**Guidance Core Seminar Week 2**

**I. Introduction**

Good morning! Welcome to the Guidance class. We’re in our second week of thinking through how the Bible tells us to make decisions. As we talked about last week, our goal is to not be anxious decision-makers, but restful. Resting in God’s good plans for us and his promises to carry out those plans. A big piece of becoming a restful decision maker is understanding God’s sovereignty over our circumstances and our decisions—and how our responsibility fits into that. So that’s what we’ll be looking at today. But before we get any further, I want to open up with a question.

*If God were not sovereign, how would that change the way that Christians make decisions?*

My prayer is that by the end of this class, you’ll see how glorious the truth of God’s sovereignty is, how it is the bedrock of our trust, and how it gives us peace in decision-making. We can’t even begin to make a decision in a Biblical way without understanding how it fits with God’s sovereignty. We’ll start off by thinking through what that means, that God is sovereign. We’ll consider what goal he is using all his sovereign power to accomplish. We’ll think through how that fits with our responsibility. And finally we’ll finish with some practical implications of all of this for our decision making.

So first:

**II. God is Sovereign**

What I mean by that is the biblical teaching that all things are under *God's* rule and control, and that nothing happens without His direction or permission. God works not just some things but all things according to the counsel of His own will. Let’s step through a few of these:

**First, God is sovereign over our circumstances**. One of the most well-known verses in all of Scripture regards God’s sovereignty over our circumstances, and comes in Genesis 50:20 which says,  *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”*

The circumstance in question is Joseph’s being sold into slavery by his brothers. Was God in control of that? Absolutely—and though it was evil, he meant it for good. Through Joseph’s time in Egypt, God saved thousands from starvation, including the chosen family of Israel from whom the Messiah would come. Every circumstance, even hard ones, are within the control of a sovereign God.

**Second, God is sovereign over our past** **and our future.** Isaiah 46:10 says, *“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please”*

No random string of events here. Everything that’s happened in your life has been within God’s control, and everything that’s yet to come.

**Third, God is sovereign over our decisions**. Psalm 33:10-11 says, “*The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.”*

No matter what we decide, the outcome is entirely in his hand.

**Fourth, and finally, God is sovereign even over our hearts**. Proverbs 21:1 says, *“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”*

There’s an implicit argument in this verse. From the greater to the lesser. If God’s sovereign over the hearts of kings, how much more is he sovereign over *our* hearts!

We don’t live in a haphazard universe that came into being by chance, or progresses by chance. No, we live in an ordered universe that was created by God and is actively governed by God. Now, at first that might seem terrifying. It feels quite powerless to consider someone so powerful. Until we remember his good purposes. He uses all of his power for good. Which leaves us not terrified but with comfort, peace, and rest. And that rest has a direct impact on how we make decisions.

But what exactly is the good he’s using his sovereignty to accomplish? That’s our next point:

**II. God’s Goal of Glorifying Himself**

To put it simply, God’s overarching goal behind all he does is to show off how amazing he is. To glorify himself. Like a master painter whose canvas is the whole universe, God is sovereignly governing every single event, down to the most minute detail to bring Himself glory.

He made people to show off his glory. Think of Isaiah 43:7, “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” And with our sovereign God behind it, that is history’s going to end up. Think of the words of the prophet Habakkuk: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

You see this all through Scripture. Why did God rescue his people from the mighty nation of Egypt? As God tells Pharaoh, “for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (Ex. 9:16). Why rescue his people from the hand of Babylon after the exile? Ezekiel 36:22, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.” Why did God send Jesus to earth? John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” And why did Jesus go to the cross to save us from our sins? Ephesians 1:11, “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works out all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”

Unpacking that last verse for a moment: we were *predestined* for God. He works out *all* things according to the counsel of his will. Why? “To the praise of his glory.”

And why is Jesus coming back? 2 Thes. 1:10, “to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.”

What’s God about? Himself. Who is God for? Himself. What undergirds all that he does? The praise of Himself.

But doesn’t that strike you as odd, maybe even offensive? We’re sitting here, trying to figure out how to make decisions in the context of a God who works out all things to praise himself. Are we really OK with that? Is he really that vain and insecure?

Here’s how Oprah Winfrey describes her walk away from traditional Christianity. She was describing being in a church service where the preacher was talking about the attributes of God, his omnipotence and omnipresence.

Then he said, “The Lord thy God is a jealous God,” I was caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said, “jealous.” And something struck me. I was 27 or 28, and I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is . . . also jealous? A jealous God is jealous of me? And something about that didn’t feel right in my spirit because I believe that God is love, and that God is in all things.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Why would we want to serve a God who is all about Himself? Because what better thing could he be about?

Here’s how C.S. Lewis put it: “My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can’t help doing, about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation[[2]](#footnote-2).”

Or listen to John Piper put this truth into the mouth of Jesus, reflecting on Jesus’ prayer in John 17 that we see his glory:

If you find your ultimate joy in your most cherished earthly treasure, you will be disappointed in the end, and I will be dishonored. Because I am offering myself to you as the all-satisfying beauty and greatness and wisdom and strength and love of the universe. I am what you were made for. And I am telling you that, if you see this—if you see me as your supreme Treasure—then you don’t have to choose between your satisfaction and my glorification, because in the very act of your being most satisfied in me, I will be most glorified in you[[3]](#footnote-3).

God is working everything out for the praise of his glory—and that is exactly as it should be. He is the most excellent, the most glorious, the most beautiful being in or beyond the universe. His greatest delight, and ours, is for him to welcome us into the wonder of who he is. There is no cost so high that it is not worth exchanging for the wonder of the knowledge of God.

So in every decision you make, you need to understand that it is being made inside a universe that is absolutely under the control of a sovereign God. That his sovereign power is at work to accomplish one great aim: to showcase the excellence of his glory. And that he *will* accomplish that aim.

**How does God’s great aim of showing off his glory affect our decision-making?**

**III. Man’s Responsibility**

OK. That all seems biblical and good. But how exactly do these truths square with a class on decision-making? If God’s gonna do what God’s gonna do—and what’s more, if what he’s gonna do is the most perfect thing imaginably—the praise of his glory—why stress out about our decisions?

Well, because the Bible makes it clear that we’re responsible for our actions. Just to give one example of many, consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 12:36-37. “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

We are responsible for what the decisions we make, even the decision of what words to use—even of the words we use carelessly.

And our responsibility is to aim our lives at the one aim that God has. 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

The Bible never fully explains how our responsibility coexists with God’s sovereignty. It makes sense that some aspects of life with an infinite God just don’t fit into our finite brains. But the Bible makes the case for both of these very forcefully. God is sovereign over everything. We are responsible for the decisions we make. And the goal of both our work and his is to show off his glory.

**Any questions?**

That’s a good summary of how Scripture speaks to God’s sovereignty. But what implications does this make for how we make decisions? For the rest of today’s class, I’d like to zero in on three specific applications of that truth.

**IV. Motivated by Faithfulness**

First: our motivation in making decisions is to be responsible. It is to be faithful as stewards of what God has given us. This point is so important, and so counterintuitive, that we’ll spend a whole class on it in a few weeks. But just a few words on it here.

The world around us makes decisions with the goal of securing specific results. You get in the car *so that* you can get to the grocery story. You exercise *so that* you can be healthy. You marry Jane *so that* you can have a happy marriage. Seems pretty uncontroversial, right?

Actually, not so much. Does God need you to go to the grocery store to feed you? Does he need you to exercise to keep your health? Does he need you to be married for you to be happy? Does he need any of this in order to accomplish his plans for glory? No.

Psalm 50:12, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.”

It’s just plane silly in a universe to make a decision in order to accomplish something. If God needs that done, he’ll do it! Did he ask for anyone’s help to create the world? To destroy the Egyptian army? To raise Christ from the dead? To make Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle?

Now, I recognize that God’s *normal* way to feed me is my trip to the grocery store. His *normal* means of keeping me healthy is my exercise. But as a Christian, I make those decisions not in order to secure the results—as if anything is really within my control in this world—but to be responsible with the time, money, and relationships God’s given me. I’d even go so far as to suggest that if you find yourself constantly frustrated and unhappy with the circumstances of your life, it’s probably in part because you’ve forgotten that your value isn’t found in the results you again (or don’t attain). It’s in how your faithfulness in the decisions you make shows of the glory of God. In other words, your work is valuable mainly because of how it shows off his work (in you).

A person motivated by results will live in constant frustration because if value is found through what they’re able to produce, or achieve, or get done, then they will always have to produce, achieve, and get things done to feel joy. But, a person motivated instead by faithfulness will understand that regardless of the situation they find themselves in, whether they’re at the bottom of the corporate ladder or at the top, whether they’re single, married, or widowed, whether they’re empty-nesters or just starting a family, a person motivated by faithfulness doesn’t find their joy in their circumstances. Instead, they use their circumstances as a means to display their joy in Christ.

But again, more on this in a few weeks. A huge implication of God’s sovereignty for our decision-making.

**V. Motivated by Meaning**

The second way these truths should affect how we live today is that we should be motivated by the meaning that God gives to everything. Everything in our created order has great meaning and value and purpose because it’s been ordained. It’s been appointed, by a sovereign Creator who never does anything in vain.

We should be people who understand and embrace that everything, from saving a life to stubbing a toe, has meaning.

God’s sovereignty gives meaning to our decisions in two ways:

1. Meaning for what we do. God allows nothing to happen that does not contribute to his grand narrative of meaning. That is, the story this universe is telling about his excellence and glory. Everything that happens, happens for a purpose because our universe is governed by a sovereign God. And, praise God, because he is good, the purpose behind everything is also good.
2. Meaning for how we do what we do. Life is full of disappointments. As Moses wrote (most likely at the end of his long life), “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10).

If you get to the end of your life and all you see around you is failure and wreckage, has it been a waste? I’m sure that’s what Moses probably thought at the end of his long life with the people grumbling and wandering in the wilderness. “I’ve raised my kids, but they’ve made a mess of their lives. I poured myself into my company, and it went under. I lived for my marriage, and now my spouse is dead. Are memories really all I have?”

In a universe governed by a sovereign God, the answer is a resounding “No!” God is accomplishing his purposes not simply by the results of what you do, but by what your work says about him. Were you faithful in raising those kids? Faithful in your job? Did your marriage showcase the beauty of the gospel? Then your life has been a giant billboard advertising the faithfulness of our faithful God. Not matter what you have left in your hands at the end of your life, your life can have been rich with meaning if it has contributed to God’s aim for the universe: the proclamation of his glory.

So let’s think this through in a bit more detail. How does God’s sovereignty give meaning?

**First, God gives meaning to the mundane**.

According to Scripture, the truth that God is sovereign over the smallest of details of life is inescapable, and frankly, I wouldn’t want to escape his sovereignty! Matthew 10:29-31 says, “***29*** *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.* ***30*** *And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* ***31*** *So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

So let’s make this real…

* Did you drive around for 16 minutes before you found a parking spot this morning? God is sovereign over that.
* Maybe you didn’t drive, maybe you walked to church. Did you trip on any of the uneven sidewalks? God is sovereign over that.
* Is your washer or dryer broken? God is sovereign over that.

Nothing is too small not to have purpose. Nothing happens by chance in this life. As Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Even the mundane is working for his purposes.

**Second, God gives meaning to all of our relationships.**

Acts 17:26-27 says, *“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”*

I want this verse to leave us in awe of the awesomeness of God. Think about this. Consider how many people are in this class right now [Count out loud], all of us born at different times, to different families, in different states and countries, and in all of the various events that have happened to all of us throughout our entire lives, all of our stubbed toes, and missed appointments, and job transfers, all of it has brought each of us here together today. Consider the number of events added together in all of our lives that would have to conspire to bring us together today! It’s IMMENSE!

So what does this have to do with relationships? Well, why do you have the neighbors you have? Why are sitting next to the person you’re sitting next to? Why do you have the co-workers you currently have? Why will you all run into seemingly random people throughout the week? Because God has placed us all in each others lives, whether we’re talking about close friends or encounters with strangers. And He’s put us where He has so that we would all seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he’s not far from any of us.

Consider how that should affect the conversation you have with your driver next time you get an Uber or take a taxi. Consider what that means for how you interact with your neighbors and your coworkers. There is no such thing as a chance encounter. Every single relationship, every single person you run into, all of them have been sovereignly placed in your life by God.

**Third, God gives meaning to our work.**

It’s in the realm of work that the image of God in man reflects most clearly God as creator. In Genesis 1 God *creates* the universe, and then proceeds to take the land that was ‘formless and void’ and *shaped* it into a land that was habitable for man to live. And then he *created* man to inhabit the land, and *work* the land. Work is basic to our function as humans. Greg Gilbert, in *The Gospel at Work*, says this, “In one way or another, your job somehow involves the work of bringing beauty out of ugliness, order out of chaos. Perhaps unassembled pieces are pulled together to make a widget used to create a product that people use. Or natural products are identified, isolated, and harvested to create something new. Sickness is treated; injustice is rectified; broken windows are repaired; cracked sidewalks are fixed” (63).

Not only do we find meaning in the reflection of God’s image in the creative aspect of our work, but we also find meaning in the way God uses our jobs to sharpen us and make us more like Christ. Think of God’s sovereignty in bringing Jacob to work for Laban, who took advantage of Jacob for 14 years! Yet it wasn’t without its purposes. Not only was God sovereignly orchestrating the lineage that Jesus would come from, but He was also sharpening Jacob in the process.

As Paul reminds the Ephesians, whether our work is difficult or enjoyable, it is all to be done unto God. God’s our boss. And whatever workplace we’re in—at home, mickey-ds, or the executive mansion—is used by God to shape us and change us more and more into the image of Christ.

So praise God that we serve a sovereign God! As the author of Ecclesiastes seems to cry out at the end of his book, “Meaningful! Meaningful! All is meaningful because all is ordered by an eternal, sovereign, and purposeful God.”

**VI. Conclusion: Restful Decision-Making**

Let me conclude with one final implication of God’s sovereignty in decision-making. We can be at peace as we make our decisions. Jesus was very clear in the Sermon on the Mount: “do not be anxious about your life” (Matt 6:25). But decisions can be some of the most anxiety-provoking aspects of life—especially for the young. So how can we not be anxious in making decisions? By remembering that God is in control. Listen to Isaiah 46:9-10, “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

Do you think that your decision can thwart his sovereign, good purpose? Do you really think you have the power to mess up your life if God has ordained it for good?

Psalm 84:11 says that God will not withhold good from those who walk uprightly. Do you hear that? God will not withhold good from you. We may struggle to see the things in our lives as good, but I’m confident that if we could see from God’s perspective, and knew what He was doing in our lives amidst our present circumstances, that we wouldn’t change a thing.

We care about the decisions we make *not* because we think that a bad decision will somehow remove us from God’s good will or thwart his purposes, but because we want to be responsible. We want to be responsible because that’s what it looks like to be a faithful steward, and faithfulness brings glory to him. So when you have a hard decision to make, do your best to make it well, in a way that pleases God. Then sit back and relax in the unwavering, unstoppable, uncompromising power of your good and sovereign God to work out all things according to the counsel of his will. That is restful decision-making.

**Any last questions?**

1. http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/is-jesus-an-egomaniac [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958, 93–95] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/is-jesus-an-egomaniac [↑](#footnote-ref-3)