

# Cooperators With God

by Elisabeth Elliot

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*Elisabeth Elliot's sermon emphasizes the balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, urging believers to actively cooperate with God in their lives.*

**Duration:** 41:56

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 4:23, 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

**Topics:** "Working"

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## Description

In this sermon, Jeanette Cliff emphasizes the importance of our efforts in responding faithfully to the challenges and hardships we face in life. She shares a story of a minister visiting a farm and acknowledging the joint effort between the farmer and God in creating a beautiful harvest. Cliff highlights the concept of the 'dignity of causality,' which refers to our ability to cause things to happen and make a difference in the world. She also discusses the idea that God's refusals can be seen as gifts and emphasizes the importance of submission to God's authority and being instruments of joy and peace in the world.

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## Transcript

The title of this morning's talk is Cooperators with God. There's always a danger of extremes, and when we speak of the sovereignty of God, there are those who would feel that because we subscribe to that doctrine, it really leaves us nothing to do. We can sit with folded hands and expect God to do everything.

If He's got the whole world in His hands and everything is under His control, then what difference does it make whether I do anything or not? It makes a tremendous difference for the very obvious reason that God arranged the universe in such a way that our choices matter. We have responsibility. I may have said some things which would make you feel that we should not be concerned with results.

I'm sure I've said again and again, perhaps not in this seminar, but it's hard for me to remember where I said what. I often say that obedience is my responsibility, and the results of that obedience are God's. Now, that's true, but that is not to say that we should not aim at certain results, that we should not set goals for ourselves, or that we should not plan.

Jesus said very plainly, take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. And yet there are other passages in Scripture that tell us that we are obligated to plan and order and arrange our lives, and to make provision for those for whom we are responsible. Clearly, Lars and I would

never be able to fulfill our obligations in Germany if we had not made plans long before now to get there from Holland.

And our lives are such that the more complicated they become, the more carefully we need to order and plan them. So I would not want anyone to understand anything that I'm saying as meaning that we are absolved of responsibility, that our choices do not matter. We are to set goals, we are not to be passive.

And let me read a passage which I think deals very well with the subject of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, Acts 17, verses 24 to 28. Paul is speaking in Athens, and he says, The God who created the world and everything in it, and who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by men. It is not because he lacks anything that he accepts service at men's hands.

Let me repeat that verse, verse 25. It is not because he lacks anything that he accepts service at men's hands. For he is himself the universal giver of life and breath and all else.

He created every race of men of one stock to inhabit the whole earth's service. He fixed the epochs of their history and the limits of their territory. Here we see divine boundaries, limitations, measurements.

God has fixed the epochs of human history and the limits of our territory. My father-in-law, Jim Elliott's father, was absolutely convinced that God would not permit men to get to the moon. He believed that that was like the Tower of Babel, and that when men started doing things like that, they were going way out of their territory.

And he was absolutely positive that God was not going to permit that to happen. Well, he never saw it happen. He died just shortly before.

Men walked on the moon, but I'm sure he understands more about those things now than you and I do. They were to seek God, and it might be touch and find him, though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move.

In him we exist. As some of your own poets have said, we are also his offspring. So here we have brought together in just a few verses the unarguable fact of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of men.

And I'm going to give you many more texts which will do the same thing. My second husband, Addison Leach, was a philosopher and a theologian, and he used to say about this question of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, we drive in a theological stake over here. God is sovereign, because the Scripture clearly teaches again and again and again that he is sovereign.

So we drive in one theological stake here. Then the Scripture teaches also that we have responsibility. So you drive in another stake over here, which is man's responsibility.

Now there is no way to bring those two together in an intellectually harmonious way, which will satisfy all of us. There will always be that question, well, where is the boundary between what God is going to do and what he expects me to do? How far am I supposed to carry my responsibility? And it's a question for which there is no simple answer. There is no rule of thumb.

And often people ask me questions about what they should do about a certain situation in their lives, and all I can say to them is, I can't answer that. That's a question that only God can answer for you. So God has left us with mysteries, hasn't he? Many mysteries.

In order to bring us repeatedly, continually to his feet in prayer, we have to walk by faith. If all the questions were answered, there would be no need for faith, would there? Faith operates in the dark. So we have responsibility.

Then this word from which I've taken the title of my talk, Co-operators, comes from 2 Corinthians, the 6th chapter. And I'd like to read verses 1-10. This happens to be the New English Bible that I'm reading from here, and it does not use the word co-operators.

I think it's the Phillips translation that uses the word co-operators. But 2 Corinthians 6, verses 1-10. Sharing in God's work is the way New English Bible translates what Phillips says, as co-operators with God.

Sharing in God's work, we urge this appeal upon you. You have received the grace of God. Do not let it go for nothing.

Now right there in that brief phrase, we see the operation of God and the operation of man. You have received his grace. And grace is a free gift.

There's nothing that we could do about that. But do not let it go for nothing. Which shows that God has limited himself.

He gives us the grace, but he expects us to do something about it. Don't let it go for nothing. God's own words are, In the hour of my favor, I gave heed to you.

On the day of deliverance, I came to your aid. The hour of favor has now come. Now, I say, has the day of deliverance dawned.

And now Paul goes on to spell out, for the Corinthians, certain things for which they are responsible. In order that our service may not be brought into discredit, that we avoid giving offense in anything. That is certainly a matter that all of us aliens have to be very concerned about when we go into a foreign country.

When we go as an alien, it's almost impossible not to give offense in some way. I never knew, until I came to Holland just less than a week ago, that it was very rude to eat a sandwich with your fingers in Holland. I was told that you eat bread and butter with a knife and fork.

So, obviously, I had already given offense in that matter. But even in our own culture, we must work not to give offense. As God's servants, we try to recommend ourselves in all circumstances.

How? And here's the list. By our steadfast endurance in distress, hardships, and dire straits. Flogged, imprisoned, mobbed, overworked, sleepless, starving.

Now, some of us know a few of the items in that list. Not many of us, I suppose, have been flogged and mobbed and starved. We recommend ourselves by the innocence of our behavior, our grasp of truth, our patience and kindness, by gifts of the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by declaring the truth, by the power of God.

We wield the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and left, honor and dishonor, praise and blame are alike our lot. We are the impostors who speak the truth, the unknown men whom all men know. Dying, we still live on.

Disciplined by suffering, we are not done to death. In our sorrows, we have always cause for joy. Poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many.

Penniless, we own the world. Paul describes here a very peculiar people, people full of paradoxes, and that's what Christians are, aren't they? People who are really out of place. We are not citizens of this world.

We are strangers, all of us, aliens in a foreign country, and we are on our way home. But on the way, these are the descriptions of the things that we must face and endure. And in all of those things, we are cooperators with God.

He himself has been through that route. He's been over the trail ahead of us. So we accept these conditions of hardship or inconvenience or discomfort, whatever they may be, because we do it for his sake, and this is our responsibility.

It is not necessarily our responsibility what happens to us, but it is most emphatically our responsibility how we respond. It is not the events of our lives that change us. It is our response to the events.

We can respond in resentment, bitterness, anger, or we can respond in faith and thanksgiving. And the choice that we make as to our response is going to determine the progress that we make in holiness. I think we've all known people who have been through terrible things, and they have come out very bitter and very resentful and perhaps angry at God.

In fact, some of them, we might say, have lost their faith. But then, on the other hand, we know people who have been through equally difficult things, and Corrie ten Boom is one who springs to mind. I don't know anyone with a story of greater hardships than Corrie ten Boom's.

And yet, what was the effect of those hardships on her? Just the opposite of bitterness and resentment and doubt. Her faith was strengthened. She came out filled with joy.

When the film was made, THE HIDING PLACE, I saw Jeanette Clift George, who played the part of Corrie ten Boom, interviewed by Billy Graham. And Billy Graham asked her, as you studied the character of Corrie ten Boom, what was the outstanding characteristic? And without any hesitation, Jeanette Clift said, it was joy. Just a wonderful example of the difference that a faithful response makes.

We do have a responsibility. All right, let me give you one, two, three, four, and five. Number one, our efforts are required.

Our efforts are required. Number two, we are given what Pascal called the dignity of causality. Just those three words you can put down for number two.

Dignity of causality. To put that a little more simply, perhaps, just the power to cause things to happen. The power to make things happen.

Number three, God's refusals are gifts. God's refusals are gifts. Number four, submission.

Number five, the most God-like work. All right, back to number one, our efforts are required. There's a story told of a minister, a preacher who went out to visit a beautiful farm.

And as he and John, the farmer, stood looking out over the great fields of waving golden grain, the minister said to the farmer, Well, John, you and God have done a beautiful job here. And John stood there, slapping his hat against his thigh and sort of kicking the ground with his foot for a minute. And he looked at the minister and he said, Well, you should have seen it when God had it by himself.

The truth, of course, is that God could plant that field of corn that we see across the canal. But God does not do those things. God has so arranged the universe that you and I have responsibilities.

There are times when I wish with all my heart that God would finish a book that I've started. But somehow or other, that's never happened. And I suspect that it isn't because of a lack of faith on my part.

I think that God has dropped certain jobs in our laps and we are expected to do them. God does not wash my dishes. He does not do my ironing.

He doesn't write my books. And he doesn't plant the field of corn. So our efforts are required.

When God told Noah to build an ark, what did Noah do? What did Noah do? He built an ark, didn't he? Yes. Now, God could have provided Noah with an ark, but he didn't do that. In fact, he made it necessary for Noah to do what seemed to be an utterly absurd thing, to build this tremendous sea-going vessel up on dry land where there wasn't the slightest chance of it ever being moved.

You can imagine what he must have gone through with his neighbors who came by day after day to see what he was up to. And he had to go through the humiliation of not being able to explain why he was doing this. But it was required of him.

And when you look at the miracles in the Bible, almost every one of them requires some human action. The story of the widow of Zarephath. When Elijah asked her to bake him a cake, he expected her to use that little handful of flour that was the last thing she had in the house plus a few drops of oil.

He didn't make a cake for her out of nothing. She had to give him the flour and the oil, which she felt was the only thing that stood between her and starvation. She and her son were about to starve.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, he did not make it out of nothing. He made it out of a little boy's lunch. When Jesus healed the blind man, he didn't heal him without any earthly materials.

He used spit and clay. When he turned water into wine, he required the action of the obedient servants. They had to fill the water pots.

And so it is all through life. If God doesn't work the same kind of miracles today, at least it seems as though he doesn't work nearly so many so obviously, it may very well be because we have the full tale of the scriptures. We have so many more reasons for faith.

I've seen God deal in strange, almost miraculous ways with illiterate people in the jungle, ways that he's never dealt with me. And I've said to the Lord, why can't you give me a miracle like that once in a while? Or give me a guidance by a dream such as you did so often for the Indians? And I think the answer is simply that he requires one measure of faith from me. He requires a different measure of faith from those who do not have my heritage.

But the fact remains that action is required. Secondly, the universe is arranged in such a way as to give us the dignity of causality. And this helps me very much with the matter of prayer.

It's easy to argue that prayer doesn't make sense because in the first place, God is sovereign, and God's going to do what he wants to do anyway. In the second place, God already knows my thoughts before I know them. So what is the point of my coming to God and expressing my desires and bringing my requests to him when he knows what I'm going to ask before I even ask it? What is the use of asking? And thirdly, if I'm asking for something which is going to require him to change his mind, as it were, do I really think that God is going to change his mind because I pray? And on and on.

You can add a few more of your own arguments to this business about prayer. But I go back to the farmer and the field. God could do all of those things without prayer, but he has so arranged the universe as to give us the dignity of causality, the power to change things, the ability to act in such a way that there are consequences which would not be there if we had not acted.

And prayer has been built into the universe. The corn wouldn't grow if it weren't for the sun and the rain. And the farmer can do nothing at all about the sun and the rain.

The farmer does a lot of other things which God is not going to do for him. But he can do nothing about the sun and the rain. God could do everything that he wants to do in the world without the power of prayer, but he has given us the power of prayer as he has given the farmer the strength and the skill to plant the corn.

And that takes care of it as far as I'm concerned. There are still many mysteries involved, but I know that my prayers matter. I know that it makes a difference.

And there is a mysterious sense in which there are things which would not happen, that God simply would not do without somebody's prayers and without somebody's suffering, which is another matter that we will come to this afternoon. The dignity of causality is illustrated not only in prayer, but also in work. Jesus gave his disciples assignments of work to do.

And in the last chapter of the book of John, you remember his marvelously loving and gracious and tender dealing with Peter who had so grievously betrayed him. Jesus asks him three times if he loves him. And Peter says probably what I would have said, Well, you know everything, Lord.

You do know that I love you. And three times Jesus repeats what should necessarily follow. If you love me, he had said earlier in that book of John, the 14th chapter, if you love me, do what I say.

Now, Peter, if you love me, and Jesus was remembering, or at least Peter was certainly remembering that he had protested his love for Jesus earlier and had sadly contradicted his declaration of love. But Jesus says now, if you love me, feed my lambs, feed my sheep. There is something I want you to do about it.

And there is something that God wants you and me to be doing every day. There is plain, ordinary work to do. And the more I think of just plain, ordinary work, the most humdrum, down-to-earth, daily tasks, the more I see it as a tremendous means of grace that God has given us.

What therapy there is in just plain, hard work. The older I get, the more I appreciate it. And I can get up in the morning with joy, looking forward to work, which I have to do.

I not only can thank God for my health, which enables me to get out of bed in the morning, but for a place to work and for work to do. And I pray that God will help me to do it for his glory and with joy and with thanksgiving. I particularly came to appreciate the value and the therapy that work provides during a time of great sorrow and suffering when my second husband was dying of cancer.

I got to the place where the possibilities of what was going to happen to him before he might die, which was so much worse to me than death itself, that I was filled with fear and almost paralyzed at times. I just wondered how I was going to make it through the next day. And the very fact that I simply had to get up, I had to bathe him and feed him and give him his medicine and take care of all the other things which are necessary for an invalid.

It was my salvation. Instead of sitting down and folding my hands and feeling sorry for myself and for him and just melting into a puddle of self-pity, I had to get up and physically act. I had to go out in the kitchen and cook and I had to do laundry and I had to clean the house and I had to change his sheets and I had to do all these things which kept me busy virtually all day long.

And I couldn't sleep through the night. I had to get up and do things for him at night. So I thanked God for plain ordinary work.

And after he died, I found that the same thing was true. I had found that to be true when my first husband had died because there I was, the only missionary left on the station. He and I had been on the station by ourselves.

And when he died, I had twice as much to do as I had had before. And I had had my hands full before. I was trying to do everything that he and I had done together.

And believe me, it was more than a full-time job. Lots of things which I didn't know how to do at all. I suddenly had to find out how to do them.

And I discovered that there is no consolation like obedience. It's just a wonderful means of healing. Get up, go out, do the work.

And if you don't have work to do for yourself or for somebody in your own home, then go out and find somebody. That grace of the dignity of causality will do for you yourself. We are cooperators with God.

Every kind of work, when you think about it, is in some way a cooperation with God in bringing order out of chaos. When God created the world, he brought order out of chaos. And the first thing that most of us do when we get up in the morning is to bring order out of chaos.

We look in the mirror, and what do we see? Chaos. We have to start in washing our faces, combing our hair, getting dressed, making the bed, and bringing order out of chaos. When I sit down to write a book, I have sheaves of notes that I've been dropping into a file for years, probably.

I go through all these notes. I try to put them in different categories. Eventually, I set them out on a counter or a table, and I shuffle them and I reshuffle them, and I spend most of the time bringing some kind of order before I can put words on paper or words into the word processor, as the case is now.

It's merely a process of bringing order out of chaos. The same thing is true of a sculpture. I'm told that Michelangelo said that it's very easy to make a statue.

All you do is take a block of marble and knock off what you don't want. The artist does not create anything. He takes what's here and puts it into some kind of form.

God is endlessly bringing order into our lives. The more we know him, the holier we become, the more ordered are our lives. There's a beautiful hymn that says, Drop thy still dues of quietness till all our striving

cease.

Take from our souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace. I thank my parents for teaching me that order does, in fact, have something to do with godliness. It is said that cleanliness is next to godliness, and I can certainly see that the Dutch people believe that.

It is wonderful to see the cleanliness in this country, which is very different where I come from. But I do believe that a Christian's life should be ordered in every aspect, every phase. The way he does things should be in order because we are cooperators with God.

Now, let's look at some of the scriptures which bring together the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man to choose. In Acts 11, we read that Barnabas called Saul. Then in Acts 13, we read that the church called Saul, but then Paul himself says that God called him.

It's as though it doesn't really make any difference. God called him using Saul and using Barnabas and using the church. God works through human instruments.

God produces that cornfield over there through the instrumentality of the farmer. And God calls us and God speaks to us through human instrumentalities. Of course, through the scriptures, which were written by people whom God inspired.

And the scriptures come alive, don't they, through the lives of human beings, of our own contemporaries. We need to have the word made flesh again. Christ came and made the word flesh.

God had been revealing himself only through the word. Then when Christ came to earth, that word became flesh. And then when Christ went back to heaven, he made it very plain that we were to be his body.

That the word would have to be made flesh in you and me. So we are the incarnators of the word of God. So when Paul said that God called him, he was not ignoring the fact that Barnabas called him and the church called him.

Then in Romans 15, we read that God through Paul secured the obedience of the Gentiles, working by signs and miracles and the Holy Spirit. There we find Paul, signs, miracles, and the Holy Spirit all bringing about the obedience of the Gentiles. So it was Paul's freedom to will to work as a cooperator with God.

And it was the Gentiles who had the freedom to choose to obey or not to obey. And they chose to obey. But all of this was in cooperation with God through signs and miracles and the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3, 1-15 is a passage that you can look up. I won't read it to you now. But it shows that we work with God.

1 Corinthians 3, 1-15 In Galatians 1, we read, The Lord Jesus Christ, according to the will of God, gave himself. Here we find Christ in his human form, laying his own will alongside the will of God. And that's what you and I are permitted to do.

When I say I want to do the will of God, what I'm saying is that I will to lay my will alongside God's will. I don't want to cross His will. As someone has said, where the will of God crosses the will of man, somebody has to die.

But as a Christian, I want to lay my will alongside His. I want to identify with the will of God, as Jesus did here. He, according to the will of God, gave himself.

He had the power to give himself. The power to choose. As you and I have.

And we know that there is this great mystery of His humanity and His divinity, which we find most clearly depicted, not explained, but depicted in His great prayer in Gethsemane. Not my will, but Thine be done. How could there have been a conflict? And yet there was, or He would not have been in such an agony.

Then in 1 Peter 1, I think it's verse 5, He says, He says, You are guarded by the power of God operating through your faith. Again, we are given the dignity of causality. The power of God operates through your faith.

In Revelation chapter 17, we read that the Lamb with His followers conquers. It matters that the Lamb has followers. And then we could go through many chapters in the Old Testament about the making of the tabernacle, in which so many people contributed what they knew how to do.

The goldsmiths and the stone workers and the embroiderers and the weavers and the perfume makers, all of these people had natural human skills, which they had developed and which they voluntarily contributed to the making of the tabernacle. Then in Psalm 77, we find a question raised as to whether it was Moses or it was God that led Israel. In one verse it says that Moses, that they were led by the hand of Moses, and another verse it says that they were led by the hand of God.

It doesn't really make any difference, does it? Because Moses was cooperating with God. And here's one of my favorites. In the book of Nehemiah, chapter 4, verse 9, he says, We prayed and posted a guard.

Now there's some people that would say, if you have enough faith, you don't have to post the guard. But Nehemiah said, We prayed and posted a guard. You do what you can do.

God will do what you can't do. And very often I find that when I pray for somebody else, to my dismay, occasionally, I find that God expects me to answer the prayer. He's not going to do what I can do for that person.

As James says, it's no good for a Christian to say to the poor person, depart in peace, be warmed and filled. He has a responsibility to do something about their being warmed and filled. Then in Acts 4, it's very interesting to me to see the way the church prayed for, who is it there? I have to look it up.

Peter, Paul. Peter. Yes, they have been arrested, Peter and John.

And then when they were discharged, they went back to their friends, this is Acts 4, 23, and told them everything that the chief priests and elders had said. And when they heard it, they raised their voices as one man and called upon God, the Lord. Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth and sea and of everything in them, who by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David, thy servant, there it is again, by the Spirit through the mouth of David, did say, why did the Gentiles rage, et cetera.

And then what they prayed for was not, Lord, please stop this persecution. Lord, don't let them get arrested. They prayed, Lord, please observe.

Look what's going on here. Give courage to your servants and heal them. In other words, they're saying, please look at what they are doing.

Help us in what we are to do and then you do what needs to be done. Look at what they are doing. Help us in what we must do.

Then you do. Give us courage, in other words. We need courage to go through this if this is the kind of thing that's going to be happening.

They were not asking for escape. They were asking for a proper Christian response to trouble. And then when they said heal, they were asking God to do what only God could do.

Well, I've got more here but I think that ought to suffice for that second point that the universe is arranged in such a way to give us the dignity of causality. Number three, God's refusals are among his greatest gifts. Think back to some of your earliest prayers as a Christian or maybe as a little child.

Can you remember some things that you prayed for to which the answer was no? And can you think what might have happened if the answer had been yes? I think back to when my first child was to be born and Jim and I had decided that we'd like to have at least four children, maybe six, maybe eight, but we decided that we would like to have a son first. I have an older brother and I always thought it was a great advantage, a much greater advantage to have an older brother than it was to have three younger brothers so I have three younger ones too. And I think most men like to have a son first and it's just nice to have the oldest child be a son.

So we prayed for a son and we got a daughter. Well of course God knew that by the time that daughter was ten months old she wouldn't have a father anymore and I've often thought how much more difficult it would have been for me to raise a daughter, a son by myself than a daughter. And so I've thanked God that he said no to that prayer.

And Amy Carmichael tells a story of how when she was three years old she heard from somebody that God answers prayer and that he can turn water into wine. And she decided that the thing that she wanted more than anything else in the world was blue eyes. So she would test what they had told her about God answering prayer and turning water into wine.

He certainly could make blue eyes out of brown ones. And she got down beside her bed and with the perfect confidence of a child asked God to change those eyes during the night so that she would have blue ones in the morning. And she jumped out of bed in the morning without a doubt that God would have done what she asked.

She pushed a chair over in front of the mirror and climbed up and looked into the same old brown eyes. But as she told the story to her children many years later she said, I don't remember how the answer came whether someone actually said it to me or whether God himself put it into my heart. But the answer came from somewhere isn't no, an answer.

And so she had to learn a very difficult lesson at the age of three that God's answer is frequently no. What she did not know then was that many years later she would be a missionary in India and find herself in situations where it was very important that she be taken for an Indian. She always dressed in a sari.

She went barefoot. She had very dark hair. And she would have been immediately recognized at a distance if she had had blue eyes.

There were some times when it was so important it was even a matter of life and death that she be taken as an Indian and so she dyed her skin dark and was able to pass as an Indian. So God doesn't necessarily explain his reasons for saying no, but every now and then he does remind us that he is in charge and he knows what he's doing. His refusals are among his greatest gifts.

C.S. Lewis has this wonderful illustration of the sovereignty of God and the will of man. He speaks of a dog on a lead. The dog wraps himself around a post.

You pull him back because you want to enable him to go forward. In other words, you want to help him do what he wants to do. He resists you because he does not want to go back, but forward.

If he is an obedient dog, he obeys reluctantly as a matter of duty, which seems to him to be quite in opposition to his own will, though in fact it is only by yielding to you that he will ever succeed in getting where he wants to go. The master not only understands the dog's desire, but shares it. If by your will, however, you mean your will to pull against the collar and try to force yourself forward in a direction which is of no use, then I, as your master, understand it, of course.

But because I understand it, I cannot possibly share it. In fact, the more I sympathize with your real wish, the less I sympathize in the sense of share or agree with your resistance to the collar, for I see that this renders the attainment of your real wish impossible. To me, that explains a great deal about God's sovereign will.

We know that there are times when God gives us our own way. You remember that he gave the Israelites their request for meat, but sent leanness into their souls. And if we stubbornly and defiantly insist on having my will, not thine, then in the last resort, that will be what we get.

But God, in his mercy, refuses many of our requests. When he sees that the direction of our heart is toward him, that we do want to do his will, Jesus said, He that willeth to do my will shall know. I think of the story of Joseph.

To me, there is no greater story in all of Scripture to illustrate that sovereign will working in hidden, silent ways, where apparently God is paying no attention at all. God did nothing to stop those jealous brothers from treating Joseph horribly. They were jealous.

They were hateful. They were spiteful. They were lying.

They were murderous. And they decided to kill him. Then they decided that they could make some money by selling him.

And God did nothing to intervene. He was sold. He was taken to Egypt.

He was given a job. He was seduced. A woman tried to seduce him.

He refused to fall for the temptation. And so he was lied about. God did nothing to stop her attempts at seduction.

He did nothing to correct the lie that she told. And he was put in prison. While he was in prison, several people who were there with him promised that they would speak a good word for him when they got out.

And they forgot. So year after year after year, here is Joseph completely at the mercy of sinful human beings, as far as we can tell. God is not saying anything.

He's not doing anything. He's not intervening. But what happens in the end? If it hadn't been for that long chain of events, Joseph would not have been in a position to save the lives of his family.

And of course, when the famine came in their land and they came to Egypt and he by that time had been promoted to a position where he was in charge of the grain stores and was able therefore to provide his family, his father and his brothers with food, they of course were terrified to recognize who this was that was in a position of authority over them. And he puts their minds at ease. He says, you meant it to me for evil, but God meant it for good.

So there we have the free will of man and the sovereignty of God working together even in a matter of sin. God can change the worst thing into a blessing. He does not necessarily stop us from sinning or stop others from sinning against us or prevent us from sinning against others.

But God can make something beautiful out of that thing. Number four, submission. And I just wanted to put this in very briefly because my definition of submission is cooperation with the one whom God has put over you.

It's the recognition of authority. And my submission to Jesus Christ does not mean that I become a zero. My submission to my husband does not mean that I become a zero.

It's one plus one that makes two, not one plus zero. Submission is the recognition of divinely assigned authority. Cooperation means the willingness to trust and to wait.

If I am to be a cooperator with God, I must submit to his authority, accept his will, and wait in silence and trust. And lastly, the most God-like work that human beings can do is to give joy and to be an instrument of peace. Can you think of anything more important in this world than that we should be joy-givers? Okay, the fifth thing is that the most God-like work that human beings are given to do is to be joy-givers and instruments of peace.

And I was not going to elaborate on that, only close with the beautiful prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Would you bow your heads? Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

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