

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, NY

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GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S FREEDOM

Selected Scriptures

PRAYER: *Father, we do once again thank you and praise you for the grace that you bestow on us. We thank you for the gift that is this church. We thank you for the freedom we have to come before you each Sunday and offer corporate worship. And Lord, it is of freedom that we're going to be speaking about this morning, and so again, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be here, that you would guide us as we open up your book, that you would lead us into truth and that you would again allow us to make your truth of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, a while back, PBS ran a special. They ran a special about frontier families. They wanted to re-create what happened in Montana in 1883 with The Homestead Act, and that act gave 160 acres to any family who could live on that plot of land for five years. And so PBS sought out three families who they would find to live on that land for three months, and they were to live exactly as the homesteaders lived. They were to raise their own food, they were

to work from sunrise to sunset, and they were primarily there to prepare for winter. There would be no TV, no phones, no iPads, no laptops, no video games because there was no electricity. And after the experiment was finished, well, it turned out that the stress of the contest had split one family apart but it had transformed most of the others who had taken part in the experiment. One 10-year-old said for the very first time she had discovered imagination. And the families involved, they found their lives to be filled with struggle but also for the very first time, with purpose. And after five months, the cold weather descended and as it descended, they all left and each family was evaluated on how they had prepared for winter. And all of them had failed. Some more spectacularly than others.

And two months later, PBS interviewed the families again. It was interesting. The 10-year-old was playing a video game and was kind of zonked out, the teenage -- one of the teenage girls was in a hot tub and they -- they were all complaining the very same complaint, life was so boring compared to their home schooling -- their home steading days.

And so the special really did make for excellent TV, because it really gave an appreciation for what the homesteaders did, but in one very important area it was fatally flawed. And the area was

this: The special confused survival with fulfillment. They are not the same thing. It is very easy to think that boring, meaningless 21st century lives can become lives of great purpose and great fulfillment if they were just thrust back to 1883, because back then, every one of our resources was single handedly devoted to survival. The problem is we were not designed just to survive. God didn't tell Adam that life was a struggle until after the fall. So what gave him purpose before that? Well, Genesis 2:15 says this. It says: *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.* Well, that is part of the same thing that gives us meaning and purpose today. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says: *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

You see, it is our relationship with our Creator and the image that we were designed to bear that really gives us fulfillment and meaning. Genesis 1:26 says: *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and over all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

You see, we are still here to bear the image of God as Adam was,

even though that image has been shattered by the fall. God still insists that all things still do work together for the good purpose of conforming his children into the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now for many, particularly those in the Middle East, in the Pacific basin, in Africa, that may mean persecution, that may sometimes mean martyrdom. But that's not the case for us. The North American church shares many of the very same characteristics of those 21st century frontier families. In many cases, we in the North American church are affluent, we are overindulged and we are frankly, bored. We are aching for the chance to find something meaningful.

You know, when this program -- and the program's name was Frontier Families, when it was just an idea kind of floating around in the producer's mind, they thought they would get a few hundred families willing to give up 21st century living for five months. And so they floated the idea on their website, and they wound up with almost 6,000 families applying. What they found was that families were desperate for an opportunity to trade in the liberation of 21st century living for something of greater value, even though it was something of far, far greater cost.

This morning I want to address a similar challenge, and it is in the area of what we call Christian liberty. It's about how we live

out our Christian lives in the middle of our relative prosperity and safety. You see, we 21st century North American Christians share much in common with the Jews of Deuteronomy 6, and God gave them a strict warning in Deuteronomy 6:10. This is what he said. He said: *"And when the LORD your God brings you into a land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you -- with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant -- and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear."*

Now, before you say "Well, wait a minute, that's not me, nobody's given me any houses or cisterns or vineyards or olive trees," just consider what life was like in 1883. You know, to go back to the show, in order to match the way it was for homesteaders, what the producers did is they gave the three frontier families by lot three completely different scenarios. The first family found that they had a working cabin to work out of. The next family was given the supplies necessary to build the cabin. The third family was just given an axe and pointed to the woods. By lot. All of them had to make their own food, their own clothing, and their own shelter.

None of the families had water, furnaces, fans, there was no such thing as a washing machine or a dryer, no stoves, no toilets, no toilet paper, no showers, no microwaves, no toasters, nothing. The next time you decide to make toast for yourself, just imagine what that task was like in 1883. Everything was an overwhelming effort. Survival was all-consuming. We may not have been given vineyards and olive trees and the rest but everything else has been served up to us on a silver platter. And God says, "*Be careful.*" "*Be careful not to forget the LORD.*" He says, "*fear the LORD your God and serve him only.*"

And you know, I -- here that's really something that all of us agree on. I mean, who here doesn't want to serve the Lord? The question that we all need to have answered is simply the question of how. And when it comes to serving God, I think most of us think of missionaries and ministers and other full timers as they're the spiritual frontier families. I mean, at least they know what to do to serve God. After all, it's their job, you know, they get up in the morning and they go off and they serve and advance the kingdom.

But what about most of us who don't earn our living from the gospel? I mean, how do we know what we are supposed to do in order to serve? We are stuck in our 21st century houses, vineyards, and

olive trees. So how do we *"fear the Lord and serve him only?"*

Well, God's already told us. He told us in 1 Corinthians 10:31, he says: *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Now, what exactly does that mean? Well, for one it means you do not have to go to Montana, you don't have to go to 1883 to find a significant way to serve God and advance his kingdom. Those opportunities are right here, right now, and they are right under your nose. They exist wherever we rub shoulders with another human being, Christian or non-Christian. The context in which they are expressed is what we call "Christian Liberty."

I remember last time I said Luther said this. He said, *"A Christian man is a most free Lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all."* Learning what it means to be that type of a bondservant is the challenge of Christian liberty. Every person you meet in every circumstance you encounter is an opportunity to express this liberty for the glory of God.

You know, I think we think we need to go to Montana, we need to be at the cutting edge for the kingdom. But Montana is right outside that door. It just doesn't look like Montana. What it looks like

is people, messy people, pushy people, lost people, nice people, obnoxious people, people we just don't want to deal with, Christian people.

See, I fear that we have forgotten just how radical these words were that Christ spoke in John 13:34. He said this. He said, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

I think we get this confused. As I said before, love is not simply amplified niceness. It is the outward expression of the inward presence of God's Holy Spirit. By far, the most lovely people on the face of this planet -- I say this all the time -- it should be born again believers. I mean, after all, we are the ones who have the Holy Spirit of God living inside us, and it is he who gives us the ability to love those who we don't normally want to love.

1 John 4:12 says this: No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. You see, it is God who gives us the ability to love those we don't normally want to love, and when God's Holy Spirit comes in to live in us, he brings with him nine different fruits that really mark



the hallmark of who Jesus Christ was. And we call those marks the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22 says: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. You know, it should be pretty obvious that those nine qualities would also define absolutely lovely people. And so the question that we have to ask is does that define you? Does that define me? Does that define the evangelical church?

You know, years ago, I heard the number one reason why missionaries leave the mission field, it's not because the task is altogether too difficult. It's that they cannot get along with other missionaries. That is quite an indictment, but it also points to something else. It points to the premium the enemy puts on disrupting our ability to love our brothers and sisters with the Holy Spirit's love. You see, we don't see the focal point of our spiritual war as the ability to love, but it really is. The spirit world and the unsaved world don't want to see how fancy our buildings are. They want to see -- and this is what God expects them to see -- how we love one another. So how do we do that? How do we abandon ourselves to the task of loving people?

Well, the first thing that we have to do is to see the task as a critical necessity. I think we see all these other things as

incredibly important, and this love stuff is kind of optional. The ability to love is the essence of what it means to be new creatures in Christ. If God's Holy Spirit is living inside you, if he is shaping and molding you into the image of Jesus Christ, you will have a drive to love one another, and that includes the unlovely among us. It includes those people that you personally cannot stand. Jesus never said we have to like each other. He said we have to love each other and those two things are vastly different concepts.

In addition, Jesus is absolutely unimpressed if we love those who are loveable. Matthew 5:46-47 says this: *"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same?* You see, what Jesus demands is that we love those whom we naturally do not love. And if you think of love as amplified niceness, you're going to be trying to gin up a human emotion instead of relying on a divine empowerment.

And so the question is how do we do that? Well, my answer is this. The very first thing you have to do is abandon yourself to the sovereignty of God. I am passionate about this because this concept of God revolutionized my thinking and my Christian walk.

And over the last 100 years, the evangelical church has almost completely reversed the historical understanding of how God's sovereignty is understood. We have forgotten men like Martin Luther who truly understood what Christian liberty was all about, and we ask ourselves what is it that gave him the courage to stand up against the church of Rome? Well, it was the sovereignty of God. It was knowing that God was in charge of absolutely everything.

R.C. Sproul in Chosen by God writes this. He says: *"If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled."*

You see, Luther believed God was in control of every molecule in this universe because he believed that no one or no thing could touch him outside of that sovereign control. Many in the evangelical church have abandoned that belief almost completely. You know, we like to sing that God is in control but we leave undefined the question of what it is that he controls. We accept that he controls the seasons, he controls the stars, he controls the planets, but here's the big question. What about people? That's a very important question. And once again, this goes to the question of free will. You see, if God's sovereignty stops where

man's free will begins, then God is not truly in charge, and man is, ultimately. You and I can only both be completely sovereign as long as we live in two separate universes. If you're on your island and I'm on my island, we can both get along fine. But as soon as your world intersects with my world, one of us is going to have to give. If man is sovereign, God can't be. And if God is sovereign, man can't be. I mean, there really is no other way around that. You know, if God voluntarily agrees to limit his sovereignty to allow for man's free will, then God, voluntarily or not, lacks the power or the desire or the ability to truly superintend all of those details of my life.

Here's the question: What happens when I'm affected by someone else's exercise of free will if God is not free to rule over that expression of free will? Oh, God can sympathize with me, he can offer me grace, perhaps he can offer me some wisdom as well, but if he cannot superintend that exercise of free will, well then my fate is in the hands of whoever it is that is exercising it. I can't live my Christian life that way. I just can't. The sovereignty of God is not a theoretical intellectual concept. It is the core understanding of my freedom in Christ.

You know, I mentioned last time that every single one of us has this little voice inside of us. It is a voice that constantly

tries to dominate, constantly tries to control us, it tells us we're not getting appreciated enough, we're not getting cared for enough, we're not getting loved enough, respected enough, you name it, it's not enough. It's a voice that tells us we deserve more. It's a voice that tells us how to take care of ourselves, how to protect ourselves, and how to deal with those who are a threat to us, how to deal with those who we don't like. If we listen to that voice, if we follow its instructions implicitly, it will kill us. It is a voice that comes from our hearts. And Jeremiah tells us two things about that heart in Jeremiah 17:9. It says: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* You see, the preeminent voice that we hear barking in the back of all of our minds is the voice of deceit.

Now, I hear people say well, I just had to follow my heart. I think to myself, are you out of your mind? Why would you do that? Why in the world would you listen to that one part of you that is dedicated to deceiving you? That part of your conscience that is, as God puts it, desperately sick. Other translations have it as desperately wicked. You know, instead of speaking out God's voice as sovereign, this voice speaks to no one but me, and it refuses to hear anyone but me, and that includes the Holy Spirit.

Now, am I the only one who's ever heard that voice inside my head?

Have you ever heard that voice inside your head? You see, if you say no, that voice is deceiving you right now, and you will never be able to love as Christ loves until you learn to shut that little voice down.

So how do we do that? How do we fight this fight? Better still, how do we conquer? Well, first, consider those who follow only the dictates of their own hearts. Just look around. Has that ever worked out? Next, understand that God has the sovereign right to every single part of my existence. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says this: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own. That's an incredible concept. You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

Erwin Lutzer said this. He said: *If there is one single reason why good people turn evil, it is because they fail to recognize God's ownership over their kingdom, their vocation, their resources, their abilities, and above all, their lives.*" Now for me, it's very simple to translate that. The simple translation of what he was saying is my God is sovereign. My God rules. When that voice inside me keeps telling me you're getting disrespected or used or shafted or whatever, I've got something to say back to that voice. My God is in control. There are no loose

contingencies, not one molecule of anyone's free will can alter or change God's plan for me, because my God is sovereign.

And again, God uses his own son as a model. In 1 Peter 2:21-23 it says this. It says: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

You need to think about that passage. Think about what Jesus was doing to realize how liberating that truly is, because if you truly buy that notion, if you truly own it, you never have to play the games the rest of this world plays constantly. You don't have to look out for number one if the real number one, the one who judges justly, is already looking out for you. And he has the power and the sovereign right to rule this world completely.

Let me show you how this works practically. A while back, I got a phone call from a pastor in Long Island, because I'd been asked to lead a retreat for his church's men's group, and he was just calling to touch base with me. I didn't know him; he didn't know me. So he called and as he called, that little voice inside me,

that voice I've been talking about, told me now it's very important for you to impress this guy. You need to drop some trendy names. You need to drop some fancy theological terms, show him how sharp you are. Here's the point. I don't need to listen to that voice because my God is in charge. So I told the pastor flat out, I said, "you know, I've never done this before, and quite frankly, I find this very scary and I don't know if this is the greatest idea, but I believe that God is leading in this decision." And furthermore I said, "Look, you're the pastor. If you think that's a bad choice, that's fine for me." And I said that because I firmly believe that God is in charge. And since I really believe that, I'm free to be honest about my limitations because the decision's not in my hand, it's not in the pastor from Long Island's hands; it's in God's hands. That can't be unless you believe that God is absolutely sovereign.

Now, am I saying that I'm trusting God to make little robots out of everyone that stands in my way? The answer is of course not. What I am trusting in is that God can work his will through human free will. I'm trusting God can work his will through human free wills in ways that we simply cannot understand as human beings, as creatures. The Westminster catechism says: "He works his will without doing violence to man's will." I don't know how that works. I have no idea.



Donald Gray Barnhouse tried to put it this way. He said, "Man acts always according to his will. God just changes his willer." Now, does that seem far-fetched? Does that seem impossible? Is God free to superintend man's free will that way? Let's see what God says in Jeremiah 18:6. He says, "*O, house of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter has done? Declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*"

Now the question is, does that seem offensive? Does that hit our senses in a bad kind of a way? And that leads to the other question. Has God's sovereignty been so shrunken and man's sovereignty been so elevated that God can't work in the wills of men to accomplish his own purposes? Well, the fact is he can, and the fact is he has, and the fact is he does. Just ask yourself this question. How does a rebellious sinner, dead in his own trespasses come to Christ? I mean, if his will is bent toward rebellion and we are as Ephesians 2 tells us "children of wrath" by nature -- that's inside us, that's what we're born with, how do children of wrath come to Christ? The only way is for God's will to reign over our wills. I've quoted Ezekiel 36 so many times that by now, I hope many of you have it half memorized. But in it, God says this: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I*

*will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

You know, I quote that all the time but I haven't really unpacked it a great deal. Let me just unpack that a little bit. For one, that scripture can only mean that our old heart -- that's the heart that you and I were born with -- that old heart would not follow his decrees or keep his laws, otherwise what's the point of a heart transplant? And why do you need a heart transplant if your old heart's good enough? You need a transplant when your heart's given out. But you notice, God never says let me ask you if you'd like the new heart. Isn't God a gentleman? Why doesn't he do that? You know why he never asks if we would like a heart transplant? He never asks because it's a ridiculous question. Clearly, our old hearts are not interested in a heart transplant at all because that heart is perfectly content to stay right where it is. The old heart will not follow his decrees or keep his rules because it is a heart of flesh, a heart of stone. God says *for the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, in Romans 8:7, it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* So what we see here is that between God and man, there's this clash of wills, and only one will gets to reign

supreme.

Horatio Bonar addresses of the problem this way. This is what he said. He said, "What arguments can you expect to prevail with a man that refuses the gospel? Admit that there are other arguments, yet the man is set against them all. There is not one argument that can be used which he does not hate. His will resists and rejects every persuasion and motive. How then is his resistance to be overcome, this opposition being made to give way? How is the end of the will to be so altered as to receive that which it rejected? Plainly by this will coming into contact with a superior will, a will that can remove the resistance. A will like the one that said "Let there be light!" And there was light. The will itself must undergo a change before it can choose that which it rejected, and what can change it but the finger of God."

Once again, once you fully grasp that God reigns supreme in man's will, you will be free to present the entire gospel, warts and all. You will also be free of that little voice that says you have to look out for number one because you understand that number one is already looking out for you.

Now, I used to be greatly intimidated by the scorn that most folks have for the gospel. I didn't understand what God meant by 1

Corinthians 1:18 which says: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* I now understand that power. It is the power to change hearts and minds, and yes, even wills without asking anyone's permission.

Is God the perfect gentleman who will never violate man's free will? Well, I want you to judge for yourself. I'd like to give you some examples of God doing just that. For that, I'd like to take you back to the very beginning, to the book of Genesis. There there's an example of God's absolute sovereignty over man's free will. In Genesis 15, God told Abraham what the future of his offspring would be. This is what he said in Genesis 15:13-14. It says: *Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain" -- this is the LORD speaking to Abraham -- "Know for certain that for 400 years your descendents will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions."* That was the promise. What do you know, exactly 400 years later God answers that prayer. But he answered it in a way that many would find shocking. I've said it before and it's been said over and over again, God is a perfect gentleman. We are told that he will never, never violate man's free will, even though there's no scripture whatsoever to back that up, because

that's just what God does. That's just what God did when he provided the Jewish slaves with great possessions as he had promised 400 years earlier. He told Moses in Exodus 3:22 that as they were leaving, they were to quote "plunder the Egyptians," but you know, it wasn't going to be by force, it wasn't going to be by guile, it was going to be by a display of God's sovereign rule over men's wills. God promised to invade the Egyptians' free will and make them do the impossible. They would take the Jews, the very people they detested, the people responsible for the ten plagues, the plagues that destroyed the Egyptian economy, the land itself and killed the first born of every Egyptian, God would take those hated people and have the Egyptians shower them with gold, jewels, and clothing, not because they were compelled to, but because God claims that he would make them want to. God had so altered their wills, they wanted nothing more than to shower these Jews with these gifts.

In Exodus 3:21, God predicts to Moses the following. This is what happens in Exodus 3:21. God says: *"And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave, you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."*

Nine chapters later we get the actual event in Exodus 12:35. It says: *The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.*

You might say, okay, well, maybe the Egyptians did this out of fear. After all, they had seen the power of Israel's God. But remember, they had seen that power through nine other plagues. They had seen it all along. And God specifically said that he would make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people. Well, you see, the Egyptians gave generously because God made them want to give.

This isn't the only case of God working actively, superintending man's will. Jerry Bridges in his book "Trusting God" points out another amazing evidence of God sovereignly working through man's will in Exodus 34:21. There it says this. This is God again speaking. He says, *"Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at year's end. Three*

*times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.*

So what we have here is three times a year God commands a gathering of all the males to appear before the LORD, and this clearly would have left the land painfully exposed to all the enemies that surrounded it. But God has a solution to that problem. Six little words. "*No one shall covet your land.*" Think about that statement. You know, God didn't say I'm going to post angels to guard your land. He didn't say I will miraculously surround your land with water or fire or beasts or insects or anything like that. He said something far more profound. What he said is that he would enter into the wills of those enemies and miraculously prevent them from even wanting to take advantage of Israel.

You see the point? Do you see how this practically applies to us? You see, if God is the mere bystander to human free will, then I will never have the confidence that he truly rules in all things. I will never shut down that little voice inside me that says you better watch out for number one. However, if God is in total control of this universe and all of the people in it and my confidence is in him, I don't have to fight or kick or claw for my

own survival. I just have to trust in his power. You see how freeing this can be? This is the source of Christian liberty. I don't believe there is one random molecule in the entire universe. I also don't believe there is one random thought in any mind anywhere in the universe. God has seen them all, and God superintends them all, the good, the bad, and the ugly.

You know, you think the story that God told us in Genesis about Joseph applies only to Joseph? Remember Joseph's brothers, the ones who threw him into the pit? They were jealous, they were heartless, they were murderous. And yet years later through many, many trials, Joseph finds himself prime minister of Egypt and his brothers find themselves starving. And he reveals to his brothers that he was their long lost brother, that though they had intended great evil to him, God had superintended that evil for good.

Joseph tells his brothers in Genesis 50:20: *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.* Joseph's brothers' intent was strictly evil. God's intent was strictly good. And again, practically for us, what that means is it doesn't matter whether somebody else's motive is good, neutral, or bad, God is still capable of ruling completely. That can only be so for a God who is totally sovereign. The essence of Christian liberty comes from that understanding. That understanding undergirds everything you



do, everyone you meet, every circumstance you find yourself in, because there are no random circumstances in God's universe.

As I said last time, our God is the source, the subtext, and the solution to everyone of those circumstances. You see, if God and not coincidence is the source of all of my relationships, if his glory is the subtext that sovereignly undergirds all that's taking place in those relationships, then his grace has got to be the solution to how we successfully navigate those relationships.

And all this comes back to the question of why are we here? Why are we here, and what is our mandate? We are here to glorify God, and our mandate is to love God and love others, especially those we don't feel like loving. Frankly, none of us has the power to love God as we should or our neighbors as ourselves. We are all slaves to our own fallenness.

And so the question is is God the solution or is it me? You see, if you can't, don't, or won't love those who naturally inspire anything but love, you've got to ask yourself if the Spirit of God really is dwelling within you. 1 John 4:12 says: *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

So the question we need to ask is do you seek the grace to work out your relationships with your spouse, your friends, your relatives, your brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that his glory is all that matters? That's where the rubber meets the road. You see, we don't need to travel back to Montana in 1863 to have lives of substance and meaning. And the challenge of loving God and each other and our neighbor as ourselves is as great today as it was 5,000 years ago, because that's where God's glory lies, and that's why we're here.

God has warned us repeatedly of the dangers of an abundance of houses and cisterns and vineyards and olive trees that he's prospered us with. He says: *Take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

We can pursue the kingdom of God just like the saints of old did, provided we trust like they did. They understood Proverbs 21:1 which says: *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he wills.* Whether it's gifts given suddenly by heart warmed Egyptians, or land protected by suddenly disinterested marauders, or kidnapped slaves winding up as prime ministers, God wants us to understand one thing. The key to our ability to love recklessly is knowing the author of love itself has

got your back.

As Jerry Bridges puts it in "Trusting God," he says this: *"Our duty is found in the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. Our trust must be in the sovereign will of God, as he works in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives for our good and his glory."* Let's pray.

Prayer: Father God, I do thank you for the incredible practical value of trusting that you are sovereign over every single molecule in this universe, that you are sovereign over every single thought that takes place, every single motive, good, bad or evil, you are sovereign over. Our task is not to manipulate, our task is not to look out for number one. Our task is to trust that you do that, that you care for us more than we could ever care for ourselves, that you are guiding sovereignly our lives, shaping and molding us into the image of your Son. Give us that grace, give us that Christian liberty. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.