

# Absorbing and Believing in God's Sovereignty in All Things<sup>i</sup>

by John Hawkins

*This, then, is of faith, that everything, the very least, or what seems to us great, every change of the seasons, everything which touches us in mind, body, or estate, whether brought about through this outward senseless nature, or by the will of man, good or bad, is overruled to each of us by the all-holy and all-loving will of God. Whatever befalls us, however it befalls us, we must receive as the will of God. If it befalls us through man's negligence, or ill-will, or anger, still it is, in even the least circumstance, to us the will of God. For if the least thing could happen to us without God's permission, it would be something out of God's control. God's providence or His love would not be what they are. Almighty God Himself would not be the same God; not the God whom we believe, adore, and love. — E.B. Pusey*

*All shall work together for good: everything is needful that he sends; nothing can be needful that he withholds. — John Newton*

*The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all. — Psalm 103:19 (NASB)*

*... until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. — 1 Timothy 6:14b-16 (ESV)*

*Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens, Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants. — Psalm 119:89-91 (ESV)*



While a young man in my twenties, I had several friends travel to Chicago to learn about church planting there. They met with a seasoned church planter in one of Chicago's darkest and most dangerous communities. As I recall, his church was struggling but faithfully continuing on; largely due to the extraordinary sacrifice of this pastor and his family. He had suffered much, including the rape of his teenage daughter by someone in the neighborhood. When my friends asked this pastor what was needed to faithfully endure in such a challenging context, he quickly and succinctly said one thing, "You must have a rock solid belief in the sovereignty of God in all things."

I have mused on this pastor's experienced remark for now nearly 40 years. As a Christian man and leader, it has encouraged me, guided me and reminded me. When I think about the biblical passages from Psalms and 1 Timothy given above, along with other biblical passages that clearly put forward God's sovereignty in all things, I wonder what belief in this truth would look like in the life of a Christian. I've come to see that at its core, belief in the sovereignty of God in all things brings us to hope and peace in life's hardest moments, rather than hardening, cynicism and bitterness.

I've suffered many experiences of brokenness, despair, frustration, mental anguish and disappointments over the years of my life. In this, I'm like most other folks. Many of these moments were a result of my own sin and foolishness, some came to me seemingly unrelated to my fault. All came to me through the kind sovereign hands of my Father. I've grown to see that in these moments, the great blessing and hope that I have is that they are measured out for me by the One who loves me and is committed to me more than I can ever comprehend. My life is not wholly self-determined nor a result of a mechanistic universal cause and effect. And for this, I've grown to be deeply grateful.

I've also come to find much comfort and confidence in praying to my sovereign and kind Father about the hard and hurtful parts of life. I know that he wants and hears my prayers. I also know that He will act according to His holy purposes in the matters that afflict or concern me. I've come to see how horrible life would be if I didn't have a kind and sovereign Father to call out to in moments of pain that come throughout life.

So I believe that E.B. Pusey is correct that, "Whatever befalls us, however it befalls us, we must receive as the will of God." And that John Newton is also rightly representing God's Word when he says that, "All shall work together for good: everything is needful that he sends; nothing can be needful that he withholds." Through the years, quotes like these have helped me absorb and believe the full meaning and goodness of God's kind sovereignty in all things. I've included a few additional quotes below that have also been of encouragement to me over the years.

### **Additional Quotes on God's Sovereignty in All Things**

*... the mercy and the sovereignty of God are the twin pillars of my life. They are the hope of my future, the energy of my service, the center of my theology, the bond of my marriage, the best medicine in all my sicknesses, the remedy of all my discouragements. And when I come to die (whether sooner or later), these two truths will stand by my bed, and with infinitely strong and infinitely tender hands lift me up to God. — John Piper*

*Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer, without God's ordering and permission.*

*The providential government of God over everything in this world is a truth of which the Greek and Roman philosophers had no conception. It is a truth which is specially revealed to us in the word of God. Just as the telescope and microscope show us that there is order and design in all the works of God's hand, from the greatest planet down to the least insect, so does the Bible teach us that there is wisdom, order, and design in all the events of our daily life. There is no such thing as "chance," "luck," or "accident" in the Christian's journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God. And all things are "working together" for the believer's good (Romans 8:28).*

*Let us seek to have an abiding sense of God's hand in all that befalls us, if we profess to be believers in Jesus Christ. Let us strive to realize that a Father's hand is measuring out our daily portion, and that our steps are ordered by Him. A daily practical faith of this kind, is one grand secret of happiness, and a mighty antidote against murmuring and discontent. — JC Ryle*

*Let us rest our souls on the thought, that all around us is ordered and overruled by God's almighty wisdom. The course of this world may often be contrary to our wishes. The position of the Church may often be very unlike what we desire. The wickedness of worldly men, and the inconsistencies of believers, may often afflict our souls. But there is a hand above us, moving the vast machine of this universe, and*

*making all things work together for His glory. The Scriptures are being yearly fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle in them shall ever fail to be accomplished. The kings of the earth may take counsel together, and the rulers of the nations may set themselves against Christ (Psalm 2:2), but the resurrection morning shall prove that, even at the darkest time, all things were being done according to the will of God. — JC Ryle*

*God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.*

*“God Moves in Mysterious Ways” by William Cowper*

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?*

*In every condition, in sickness, in health;  
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth;  
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,  
As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be.*

*Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,*

*For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand  
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.*

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

*When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

*Even down to old age all My people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.*

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.*

"How Firm A Foundation," Author Unknown

*Does our faith depend on having every prayer answered as we think it should be answered, or does it rest rather on the character of a sovereign Lord? We can't really tell, can we, until we're in real trouble. — Elisabeth Elliot*

## Take it to the Lord

1. Read through this meditation again, asking God to open your eyes, mind, heart and soul to His message for you today.
2. As He speaks to you, listen. Ask Him to guide you as to what you should do with what He says and for the grace to do so.
3. End your time with some form of worship—prayer, praise, thanksgiving or surrender.

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<sup>i</sup> From *Longings Toward a God-Centered Life: Meditations on Great Thoughts and Passages* by John Hawkins. The purpose of publishing these meditations is to share perspectives for leaders and followers on biblical understanding for daily living. The meditations are derived from John's reflections on quotes from Christian leaders and from God's Word.