

# KNOWING GOD

## STUDY 4: GOD IS SOVEREIGN

“Man’s will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so.”  
A.W. Tozer

Does God guide the tides of the world’s oceans? Does He give you the best parking spot? If He does control everything then why is there famine on the continent of Africa? Why is there enormous drought, followed by severe fires, followed by overwhelming rains? Why do evil despots prosper? Why are some people underprivileged simply because of the place they were born or the colour of their skin? If God... then why...? God’s sovereignty involves both might and right. God has complete **power** to do whatever He pleases (might) and He has complete **authority** to do whatever He pleases (right). This means that He has no higher power that He must consult. No one has more authority than God. The whole earth is His. As Creator of the universe, He has the right to do whatever He chooses; whatever He chooses is always right. Often, what separates one group of Christians from another are the answers to those opening questions. We cannot avoid this important attribute of God simply because it can get messy. So, let’s get going!

### READ TOGETHER:

**Job 42:2 (NIV)** “I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

**Genesis 1:26 (NIV)** “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

**Romans 1:18 (NIV)** “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”

**Psalms 5:4 (ESV)** “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.”

**1 John 1:5 (ESV)** “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

**James 1:13-15 (ESV)** “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

**Acts 2:23 (NIV)** “This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

**Genesis 50:20 (NIV)** “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

**Fully independent** (Job 42:2) One reason God’s sovereignty is so difficult to grasp is that there is no one in our world who has unqualified freedom. Every creature is dependent upon other creatures and/or other elements of creation. Even a harsh dictator who wields deadly power has no power over the weather and, in reality, no power over his own length of life. In His freedom, God cannot be hindered from doing anything. He cannot be forced against His will to do something, nor can He be stopped from doing whatever He determines to do. God is free of all constraints.

**DISCUSS:** What about God’s sovereignty brings you the greatest comfort and what causes you the most angst? Are you able to hold God’s love, wisdom, and sovereignty together in one hand or is that too troubling? Why/why not?

**DIG DEEPER: The names of God** (Jeremiah 32:17) The major names for God can give us clues to understanding His sovereignty. Read the above verse in various translations. The variety of word choices indicates the difficulty of communicating God’s sovereignty in our culture and language. Also read Daniel

# KNOWING GOD

3:26 to learn what Nebuchadnezzar called the Hebrew God. Research the three names of God used in these passages: Yahweh, Adonai, and El Elyon. How does that help you understand God's sovereignty?

**Authority and Responsibility** (Genesis 1:26) God has authority AND humanity has been given responsibility. In this verse, we find two major ways in which we have responsibility – as image-bearers of the Most High God and as those given the charge to rule over the earth. So, humankind has been given immense freedom within the context of that responsibility, freedom to name every animal, even. This is the first example of the role of “stewards” – those who are given charge of another's property.

**DISCUSS:** Consider the freedom and responsibility that God has entrusted to humanity. With responsibility comes the acceptance of consequences. Discuss the immense messes in the Old Testament and the New Testament that were created by humans facing consequences due to very poor and, often, sinful choices.

**The Problem of Evil** (Romans 1:18; Psalm 5:4; 1 John 1:5; James 1:13-15; Acts 2:23; Genesis 50:20) Certainly, we all agree that evil is problematic, in itself. Even though each of us sin, most of us would state that we hate evil. We would all prefer to live in a world without evil. Foundationally, evil is a problem for us because we are unsure of its origin and we question why God allows it to exist.

**DISCUSS:** Read each of the above verses and unpack the following truths in progression: God hates sin, God cannot sin, God is not the source of evil, humans are responsible when they choose evil, God's purposes are accomplished... even through wicked agents, God ultimately overrules evil. What positive benefits come to both human understanding and human behaviour when evil is recognised as evil (e.g. light is more obvious in the darkness)?

**God's Purposes/Our Choices** Think of going on a long train trip. We are not the creators of the train and we are not the operators of the train. So, we relinquish control and trust in those who are in control. Yet, we are not left without choices. We can travel in different directions. We can enjoy stops along the way. We have free choice when it comes to when we sleep, what we eat, with whom we strike up conversations, when we look out the window. The trip is designed that way. Imagine what kind of anarchy would ensue if each one who wanted to go on the train tried to exercise their own complete freedom – changing where tracks went or removing the tracks completely because they were too constraining... chaos. The existence of the tracks does not reduce our options; it allows us to have success with our options. Our freedom of choice and God's sovereignty are not mutually exclusive. Our free choice is part of His sovereign plan.

**DISCUSS:** Consider the “dance” of our choices and God's purposes. How can you best articulate the fact that God is sovereign AND we have choice. In what ways does God's love influence this?

**DIG DEEPER: God's Management Style** Do some serious study of the life of Paul, looking specifically for the times when God intervened and changed Paul's course and the times when Paul made choices based upon the best information before him. You could start here: Acts 7 and 8; Galatians 1; Acts 16:6-10; Acts 20:16. In what ways did God's sovereignty allow Paul to live in strength and security, strength in the decisions he faced and a sense of security about what was out of his hands?

## RESOURCES:

- **Book:** Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* and *The Question that Never Goes Away: “WHY?”*
- **Book:** John Lennox, *Determined to Believe? The Sovereignty of God, Freedom, Faith, and Human Responsibility*
- **Book:** C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*
- **Podcast:** The Bible Project God Series: <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/gods-fusion-humanity-god>