

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.