

# Think on These Things

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## Trusting God

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*Our suffering has meaning and purpose in God's eternal plan, and He brings or allows only that which is for His glory and our good to come into our lives.*

**T**rusting God can often be a difficult thing even for the child of God. However, the most difficult time for us to trust Him is during times of adversity. During such times the believer needs to understand that the Scriptures teach three essential truths about God: God is completely sovereign; God is infinite in wisdom; God is perfect in love. God in his love always wills what is best for us (Rom 8:28). In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about.

### GOD IS COMPLETELY SOVEREIGN

The question that many ask is if God is both powerful and good, why is there so much suffering, so much pain, so much heartache in the world? God is either good and not all powerful, or he is powerful and not all good. Rabbi Kushner in his popular book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, says "God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about. It is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims."

Kushner, forced to choose between a good God who is not totally powerful, or a powerful God who is not totally good, chooses to believe in God's goodness. However, the Scriptures teach that we do not have to choose, for God is both all powerful and all good.

We must first note God's providence, which is defined as His constant care for and His absolute rule over all creation for His own glory and the good of His people. The two-fold objective of God must ever be kept in mind: His glory and the good of His people (Psalm 31:15; 115:3; 147:8,9; **Acts 17:24-28**; II Cor. 9:10; Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17).

When we think of the providence of God over our lives we tend to make two mistakes. First, we almost always use the expression in connection with something good. However, His providence is just as real when we meet with tragedy (Lam. 3:38). Secondly, we suspect that God intervenes at specific points in our lives but is largely only an interested spectator most of the time. The Bible does not agree, declaring God to be actively at work in the lives of His people at all times (note Prov. 16:9; 19:21; Lam. 3:37; James 4:13-15 and Job 42:2).

It is usually when life has turned sour that Christians begin to question the sovereignty and goodness of God. Yet, all people — believers as well as the unsaved — experience anxiety, frustration, heartache and disappointment. Some suffer intense physical pain and catastrophic tragedies; however, the distinction between the suffering of believers and that of 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 only that which is for His glory and our good to come into our lives.**

### GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER PEOPLE

The Scriptures teach that **God's sovereignty is absolute**. There is no act or circumstance

that can occur outside the bounds of God's will nor can anything thwart God's plan. God does as He pleases, and only as He pleases and no one can frustrate or hinder His purposes (Isa. 14:27; 43:13; 46:10-11; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11).

God has a purpose and plan for our lives and He has the power to carry out that plan (Ps. 138:8; Gen. 45:8; 50:20). God is never surprised, never caught off guard, and never frustrated by anything. God does as He pleases and that which pleases Him is always for His glory and our good. Even so, it is true that for reasons known only to Himself, the Lord allows people to act contrary to and in defiance of His revealed or moral will. He, however, never permits them to act contrary to His sovereign will (Isa 45:7). No one can do anything if the Lord has not first decreed to either make it happen or permit it to happen.

On the other hand, He can restrain people from carrying out their intent (Gen. 20:1-7; 35:5; Exod. 34:23,24). We do not know why God allows the enemies of His people to prevail at one time and restrains them at another. It is enough to know that God can and does restrain the harmful acts toward us when that is His sovereign will. Furthermore, God in His wisdom and love, intends that good ultimately come from those harmful acts.

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Trusting God at such times, is not a matter of our feelings but of our will. We seldom feel like trusting God when adversity strikes, but we can choose to do so nevertheless. Scripture teaches that God can prompt people to do His will even without them knowing what He is doing (Ezra 1:1,5; 6:22; Prov. 21:1; Dan. 1:9; II Cor. 8:16,17; Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20).

The Bible never attempts to explain the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility (The closest thing to it is perhaps **Rom. 9:19-21**.) However, there are three truths that we will need to consider. **First**, God is infinite in His ways as well as His being (Ps. 50:21). **Second**, God is never the author of sin (James 1:13,14). **Third**, the Bible consistently portrays people as making real choices with their own wills.

We should respond using the following format. We must **TRUST** that our future is in the hands of God, not others. We must go to God in **PRAYER** (Phip. 4:6). We must not become resentful, instead, remember that God will never allow any action against us that is not in accordance with His will for us. We get resentful when we want to live by our agenda, not God's (Hab. 3:17-19). We must **ACT PRUDENTLY**, by using all the means at our disposal to avoid harm and/or to take the proper course of action (Neh. 4:7-20).

It is important that we are aware of some areas of caution. We should never use this doctrine as an excuse for our own shortcomings. We should not allow this doctrine to cause us to respond passively to the actions of other people that affect us. We should take every reasonable step within the moral will of God to protect and advance what we know is right. Also, we should never use this doctrine to excuse our own sinful actions or decisions that hurt another person (Deut 29:29).

## GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER THE NATIONS

The fact that God is sovereign over our rulers is usually not evident to us as we view their decisions and actions. For the most part, government officials and legislative bodies do their work quite apart from any intent to carry out the will of God, but nevertheless they do exactly that. We should remember that for those experiencing the events recorded in the Scriptures, God's hand was usually no more apparent to them in those events than it is to us today.

There are several truths concerning government that stand out in the Scriptures. God in His sovereignty has established government for the good of all people (Rom. 13:1-4; I Tim. 2:1,2). God determines who rules those governments (Dan. 4:17,32). God also determines when these people will rule (**Dan. 4:28-37; Isa. 40:23,24**). Finally, God rules in decisions

that rulers make (**II Sam. 16:23; 17:14; Judges 7:2,3,22; I Sam. 14:6,15,20; I Kings 20:28,29**; II Kings 5:1; II Chron. 13:14-16; Prov. 21:31; and Psalms 20:7; 33:16,17; 44:6.)

### **GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER NATURE**

Scripture teaches that God controls the weather. It is true that He has established physical laws by which He governs the forces of nature, but those laws continuously operate according to His sovereign will. There are over fourteen-hundred references to weather terminology in the Bible, many of which attribute the weather directly to the hand of God. Passages such as Psalm 147:8, 16-18; 148:8; Jere. 10:13; and Amos 4:7 point out that both good and bad weather are controlled by God.

Other negative areas for which God takes the credit are disasters (Exod. 4:11; Isa. 45:7), physical handicaps (John 9:1-3), and childlessness (Gen. 16:2; 29:31; Judges 13:3; Ps. 139:13). Lam. 3:31-33 tells us that God does not delight in causing us to experience pain or heartache. He always has a purpose for the grief He brings or allows to come into our lives. Most often we do not know what that purpose is but it is enough to know that God never wastes pain.

### **GOD IS INFINITE IN WISDOM**

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. God in His wisdom adopts the best possible means to accomplish His purposes. His chief purpose is to bring glory to Himself and good to His people (Jh. 15:8; Rom. 1:21; 8:28,29; 11:36; I Cor. 10:31; Eph. 1:12,14; Rev. 4:11; 5:13; 15:4).

We need to understand that God's wisdom is incomprehensible (Isa. 55:8,9; Rom. 11:33,34; Job 42:3; Col. 2:2,3). We may never understand why God has done certain things in our lives, nor is God under obligation to explain His ways to us. Job, for example, apparently **never knew why** God had brought such suffering to him. In fact, interestingly enough, to Job's question of "why," God's answer was "Who" (see Job 42:1-5).

### **GOD IS PERFECT IN LOVE**

A fact that is taught over and over in Scripture is that God loves us (Psalm 103:11; Isa. 54:10; Rom. 8:38,39; Col. 3:12). The supreme demonstration of that love of course was on the cross (I John 4:9,10), where the extent of God's love is shown not only in the fact that Christ died but also that He died for such miserable, wretched sinners. We need to remember who we are, that we have absolutely no claim on His love, and that **anything this side of Hell is pure grace**.

Even when the Lord takes us through difficult times we can know that He does so in love in order to accomplish His purpose in our lives (John 15:2; Heb. 12:5-11). We mistakenly look for tokens of God's love in happenings when we should instead look for them in His faithful and persistent work to conform us to Christ. God's goals may be different than ours.

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Note the following quote from the from the book, *Trusting God*.

- *"God's unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. It is true whether we believe it or not. Our doubts do not destroy God's love, nor does our faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, Who is love,*

*and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son. But the experience of that love and the comfort it is intended to bring is dependent upon our believing the truth about God's love as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Doubts about God's love, allowed to harbor in our hearts, will surely deprive us of the comfort of His love."*

When we realize that God loves us too much to harm us, is too wise to make a mistake and too powerful to allow anything to happen beyond His control, then several things can take place in our lives!

*We can trust God for who and what we are.*

**Psalm 139:13-16** teaches us that we are who we are because God Himself created us the way He wanted us to be. (See Psalm 119:73; Jere. 1:5) Obviously we need to change insofar as our sinful nature distorts that which God has made; nevertheless, we can trust God for our basic physical, mental and emotional makeup.

**Psalm 139:16** tells us that not only did God have prior knowledge of what would occur in our lives, but that God was and is actively involved in mapping out our lives. Whatever God has created us to be uniquely fits the life that He has planned for us. Additionally, as Christians God has also sovereignly and uniquely gifted each of His children for ministry within the church (I Cor. 12).

*We can learn to grow through adversity.*

It is as a result of God's sovereign love and wisdom that we can be assured that even in adversity the Lord is at work developing a Christ-like character in our lives (Rom. 5:3,4; James 1:2-4; Phip. 1:6; Heb. 13:21). Our obligation is to submit to God's Word, seeking to learn whatever lessons He would have us learn.

*We can choose to trust God.*

The Scriptures verify that God is trustworthy (Psalm 50:15; I Pet. 5:7; Titus 1:2; Heb. 13:5). However, we must choose to trust Him. Trusting God is not a matter of feeling rather, it is an act of the will. **Trusting God is a matter of faith.**

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For further study on the subject of trusting God, we would recomend first of all the prayerful study of the Word of God. Other books that are helpful would include:

*Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges (much of the information for this paper was taken from this volume, including several direct quotes that we have not bothered to footnote)

*Knowing God* by J.I. Packer (this is perhaps one of the greatest of all Christian classics on God)

*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I. Packer (an excellent study on how God's sovereignty plays out in evangelism)

*The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer (another classic that will endure until our Lord returns)

*The Attributes of God* by A.W. Pink (a good compliment to Tozer's work)

*The God You Can Know* by Dan DeHaan (a little easier to read than the others with good application)

A couple of books on the related subject of worship would be *Real Worship* by Warren W. Wiersbe and *The Ultimate Priority* by John MacArthur

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