

God Is in Control

by James MacDonald

In this sermon, James MacDonald emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's control and the assurance of His promises amidst doubt.

Duration: 49:32

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, Hebrews 6:13

Topics: "Sovereignty"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Abraham and how God made a covenant with him. He recounts the moment when God appeared to Abraham in a deep sleep and made a promise about his descendants. The preacher emphasizes the importance of believing in God's promises and having faith. He also shares a personal anecdote about a church member going on a mission trip to highlight the need for earnestness and assurance in one's faith. The sermon concludes with a call to not be sluggish in one's faith and to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

Transcript

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. We're going to honor the Lord. We're going to tithe.

We're going to keep our commitments. We're going to trust God. We're going to believe that 90% with us in God is more than 100% with us on our own.

And that's what we are when we leave God out. We're on our own. And that might be how we got here, but that's not how we're going to get out of here.

We're going to put God first in our life. We're going to honor Him and trust Him to keep His promises. Don't you think God sees how much you have? Don't you think God sees your situation? Trust in the Lord with all of your heart.

Don't lean on your own understanding. Walk, walk in the Word. Walk in the Word.

Walk, walk in the Word. This is the way. This is the second week in our new series, Always True.

God's exceedingly great and precious promises. Last week we talked about, I will not fear. God is with me.

And today we want to talk about, I will not doubt. God is in control. I will not fear.

God is with me. And I will not doubt. God is in control.

Open your Bibles, please, to Hebrews 6. And we're going to begin with a little bit of theology. Every week in this series, God willing, I want to talk about a little theology of promises. And last week we learned that the nature of God is to promise.

We reviewed this definition, that a promise is the assurance that God gives His people so they can walk by faith while they wait for Him to work. That's a promise. And God is a promiser by nature.

And a promise is the assurance that God gives to His people. Anybody need assurance? Put up your hand if you need assurance sometimes. Sometimes what's happening, I don't get it.

I don't understand. It's getting very difficult right now. And how am I going to get through this? Here's how you're going to get through it.

God's given you some assurances so that you can walk by faith while you're waiting for Him to work. You don't have to take your view of life from what you see. You don't have to take your view of life from what's happening right in front of you.

You don't have to listen to what some person is putting into your head that you know isn't true. Listen, listen. God has said some things.

And it's in God's nature. He's a promiser. Now here's the second thing.

This is why I had you turn to Hebrews 6, building a little theology of promise. Last week, God is a promiser. And this seems fairly obvious, but I want to show it to you from Scripture.

Jot this down. God keeps His promises. Okay? Did you know that? I mean, He just flat out keeps His promises.

Every single one of them. Turn to your neighbor and say, God keeps His promises. Go ahead, tell them.

Alright? Did you know that? Did you know that? God keeps His promises. And it's such good news. Hebrews chapter 6, we're going to get in at verse 13.

But I'm going to kind of just take a run at it from verse 11. You okay with that? Look at verse 11. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness.

To have the full assurance of hope until the end. What he's saying is this. I don't want you to mess up this Christian life thing, man.

I want you to go after it. I want you to take it and take hold of it and make it happen. Alright? And I want you to have full assurance right until the end.

I don't want you to give up or back up or shut up. I don't want you to quit. I want you to go all the way with God.

Alright? Alright, that's Hebrews 6, verse 11. Got it? That's what he's saying. We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness.

To have the full assurance of hope until the end. I don't want one person here to quit. I don't want one person here to give up.

I don't want one person here to walk out on the Lord or turn your back on Him. I want you to make your calling and election sure. I want you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

I want you to give full demonstration of the reality of your conversion to Christ. How? Well, he's going to get to that, but first verse 12. Why? So that you may not be sluggish.

Know some sluggish Christians? Here's a better question. How many believers here have had a sluggish season in their faith? Hey, put up your hand. Now don't leave your brother and sister alone there.

Okay, he says, that's not what we want for you. Not some sluggish, tired... But we want you to be imitators of those. Here's the key.

Imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The sum total of the Christian life is that you keep going until you get the stuff that God promises. Alright? Everyone say, I don't have it yet.

You don't have it yet. You don't have it yet. Alright? Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

You don't have hardly any of it yet. You have almost nothing of what God has in store for you. Alright? Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.

But it does not yet appear what we shall be, 1 John 3, verse 1. But when He appears, we'll be like Him, for we'll see Him as He is. Alright? You don't have even a fraction yet of what... If you're kind of looking at it and you're like, this is it, this is it, this is not it. Alright? There is so much yet to come.

So don't be sluggish. But be imitators of those who through faith... Through what? Through faith and patience inherit... There it is, the promises. All things about the promises.

And getting the promises. Now a little bit about those promises, verse 13. For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself.

That's fantastic. A little background here. The Bible contains two kinds of promises, sometimes called covenants.

Two kinds of promises or covenants in the Bible. One kind is a conditional covenant. In a conditional covenant, you have to participate or you're not getting it.

Alright? There's your part and there's God's part. In a conditional promise, in a conditional covenant, you're not getting what God has for you unless you do the part you have to do. I do my part, then God does His part.

That's a conditional covenant. The Mosaic covenant was conditional. God said, if you obey me, you'll be blessed.

But if you disobey, you'll be judged. That's a conditional covenant. However, the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional covenant.

Sometimes in the Bible, God says, I'm just going to do this because I'm God. I'm just going to do this because I've decided to. You don't have to do anything.

I'm going to do it. I'm God. That's an unconditional covenant.

In the covenant, they actually would have a ceremony. When they would make a covenant, they would take a sacrificial animal and they would cut it in half. If you and I were making a covenant or a promise together, a contract we were agreeing to, we would take the animal between us, we would cut it in half, we would separate the halves, and then you and I would come around between the halves and we would stand between the two halves of these things.

In fact, the word covenant, literally, the idea, it actually means, make a covenant means literally to make a cut, is what it means. And we would stand there between that animal cut in half and we would shake hands upon it and we would seal it. Keep your finger in Hebrews 6 and turn back to Genesis 15 and see how this exact thing happened in Scripture.

The difference is that there wasn't two people between the sacrificial animal. There was just God. Abraham was sleeping when God made this covenant.

Notice Genesis 15, one, after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. We were just singing that. Your reward shall be very great.

But Abraham said, Lord, what will you give me? I continue childless. The heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus. Not great.

And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring. A member of my household will be my heir. The word of the Lord came to him.

This man is not going to be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. He brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven.

Number the stars if you're able to number them. So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Romans 4. And he said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out of the Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess. But he said, O Lord, how am I to know that I shall possess it? And he said, Bring me a heifer, three years old, a female. And a ram and a turtle dove and a young pigeon.

And he brought him all these and cut them in half and laid each half over against the other. Verse 12. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram.

And behold, a dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said, So Abraham is sleeping. And God comes out between these animals cut in half.

And he stands there. Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in the land that is not theirs and will be servants there. And they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve. And afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for you yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace and be buried in a good old age.

Verse 17. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant, unconditional covenant, with Abram saying, To your offspring I give this land.

Now that was unconditional. Regardless of what Abraham did, God was saying, I will do that. And that's what's back to Hebrews 6. That's what's being talked about here.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, this was unconditional. He didn't have a person like him who he could make the oath with. Since he had no one greater by him to swear, he swore by himself.

Now that's kind of an interesting thing because in biblical times when they would make a covenant, they would swear by something greater than themselves. You know, I swear by my mom or I swear by, remember when Jesus came to the Pharisees because they were swearing by the temple and by the gold on the temple and Jesus was like, You blind guys, which is greater, the gold or the temple? And the point was they just had completely lost the value of the whole thing. And so here that's the context in which he had no one greater by him to swear, so he swore by himself saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. It's interesting how many times in Hebrews 11 it says, And he obtained the promise and he obtained the promise. Look up here.

I don't think I'm ever going to think about the Christian life the same again because of this study. The whole thing is about the promises. This is my whole life.

God has made some promises. I believe the things that God has said and I'm waiting for God to keep those promises. I'm waiting patiently for him to do that.

That's the Christian life. In fact, notice in verse 16, For people swear by something greater than themselves. We talked about that.

And in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly, desired to show, he wants us to know this. That's very encouraging to me.

When God desired to show. New American Standard says even more show. NIV says when God desired to make it very clear, or this text says to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise, the unchangeable character of his purpose.

So these purposes, these promises that God has made cannot change. He guaranteed it with an oath. So that by two unchangeable things.

Of course, the two unchangeable things are God's character and his word. These are the things that can never change. God's nature never changes.

God's word never changes. Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away. And so when he desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of promise, the unchangeable character of his purpose.

It's hard for us to even imagine unchangeable. It's hard for us to even imagine that someone would say something and that it absolutely categorically can never change. One of the things that Kathy and my kids always tease me about is if I've seen a movie, two weeks later, I literally cannot remember it.

I'll go to Blockbuster and I'll bring home. I said, Kathy, this looks good. Doesn't seem like there's any garbage in this.

This would be good. She said, yeah, well, we actually know that that's good because we watched it two weeks ago. So she'll go sit down and read a book.

I will literally sit down and put it in again and watch to find out what happens because I cannot remember any of it. This is not a great characteristic of me. It comes up in our relationships too.

Like I'll meet somebody and he'll say, oh, he golfs. I said, well, I golf. I love to golf.

We should go golfing. And he'll go, like we did a month ago? I go, right, right. I remember that.

And I just don't know why it is I can't always remember things like that. And maybe you're like that a little bit. But to realize that God's not like that at all.

God forgets nothing. Nothing ever changes with him. He's a rock.

And so when God says something, again, look at verse 17. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise, by the way, he said, well, I thought this was talking about Abraham. In what sense am I an heir of Abraham? Galatians 3.29 says if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's descendants according to the promise.

All right? You're in on all of this. All right? Now, so when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath. So that by two unchangeable things in, oh, I love this part, in which it is impossible for God to lie.

How great is that? How hard is it for God to lie? I just, it's not unlikely that God would lie. Everyone say it's not unlikely. It's not improbable.

We're not saying it's a low percentage here. What are we saying? What is it? Lift up your voice. What is it? It's impossible for God to lie.

God is truth. God invented truth. Everything about him is truth.

Think of all of the reasons why people lie. Even if God could lie, he'd have no reason to. Everything he wants to have happen, happens.

Everything he says is true. He's afraid of nothing. He's right about everything.

He's God. He does not lie. He cannot lie.

Now, Satan is a liar. John 8.44 says that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He cannot tell the truth.

Satan cannot tell the truth. You say, I think he told me the truth one time. No, no, you're lying to yourself now.

All right? Satan is a liar. And God is a truth teller. He cannot lie.

It's impossible. He cannot lie. One of my kids' favorite stories, I'm sure you have these at your house.

We have these little funny ministry stories. When I was a pastor back in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, I was a youth pastor before we moved to Chicago many years ago now. There was this guy in our church.

I'll never forget this. His name is Barry June. Barry was an interesting guy, just a wonderful young adult in our church.

And he decided that he was going to go to the mission field. And it was a pretty ambitious plan, but he found a mission board that was willing to take him. And he got approved.

And then he started raising his support. And all of us kind of chipped in and raised his support. He was going to go on a two-year short-term mission project.

It was just a little church, 150 people. And to have somebody in your church going to the mission field was a huge deal. So weeks and weeks went by.

He packed up. He loaded everything up in these trunks. He didn't have any money, so we had to raise all the money for his airfare.

We bought him this special one-way ticket to wherever he was going, I don't remember anymore, in Africa. And we had a big thing on a Sunday morning. We called him forward and we prayed over him.

And we got around him. We told him how much we loved him, how much we believed in him. And elders in the church prayed for him.

He was going to Africa to serve God. And after, we took up a love offering for him because he didn't have hardly any money. And all the needs were finally met.

And it was fantastic and miraculous. And then after church, we went downstairs into the basement of the church. We had a big luncheon.

And we had a meal together. And we embraced and cried. And God's going to use you.

And off you go. And someone took him to the airport in the afternoon. Sunday night service came around.

Back to church again. Guess who was there? Barry June. Barry, what are you doing here? Oh, he says, when I found out how much people love me, I just couldn't go.

And he never did. He never went. He said he was going to go.

He raised money to go. We prayed over him to go. Someone took him to the airport.

I don't know. He didn't get out of the car. He just changed his mind.

We smile at that. But you know, we're so fickle. I'm going to do this.

I'm going to do that. I'm going to go here. Now I'm about this.

This is what matters to me. Now it's this. God's not like that.

I am not a man, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my thoughts above your thoughts. God does not waver.

God does not change. Has he not spoken and will it not come to pass? These are the promises of God. Last week, it's in God's nature.

He's a promiser. This week, God keeps his promises. He flat out keeps them.

That's a great spot for an amen. Let me run at that again. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

God keeps his promises. He flat out keeps them all. He really does.

God keeps his promises. All right. Last week, I will not fear.

God is with me. This week, first the negative assertion, I will not doubt. I will not doubt.

Why? I will not doubt because we're going to get to that. Turn back in your Bibles to Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. I will not doubt because God is in control. Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. You know, I had you all go to the website and write down your favorite promises.

This was a big one. So many people wrote this. How many people know Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 by heart? Put up your hand if you know it by heart.

Up high, everyone look. Look how many people have memorized this verse. This is a very, very popular verse.

Some people have called Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 the John 3, 16 of the Old Testament. All right. This is a very, very popular verse.

This is underlined in almost everyone's Bible, and as of this moment, it is now underlined in yours. All right. And a very, very popular verse.

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding. In all of your ways, acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

Let's start with that first phrase. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. All right.

Obviously, that's the exhortation not to doubt. I took a lot of time this week, and I studied doubt. Nasty what doubt does to people.

Listen, what doubt does to your soul. Doubt is to your soul what infidelity would be to your marriage. Shattering.

Doubt is devastating to your soul. Remember your soul? Your soul is the immaterial part of you. You're not just flesh and bones.

You're mind, emotions, and will. It's your spirit. It's the part of you that relates to God.

It's the part of you that's going to live forever. It's your soul. And doubt is so destructive to your soul.

Doubt is to your soul what foreclosure is to your mortgage. All right. It ends everything.

It's all over now. And I don't have that anymore. Doubt is that destructive.

Doubt is to your soul what cancer is to your body. Okay. It eats away everything good.

It's so destructive. Look up here for a minute. I'm not just playing a game here.

I'm talking about something that goes on in our lives. It's a real thing. When I doubt what God has said, it's destructive to me.

It's unhealthy. It's unhealthy in every possible way. When I believe what God says, that's really good for me.

When I doubt what God says and wallow and wonder and wonder, it's very, very hurtful to me. I will not doubt. I studied doubt a little bit this week.

Here are some consequences. Jot this down. Doubt is the soil that fear grows in.

We talked about fear last week. Well, fear can never be unless there's first doubt. Fear grows in the soil of doubt.

For example, Luke 24, 36. Now, as Jesus said these things, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and said to them, peace to you. Remember, Jesus, just after he was resurrected and all the disciples were freaking out and what's going to happen and am I going to be okay? They were terrified and frightened and supposedly had seen a spirit.

But he said to them, why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your heart? See? Jesus said, all of your fear, it's because you doubt. I made some promises to you. You don't believe the promises and that's why you're afraid.

Doubt is also the cause of our emotional peaks and valleys. Do you know that? And doubt is the cause of the ups and downs. How many times are you kind of up and down and up and down and up and down? And did you know that James 1, verse 5 says in the context of trials, if you lack wisdom, ask God.

If you lack wisdom, ask God who gives to all generously. If you want to know wisdom, you want to know what's going on in your life, you want to know why this is happening, ask God. He'll tell you.

And then James 1, 6 says, but ask in faith, not doubting. There it is. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.

Imagine if I went down to the harbor front in Chicago there, downtown, and I took this little container here and I threw it out on a windy, wavy night there. How much control would this little container have over where it went on the water? How much control? Hold up the universal symbol for how much control. Correct.

It would have none. And so where would it go? We don't know where it would go. It would go wherever the waves would take it.

It would go up and down. It would go in and out. It would go everywhere, all by itself, but no control over where it went.

And a lot of times we're like that in our lives because we're living in doubt instead of in faith. Let him ask in faith, not doubting. For he who doubts is like the emotional ups and downs, the roller coaster that some of you have been on, the living, what's going to happen to me, and the terror, and oh no, and all of that, it's caused by doubt.

Living by faith, holding on to God's promises, gives stability and strength to life. And I'm not living by what I see. And I'm not living up and down and the latest phone call and what did she say yesterday and not like that.

Why? Because it doesn't matter what happens here and there and here and there. God's made some promises to me. And I know where this whole thing's going to end up.

And I don't know when and I don't know how, but I trust God. And living by faith gets us off the emotional roller coaster. Living by doubt causes those peaks and valleys continually.

Another passage of Scripture, Matthew 14. Doubt is the direct, jot this down. So doubt is the soil fear grows in.

Doubt is the cause of emotional peaks and valleys. And then this. Doubt is the direct result of taking our eyes off the Lord.

You say, why do I doubt? I don't want to doubt. I'll tell you why you doubt, because you're not looking at the Lord anymore. When your eyes are on the Lord, man, your heart is filled with faith.

But when your eyes are on the wind and the waves and the up and the down, Matthew 14. Remember the story where there was a big storm? And the disciples were in the boat, but Jesus wasn't with them in this storm on the Sea of Galilee. I'm going to the Sea of Galilee, by the way.

And there was a big storm on the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus came walking to them on the water, Matthew 14.28. And Peter said to him, I love this about Peter. He's like, Lord, if it's you, command me to come to you on the water.

I'm not going to get another chance like this to walk on the water. What do you think you can walk on water? If Jesus says I can, I can. And so Peter's like, Lord, command me to come.

Jesus said, come. And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was blustering, he was afraid.

And beginning to sink, he cried out saying, Lord, save me. See what happened? Took his eyes off the Lord. The moment you take your eyes off the Lord, you start to sink.

You start to go down. And I don't know where you've been this week. You say, James, I've been going down.

Your eyes have not been on the Lord, guaranteed. You've been looking at the waves. You've been looking at the wind.

You've been listening to the howling. And I've been there. And when you take your eyes off the Lord, you're going down.

Peter cries out, Lord, save me. And immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said to him, O you of little faith, why did you? Next word. Why did you doubt? Listen, the Christian life is a life of faith.

And when you hold on to the promises of God, you've got to believe them. You've got to say to yourself continually, this is true. God said it.

I believe it. That settles it. I know what's happening.

I don't know when it's happening. I don't know how it's going to happen. But God has made some promises and I believe them.

And that settles it. That's why the text says, see, I love that, total commitment with everything you have. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

You're like, well, am I trusting God with all my heart? How many people want to trust in God with all their heart? They want to trust in God with all my heart. Am I doing that? Well, this will help. The next phrase in Proverbs 3, 5 says, and don't lean on your own understanding.

You are not trusting in God with all your heart if you're leaning on your own understanding. It's not so bad that you know some things. It's not so bad.

You probably figured some things out. I bet you figured some things out. The problem is, are you leaning on those things? And now a crisis comes in your life and a difficult circumstance.

And what are you going to do now? See, it's not bad that you know some things. But the problem is, if your confidence is, I know how to fix it. Hey, hey, hey, hey, leave this with me.

I know how to fix this. I've been through this before. I know how to handle it.

I'm going to take care of business. I always take care of business. I'm going to take care of it again.

Nobody messes with me. Nobody runs over me. I know how to get what I have to have.

And that's not going to stay like that. And I'm going to get on this. Not great.

Don't lean on your own understanding. You say, well, what then? In all your ways, acknowledge Him. In every choice, in every decision, acknowledge God.

This is about God. This is about God's honor. This is about God's reputation.

And I want to honor God with my life. And I want to handle this in a way that pleases Him. I might be able to get myself out of this.

But I don't just want to get out of it. I want to honor God. And so, in all my ways, I'm going to acknowledge Him.

Now, let's just take a practice run at this. Somebody just call out, because this couldn't be more practical, really. Somebody just call out a problem that we deal with in life.

Some general category. I'm sure it's not your problem, but maybe for the person next to you or something. And just call out a problem that we deal with personally on a daily basis in our own lives.

And let's just see how Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 works. I'm listening. Okay, financial.

I'll go with that. Today, you should get a chance to give one financial problems. So, I'm not onto the next problem yet.

You want to elaborate on that? No problem at all. So, we'll just expand his category. Financial problems including gas prices.

Could someone give my sister a gas card before she goes today? But let's talk about that. Financial problems. So, now there's a crisis.

I lost my job. Sales haven't been going as well. Things are really tight around here.

Not to mention the growing cost and the inflation and the cost of gas. It's tight. It's really tight.

It's so tight. I don't know how we're going to pay the bills. And the phone calls are getting old.

And we're getting behind. And this is a problem. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Don't you believe God sees your situation? Don't you believe that? So, what would I humanly tend to do? Rather than, in all my ways, don't acknowledge Him. I'm going to lean on my own understanding. Alright? Times are tough.

We're going to tighten the belts around here, baby. That's what we're going to do. And not that that's wrong to do.

But I mean, I'm not giving no more money to the Red Cross. And we can't help our little compassion child anymore. She's going to have to take care of herself.

And we're not giving no more money over at that church. They seem to be doing fine. They're going to have to do fine.

Because we're not going to be part of that. And I'm going to start hoarding. I'm going to hoard.

And I'm going to build a pile. And you don't spend one more dime when you go to the store. Alright? You check everything with me.

No more granola bars. No juice boxes for the kids' lunches. They can get a drink out of the fountain.

Alright? And we're going to tighten the belts around here. And I'm going to make this work. And, listen, it's not wrong to be wise in how you spend.

But I'm just telling you. Proverbs 11 says, There is one who scatters yet increases all the more. And there's one who withholds but it only results in poverty.

And if you think you're going to just hoard and gut it out. And, listen, you need God to help you. And you need some corners to turn.

If you think you can get past that problem. Maybe God has allowed that to come into your life to teach you some things. And if you think you're going to graduate from the financial stresses without God.

Without partnership with Him. That's not going anywhere great for you. Okay? Trust in the Lord with all of your heart.

We're going to honor the Lord. We're going to tithe. We're going to keep our commitments.

We're going to trust God. We're going to believe that 90% with us in God is more than 100% with us on our own. And that's what we are when we leave God out.

We're on our own. And that might be how we got here. But that's not how we're going to get out of here.

We're going to put God first in our life. We're going to honor Him and trust Him to keep His promises. Don't you think God sees how much you have? Don't you think God sees your situation? Wasn't it God Himself who said through the prophet in Malachi, Bring all the tithes into the storehouse and test me now in this.

And see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing for you that you cannot contain. Just try me on that one, God. Just test me and see if I'm not faithful.

That's pretty clear. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding.

In all of your ways acknowledge Him. Okay, so the people over there, they have financial problems. What's your problems? Okay? Relational, like say maybe in the family, right? Okay, I've got a problem with my son, or I've got a problem with my daughter, or I've got a problem with my spouse, or I've got a problem with my mom, and sometimes it feels like at our house we've got all those.

And I've got these things to work on, and there's friction, and there's tension, and how am I going to handle that? I'm going to trust in the Lord with all my heart. I'm going to do what's right, and I'm going to trust God to honor my obedience. I'm not going to get petty.

I'm not going to pay her back for the way she's treating me. I'm not going to try to get even. I'm not going to take vengeance.

God says vengeance is mine, said the Lord. I will repay. And I don't have to take vengeance myself, and I don't have to try to get even.

I don't have to be prideful and petty and difficult with people. I can give the matter over to God. I can wait upon Him to work.

And my son's not where I wish he was with God, maybe, and my mother-in-law, she doesn't seem very interested in spiritual things, and every time my dad calls me, he's always got something he's got to lay on me, and it's not easy sometimes, you might say, or whatever your particular burden is. I'm telling you, how, how, how, how you handle that is everything. If you doubt God's Word, that's not going anywhere good.

But if you trust in the Lord with all of your heart and don't lean on your own understanding, if you acknowledge Him in all of your ways, other examples could be given. Notice this phrase. This is the promise.

And by the way, is this a conditional or an unconditional promise? This is conditional. You've got to do some stuff. You've got to trust in the Lord with all your heart.

You've got to acknowledge Him in all of your ways without leaning on your own understanding. And if you do your part, God will do His part. This is not unconditional.

This is conditional. God will make straight your paths, my translation says. The one I memorized as a kid says, He will direct your paths.

Actually, it means that He'll make it smooth. The idea is that this is your life right here. It's right out in front of you here.

You're like, yeah, as I kind of look down there, there's a fair number of bumps in that road. And there's some stuff I'm going to have to climb over, and I'm not sure how I'm going to get my kids through college, and I'm not sure if I'm ever going to have a retirement. And, you know, I'm kind of concerned about this and that.

There's some bumps down there, some things I'm concerned about. How many people have some things in the future kind of on your mind? Well, if you trust in the Lord with all your heart and you don't lean on your own understanding, if you acknowledge Him in all of your ways, He will make your path smooth. What we would say in the vernacular today is, He will pave the way.

Everyone say that. He will pave the way. Say it.

God will pave the way for you. How's that sound, huh? Nothing worse than gravel roads, man. Nothing worse than gravel roads.

And potholes and speed bumps. Down with all of that, man. God will level the ground in front of you.

God will pave the way for you. The safest, fastest, smoothest road to the best possible destination. How's that for a promise? No wonder people treasure this verse.

Let me say that again. The safest, fastest, smoothest road to the best possible destination. That's what God promises.

Man, how do you get that? I told you how. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways, acknowledge Him. And He will pave the way for you. You're like, that's really quite a commitment on God's part when you think of it.

I mean, He's gonna pave the way for me? I mean, who does He think He is? Answer? He's God. There's no illusions there. He's God.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? He can handle anything that's in your path. It's like not a thing for Him. He's like, how are we gonna ever get over that? Not a thing.

Out of the way. All right? He's God. And the biblical term for this, a term that every Christian should know, jot this down, kind of the common way we say it is, God is in control.

But the doctrinal term is sovereignty. Sovereignty. Every believer should be as familiar with this term as they are with breathing.

The sovereignty of God. I got an email from my dad today. I got some great emails from him.

Dear James, quick note before I head off to a conference, Setting Captives Free, an organization that's been an encouragement to your brother the last couple of years. He was going with my brother and his

son and their pastor of the Harvest Church in London. Had a few minutes with your older brother on the way through last night.

My older brother was down for the Harvest Bible Fellowship board meeting this week and the Walk in the Word board meeting. And I had told my older brother that I think that he and my dad are alike. Because being with my older brother now is so creepy.

It's just like being with my dad. And so he said, glad you think John and I are alike, but then it always takes a third party to see such things. And then he says, acorns ripen, they slip off the tree, and they fall very close to the trunk.

Acorns are really nuts, he says. And then he says, do you need more wisdom for today? But then he says this, will be an unceasing prayer for you and yours on every front known to me. And of course through other fronts that I know little or nothing of, but God my Father knows in full detail and has under His sovereign control.

He says, I've been in Psalm 103 all this week, love and kisses, Dad. You see, my dad is a great believer. And he knows about the sovereignty of God.

That God is always in control. And if you want to have something to comfort your heart, if you want to have something to give to another believer, you've got to have this thing. You've got to know the biblical doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

That no matter what happens or comes our way, we have a God who is in complete control. Now how good would the promises of God be if we had to wait and see if He could really do it? How many people here have ever over-promised? Have you ever over-promised? Have you ever over-promised? Has he ever over-promised? Once or twice. Alright, what a great answer.

What a great answer. And we do that, don't we? We over-promise. Does God over-promise and under-deliver? He never does.

You say, well how come? Because He's sovereign. God never over-promises and under-delivers because there's just nothing too hard for Him. He can do anything.

He's in complete control. He's sovereign. You say, He's in control of what? What do you mean by everything? Well, sort of a crazy question, but I'll expand on that a little bit for you.

Acts chapter 17. If you want to turn over there, Acts chapter 17, Paul was preaching, and he said this in verse 24, the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord, so there God, He's sovereign over the universe, being Lord of heaven and earth, He does not live in temples made by man. God doesn't live in this building.

He's not going to be here all week while you're where you go. Alright? He doesn't live in temples made by hands, nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything since He Himself gives to all mankind breath and everything. Okay, so He's sovereign over the universe.

He's sovereign over humanity. Everyone take a deep breath. Go like this, go.

That right there, that's a gift from God. The capacity to take another breath. He's going to say here in a moment, in Him we live and move and have our being.

And verse 26, He made from one man, Adam, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries. So He's Lord of the countries, Lord of the races, Lord of the governments, having determined beforehand the boundaries of their dwelling place that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He's actually not far from each one of us.

We learned that last week. He's with us. In Him we live and move and have our being.

We are His offspring. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or some idol of some kind. By the art and imagination of man, you can't make up God.

Always makes me sad when I hear people say, well, to me God is, oh, you're already off track. To me God is, that whole sentence is irrelevant. God is who God is.

You don't make God up. Well, it seems to me, well, I prefer to think of God as, well, we really don't care what you prefer to think of Him as. He is what He is.

So we ought not to think like that. He says in verse 29, He said, well, I didn't know that. Well, these times of ignorance, verse 30, God is overlooked, but now commands all people everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world by a man whom He has appointed.

That's Jesus Christ. And of this He has given assurance by raising Him from the dead. Look it, look it, look it.

I love to say this. God is so in control, God rules the universe with His feet up. He's not stressed or strained in any way.

He's not pacing back and forth. He doesn't wipe sweat from His brow. This is not stretching Him, not in any sense of the word.

This is like, not a problem. Not a problem. God is infinite.

He could have made the universe a billion times more complex than it is, and He still be like, nah, it's no problem. He's God, and He is sovereign. Now that is what lays behind every one of God's promises.

The reason why He is present with us is because He's sovereign. He can be. The reason why He can listen to all of our prayers in a church of our size, how many hundred people are out of bed in the middle of the night, on their knees because they can't sleep, calling out to God, and He's hearing every one of us at the same time.

Why? Because He's what? God. He's God, and He's sovereign. He rules the universe.

You say sovereign over what? Let me give you some examples from Scripture. I love this reference. Jot it down.

Ephesians 1.11 says that God determines all things according to the counsel of His will. How different is that than us? We hope things will happen. God just makes it happen when He wants to.

We try to get things to happen as quick as we can because we're afraid tomorrow we won't be able to make it happen, so we better make it happen today. God doesn't even think about stuff like that. He

makes it happen when He's good and ready.

He determines all things according to the counsel of His will. Think of some Bible characters we know. Think of Jonah.

Think of Jonah. God is sovereign over rebellion. You remember Jonah? God was like, you're going here, and you're gonna do this.

Jonah's like, I am not going there, and I am not doing that. How's that gonna work for Jonah? Not great. And so Jonah starts running in this direction, and Jonah 1.4 says, and the Lord appointed a great wind.

Remember, he was in that boat, and all of a sudden out of nowhere, and in fact the Hebrew, it means literally, our translation says that he hurled the storm at him. God was like, you're going away, are you? Well, try this on for size. And God throws this big storm, and all of a sudden everyone's afraid for their life, but does Jonah get the message? No, he's still rebellious.

So then the book of Jonah says, in Jonah 1.17, the Lord appointed a great wind, then the Lord appointed a great fish, and they throw Jonah overboard, but is God done with him yet? And up comes this big fish and swallows him, and you know the story of Jonah. When he gets spit on on dry land, he didn't even land, and his feet were what? Moving in this direction. And then at the end of it all, and God brings the big revival, and Jonah's so discouraged and depressed because he's still prideful and rebellious.

Now God in his tender love, it says in Jonah 4.6, the Lord appointed a great plant that grew up over Jonah and gave him some shade. And the Lord came to Jonah and said, do you have reason to be angry? And Jonah was like, I have reason to be angry, even to the point of death. Seriously, problems.

And the Lord was so tender and so loving toward him and won his heart. And God is sovereign over rebellion. This is very comforting to me.

God is sovereign over sin. Even when you or people in your life sin or choose to sin, and it affects you, to know that God is sovereign over that. Are you got a Bible verse for that? How about a whole Bible story? How about Joseph who had some big dreams that God had given him for what was going to happen with his life? But his brothers were not buying it, so they took him and beat him and stripped his clothes off of him and sold him as a slave into Egypt.

They sinned against him. Has anybody ever sinned against you? Somebody sins against you and you think to yourself, what's going to happen now? These people are sinning. God is sovereign over sin.

Joseph ends up down in Egypt trying to honor God with his life, trying to trust the Lord with all his heart and not lean on his own understanding. He gets in working his butt off in this place with this lady. She falsely accuses him, tries to seduce him.

He ends up in jail. So now this lady lies. She sins against him and his life is over.

But God is sovereign. Joseph starts working hard and gains the favor of the prison keeper. He interprets the two dreams for the baker and the butler.

Then they betray him. They get out of prison. They forget all about him.

They sinned against him too. Surely his life is over. But God is sovereign over the sins of brothers and false accusers and betraying friends.

And in God's time, in God's time, Pharaoh said, where can we find such a man as this in whom the Spirit of the Lord is? And he was elevated and raised up until in God's sovereignty his brothers came down there at the perfect time and his brothers were so terrified when they met him. He's going to kill us. We sinned against him.

But he was such a great man. He knew about the sovereignty of God and he looked into their eyes and he said in Genesis 50, you meant it to me for evil but God meant it for good. That is an awesome truth that God can use even the sin of other people to accomplish his purposes in your life.

Trust in him with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways and he will pave the way for you.

Sovereign over rebellion. Sovereign over sin. How about Esther? Sovereign over world events.

How many people know the story of Esther? This is an incredible story of this young woman who went through something awful. She was taken and put in the harem of the king and because she was so beautiful through a series of events, she was chosen to go into the king. And she was taken as the king's mistress and yet there was this guy named Haman who was going around and this is an amazing book because the name of God's not mentioned not one time in Esther but God is through all of it.

He's sovereignly working behind the scenes. And even where his name's not spoken he's working, working, working sovereignly all the time in your life. And there was Esther and this guy Haman comes up.

He hates the Jewish people as Satan is always stirring up hatred toward God's people. And so he hates the Jewish people and we're going to exterminate them all. We're going to kill them all.

That's on every page in history, isn't it? But this time it was Haman. And so Haman's out there and he's trying to do this and Esther doesn't know what to do and she's like, well I don't know if I can say anything and the king might kill me and I've got a safe place here in the palace. Surely he's not going to kill me.

And Mordecai, her uncle, says to her, do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place. See, God's sovereign.

If you don't do it God will find someone who will. His purposes will be accomplished. But you and your father's house will perish.

And who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. All these awful things that you've been through. Everything you've had to endure.

All the pain and suffering that you've gone through, Esther, have brought you to this place in God's sovereignty. He knew what he was doing. Sovereign over rebellion, over sin, over world events.

Jot down this reference. Proverbs 16, 33. It means so much to me.

It says this. The lot falls into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord. The lot falls into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord.

I'm not going to have time to read Psalm 37. It so perfectly portrays sovereignty. You can read it yourself but go back with me as I close to Hebrews 6. Hebrews 6, 19.

So that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. Here it is. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.

How many people need an anchor? I'm telling you, man, the waves are going. The wind's blowing. We need an anchor so bad.

In ourselves, we're like this. Man, can anything just kind of calm me down a little bit so I can just be steady and faithful and honoring God? I'll tell you what can calm you down. It's God's promises.

We have the sovereignty of God and the promises that He has made. It's like an anchor to our soul. And I believe what He said.

And I'm not going to deviate from that. And you say, but you don't even know what's going to happen. I don't know what's going to happen except I know that what God's promised will happen.

But you don't even know when it's going to happen. No, but I don't need to know when because I know for sure it will. And I trust God with all of my heart.

And I'm not leaning on my own understanding. I'm not taking my cues from what it looks like. I'm going to acknowledge Him in all of my ways and He will direct my paths.

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If you'd like to write us, our website has the U.S. and Canadian address information. And that website again is walkintheword.com. Now here's James with some closing comments. Father, we thank You today that You are able.

You are able to accomplish what concerns me today. You are able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. You are able because You are sovereign.

You are the Lord and nothing is too hard for You. God, I pray that You would continue to engrave upon my heart and the hearts of these precious ones this reality that we are walking by faith. You have made some exceedingly great and precious promises and we believe what Your Word says.

And so we're holding on to these promises. I will not fear You are with me. I will not doubt You are in control.

I will not fear You are with me. I will not doubt You are in control. Seal these promises to our heart.

Don't let the enemy snatch away the seed that's sown in us today. But let our lives reflect that stability of knowing that You see and know and are at work on our behalf. We thank You for these exceedingly great

and precious promises today.

In Jesus' name, Amen. I will not go to the left or the right. I will not go.

I will not go. Walk, walk in the Word. Walk in the Word.

Walk, walk in the Word. This is the way.

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