

# In Pursuit of Knowing God

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*The Supremacy of God*



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# Unit 1



## The Sovereignty of God

*Limitless Power, Perfect Knowledge, Absolute Authority*

### TRUTH

#### by memory (option a) – 1 Timothy 6:15b-16 (ESV)

*"...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,<sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."*

#### by memory (option b) – Job 42:2 (ESV)

*"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."*

#### in Bible –

This section of *The Journey* will equip you with some basic biblical theology regarding the nature of God. Unfortunately, the word *theology* often elicits a yawn from Christians because they think of it as a boring, impractical intellectual exercise. Not so! Studying theology will help to mature and equip you, making a significant contribution to your spiritual progress. It is neither boring, nor impractical. True, your mind will be exercised as you wrestle with difficult questions about who God is and what He does. But your soul will benefit from this exercise as you begin to see your expanding biblical understanding worked out in a practical, everyday life of faith.

In this unit you will explore one of God's essential attributes – His sovereignty – by comparing several passages from the Old and New Testaments. Sovereignty is the word Christians use to describe God's supreme and undisputed authority. You may find it beneficial to focus on these passages during your personal worship this week. If you use a different Bible reading plan for your personal worship, be sure not to neglect the "S" of **PRAISE** – to summarize specific applications of the Bible passages for your life.

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**Psalm 29** – This psalm of David is a call to worship the Lord who reigns in power, majesty and authority. It was most likely inspired when he observed a powerful thunderstorm. Notice how David uses the repeated phrase, *"The voice of the LORD..."*.

What does David mean by the phrase, *"Ascribe to the LORD..."*?

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David thought of a storm's thunder and lightning as poetic illustrations of God's power and authority. What inspires your awe of God's power? What adjectives or illustrations come to your mind?

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Interestingly, David doesn't conclude this psalm with a call to fear God's power, but rather with a prayer of reliance on God's power (v 11). What do you think David wanted to inspire in those who heard him sing this psalm?

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**Psalm 115:1-13** – This psalm contrasts God's power with the powerless idols which other nations worshipped. Like Psalm 29, this psalm inspires hope, trust and confidence in the power of God.

Verse 3 is a key verse in this psalm. What does verse 3 teach about God's power and authority?

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The psalmist called Israel to trust and hope in the Lord, *"...their help and their shield"*. Does this psalm help you trust that God can and will help you in your need? Why or why not?

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**Isaiah 40:27-31** – This well-known passage describes the power and knowledge of God as a resource that His people can personally benefit from, if they will "*wait for the LORD*". It is a response to the despairing belief that our need is hidden, unknown by God.

What does this passage teach about God's knowledge, even His knowledge of your personal need?

[Hint: compare this passage with Matthew 6:8.]

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What does "*wait for the LORD*" mean? Is your spiritual journey marked by a habit of waiting for God?

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**Isaiah 46:9-11** – This passage gives us insight into the extent of God's authority and knowledge.

What is the extent of God's authority and purpose? [Hint: compare to Job 42:2.]

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What is the extent of God's knowledge? How does God know what He knows?

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**1 Timothy 6:15b-16** – Paul's closing words in this letter to Timothy are a doxology of praise to God.

Several phrases in this doxology describe the authority of God. Put these phrases in your own words.

What is Paul saying about the authority of God?

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## to summarize –

Question: How is God’s power and knowledge *not* like Superman’s? Answer: Superman’s power and knowledge are finite and can be challenged; God’s is not and cannot.

Nothing could be more intrinsic to our basic concept of God than that He is powerful and vastly intelligent. As a child, your earliest ideas about who God is probably included the notions that He was big and strong, and knew more than any adult. As you grew and your concept of God developed, these ideas were refined and you began to grasp the meaning of words like “almighty”, “all-powerful” and “all-knowing”. You may even have been introduced to the technical terms “omnipotent” and “omniscient”. As you began studying this material, you probably had both an intellectual and spiritual commitment to a belief that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and controls all things. You may even have added the word “sovereign” to your God-vocabulary. But, how well did you understand the implications of the statement, “God is sovereign”? The goal of this unit is to help you dig a little deeper in your understanding of the sovereign exercise of God’s power and knowledge.

First of all, let’s establish a good definition of sovereignty. Sovereignty has to do with control and authority. The dictionary definition describes sovereign authority as superlative, exalted, supreme, undisputed, unlimited, absolute and autonomous. When speaking of God, sovereignty describes the absolute authority with which He exercises His power and knowledge over creation. To say that God is sovereign means that God is the supreme, absolute ruler of the universe. He is completely free from external control, and His rule cannot be challenged. He exercises His power and knowledge so that all that He wills is accomplished. He is *“...the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords...”* (1 Timothy 6:15b).

As you’ve noticed, God’s sovereignty is closely related to His power and knowledge. He is sovereign because He is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing). Let’s explore these concepts.

Our omnipotent God is frequently addressed as “The Almighty” throughout Scripture. To address Him as such means that He is all-powerful. What does this mean? You might think it means that God is the most powerful being among many who have power, but that would be inaccurate. To say that God is almighty, or all-powerful, means that He *has* all power. He is the source of all power that exists. All other powers, natural and supernatural, are derived from His. Therefore, there are no competing powers. No one comes in second place to God. Galaxies, angels, even Satan, have only the limited power that is granted to them. God’s power is infinite; it is not diminished bit by bit because of the power He grants to His creatures. Therefore Jeremiah could say, *“Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.”* (Jeremiah 32:17).

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Our omniscient God knows all that was, is, will be and *could* be. He knows the actual and the possible all in one simple act of knowing. That is to say that God always knows, but never learns. He has always had perfect knowledge (Job 37:16), that is beyond the realm of human comprehension (Isaiah 40:28). He also exercises perfect wisdom by always using His knowledge to bring about the best goals by the best means. But how can God really know *everything* that could be possibly known. There are two answers to this question. One has to do with the fact that God is eternal. God knows the future because He stands outside of the limits of time. The past, present and future are all the same to Him. The second answer has to do with God's purposes. God knows the actual and the possible because He declares, He determines, all that is. Nothing is or comes to be of itself. He says, *"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.'"* (Isaiah 46:9b-10).

Let's put two and two together now. Now that you understand what it means for God to have all power and all knowledge, can you see what it means for God to be the sovereign Lord and King? He uses His limitless power and perfect knowledge to exercise absolute authority over all He has made in the physical and spiritual spheres. His will cannot be successfully opposed; His purposes always stand. Job said, *"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* (Job 42:2). Therefore, it can be said that God is the most joyful being in the universe because He does all He wishes to do. *"Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases."* (Psalm 115:3).

The Bible's teaching about God's Sovereignty raises challenging questions about the existence of evil in the world. If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, why does He allow evil to exist? Unfortunately, this question can't be adequately addressed in this unit. But, suffice it to say that God has power and knowledge to control all things so that, ultimately, they only serve His good purposes.

The wind, thunder and lightning, were enough to convince David of God's sovereignty. In song he called upon Israel to *"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name..."* (Psalm 29:2a). He wanted Israel to recognize God's sovereign power with worshipful awe. He declared, *"The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever."* (Psalm 29:10). But he also wanted to inspire trust and confidence in the God who gives strength to His people). Isaiah echoed this theme adding that God knows the needs of his people and sustains them with His power, *"...they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength"* (Isaiah 40:31). Therefore, in response to God's sovereignty, worship Him with awe and wait in trusting dependence upon Him to meet your needs.

# EQUIPPING

In your own words, describe how God's sovereignty, power and knowledge are related.

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Look back to the **in Bible** questions and review your answer to what inspires your awe of God's power. Take a few minutes in silent worship focusing on God's power, then conclude your worship by writing a few lines of praise to your almighty God.

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Now, think about your personal needs. Your needs may be typical or you may be in dire need. How can the teaching of God's Sovereignty help you trust that God will meet even your greatest needs?

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Finally, take a few minutes to bring your needs to God and confess your trust (and doubt) to Him. Write your prayer below.

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## MISSION – SERVING

For several weeks now you have been praying for people on your missional prayer list. Please continue building a daily habit of prayer for the least and lost that you are concerned about.

You have learned that missional living is making the gospel known to all people through word and deed, across the street, track and ocean. For the next several weeks you will concentrate on demonstrating the gospel through service to the least and the lost. You and your Journey Group will partner together in a small service project of your group's choice. Your project could be anything from writing letters to servicemen and women in harm's way, to doing yard work for an elderly neighbor, to visiting a children's hospital, or to serving a meal at a homeless shelter. At your next meeting, your Journey Group leader will have several options for a service project for your group to discuss. Your mission assignment for the next several weeks will be to participate in the planning and execution of your Journey Group's project.

As soon as you read about *servicing* you had some sort of mental and emotional response. What was your response? Did you think about the obstacles that might prevent you from participating (e.g. schedule, priorities, travel, disinterest, anxiety, discomfort, etc.)? Take a moment to describe your response and any obstacles you perceive in the space below.

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Now bring your response to God in prayer. Tell Him what you think and feel. Ask Him to help you respond to this opportunity to take up His mission as Christ would, and to give you the right motives.

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