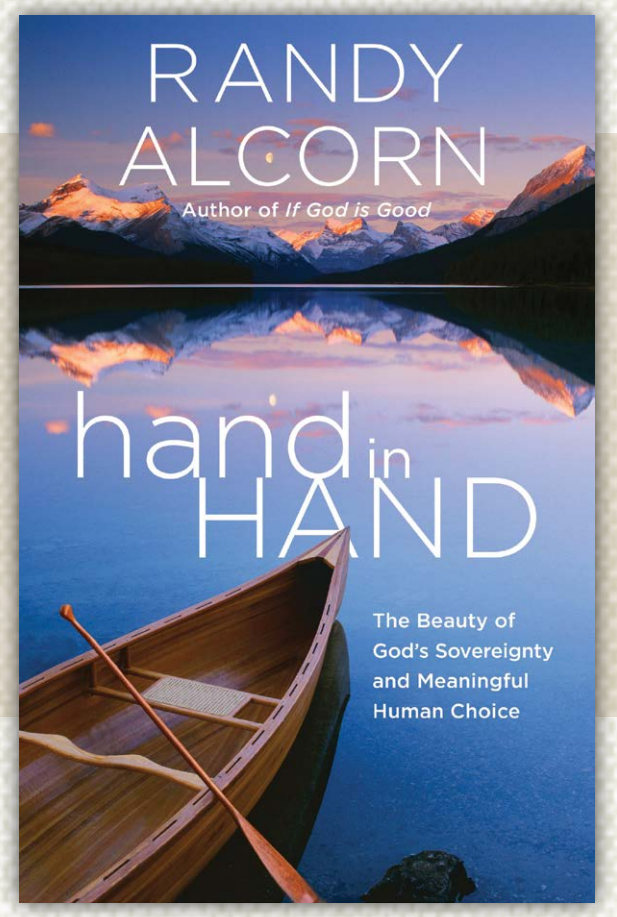
hand in HAND

study questions



eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

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Chapter 1

Why Is This Tough and Controversial Issue Worth Discussing?

1. Respond to this statement: The issue of God's sovereignty and human freedom isn't important. Doctrine doesn't matter; it's all about following Jesus.

2. On page 2, the author affirms our need "to *better* understand what we cannot *fully* understand." Do you find the idea of studying a subject we can't wrap our minds around frustrating or intriguing? Why?

3. In your family or church background, was greater emphasis put on sovereignty or free will? How has that affected your own thinking?

4. What questions do you have about the relationship of God's sovereignty and free will?

5. One of the stated purposes of this book (page 5) is "to prevent us from becoming trivial people in a shallow age." Do you think this is a serious danger?

6. Do you agree that "everything about God, including his choices, is greater than everything about us" (page 7)? How does your answer affect your thinking concerning this subject?

7. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 2

An Invitation to Calvinists, Arminians, and Those Who Don't Know the Difference

1. Before reading this chapter, how familiar were you with the terms "Calvinist" and "Arminian"?

2. How would you explain the similarities and differences between Calvinism and Arminianism?

3. While recognizing real differences between Calvinism and Arminianism, the author says, "Let's not condemn people for what we've heard they believe. Let's ask them what they really do believe."

    a. Have you had experience discussing Calvinism and Arminianism? Was it good or bad or some of both?

    b. Have your beliefs ever been misconstrued by unbelievers or fellow believers? How did that feel?

c. How can we avoid misrepresenting those we disagree with while respectfully maintaining our disagreement when needed?

4. On page 27 the author lays out a partial list of orthodox doctrines. Are there any you would add or remove? Do you agree that some Calvinists and some Arminians are orthodox; that is, they hold to the essential doctrines of the Christian faith?

5. In examining the five-point tables on pages 18–20 and the ten different doctrinal issues on pages 23–25, do you find yourself more on the Calvinist or Arminian side? Are there some exceptions?

6. A. W. Tozer said, "Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian." What are the consequences of embracing selected parts of Scripture?

7. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 3

The Sovereignty of God

1. How does a Calvinist's and an Arminian's view of God's sovereignty differ?

2. What Scripture passages mentioned do you find troubling or difficult to understand?

3. How does God's sovereignty relate to the evil and suffering we see in this world? (Share relevant Scripture.)

4. The author quotes his friend with cerebral palsy as saying, "God tailors a package of suffering best suited for each of his own" (page 46). Do you see that statement supported in Scripture? Does this comfort or encourage you?

5. The author states, “We can trust God’s loving sovereignty in every hardship.” Give examples of how you have experienced that trust or seen it in others’ lives.

6. What biblical characters come to mind in whose lives God used suffering for their good and his glory?

7. How should we respond when God allows or brings suffering into our lives?

8. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 4

Free Will and Meaningful Choice

1. How would you define "free will"? In what ways are human beings free, and in what ways are we not free or is our freedom limited?

2. The author likes the term "meaningful choice." Can a choice that is only partly free still be meaningful and consequential?

3. The author says that "contrary choice" can be either a biblical or unbiblical notion, depending on how we define it (pages 59–61). How would you explain contrary choice?

4. What is "prevenient" grace? Why is it a particularly important Arminian belief to understand?

5. The author talks about the terms “total depravity” and “total inability” (pages 67–69). How do these relate to human choice?

6. How could the belief *that no matter what decisions we make, God has predetermined our every thought and action,* affect us negatively? How could seeing ourselves as “masters of our fate” affect us negatively?

7. Are believers freer or less free than unbelievers? How are our new natures, sanctification, and the Holy Spirit involved in this?

8. Though freedom of choice complicates our lives and opens the door to suffering, why should we be grateful for it?

9. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 5

Main Views of Sovereignty and Choice

1. What are the differences between the *libertarian, determinist,* and *compatibilist* views?

2. Which of those terms would you apply to your own beliefs? Have you always held your current view?

3. What verses in this chapter do you find yourself most in danger of neglecting?

4. How did Spurgeon's views about election and God's sovereignty affect his sharing of the gospel?

5. How would you explain "The Wills of God" chart on page 102? Does saying "God is sovereignly accomplishing his will" mean that God approves of everything that happens? Why is it important to clarify the term "God's will"?

6. How did this chapter challenge or reinforce your view of God's sovereignty and human choices?

7. What did you learn about the other side of the argument in this chapter (whichever side you disagree with)?

8. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 6

Does Open Theism Resolve the Sovereignty/Choice Paradox?

1. How would you define "open theism"?

2. Does the Bible teach God's full knowledge of all things—past, present, and future? Support your answer from Scripture.

3. Have you ever found yourself wanting to redefine God or reduce him to a single attribute (for example, love or holiness)? Why is that dangerous?

4. Does open theism's view of God attract or concern you? Why?

5. Do you agree that open theism goes beyond the bounds of biblical and orthodox Christianity? Why or why not?

6. Do you find comfort in God's exhaustive knowledge of the future? Why or why not?

7. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 7

The Fascinating Interplay of God's Sovereignty and Human Choice

1. Which diagrams in this chapter come closest to depicting your views?

2. The author notes that Scripture seldom struggles with the relationship between God's sovereignty and our choices. Why do you think many of us struggle with this issue?

3. How does the author's statement "Meaningful choice is essential for genuine love" (page 144) deepen your understanding of God's love *and* our love toward him and each other?

4. How might our freedom be the same and different after we are with Christ?

5. Since God *can* overrule our choices, why doesn't he do so to keep us from hurting ourselves and others?

6. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 8

Meaningful Human Choice and Divine Sovereignty Working hand in Hand

1. Does the imagery of our small hand being in God's big Hand appeal to you? Why or why not?

2. How would you state a version of the "passengers on the ocean-going ship" analogy (pages 152–53) that expresses your understanding of sovereignty and meaningful choice?

3. Do you agree that we sometimes force Scripture into a box that fits our background and preferences, rather than letting it speak for itself ? Why do you suppose we do this?

4. Reread the two numbered lists on pages 158–59 from D. A. Carson—one with four points on God's sovereignty, the next with nine on human choices. Which ones are hardest for you to believe?

5. The author states, “Scripture often portrays God’s choices and human choices as intertwined” (page 162). Looking at the related diagrams, how would you explain this coexistence?

6. Do you agree that the biblical worldview is not fatalistic? What is our calling from God toward the broken world around us?

7. Can “trusting God” become an excuse for being lazy? How? Have you found a balance between doing your part while depending on God to do his?

8. Is the offer of the gospel universal or just for some? Support your answer biblically.

9. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 9

Voices from the Past Share Timeless Truths

1. What did C. S. Lewis mean when he spoke of "chronological snobbery" (page 178)? Do you agree this is a problem for modern believers?

2. The author, with support from Spurgeon (pages 180–81), affirms the importance of sound doctrine but says, "While the Bible is God breathed, theological systems are not." Have you ever granted too much authority to a system or a person at the expense of biblical authority?

3. The author tells the story of Charles Simeon, the Calvinist, speaking with John Wesley, the Arminian (pages 182–85). Do you find this story helpful?

4. The author quotes Arminius as enthusiastically recommending the commentaries of John Calvin (page 188). What does this tell you about Arminius? About Calvin?

5. Proverbs 6:16, 19 says God hates "a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."

   a. Do you think this passage sometimes applies to people fixated on a theological viewpoint? When?

   b. What motivation do you find in this chapter for being gracious toward those with whom you have theological differences?

6. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 10

Trusting God to Weave All Choices Together for His Children's Good

1. What is God's perspective on our suffering? Does he have purpose in it? How can suffering make us more like Jesus?

2. What promises from the Bible can you cling to in difficult times?

3. Have you seen God bring good out of something terrible that happened to you?

4. Genesis 50:20 implies that Satan intends your sufferings for evil while God intends them for good. Do you agree? How does that affect your perspective?

5. From God's perspective, is any circumstance random or any outcome uncertain? Support your answer scripturally.

6. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

Chapter 11

Concluding Thoughts on Sovereignty, Choice, Calvinism, and Arminianism

1. The author observes how we tend "to become deeply entrenched in our own positions" (page 209). How have you seen this to be true in your life?

2. The author discusses further engaging with this issue by reading books of a different persuasion or with multiple authors presenting their own positions. Which books would you like to read next?

3. How has reading *hand in Hand* helped you…

    1. in relationship to God's sovereignty and our choices?

    2. in your approach to Scripture?

3. in your view of the value of doctrine?

4. in your understanding and graciousness toward people with different positions?

4. Has this study impacted your relationship with God? How?

5. How would you explain to someone both the strengths and weaknesses of your position on God's sovereignty and human choice?

6. Choose at least one Scripture and one statement in this chapter that you find particularly significant. Why are they significant to you?

eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a Bible-believing, Christ-centered nonprofit organization with two goals:

- to teach the principles of God's Word, emphasizing an eternal viewpoint;
- to reach the needy in Christ's name, calling attention to the needs of the unreached, unfed, unsupported, unborn, unreconciled, and untrained.

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