

# Free Choice, Love, and God's Power



## SABBATH—FEBRUARY 15

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Psalm 81:11–14; Revelation 11:17; Matthew 22:37; Ephesians 1:9–11; John 16:33.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world [among people who hate God's cause] you will have trouble. But be brave! I have defeated [won the fight against] the world [the things that get in the way of God's cause and block it]!’ ” (John 16:33, ICB).



The story about the Fall, sin, and evil shows us what happens when we make bad choices.

**GOD** does many things to take care of His people. God's work and care for His people on this earth has a special name: providence. How we think about God's providence or care for us is important. Our thoughts and feelings about God, other people, and the problem of evil come from our understanding of God's providence.

Not all Christians believe that God wants good things for all of us. Some Christians believe that God uses His power to control everything that happens. These Christians believe God decides who will be saved and who will be lost. This idea teaches us that people aren't free to choose. People who believe this way say that God decides our feelings, not us. Compare this idea with the Bible teaching that God doesn't decide everything for us. God gives us the freedom to choose. He allows us (and angels) to choose to do things that He doesn't like or want. The story about the Fall, sin, and evil shows us what happens when we make bad choices. God made His plan to save us from the bad things that happened when humans chose the wrong things.

## GOD IS IN CONTROL (Psalm 81:11–14)

The youth pastor told a group of students in middle school, “God is in control. That means God controls everything that happens.” One confused middle school student said, “So, God was in control when my dog died? Why did God kill my dog?”

The youth pastor tried to answer the question: “That’s a difficult question. Sometimes God lets hard times happen to us to help us be ready for more difficult things in the future. When my dog died, I was very sad. But that experience helped me later on when my grandma died. Does this example help you understand?”

After a while, the student said, “So, God killed my dog to help me get ready for the time when He’s going to kill my grandma?”—Marc Cortez, in John C. Peckham, *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), page 141, adapted.

People sometimes think that everything happens in the way God wants. They think that whatever happens in life is just what God wanted. God is all-powerful, right? How, then, can anything happen that God doesn’t want to happen? So, the bad things that happen must be part of God’s plan. That is what this belief teaches.

**Read Psalm 81:11–14; Isaiah 30:15, 18; Isaiah 66:4; and Luke 13:34. What do these verses say about the things that happen? Does everything happen because God wants it to? What does the Bible really teach on this topic?**

Yes, many people believe God must always get what He wants. But the Bible tells a different story. Again and again, the Bible shows God not getting what He wants. Things happen that God does not want to happen. God often announces that what is happening is not what He wants. God wants something good for His people, but they choose something different. God feels sad when He says, “ ‘But my people wouldn’t listen to me. Israel wouldn’t obey me. . . . I wish my people would listen to me! I wish Israel would live as I want them to live! Then I would quickly [very fast] bring their enemies under control’ ” (Psalm 81:11, 13, 14, NIV).

**Think about the teaching that everything that happens is what God wants. How does this idea, then, explain evil?**



**God wants something good for His people, but they choose something different.**

## OUR ALL-POWERFUL GOD (Revelation 11:17)

The Bible shows us that God is very powerful. The Bible includes stories about God doing miracles. Even so, many things happen that God doesn't want to happen.

**Read Revelation 11:17; Jeremiah 32:17–20; Luke 1:37; and Matthew 19:26. Think also about Hebrews 1:3. What do these verses teach us about how God is very powerful?**



**Jesus also prayed to God the Father before He was nailed to the cross, “My Father, if it can be, let this cup of trouble pass [be removed] by [from] me” (Matthew 26:39, WE).**

These verses and other ones teach us that God is all-powerful. He keeps everything going with His power. The book of Revelation again and again names God the “Lord God All-Powerful” (Revelation 11:17, ERV; compare with 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 1:8; Revelation 16:14; Revelation 19:15; Revelation 21:22). The word written as “Lord God All-Powerful” is “**pantokrator**” in the Greek language. “**Pantokrator**” means “all-powerful.” God shows He is all-powerful when God saves His people or does a miracle.

When we say that God is “all-powerful,” we don't mean that God can do everything. The Bible teaches us that there are some things God can't do. 2 Timothy 2:13 says that God “cannot go against what He is” (NLV).

Most Christians agree that God is all-powerful. God can't do anything that is false. Some things aren't possible for God because if He did these things, He would not be true to Himself. We learn about this idea in Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said, “ ‘God can do anything’ ” (Matthew 19:26, ERV). Jesus also prayed to God the Father before He was nailed to the cross, “ ‘My Father, if it can be, let this cup of trouble pass [be removed] by [from] me. But do not do what I want. May what you want be done’ ” (Matthew 26:39, WE).

Of course, the Father had the power to save Jesus from suffering on the cross. But God could not do that while also saving sinners. God had to choose to do one or the other, not both.

**The Bible also teaches that God wants to save everyone (read 1 Timothy 2:4–6; Titus 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11). Not everyone will be saved. What does this Bible truth teach us about our free choice and the limits of God's power in our lives?**

## TO LOVE GOD (Matthew 22:37)

As we saw already, God is all-powerful. But that doesn't mean that God can do something that goes against Himself. So, God can't make someone decide to love Him. When we choose to do something without anyone forcing us, we are making a free choice. So, we can't **force** anyone to love us. God can't force anyone to love Him. When love is forced, then love is no longer love.

**Read Matthew 22:37 and Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. What do these verses teach us about our free choice?**

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The most important commandment is proof that God does want everyone to love Him. But not everyone loves God. So, why doesn't God **make** everyone love Him? That answer is that love must be freely given, or love can't be love.

**Read Hebrews 6:17, 18 and Titus 1:2. What do these verses teach us about God?**

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Numbers 23:19 says, " 'God is not a man. He will not lie' " (ICB). God never lies (Titus 1:2). God always does what He says He will do. God never breaks a promise (Hebrews 6:17, 18). If God promises something, then that promise limits God's future actions.

What does this mean? God gives us the freedom to choose. So, what we choose isn't up to God. People can make choices that go against God's wishes and plan. Sad to say, many people do make choices that go against God. That's why many things happen that God doesn't want.

**Think of a time when you did something that you knew God didn't want you to do. What does this experience teach you about our freedom, as humans, to choose?**



**Love must be freely given,  
or love can't be love.**

## GOD'S PERFECT PLAN AND HIS CORRECTIVE PLAN (Ephesians 1:9–11)



God's corrective plan is God's wish for our lives when we don't follow His perfect plan.

**Read Ephesians 1:9–11. What are these verses saying about who is saved and who is lost? Does the Bible teach that God chooses to save some people and not other people?**

Do you see the words written as “already planned” (ERV) or “already chosen” (ICB) in Ephesians 1:11? These words come from the Greek word “**prohorizo**.” This word does not teach that God decides what will happen in history before it happens. “**Prohorizo**” means “to make a decision before something happens.”

Of course, someone can make a decision without caring about what other people think or want. Or someone can decide to do something in a way that respects the free decisions of other people. When God decides to do something, He respects the decisions that other people made.

The Greek word written as “already chosen” shows us what God plans for the future after He shows respect for the free decisions of people. So, God can guide history in a way that is best for everyone. At the same time, He respects the freedom He gives us. Without this freedom, God can't have a real love relationship with us.

Ephesians 1:11 announces that God “decided to choose us long ago in keeping with his plan” (NIRV). Does this verse mean that God decides everything to happen the way He wants? If we read this verse alone, we may think it is teaching this idea. But this belief would go against many of the verses we saw earlier that show that people sometimes reject God's plan (Luke 7:30; compare with Luke 13:34; Psalm 81:11–14). If the Bible doesn't lie, how can these verses say something that goes against what the Bible says about this topic elsewhere?

Ephesians 1:11 is easy to understand if we know that God has two plans for our lives: His perfect plan and His corrective plan. God's perfect plan for our lives is what God wishes to happen for us from the beginning. This plan is the one that would happen if everyone always did what God wanted. God's corrective plan is God's wish for our lives when we don't follow His perfect plan. God puts this plan into action to help save us. Ephesians 1:11 is talking about God's corrective plan.

**JESUS WINS THE FIGHT FOR US (John 16:33)**

If everything happened the way God wanted, there would be no evil. Perfect love and peace would fill the earth. Jesus will make this happen in the future. But for now, God works out His plan in a way that respects the free choices of people.

Imagine in your mind a baking contest or match. All the bakers must use the same basic ingredients. They can add anything to the mix they want to make any cake they want to make. In the end, whatever cake a baker makes comes from, at least in part, some things in the mixture that he didn't choose.

In the same way, God respects our freedom. This freedom is necessary for our love. Many of the things that happened in history weren't God's choices.

In this view, God doesn't control everything that happens. God causes some things in this life to happen. Other things happen because of the free choices that we make. Many things happen that God doesn't want to happen.

**Read John 16:33. What hope does this verse offer us during hard times or when we are suffering?**

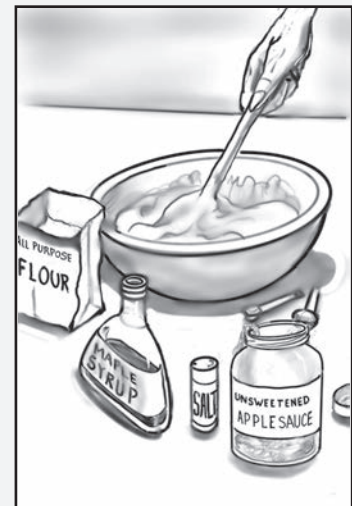
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People's faith often grows weak because they believe the false teaching that God will or should keep them from suffering or hard times. But Jesus tells us a very different story. Jesus warns His followers that they will have much trouble in this life. But there is hope. Jesus won the war against evil (John 16:33).

Yes, we may suffer or have troubles. But these things do not mean that suffering and trouble are part of God's perfect plan for us. We always must remember the worldwide war between good and evil. We know that evil is not necessary for good to happen. At the same time, we know that God can bring good out of evil happenings. If we trust God, He can use our sufferings to bring us closer to Him and to help us to be more loving and caring for other people.



**In the end, whatever cake a baker makes comes from, at least in part, some things in the mixture that he didn't choose.**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘God With Us,’ ” pages 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God’s plan to save us was not something He thought about after Adam sinned. God’s saving plan was ‘the secret truth that was hidden for ages and ages but has been made known.’ Romans 16:25 [ERV]. This plan showed the important rules of God’s government. From the beginning, God and Jesus knew Satan would fall and cause people to sin. God didn’t cause sin to happen. But God saw that sin would come. So, He made a plan to meet the terrible emergency. God loved humans so much that He promised to give His one and only Son, Jesus. ‘Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal [everlasting] life.’ John 3:16 [NirV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 22, adapted.



**“From the beginning, God and Jesus knew Satan would fall and cause people to sin.”**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① God doesn’t always get what He wants. How does this Bible truth change the way you think about what happens in this life? What does it mean for you personally that God doesn’t always get what He wants?
- ② God and Jesus “knew Satan would fall and cause people to sin.” But they went ahead and made humans anyway. God also made us free to love. God knew that giving us this freedom of choice would send Jesus to the cross. Jesus went to the cross for us so that we could be free to love. What does this Bible truth tell us about how important and holy love is to God’s government?
- ③ Often, we can’t understand why we must suffer. Or we can’t see how our suffering can lead to any good. But many things happen in this life that aren’t part of God’s plan. How does this Bible truth help you to understand your own suffering better?

## FROM A DANCE PARTY TO CHURCH

Nelson was born in Colombia. As a young boy, Nelson was too young to go to rumba. Rumba was a party with music, dancing, and drinking. Nelson knew something was wrong when his parents took him to church on December 31 and then left him home so they could celebrate New Year's Eve at a rumba party.

In Colombia, Christians went to church on New Year's Eve Day to give their lives to God. Then they went to rumba to celebrate the New Year. Yes, Nelson was a little boy, but he understood that church was a holy place. But rumba was not holy because people celebrated it in bars and nightclubs. Nelson wondered, "Why does my family go to church to become holy and then go to rumba to remove God from their hearts?"

Nelson asked his mother, "Why do you go to church and then to rumba?"

Nelson's mother didn't answer.

When Nelson grew up, he stopped going to church. He started to play music at rumba parties. Nelson was an excellent accordion player. He wanted to become a famous musician.

Then Nelson met his future wife, Laura. Laura used to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

Laura told Nelson, "Did you know that the dead are not in heaven?" Nelson didn't like Laura's ideas. But he liked her. So, they stayed together.

After some time, Laura started to go to church again. She also invited Nelson to meet her parents. At their first meeting, Laura's dad surprised Nelson when they sat down to eat. Laura's dad said, "Let's thank God for the food." Nelson never prayed before he ate a meal. Nelson became friends with Laura's dad. Soon, Nelson started to pray before he ate. Nelson also started to go to church with Laura. Nelson didn't enjoy church at first because he thought it was strange to worship at church on Saturdays. But then Nelson read the fourth commandment, in Exodus 20:8–11. Nelson understood that God commanded people to keep the 7th day holy. Nelson wanted to be holy.

Today, Nelson Silva, 30, is an Adventist musician who no longer plays the accordion at rumba. Now, Nelson plays in restaurants and at birthday parties. Nelson tells people about God's mercy and prays for them. He and a group of church musicians play music on public buses.

Pray for the Good News to be shared with people everywhere. Thank you for your offerings that help us share the Good News with people who don't know about Jesus. Watch a YouTube video of Nelson playing the accordion at: [www.bit.ly/Nelson-Silva](http://www.bit.ly/Nelson-Silva).

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



**Nelson and a group of church musicians play music on public buses.**



**Nelson Silva**