



# How Do We Know God Is Trying to Tell Us Something?



## Session Objective

Participants will learn that God reveals God's self to us in many ways, especially through Scripture. Further, they will learn how to be open to God's revelation in Scripture and what it means that Scripture is the ultimate source of authority for faith.

## Faith Statement

We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.

— Second Helvetic Confession (5.001)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What truth do you know so deeply that you don't have to hope? How do you know it's true?
- What is something you believed strongly that wasn't true? What is something that you couldn't believe that turned out to be true?
- How do you know that the church is telling the truth about a God who loves you?
- What are some reasons for believing that God is telling you a message?



## Explore

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and explore these questions:

- What does it mean that God spoke to the authors of Scripture?
- What does it mean that God speaks to us through Scripture?
- When and how has God spoken to you through Scripture?
- Is Scripture God's way of telling us about the world, like a history or science textbook, or is it God's way of telling us about God? Explain.



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- If God had a cell phone, how would God squeeze the message of the whole Bible into one text message?
- Is God trying to tell your generation something? If so, what is it and how does God communicate it?
- Do you ever miss some important message that God gives us through Scripture? Is that the fault of God, the Bible, your leader, or you?
- How can you listen better for God's message?



## Exit

Have participants pray for open ears to hear God's message.





# Is God in Charge of Everything? Really, Everything?



## Session Objective

Participants will learn about a central emphasis of Reformed theology: The Lord is sovereign. In other words, nothing happens in the world beyond the rule of God. Your group will consider what this principle of universal sovereignty implies about such issues as prayer, freedom, salvation, and grace.

## Faith Statement

God's sovereign love is a mystery beyond the reach of the human mind. Human thought ascribes to God superlatives of power, wisdom, and goodness. But God reveals divine love in Jesus Christ by showing power in the form of a servant, wisdom in the folly of the cross, and goodness in receiving sinful men and women.

—Confession of 1967 (9.15), Inclusive Language Text



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What does *sovereignty* mean?
- What are some examples of sovereign things in the world? How do these things affect your life?
- How does it feel when someone has power over you? How does it feel when someone with power takes care of you?
- Compared to other sovereign things, how is God's sovereignty different?
- How should we respond to God's sovereignty?



## Explore

Read Psalm 22:1–5 and explore these questions:

- Have you ever felt forsaken? If so, what did it feel like?
- If God is in charge of everything, why do people suffer?
- Psalm 22:1 is what Jesus says on the cross. If Jesus can complain to God, how do you think God feels when we complain? Explain.



## Express

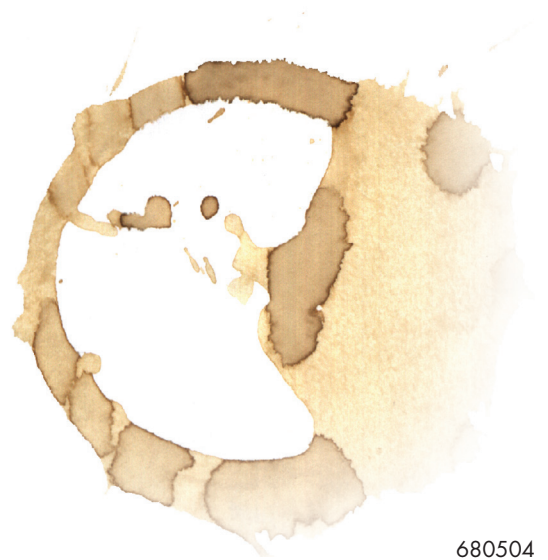
Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- Have you ever asked God for something? If so, how did you ask? What happened? If you got what you prayed for, did you get it because you prayed?
- What do you think God is thinking when we ask God to do something? Does God ever change God's mind based on what you ask?
- In the broad scope of life, would you prefer a God who takes care of us, even if we don't get what we ask for, or a God who can be swayed by our wants and requests, even if they are not originally in God's plan?



## Exit

Have participants pray that God continues to keep them in sovereign care.





## Session Objective

Students will study the sinful nature of humankind in reference to God's grace. They will leave this session with tools for minimizing sin and with a better understanding of confession and repentance.

## Faith Statement

But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

—A Brief Statement of Faith (10.3)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- How is the word *sin* used in our culture?
- The Bible discusses sin much more often as a state of being, rather than as bad things people do. What does it mean to you that the biblical concept of sin is more about the sinner than the act?
- What does sin do to us? Why is sin important?
- Do you know anyone who *never* sins, who never does anything that puts him or her in a sinful state? Can any human keep from sinning forever? If so, how? If not, why not?



## Explore

Read Romans 7:14–15, 20 and explore these questions:

- Do you ever feel like Paul, that you “do the very thing” you hate? What happens when you keep doing them?
- Why can't you stop doing these things?

Read Romans 7:21–8:3a and explore the questions:

- What is the best news in this passage?
- Knowing that you sin, and sometimes can't help it, what does it mean to you that “there is therefore now no condemnation”? Does that erase all the guilt, cover it up, or what?
- Romans 8:1–2 says you can't do enough bad to not be forgiven; verse 3a says that you cannot do enough right things or few enough bad things to earn salvation. What does this mean to you?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- What does sin feel like?
- If sin feels so bad, why do we keep sinning?
- How can you ease the feeling of bitterness when you sin? Can you erase sin's effects? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What does God's grace mean to sin?



## Exit

Have participants pray for a clean heart and mercy when they sin.



# Is Everything Predestined, or Do I Have Free Will?



## Session Objective

Participants will learn about predestination. Whether or not the participants agree with philosophical or spiritual predestination, they will understand how both concepts are joyful implications of God's sovereignty and will consider how to respond faithfully.

## Faith Statement

Those of [humankind] that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to [God's] eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ . . . without any foresight of faith or good works . . . or any other thing in [humankind], as conditions, or causes moving [God] thereunto . . . God hath [given] the will of man . . . that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil.

—Westminster Confession of Faith (6.018, 6.059)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Does God *know* what words you will choose, what career you will have, and what your life will be like or does God *choose* these things to happen? What is the difference between the two?
- Does God's foreknowledge about your decisions affect your decisions? Is it possible that God knows how your life is going to end up, and yet you still have free will?
- Does God's foreknowledge about your life affect your salvation? Does God's foreknowledge about your salvation affect your life? Why or why not?
- What does *predestination* mean to you?



## Explore

Share the following with the participants:

- Two kinds of predestination sometimes get confused.
- *Philosophical predestination* concerns the things that happen in the world. It means that there is a way that things will end up, period.
- *Spiritual predestination* concerns salvation. It means that God chose whether to elect our salvation before and with no reference to our lives, beliefs, or actions.

Read Ephesians 1:3–6, 11–12 and explore these questions:

- What does it mean to you that your salvation was *chosen* or *destined* before you were born?
- Why are some people scared of spiritual predestination? Why are other people joyful about it? Do these perspectives say more about what people think about themselves or about God?
- Which do you trust more: your capacity to earn God's favor, or God's grace?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- Is there any way to *know* if God has predestined you to salvation or damnation? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
- Do you have any reasons to believe that God elected you to damnation? If so, how can God help you to redeem those reasons, so that you have new reasons to believe in God's grace?
- Do you have any reasons to believe that God elected you to salvation? By living as an even more committed Christian, do you more convince God to save you, or more convince yourself to trust in God's salvation?
- If you are scared of not being chosen for salvation, how might you act? How might you act if you are joyous about the possibility of being chosen for salvation?

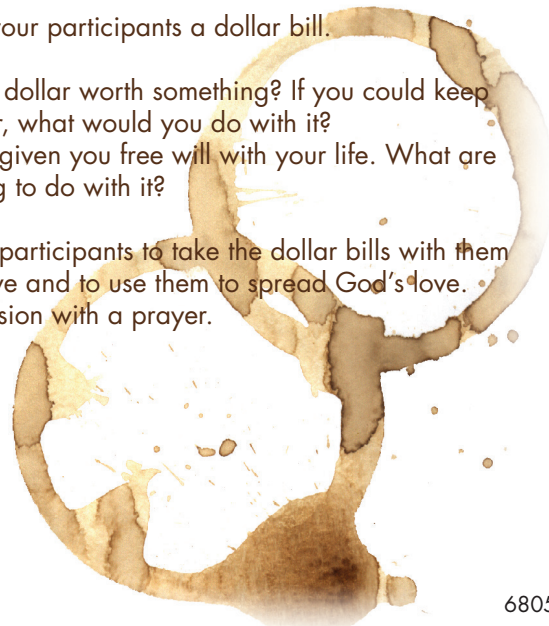


## Exit

Give each of your participants a dollar bill.

- Why is a dollar worth something? If you could keep this dollar, what would you do with it?
- God has given you free will with your life. What are you going to do with it?

Challenge the participants to take the dollar bills with them when they leave and to use them to spread God's love. Close your session with a prayer.





# If the World Belongs to God, Why Do I Have to Worry about It?



## Session Objective

Participants will explore how they can act responsibly in a world under God's sovereign rule. They will learn what is unique and valuable about the Presbyterian reason for obeying God, namely that good behavior is a way to respond thankfully to God's grace.

## Faith Statement

**Question 86. Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?**

Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through his Holy Spirit according to his own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us.

—Heidelberg Catechism (4.086)



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." What does it mean that the world *belongs* to God?
- If the whole world belongs to God, how can one mere person be important to God? If God has a plan for the whole world, does it really matter how you live?
- If God has a plan that is going to happen, why do anything good?



## Explore

Read John 3:16–17, and explore these questions:

- What does this passage say about God's love?
- Did God give his only Son because of anything humanity has done?
- How do you respond to this act of God's love? How should you respond?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- How does it feel when someone thanks you? How do you feel when you say thanks?
- How do you thank people? Why do you thank them?
- How do you thank God? For what do you thank God? How can you thank God more?



## Exit

Invite each person to make a pledge for how he or she will thank God. Close your session with a prayer.







# What Is Re-formed about My Church?



## Session Objective

Participants will evaluate how the lessons of the past five sessions apply to their denomination and local church. Specifically, they will learn where to look in their congregational context for uniquely Reformed characteristics. More broadly, they will learn where these distinctive aspects originated.

## Faith Statement

*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei.*  
("The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God.")



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Is our congregation open to change or closed to change? Why?
- In the world, when is change good? When is it bad? In your life, when is change good? When is it bad?
- Does God change? Should churches change?
- In churches, when can change be good? When can it be bad? How can churches balance change and tradition?



## Explore

Read Acts 15:1–6, and explore these questions:

- What is happening in this story?
- Do all of you agree with all of the decisions that are made in your congregation? Why or why not? Does your congregation always agree about church business? Why or why not?
- Is it more important for a church to agree or to have diversity of opinions? Explain.



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passage.

- Compared to other congregations or what culture says about churches, what do you think is unique about your congregation?
- From what you have learned in this mini-course, what about the Reformed tradition seems especially reasonable? What seems confusing? What seems as if it must be true? What just seems wrong?



## Exit

Ask: What is something that you would like to see our congregation or denomination change? Close your session in prayer, thanking God for the time that you have had together to explore important questions of faith.