

PREFACE

When I became a Christian, I couldn't have imagined all God intended to do in and through my life. I grew up in an isolated community on the west coast of Canada near the Alaska border. My father was a bank manager and a dedicated man of God. As a boy I came to a profound realization: God is God and I am not.

That seems straightforward enough, but that truth revolutionized my life. I came to believe that not only is God real, but He wants to take an active role in my life. I grew up to be a shy, introverted teenager. Then in a special worship service, God made it clear that He wanted exclusive access to my life, to use it for His purposes. I'll never forget the evening when I fully surrendered my life to God and told Him I would do whatever He instructed me to do. From that point on, I no longer attempted to set the agenda for my life. My only goal was to do God's will, whatever that might be.

When I was a young man, God did not reveal to me that I would one day be a pastor, or a denominational leader, or an author or mentor to corporate executives. God simply gave me one assignment at a time, and I sought to be faithful. Eventually I grew to realize that God is always actively at work around me and, if I look for it, I will recognize God's activity in the lives of the people around me. I also discovered that every time God told me to do something—no matter how difficult it might appear—He *always* enabled me to accomplish what He asked.

Over time, God led me to serve as a youth leader, worship director, education minister, senior pastor, Bible college president, denominational leader, author, and international speaker. Each new assignment took me well beyond what I felt comfortable or skilled to do. Yet each time, God proved to be more than just my Creator or Savior. He was also my sustainer, counselor, comforter, teacher, strength, protector, guide, and much more. Every time I obeyed

God, I came to experience Him in new and deeper dimensions than I had ever known.

I was occasionally asked to speak at conferences, especially student meetings, to tell others how I had learned to walk with God. My relationship with God seemed pretty ordinary to me—since it was the only one I had experienced—and I am extremely ordinary! Yet time and time again, people told me my sharing had convicted them that they had been religious, moral, and orthodox, but they had not been experiencing God the way I was describing.

I found that a growing number of people wanted to work with me in my church and then in the denominational association in which I was a leader. Pastors would leave strong churches and move to a mission setting, living on faith, to become involved in what God was doing in our midst. It seemed so simple. And yet every time we believed God, He would show us what He wanted us to do next. As we obeyed Him, we would experience a fresh demonstration of His power, love, and provision. This became such a natural part of how I and those around me walked with God that we scarcely realized it was not the way most Christians and churches were functioning.

In the midst of those exciting days—when I worked with churches in the city of Vancouver, Canada—Avery Willis approached me to ask if I would put into writing the lessons I had learned from my walk with God. That way, others could study and learn from them. I was keenly aware of how ordinary I was, so this was a humbling moment. I was not a writer. I had a full and hectic schedule, and attempting to put into a book what I had learned over a lifetime of relating to God seemed a daunting task.

Eventually, the publisher assigned an editor, Claude King, to work with me. Claude was and is a Spirit-filled, gracious man. He listened to me teach. He read over transcripts of my sermons. We spent many hours discussing how God walks with people and reveals His will. At one point the publisher suggested we call my work, “Knowing God,” but I said absolutely not. My concern was that God’s people were already immersed in Bible studies and Christian books that gave them an enormous amount of information about God. As a result, sincere Christians were coming to church every week and learning more and more about God, but they were not *experiencing* Him. To many, He was simply a faraway God to be believed in, a doctrine to

affirm, an invisible deity to whom they recited their prayers. They needed to know He is a Person with whom Christians can enjoy an intimate, growing, loving fellowship.

I prayed that the result of our efforts would not merely be another course people could take. I asked God to somehow guide us in such a way that through our writing, people would experience a life-changing encounter with the living God. Claude and I enlisted prayer warriors from all over North America and asked them to pray every day that God would guide us to produce something He would be pleased to use to bless His people. Eventually, the material was published as an interactive study entitled *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*.

The literary world was not standing in long lines to purchase copies of the book upon its release! No one had heard of Henry Blackaby. Interactive studies were not popular, and the publisher did not launch a major advertising campaign. Expectations were modest, to say the least. But something began to happen. A few small groups worked through the study, and they encountered God in a fresh, new way. They and their churches began to experience renewal. Word began to spread that this was unlike any other course people had taken. Before long, we were hearing of God doing amazing things across the country among various denominations, as well as internationally. Often, as people studied the material, they would sense God calling them into Christian ministry. I heard from mission agencies and seminaries that the number one reason people were listing for entering the ministry was that God had clearly spoken to them as they were studying *Experiencing God*. Many people expressed to us that the truths they encountered helped them become God-centered in their thinking and taught them how to recognize God’s will for themselves, their families, their businesses, and their churches. A couple of years later, the material was developed into a trade book, the revised and expanded edition of which you are reading now.

Some of the most exciting testimonies have come from readers who are longtime Christians. They’ve said things like:

- “I wish I had known these truths forty years ago. My life and ministry would have been totally different.”

- “This is the most wonderful time in my Christian life. I never knew I could have an intimate and personal relationship with my heavenly Father.”
- “My whole life and attitudes have changed since I began this study.”
- “I sensed God’s call to missions while I was studying *Experiencing God*. That is how God led me to the mission field.”
- “Our church is not the same. It has come alive again. We have started eleven new ministries in the past year.”

I can’t tell you how thrilling it has been for me to see the way God has used that material to impact His kingdom! *Experiencing God* has been translated into more than seventy languages. I have ministered in one hundred fourteen countries, and everywhere I have gone, people have tearfully related how God used the book to transform their lives. Countless individuals have told me they’re serving in their church or on the mission field or in their current job because of what God said to them while they were studying *Experiencing God*.

I discovered there was a deep hunger in the hearts of Christians to know and do God’s will. This has led me to incredible opportunities to serve the Lord. I’ve been invited on several occasions to minister at the United Nations as well as the Pentagon and the White House. Many fine Christian leaders, authors, and government leaders have told me that, as they were studying *Experiencing God*, God clearly guided them into their present position and gave them focus for their lives. I also became involved with a dynamic group of Christian CEOs who asked me to help disciple them and to teach them how to recognize God’s activity in the marketplace. It has been truly amazing and humbling to be a part of what God has done over these years.

Since I first wrote *Experiencing God*, it has been deeply rewarding to see people discover practical ways to apply the spiritual truths to their lives. I have written, along with my wife and children, a number of related materials, including *A God Centered Church*, *Fresh Encounter The Man God Uses*, *Experiencing God as Couples*

Hearing God’s Voice, *Spiritual Leadership*, *Experiencing God Day by Day*, *God in the Marketplace*, *Called and Accountable*, *When God Speaks*, and many more. I’ll never forget listening to an immense choir singing the debut of the *Experiencing God Musical*. Words cannot describe the deep gratitude to God I felt as the truths I had experienced walking with Him were sung by ten thousand people that evening! I was also blessed to be able to establish Blackaby Ministries International (www.blackaby.org) to continue spreading the message contained in *Experiencing God* around the world for many years to come.

After seventeen years of seeing *Experiencing God* used to teach and challenge people around the world, we felt it was time to revise and update the course. While I’ve heard many marvelous testimonies from those who encountered God as they studied the material, I have also been asked numerous questions I didn’t anticipate when we first put the course together. The result is the book you now hold—a completely revised and expanded edition more comprehensive than the original version.

In this new endeavor, I was pleased to have my oldest son, Richard, join Claude and me as a writer. Richard has served as a pastor and seminary president and is now the president of Blackaby Ministries International. He has coauthored numerous other works with me and is well qualified to join in the revision of this material. He coauthored the revision of *Experiencing God*, *Interactive Study* and was a field editor for the original material. Richard knows my heart and my message thoroughly, and he travels internationally sharing truths from *Experiencing God*. This book is written in the first person—from my perspective—because the biblical understandings and illustrations have come primarily from me. However, Claude and Richard have both made significant contributions to this work. I pray you will encounter your Lord in its pages and that, as a result, your life will never be the same.

INTRODUCTION

IN CHURCH BUT NOT IN CHRIST

While speaking in a series of meetings several years ago, I was approached by a man during a break. He appeared visibly shaken by what I had said and told me he was a professor at his denomination's Bible college. He explained that for years he had taught his students to treat the Bible like a classic piece of literature—a book to read and to enjoy its beauty but not something through which Almighty God would speak directly to the reader. Through tears, he confessed that he had done this because he had not personally experienced God communicating with Him. But during that conference, the Spirit of God had spoken clearly to the man and reminded him that Christianity is fundamentally an interactive relationship between God and people. When this man was younger, he had experienced God's guidance in his life. As he grew older, however, and entered the academic world, he had steadily grown more distant from God. Eventually, his estranged relationship with God seemed normal for him. Now he assumed it also should be normative for the students he taught.

Here was a man who had studied the Bible all his life. Yet for him, Scripture had become merely a collection of ancient writings that had little direct application to his life. Now that this man's heart had been awakened to the living God of those Scriptures, he realized he had been poisoning the minds of a generation of young people by teaching that God does not speak to His people. This man had experienced revival, and he was eager to re-enter the classroom to

tell students that God is real, and that He wants to encounter every person.

Sadly, we experience this scenario regularly. There are far too many people who settle for practicing a sterile religion rather than enjoying a growing, vibrant, personal relationship with the living God.

GOD'S INVITATION

God is not a concept or a doctrine. He is a Person who seeks a close, one-on-one relationship with you and me. God does not want us to merely believe in Him, He wants to relate to us on a personal level. He does not just want to hear us recite prayers. He wants to converse with us. God's plan is not to abandon Christians once we are born again, leaving us to build the best life we can. He does not intend that we simply use our wits to "get by," to bravely "survive" until we are finally ushered into heaven. God wants to be actively involved in our lives each day.

God knows what your life can become. Only He understands your full potential as His child. He does not want you to miss out on anything He has for you. I believe that within the heart of every Christian is an innate desire to know God and to do His will.

When you became a Christian, you were immediately adopted as a child of the heavenly king. The king's business became your business. And now, as your Savior and Lord, Christ wants to bring your life into the middle of His activity, which offers salvation to every person on earth. God Himself will give you the desire to serve and obey Him. The Holy Spirit will create within you a longing to know the Father's will and to become involved in what God is doing around you. Yet God has far more in store for your life than merely giving you an assignment to accomplish for Him. He wants you to have an intimate love relationship with Him that is real and personal. Jesus said: "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ" (John 17:3).

ETERNAL LIFE—NOW

The essence of eternal life—and the heart of this book—is for you to personally know God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. Knowing God does not come through a program, a study, or a

method. It is the result of a vibrant, growing, one-on-one relationship with God. Within this intimate connection, God will reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways so you can know Him in deeper and profound dimensions. As you relate to Him, God will invite you to join in His activity where He is already at work. When you obey what God tells you, He will accomplish through you things only He can do. As the Lord works in and through your life, you will come to know Him ever more closely.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10). Would you like to experience life in its fullest and richest dimensions? You may, if you are willing to respond to God's invitation to enjoy an intimate love relationship with Him.

PREREQUISITE: A SAVING RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

The pages that follow assume that you have already trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and acknowledged Him to be the Lord of your life. If you have not made this most important decision, the rest of this book will have little meaning for you because spiritual matters can only be understood by those who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within them. Scripture says: "The natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Perhaps you were baptized as an infant. Or you may have regularly attended church since you were a child. You may even be a leader in your church. Baptism, worship attendance, and church involvement are all appropriate, obedient responses to a relationship with God. However, they do not *create* or *replace* the relationship. Was there an occasion when you repented to God for your sins and asked Christ to be your Savior and Lord? If not, then the most important thing you could possibly do right now is to obey what Scripture exhorts and settle this matter with God. Ask the Lord to speak to you as you read and consider the following Scriptures:

- Romans 3:23—All have sinned.
- Romans 6:23—Eternal life is a free gift of God.

- Romans 5:8—Because of His love, Jesus paid the death penalty for your sins.
- Romans 10:9–10—Confess Jesus as your Lord and acknowledge that God raised Him from the dead.
- Romans 10:13—Ask God to forgive your sins and trust Him to do so.

To place your faith in Jesus and receive His gift of eternal life you must:

- Recognize that God created you for a love relationship with Him. He wants you to love Him with all your being.
- Admit you are a sinner, and that you cannot save yourself.
- Believe Jesus paid the penalty for your sin by His death on the cross and that He rose from the dead in victory over death.
- Confess (agree with God about) your sins that separate you from Him.
- Repent (turn away from) your sins.
- Ask Jesus to save you by His grace, which is an undeserved gift.
- Turn over the control of your life to Jesus.

If you need help, call on a minister, a deacon, an elder, or a Christian friend. If you have just made this important decision, tell someone the good news of what God has done in your life. Then share your decision with your church.

LOOKING TO KNOW GOD BETTER?

You may be frustrated as a Christian because you know God has a more abundant life for you than you are presently experiencing. Or you may earnestly desire God's directions for your life as you seek to serve Him. Perhaps you have recently experienced tragedy and now you stand bewildered in the middle of a broken life, not knowing what to do next. Whatever your present circumstances, my sincere prayer is that this book may help you to do the following:

- Believe and experience daily God's infinite love for you.
- Hear when God is speaking to you.
- Identify God's unmistakable activity in your life.
- Believe Him to be and to do everything He promises.
- Adjust your beliefs, character, and behavior to Him and His ways.
- Identify a direction He is taking in your life, and recognize what He wants to do through you.
- Know clearly how to respond to what He shows you.
- Experience God doing through you what only He can do.

These are not things that *I* can do or that *this book* can do for you. *Only God can accomplish these things.* I can serve as your guide, encourager, and, hopefully, as a catalyst to help you enjoy a deeper walk with God. I will share with you the biblical truths by which God has guided my life. I will recount for you some of the amazing works the Lord has done when God's people have applied biblical truths to following Him.

I invite you to interact with God as you read this book, asking Him to reveal the ways He wants you to apply these truths in your own life, family, ministry, job, and church. But take your time! Many people have told me that as they were reading this book, they suddenly encountered God face-to-face and He changed their lives forever. That is my prayer for you. As you read, take time to pause and pray, asking God to speak to you, to guide you, and to reveal how He wants you to respond. If God speaks clearly about something He wants to do in your life, don't move quickly on to the next chapter. Instead, camp out on what God said, and let Him show how He wants to implement that truth in your life. Once you feel you have processed what God wants you to understand, begin reading further to discover what else God has in store for you.

I have found that God always has a fresh and deeper truth He wants us to learn about Him. So once He has taught you one thing, get ready for the *next* marvelous truth God will soon introduce!

WHERE ARE YOU?

People can be in many different places along their spiritual walk. I've noted below some of the ways you might describe your spiritual life. See if one or more of these descriptions matches your present relationship with God:

nonexistent	plateaued	in decline	confused
exciting	growing	miraculous	victorious
discouraging	powerful	bewildered	defeated
dynamic	contagious	hopeless	joyful
sinful	embarrassing	deepening	ashamed

This book is unlike most you will read. Repeatedly, God has used the truths it explains to initiate a profound encounter with those who read them. So before you go further, take a moment to ask yourself, "What does God want to do in my life as I read this book?" Pause now to pray, and ask God to accomplish His will in your life as you continue.

YOUR TEACHER

Jesus said, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things" (John 14:26). God's Holy Spirit is your personal teacher. He will draw you into a closer walk with God as He reveals God's purposes and ways to you. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to do His will, he will understand whether the teaching is from God or if I am speaking on My own." (John 7:17).

That is the criteria for this and any book. The Holy Spirit, who resides within you, will always confirm in your heart the truth of Scripture. When I share in this book what I perceive as a biblical principle, you can depend on the Holy Spirit to affirm whether that teaching comes from God or not. You shouldn't automatically take my word for it! Always ask the Holy Spirit to verify—through Scripture—what I am teaching. As you read this book, be sure to nurture your relationship with God through prayer, meditation, and Bible study so you will be able to receive and obey everything God tells you.

YOUR SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

The Bible is God's Word to you. The Holy Spirit honors and uses God's Word as He speaks to you. The Scriptures will be your source of authority for how you live your Christian life and how you relate to God. You can't depend on human traditions, your experience, or the opinions of others to be accurate authorities on God's will and ways. While these can be helpful, they must always be evaluated in light of the teaching of Scripture.

Anything of spiritual significance that happens in your life will be a result of God's activity in you. He is infinitely more concerned with your life and your relationship with Him than you or I could possibly be. Let God's Spirit bring you into an intimate relationship with the Lord of the universe "who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think—according to the power that works in you" (Eph. 3:20). *Would you pray at the outset of your reading, and surrender your life to God so He may guide and instruct you in any way He pleases?* As you prepare to obey Him, trust that God who has already begun a good work in you will complete it in His time (Phil. 1:6).

I urge you to allow the Holy Spirit to take your life to a new, higher, dynamic level in your walk with God. You may be presently enjoying a vibrant Christian life. But I can assure you, there is still much more God wants you to experience of Him, for He is an infinite being. You may have been disappointed in the past. Perhaps you attempted other studies or made other commitments to grow spiritually, but your enthusiasm eventually waned and your growth fizzled. I encourage you: Don't let any previous failure or disappointment stop you from confidently moving forward with God. No matter where we are, why would any of us ever become satisfied with the current status of our walk with God when there is so much He wants to do in and through our lives?

Each chapter of this book includes a section featuring questions to ponder, set apart like the one on the following page. You might wish to keep a notebook nearby as you consider these issues and apply the book's message to your life circumstances.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Are you certain you are a child of God, that He has forgiven you of your sin? If not, stop right now and settle that matter with the Lord.
2. What in particular would you like to see God do in your life as you study this book? Do you long for a deeper walk with Him? Do you need victory over a particular sin in your life? Do you desire more profound times in prayer and reading God's Word? Would you like to gain a deeper sense of joy in your life or to better understand God's will? Ask God to address these specific issues as you read.
3. Do you have questions regarding the Christian life or your own personal experience? If so, list them in the margin of this book or in a prayer journal, and then watch to see how God guides you into the truth of your circumstances.

1

KNOWING GOD BY EXPERIENCE

This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ. (John 17:3)

EXPERIENCING GOD'S PROTECTION

One day, I was travelling in a mini-van with my wife Marilyn and two men on an extremely busy freeway near Washington, D.C. It was rush hour, and the multi-lane expressway was jammed with vehicles as impatient drivers rushed to their destinations. Suddenly, our van swerved to the left and almost collided with an eighteen-wheeler in the next lane. We all braced ourselves, certain we were about to be crushed by the behemoth. The truck blasted its air horn, and our driver veered back into our lane. But before long our vehicle again drifted into the busy lane of traffic beside us. We asked the driver if he was OK, and he assured us he was. But his driving became increasingly erratic. Finally, we insisted that he pull over and eventually discovered this dear man was having a stroke. He barely knew what he was doing. It had been a miracle we had not had a serious accident.

I had known that God was my Protector since I was a little boy (Ps. 41:2; 121:7). Yet on that day, I *experienced* His divine safeguarding. There is a world of difference between knowing something