



Trusting A Sovereign God When It Looks Bad

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

Have you ever wondered about who was in control? I've had days when it's like everything gets so out of control. How 'bout you? Is it easy for you to make sense of things when your family experiences adversity? I've spent a lot of time scratching my head in bewilderment.

Sometimes I wonder why my little sister Kathy's life was snuffed out in her youth and why mine was not. I don't talk about it much, but it puzzles me. I wasn't better "or more deserving" than her to live through those years. She loved life just like I do. She had dreams and plans and hopes and sons—she basically had a life as I do.¹ When life is really messed up, man, it's good to know that God can bring something good out of it.

If what's precious to you is ever wiped out or unravels, He is there for you. You know, we carefully write down our plans and make out our schedules so that we can be where we think we need to be each day. But we always need to remember the words of a wise Jewish King named, Solomon, who said, "***A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps***" (Prov. 16:9).

Yep, every now and then the plan we make does not unfold in our lives exactly the way we wanted. But God is always in control and He will use the situation for our good as we trust Him and draw closer. Many have seen their loved ones commit their lives to Jesus after really bad things took place. Sure the devil came "***to steal, and to kill, and to destroy***" but Jesus came that people may receive

When through life's darkened maze I go and troubles overwhelm my soul, Oh, grant me, Lord, the faith to know that You are always in control. —D. De Haan

and enjoy age abiding life—He came to make the enemy's wicked ploy backfire in his own face!² I know that when I'm hurting; God gets my attention in a heartbeat. Statistics show that the vast majority of people, who become Christians, never do so when everything is peachy in life, perfectly going their way. They don't even see a need for Christ until trouble, pain or adversity arrives.

Once a young lady named, Deborah Scaling, set out with four other friends of hers on what was supposed to be an exciting sailing adventure. Together, these five buddies (Captain John, Meg, Mark, Brad, and Debbie Scaling) thought that they would succeed and have a lot of fun delivering a 58-foot yacht called "Trashman" from the coast of Annapolis all the way to Florida. Yes, it was going to be quite an enjoyable trip for them and it began in the fall of 1982. But unexpectedly, off the coast of North Carolina, these young people came into gale force winds accompanied by huge ocean waves breaking over their bow—waves that eventually sank their boat. A beautiful dream suddenly turned into a nightmare! They were out in the elements for four long days floating in a rubber dinghy in shark-infested waters, without any food or drinking water.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.
—Proverbs 3:5

All hope seemed to quickly evaporate like late morning coastal fog.

Deborah remembers how one of her friends got angry and started shouting and cursing at God because of the bleakness of their situation. Deborah didn't do that though. She felt totally exhausted inside, but she silently prayed *The Lord's Prayer* and asked God to teach her something through this over-the-top-crazy-dilemma. Later on, that same desperate and cursing young man drank the seawater; he became sick, delirious, and then he jumped overboard. And it was so heartrending for his friends when he was soon eaten by those hungry sharks. Eventually, two survivors were rescued by a Russian freighter. It's an Interesting story to read! The book, *Albatross*³, recounts this narrative of how Debbie survived and of how her tragedy literally changed her life forever.

Maybe you remember a man named, Job. Centuries ago this godly father was also battered by one wave of tragedy after another. His story always helps me when things head south circumstantially. You know, life comes at you fast sometimes and Job was one who was impacted by horrific-news-overload in a short period of time! Yes, it got exceptionally horrendous for Job ...and his angry wife even encouraged him to curse God and die, but Job simply refused to do it. Instead he responded by asking: **"Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"** (Job 2:10).

Personally, when I don't understand something, I like to fall back on what I do understand. My puny little brain doesn't fully comprehend why so many bad things happen in this life the way they do, but I do know this: **"The Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations"** (Ps. 100:5). I know that God is sovereign—His, **"faithfulness endures to all generations"** (Ps. 119:90). That "S word" is kind of big, huh? But if you or I were asked to describe the sovereignty of God, what would we say? I would say: Just look at the word sovereign in that word, *s-o-v-e-r-e-i-g-n*. What's that last word you see inside it? It's the word *reign*. So whenever we talk about the sovereignty of God we mean that He is the supreme Ruler, the reigning One over all the earth along with its problems big and small. Yes, He's the King over every circumstance of life.

The Scriptures are crystal clear when they tells us how the Father diligently governs everything in the entire universe from the direction of the smallest feathered foul to the cyclonic violence of the largest tropical hurricane. Jesus said, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father"** (Matt. 10:29). Hear more of what the Bible tells us about God for, **"Even winds and sea obey Him"** (Matt. 8:27). It says, **"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord"** (Prov. 16:33). You see, not even delegated authority figures can mess up God's plan because, **"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will"** (Prov. 21:1).

The Word pointedly asks, **"Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?"** (Lam. 3:37), and **"Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?"** (Amos 3:6). No demons can ever resist Him, **"He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him"** (Mk. 1:27). He declares, **"I am God, and there is none like me... saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose'"** (Isa. 46:9-10).

He has... determined their preappointed times..., so that they should seek the Lord.
—Acts 17:26-27

Is there any alien or fallen angelic entity in the cosmos that can begin to thwart the sovereignty of God?—NO, not one! Think about God's most powerful of enemies among all His enemies—yes, that would be Satan, who to this present day accomplishes gobs of destructive evil in this world and often times with the help of unwitting puppets (foolish people who are quick to cooperate with him for selfish gain, and who will eventually suffer the consequences for such acts). But even Satan must first get God's permission to do any wicked stuff. None of his business dealings are outside of God's more powerful governing oversight. What ever comes into the life of a Christian is all first sifted through the loving fingers of their loving heavenly

What God is doing you may not know now; but someday you'll understand why, questions that taunt you and trouble your mind will one day have heaven's reply. —Hess

Father. Yup, that dweeb, Mister Lucifer, never breaks free from his seemingly long leash ...for even one moment (see Job 2:6-7; 42:11, Luke 22:31).

Some ask: Does God have any evil in His Person? The answer is unequivocally: Nope, zero! He isn't at all unjust, mean or cruel, though the devil would like to help you think that He is ...especially when pain comes knocking at your door. The Bible says, **"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"** (1 Jn. 1:5). It gallantly shouts: **"Good and upright is the Lord"** (Ps. 25:8).

Think about what the six-winged seraphim cry out before God both day and night. They exclaim, **"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"** (Isa. 6:3). And when it might appear like God is the One causing people to do evil things to us, the Bible teaches us not to distrust God or respond vindictively towards them, but to speak as Joseph did when he said, **"As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"** (Gen. 50:20). Joseph's brothers put him through much hardship and God allowed it. They chucked him into a deep pit and then sold him off to complete strangers. Don't get me wrong, God hated what they did—it broke His heart. But He still used what happened to bless Joseph and to save countless hungry and dying people. And through it all Joseph didn't get bitter; he got better as he fully forgave his brothers from his heart.

Yes, the Lord has people-saving and people-helping-purposes behind all the blessings and sufferings that He allows to enter onto the stage of the believer's experience... so that He may be glorified! God is not malevolent at all, even when He permits limited amounts of evil to come to pass for the ultimate good of His people. There are good, beneficent, holy and just purposes in all that He does. He is entirely fair—always!—even when life and sinners are not. And everyone will see this when this temporal earth passes away. And He is big enough to get involved with the smallest of things that bother you—**"The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever"** (Ps. 138:8, nkjv). And for those who love Him, **"God causes all things to work together for good"** (Rom. 8:28, nasb)... now and for all eternity.

The events of this life are not predetermined by fate like they are somehow inevitable ...where I as a Christian can do nothing to help in the situation. No, we Christians don't live passively or fatalistically without hope or a prayer. In a worldview that embraces fatalistic determinism, as is the case so often around us, some would say a person cannot be held morally accountable for their actions, since reward and punishment make sense only if we each have freedom of the will. But the truth is that we each can choose and that God will hold us all accountable. That's why we need to seek Him and live for Him today!

*This is my Father's world;
O let me ne'er forget that.
Though the wrong seems
oft so strong, God is the
ruler yet! —Babcock*

Christian, perhaps you feel confused about what has gone wrong in your life. Maybe you have felt angry at God for allowing things to suddenly sour. Please know that there is a trustworthy God who sits on His throne and is in control. No one can even touch you my friend. No one can even whisper a single word against you. No one can do anything to you without God's permission. Jesus Christ loves you so and wants you to grow! He has all the answers and wants you to shine brightly in this dark world, as you allow Him to shine out through you. His timing is perfect and He is enough even when you and I are waiting long for fuller understanding to arrive.

So What Can You Do As You Wait For His Soon Appearing?

1. Cry out for God's help. I've found there are three occasions when it's a good time to entreat the Lord: 1.) Pray before adversity comes your way. Yes, stockpile the faith and grace in advance, 2.) Pray when adversity arrives on your doorstep and, 3.) Pray after adversity has left you. Who knows, more adversity could follow the last bit of

hardship (hopefully not) ...or it might visit your friend's house. Please be ready for those who will need what you can share with them! Yes, more important than asking God why the troubles arrived, simply cry out to Him. Seek Him. Ask Him to give you guidance and strength for holy living as you stand firmly on the promises of His Word! Then bask in the confidence of His assurance. There are still some things we can learn about God's sovereignty and Lordship. Three thousand years after David lived, God is still, and always will be, in control.

2. Don't be afraid to get real honest with God. An elderly patriarch named, Abraham, laughed at the absurdity of God's promise to make him the father of many nations. Jacob wrestled hard with his Lord over the uncertainty of what lay ahead. David candidly expressed despair and helplessness as he was surrounded by appalling circumstances. Job accused God of being unfair, but he didn't cuss Him out. When all of heaven seemed to turn its head away, ignoring these people; they simply told God all about it as they depended upon His grace. When they thought they had a real argument, they boldly expressed it. They learned to trust the Lord in dark valleys of despair, in despondency and doubt.

3. Don't become self-destructive. Trust the Lord even when it looks hopeless and you don't feel like trusting. Sing praises to Him wholeheartedly! I know that might sound crazy, but in serious times of disappointment or distress rejoice in the Lord and avoid quick fixes that are harmful or self-destructive. None of us can afford any binding addictions that might kill the pain for the moment, but greatly complicate our problems in the long run. Don't throw a fit demanding what you want—demanding your own way and timing (read Job 42). Don't even underestimate God. Father knows best! He promised to meet all your needs. Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer observed, *"When I am in the presence of God, it seems profoundly unbecoming to demand anything."*

4. Pray and obey! If God is good, but good isn't God—if God is love, but love isn't God, how do we avoid making serious mistakes with all the best things in life? We learn the Word well; we commune with Christ. We fellowship upwards first and horizontally with growing Christians, as well. We go and tell someone the Gospel! Who wants to be like an armchair quarterback who doesn't do it—who never witnesses to others? Listen, when the sunlight of your life becomes totally swallowed up by a period of dark night (.I know, that sounds almost halfway poetic like some kind of phony Hallmark theology huh?), you can trust and praise the sovereign Lord, knowing that His design is perfect—that His timing is precise and exact, and that He alone is large and in charge.

The sovereign One wants to meet with you—with a lot of people—but life keeps getting in the way! Let's not allow the everyday activities of life to make us too busy for Jesus.

May I be frank with you? Souls are of the greatest value to God—every person! What can a man give [in exchange for his soul](#)?⁴ You know we've all sinned; we've all offended God. And there's nothing any of us can do to earn or buy God's forgiveness or salvation. But Jesus paid the price, because He was [moved with compassion for people](#).⁵ He cares about you, but will that matter to you in eternity if you never [take His free gift](#)? Many Christians in an effort to "cross over" and reach their friends never bring the cross over ...but I'll tell you about repentance, the cross and dying to self. These things are so necessary! Jesus died on a cross so that you wouldn't have to one day split hell wide open, as so many will. Please make your reservation at God's place in advance! Has your [name been logged in the book of life](#)?⁶ Today there's huge-joy in Heaven over [one person who trusts Christ and comes to repentance](#)...and we all need to!⁷ Don't put it off! The devil will say tomorrow, but God says today is the day. God says you're His, **"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine"** ([Ezek. 18:4](#)). You might feel like you are yours, but you don't belong to you. Who told you that you can simply go out and do what you want with your life? God has the right plan for you. You're not your own, **"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"**⁸ Religion, you don't need; relationship, you do—with God through Christ. Isaiah spoke for the sovereign One commanding, **"Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God"** (Isa. 45:22, kjv). Who even cares what your friends will think? If they are really your friends, they'll indeed want what's best for you. Hey, no one will force you to become a Christian—it's your choice. You don't *have to* [get right with God; you get to!](#)

Yup, the sovereignty and love of God; the evil and selfishness of the world—it all converged on Golgotha's hill ...so you could obtain [peace with Him](#). Both God and Satan were mysteriously moving in the same direction, to accomplish completely different objectives with Calvary's cross. Satan

wanted to kill Jesus, so he basically marshaled his forces and played his hand. But God wanted to deal once and for all with man's sin so that the enmity between God and man would be abolished. And it pained Him to send His Son—just to know that the sacrifice of His beloved sinless Son was His only option.

But God's well laid plans did not go ary, or careen off course, or slip out of hand when Jesus was murdered. The Bible says, "**God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**" (Rom. 5:8). All the wicked scheming, all the brutal flogging, all the hateful spitting, all the angry beating with rods, all the arrogant mockery, all the disloyal abandonment of friends, all the sharp thorns pounded into Christ's head, all the nails protruding in and out again from His hands and feet ..along with that sword's ugly red blade in Son's side... The weight of all sinner's sins—all of it happened according to Father's plan, to benefit sinners—you and me. Of course God wasn't pleased with man's viciousness, but He was pleased that we could come into a renewed fellowship with Him. To you was this act in vain, or will you make it bless your future? You decide. **Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved!**⁹

God's answer to all of man's pain and calamity is still the suffering, death and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. He sometimes allows junk to happen, because He desires the beautiful closeness of intimacy in a *loving relationship* with man, rather than having a mere *legal relationship!* He entered into our fallen dirty trash can of a world that's filled up with misery and death; He experienced the troubles that we've had to hassle with, and He bore in Himself the cause of it all—sin. Not His wrongdoings—ours. Yes, He bought by his death thee CURE of all cures for all people. It was for us that He purchased forgiveness and everlasting joy in the age to come.

Have you lost a loved one? Have your plans gone ary? The next time a storm or strong crisis hits the boat of your life, recognize God's sovereignty and do as Deborah Kiley did—call out to the Lord, asking Him to teach you something through those undesirable circumstances.

On His behalf I invite—I strongly urge—you to [turn from a life of sinning](#) to take hold of Jesus as your Savior and Lord! By faith, receive forgiveness and [be born again](#) right now! You'll see Him as the sovereign and supreme Treasure of your life!

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¹ My little sister, Kathleen Ellen Suckley, is missed! Many people loved her. At midnight on April 7 / 8th in 1993 her life was taken (a creep crept into her home. She did her best to fight off her attacker in order to protect her two boys, Dutch and Dakota [Kody] Suckley), but she lost the battle. Her mom said that she called to get right with God in her last days. Some people told me that they became real Christians at her funeral in San Juan Capistrano. Let me tell you that her sons are also loved. We all pray for them. They are grown up now as they reside in Southern California (Kody with his dad, Nat, and Dutch with Lisa Dorrin who pretty much raised them). In Christ, we look forward to reuniting with Kathy again. Heaven will be way cool! Won't you join us there—please join yourself with Jesus while there is still time!



² See John 10:10 in the Bible (nkjv).

³ Book: *Albatross* by Deborah Scaling (now named Deborah Kiley) & Noonan, Meg. Publisher: Replica Books, Pub. Date: January 2000, ISBN-13: 9780735101340. Debbie and Brad both survived.

⁴ See Matthew 16:26.

⁵ See Matthew 14:14; Mark 1:41, Matthew 9:36. Jesus even cared enough to heal their sick.

⁶ See *"Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev 20:15).

⁷ See Luke 15:7.

⁸ See what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23.

⁹ See Act 2:21.