

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

STUDY ONE

A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30

This is a warning—a warning about living your life and missing one of the great treasures God has preserved for you. You might even be missing it repeatedly, year after year. What treasure am I referring to? The providence of God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

How quickly does a year breeze past! Each January, some look back at the past year with heads held high as they check off all their accomplished goals. Others, however, might throw away that old calendar feeling a sense of disappointment or even regret. The year came and went, and all the checkboxes alongside those plans and ambitions remain empty.

Many know well the feelings of irritation, frustration, worry, and discouragement as they stand on the edge of a new year. The dissatisfaction seems unavoidable. In fact, even achieved resolutions often fail to eradicate these feelings. Something greater is required, something divine.

We can only cast out the darkness of our difficulties, failures, and worries by truly acknowledging and embracing the goodness of God's guiding hand in our lives. As you prepare to enter this new year, do not miss the shining treasure that has the power to brighten even the darkest nights . . . the providence of God.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30



PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). Scripture acts as the light that will guide us as we seek to sharpen our perspective about God this year. Offer this prayer as you open God’s Word.

Father, thank You for making Yourself known to me through Your Word. I ask that You would reveal yourself to me more as I study Your Word today and throughout this year. Help me to know You and to serve You well. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

“No one is righteous—not even one” (Romans 3:10). Paul penned these pointed words to conclude the opening section of his letter to the Christians in Rome. He wanted his readers to understand the depth of their sin. Only then would they understand that God owed them no blessing—that they could not earn the gift of salvation by their own grit and determination.

Paul didn’t stop with the bad news, though. Truly, sinners cannot save themselves, but there is someone who can. Read [Romans 3:21–22](#), and summarize Paul’s explanation of the basis of salvation.

In light of this world-changing truth, Paul dedicated the remainder of his letter to answering the question, “So what?” How does someone who knows Christ look different from someone who doesn’t? Let’s turn to Romans 8:28–30 to find out!



A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30



Observation: God's Good Plan for His People

When Pastor Chuck Swindoll studies the Scriptures, he always starts with the same question: “What does this passage say?”¹ Observing a passage often feels like slow, monotonous work, but it sets the foundation for correct interpretation and practical application. And careful observation is *especially* important when studying familiar passages.

Read [Romans 8:28–30](#) a few times using several different Bible translations to get a feel of what Paul was saying. Write below any words or phrases that stand out to you.

According to [8:28](#) who benefits from the providential outworking of God's plan? Paul talked about *one* group of people, but he used *two* different descriptions. List them below. (Hint: Look for the word *who*.)

1. _____
2. _____

Terms like *predestination* or *foreknowledge* sometimes become entangled with complicated ideas that don't always find their basis in Scripture. Don't feel intimidated, though! This study's passage focuses more on the *why?* and less on the *how?* of predestination. According to [8:29](#), for what reason did God predestine, or choose, His people?



A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30

You'll become more like Jesus than you have ever been before if you heed this warning and if you claim this treasure and live it out. This change begins in the mind, moves to the heart, and becomes a part of the driving force of your life. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

List in order the verbs in [Romans 8:30](#).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Who is the one who has ultimate responsibility for the actions Paul discusses in this passage?

God works together *all* things for the good of those who love Him. He's not in control of *some* things. He controls everything. What a comfort it is to know that our God is not surprised by anything that occurs in our lives!



Interpretation: God's Providence

Romans 8:28–30 sits atop many peoples' list of favorite passages—and rightly so! When reading these beloved verses, it is easy to skim over the words without stopping to ask, “What does this passage *mean*?” Wrestling with this question guides us to sound interpretation.



A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30

What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters? Look at *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org to guide your answer. How should seeing Jesus as our firstborn brother affect the way we see our own standing before God?

Using a Bible dictionary, look up the terms *justification* and *glorification*. When do each of these events occur in the life of a follower of Jesus? What does *Romans 8:30* reveal about the *scope* of God's saving work in an individual? Summarize your findings below.

What does this passage reveal about the character of God? What attributes does Paul highlight most clearly? Why is this passage so important for shaping our perspective about God's work in our lives?



A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30

God's providence is His care and preparation before we live our lives. All planned, all arranged, all put together so that we see His hand in every detail of our lives. Every one. The good, the bad, even the indifferent. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Providence. What a complex yet beautiful idea. While this passage does teach about the role of providence in our lives, examining an image of this attribute provides a fuller understanding of God's character.



Correlation: Clay in the Potter's Hands

In a time when the Israelites feared conquest by foreign nations, the people questioned God's plan. The prophet Jeremiah arrived to address these concerns and to reassure the Israelites of God's providence by using the image of a *potter*.

Read [Jeremiah 18:1–6](#). To whom does Jeremiah compare the potter? What does the clay represent? What can the potter do with the clay?

What does this imagery of the potter and the clay reveal about God's providence and His plan for His people?

We are the clay in the potter's good hands, and He carefully shapes us into the image of His Son. Understanding the role of God's providence in our lives today can greatly aide us on our journey toward Christlikeness.



A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30



Application: Trusting in God's Providence Today

As you consider application, look at the passage one more time. In Greek, Romans 8:28–29 reads as one long sentence in which Paul identifies two truths “we know.” Both truths provide us with a better understanding of God’s providence. *We know that . . .*

1. God works everything together for the good of those who love Him and are called by Him.
2. God knew His people in advance.

What behaviors or beliefs might be hindering you from embracing these two truths about God’s providence? Is it too much focus on the immediate, or a limited perspective, or something else? Record your thoughts below.

To go further, our world events, our personal lives are not ruled by chance or fate or luck or coincidence. All of God’s acts are filled with His wisdom. The arrangement He has put together for each one of us is perfectly designed to shape us, ultimately, into the image of His Son. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Think back on the past year of your life. Did you face any particularly difficult moments or events? How do you sense God, in His providence, working through these events for your good and your growth? How can embracing God’s providence over your life help you in the year ahead?



A Treasure You Must Not Miss

Romans 8:28–30

As you step into a New Year, do not miss the treasure of God's providence. Unexpected happiness may come, and when it does, give the glory to God for His goodness. You also might face some hardship. Remember that God wants to use these trials to bring you closer to Himself and to form you into the likeness of Jesus. God is good, and He is near.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your providence. Thank You for watching over every detail of my life and working everything together for my good and for Your glory. I ask You to remind me of Your providence throughout this new year so that I might see You working in my life even when it feels like You aren't. I pray these things in Jesus' providential name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

STUDY TWO

A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36

God's sovereignty is something that holds you close, gives you rest and peace, and takes away your worries. You don't lie awake at night restless and turning and struggling and twisting over the details of life that you can't put together. He's putting life together, and your need is to fit into what He is doing and how He is putting it together.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF you listen carefully, you can hear a siren calling in the distance. Her alluring enticements tickle the ear, impelling many men and women to set sail toward her island of temptation every day. Her subtle promise seems harmless. But it's a false promise, for her island is surrounded by impassable rocks hidden beneath the water's surface, making her reward unobtainable.

The siren's name? *Control*.

Imagine earning this prize of *total* control. Control over your finances. Control to make others see things from your perspective. Control to dictate the future. Control to erase those dark memories.

As enticing as these thoughts may seem, the reality is that having total control is nothing more than an illusion. No human being *ever* has had *total* control over anything. That's because God is in control. That's because God is *sovereign*. Yet many still resolve to chase the siren's call and run farther from the truth.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will focus on a truth you dare not dismiss: the ever-important reality of God's sovereignty. This truth always sings louder and more beautifully than the tempting call to take total control.



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A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to take a voyage through the waters of God's Word today, offer this prayer to Him to help you navigate your study:

Heavenly Father, I thank You that You are in control and that I am not. I ask that, through my study of Your Word today, You would show me how trusting in Your sovereign plan is always better than grasping for control. I pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Often, the apostle Paul would divide his letters into two parts. The first part would concentrate on theology. In other words, he would start by focusing on *orthodoxy*—right belief. Then, he would use that theology as the foundation for practical commands or *orthopraxy*—right living.

Paul's letter to the Romans follows this same outline: chapters 1–11 discuss right belief, and chapters 12–16 look to right living. In the theological part of the letter, Paul emphasizes God's work of salvation through Christ—taking desperately sinful people and declaring them righteous by faith so that they might live new, Spirit-empowered lives for God's glory.

Romans 11:33–36 acts as a conclusion of this masterful theological treatise. These verses form a *doxology*—words of glory—praising God for the sovereign outworking of His good plan.



Observation: A Doxology of Praise

Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method follows four steps: observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ When reading the Bible, it may feel tempting to jump straight to application, but without good observations, our applications won't have roots in biblical truth. Read [Romans 11:33–36](#), and focus only on what the passage says.

According to [Romans 11:33](#), what three “deep” qualities does God possess?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36

According to [Romans 11:33](#), what kind of language does Paul use to describe human attempts to understand how God works?

In [11:34–35](#), Paul asks three rhetorical questions—a literary tool he uses to make his main point clearer. In your own words, summarize the three questions Paul asks.

In [11:36](#), Paul uses three prepositional phrases to describe the relationship between God and all things. List these three prepositional phrases below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36

According to the concluding sentence of this song of praise, what is the only appropriate response to these truths about God?

What a beautiful hymn of praise to God! It may not be apparent, but this song by Paul is filled with theological significance. It contains timeless truths that have guided followers of Jesus Christ through the ages.



Interpretation: God's Sovereignty

Romans 11:33–36 is a doxology about God's sovereignty. According to *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, sovereignty is "a term by which is expressed the supreme rulership of God. This is held to be not an attribute of God but a prerogative based on the perfections of divine being."²

In what ways does Paul reveal God's sovereignty through this passage?

Sovereignty means our all-wise, all-knowing God reigns over us in realms beyond our comprehension to bring about His plans that are beyond our ability to start, to alter, to hinder, to fully understand, or to stop. Let me amplify that. God's plan includes all gains and losses, adversity, tragedy, and calamity as well as prosperity, blessings, and joy.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36

As you likely noticed, Paul didn't state his answers to his three questions in [Romans 11:34–35](#). And that's the point! Authors don't provide answers to rhetorical questions because the answer is so obvious it doesn't need stating. But it helps us in our Bible study to provide clear answers in our own minds. So what is the unstated answer to each of these questions?

Paul didn't formulate these questions by his own wit or wisdom. Rather, the first two come from [Isaiah 40:13](#) and the third from [Job 41:11](#)—one of the earliest books of Scripture. The truth of God's supreme sovereignty is not a new one. It has stood as the central pillar of His character and plan from the very beginning, and it will guide human history until Jesus returns in the end.

A wooden translation of the Greek of Romans 11:36 reads, "From Him and through Him and for Him are all things." What did Paul mean by this? Reading this verse in a [few different Bible translations](#) can help you see how the translators interpreted these prepositions.

Before discussing what it looks like to live in the light of God's sovereignty today, let's look back through the telescope of time to see an example of one individual whom God confronted with His sovereignty in a powerful, life-changing way.



A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36



Correlation: Nebuchadnezzar's Past Experience of God's Sovereignty

Nebuchadnezzar reigned as king of Babylon—one of the most formidable and wicked empires the world had ever seen. This powerful king often had bizarre and vivid dreams, which none of his most trusted magicians, counselors, or government officials could interpret . . . well, except for a Jewish exile named Daniel.

One night, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a great tree whose branches touched the sky. It's lush leaves and abundant fruit gave many animals a home. Suddenly, an angel appeared and commanded the king to chop down the tree, scatter the fruit, and disperse the animals.

Daniel 4:24–27 records Daniel's interpretation of this strange dream. According to Daniel, what did the following images represent?

Tree: _____

Animal: _____

What warning did Daniel offer to Nebuchadnezzar in *4:27*?

According to *4:28–33*, did Nebuchadnezzar heed or disregard Daniel's warning? What happened as a result of his choice?



A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36

In *Daniel 4:34–37*, Nebuchadnezzar shared his personal reflections on these events. How did his perspective change? What did he learn about God's sovereignty?

There's a difference in learning and acknowledging. When you acknowledge something, you accept it. In fact, you embrace it. Turn to the God of heaven. Learn from this warning. You have an opportunity to acknowledge that it is God who is sovereign, not you.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Our Present Experience of God's Sovereignty

Amid personal reflection on his own life, Pastor Chuck reveals four ways embracing the sovereignty of God has changed him:

1. *The sovereignty of God has relieved me from anxiety and worry.*
2. *The sovereignty of God has released me from explaining why.*
3. *The sovereignty of God has restrained me from arrogance.*
4. *The sovereignty of God has reminded me that He's always in charge.*

Which of these four statements most closely resonates with your circumstances today? How can embracing God's sovereignty free you from the burdens of your current struggles?



A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

Romans 11:33–36

As much as when life is filled with delight and pleasure—which we don't deserve—His inscrutable sovereignty has dominion over all hardships, heartaches, helplessness, broken dreams, disappointments, disabilities, and lingering painful difficulties.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Are you struggling to give up control to God today? Is there something you're grasping hold of with all your strength? What would it look like for you to set free this thing, person, desire, or feeling and trust that what God has given you through His Son is better? Write your reflections below.

God is in control. We are not. Don't miss it! If we sinful humans had complete control, the consequences would be unimaginably disastrous. Thankfully, our sovereign God is good and wise and not a petty tyrant. We may not understand His plan, but we can trust that everything is working out just as He intends—for our good!



A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study today, reread [Romans 11:33–36](#) aloud to God. Remember, Paul wrote these words as a doxology of praise. Use these words to guide you in prayer and thanking God for both His sovereignty and His goodness.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev. and ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1214.



GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

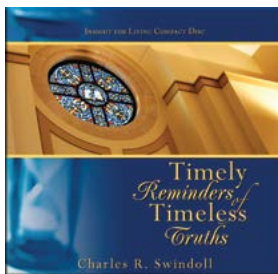
STUDY

A Truth You Dare Not Dismiss

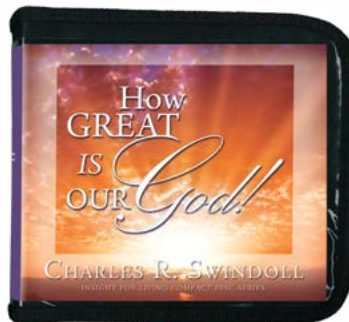
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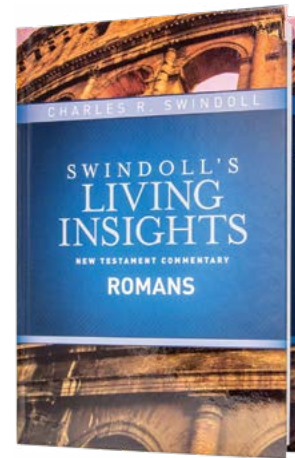
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