing can keep Him from His purposes or turn Him aside from His plans. As the character of God's omnipotence, there is no want of power to accomplish His chosen ends. God is able and sufficient in Himself for all these things.

He has unlimited authority.

Unlimited authority means that God has no one above Him. Here again, we see how all of His attributes carry over in their completeness. Because God is infinite, His authority is infinite as well. This means that there is no limit, no beginning, and no end to His authority, and nothing can stop or overrule God—not a person, a government, circumstances, or even chance. All things are under His control.

He is completely free.

Tozer points out that "God does as He pleases, always, everywhere, forever." But He exercises this freedom with complete grace. So, while He owes no one anything, He chooses to give abundantly and freely.

His sovereignty would not be complete if anything else had power or authority over Him. He is free to exercise His will and truly be God. Nothing can stop Him or thwart His plans. We can't impose our will upon God, or then He wouldn't be free.

We have comfort, peace, and purpose.

God's sovereignty brings us comfort, not uncertainty or fear. Because God's character is holy, full of grace and love without limit, His rule is perfectly good, wise, and loving. While we might not fully understand it, we can trust Him.

We looked at the attribute of God's holiness in an earlier lesson and saw the elders in heaven casting their crowns before His throne and crying out, "Holy, holy, holy." As we choose to cast our crowns and call Him holy, He makes us royalty.

He has great plans and purposes for all those He has created. The beautiful thing about this is that the will of God is certain—and His will is never frustrated. The Bible declares that God is working out His sovereign plan of redemption for the world and that the conclusion is certain.

Human choice still exists, but under God's rule. We make choices, but God remains fully sovereign. Sovereignty is experienced when your will meets God's immovable ultimate will.

To explain this truth, Tozer uses the analogy of an ocean liner. The ship has a set course and destination, but while aboard, the passengers may do as they please. They can eat, play shuffleboard, sleep, read, go anywhere on board, etc., but the ship will get to its predetermined destination. God is moving His people toward ultimate rest and restoration; that is the message of the gospel and His sovereign will. He has plans and purposes to accomplish His desired end.

Closing Thought and Prayer

Sovereignty is an amazing attribute of God. He directs and governs all by His infinite and eternal love and justice. He possesses every right, has all ability, and knows what He is doing. Our lives aren't merely "our" story, but they are truly "God's" story. We were created with specific purpose, and at our moment of salvation, were recreated with God-given plans and works for us to live out. By recognizing and honoring God's place of kingship and sovereignty in our lives, we partner with Him and align with His plans. **Our lives put His character on display to the world as we yield to His sovereignty.**

Sovereign Lord, You alone are King of kings and Lord of Lords. There is no one higher or greater than You. We acknowledge Your authority and lordship in our lives, for You rule over all things. May our eyes be opened to this foundational truth of who You say You are, and may our trust in You be deepened as a result. Thank You that nothing can keep You from fulfilling Your plans and purposes for our lives.

*Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.*

—Revelation 4:11 ESV

In each study, we will look at Scripture and pull it apart to learn what it says and what it means in our lives. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). So, we want to “hear” what He has to say to us. The following acronym is a helpful guide in our study of God’s Word.

HEAR

H—Highlight

Choose key words, verses, or phrases that stand out to you. Focus your attention and slow down to observe the text.

E—Explain

Ask: What does this mean? Look at the context, original audience, and background to understand the passage.

A—Apply

Ask: How does this apply to my life today? Make it personal. Think about actions, attitudes, or changes God might be speaking to you about.

R—Respond

Talk to God about what you’ve learned. Pray, confess, thank, or make a commitment based on your study.

STUDY

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.

—1 Chronicles 29:11 ESV

1. What is your greatest takeaway from the summary that begins this lesson or from your reading of chapter 22 in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “The Sovereignty of God”?

2. Use a dictionary to define the word “sovereign,” and write what you learn.

3. In the Book of Genesis, we learn about a man named Joseph. God gave him promises and dreams of the future He had for him (see Genesis 37). But then, his brothers sold him into slavery, and he was taken far away from home and suffered for many years because of evil done to him. Read Genesis 50:15–20 to discover the conclusion to his story and Joseph’s response. Write verse 20 here:
 - a. What did Joseph believe about God, and how did it affect the way he lived?

 - b. How does this help explain God’s sovereignty even in painful and difficult situations?

4. In 1 Samuel 1–2, we find the story of Hannah. She loved the Lord and followed Him devoutly, and yet, her greatest prayer and heart’s desire went seemingly unanswered. The Bible tells us that God had closed her womb (1 Samuel 1:5). As painful as this trial was for Hannah, God’s sovereign purposes were at work in her life and in God’s eternal plan of salvation for humanity. Hannah is the mother of the author of the book that records her story. What a beautiful full-circle moment in God’s grace. Read 1 Samuel 1–2 to discover ways you see God’s sovereignty on display and note them here.

- a. What stands out to you from Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:6–8?

⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. ⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. ⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and on them he has set the world.

5. Earthly kings and rulers have sovereignty over a limited domain or people group. What does Scripture tell us about the rule and reign of God? Write what you discover from:

- a. 1 Chronicles 29:11–12

- b. Daniel 6:26–27

- i. How is God’s sovereignty different than human authority and control?

- ii. What was the result of Daniel’s trust in God and His sovereignty?

- iii. If God is the supreme king over all the earth and all the people of the earth, how does that affect how you live?
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- 6. From the following Scriptures, what do you learn about God?
 - a. “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10 ESV)

 - b. “For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” (Psalm 95:3–6 ESV)

 - c. What is your response to these truths about God’s sovereignty?

 - 7. The sovereignty of God exists in tension with the free will of man. Read Proverbs 16:9 and Proverbs 19:21 and write what you learn about God.
 - a. Share a time when you experienced the sovereignty of God at work in your life.

 - 8. From Isaiah 45:9–19, note and comment on what stands out to you about God.
 - a. What perspective do you glean from the truths you discovered in the above verses?

9. In the Gospels, Jesus spoke about God's kingdom repeatedly and made it the central theme of all He taught. He demonstrated the power and reality of God's sovereignty and made His Father's will His life's purpose. Read the following verses and note your discoveries about the sovereignty of God and the way He cares for those under His authority.
 - a. Matthew 6:10
 - b. Matthew 6:25–34
10. One of the things we have learned about God's sovereignty is that He has purpose and intention in everything He does and everything He allows. How do the following passages deepen your understanding of this truth about God?
 - a. Romans 8:18–39
 - b. Ephesians 2:10
 - c. Share a passage of Scripture or a story from Scripture that speaks to you of the sovereignty of God.
 - d. Which one of the above truths about God ministers to you most today? Why?

11. Where have you seen God's sovereign hand at work in your life in the past?

a. What did you learn about God through that experience?

b. How does reflecting on God's sovereignty affect your trust in Him?

12. What is your greatest takeaway from this lesson on the sovereignty of God?

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

—Colossians 1:16–17