

God Pursues A Love Relationship - Henry Blackaby

Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God

Introduction: From Head Knowledge to Life Experience

The pastor began by sharing a common question he receives: "How can I experience in my life what I know in my head?" Many Christians have correct doctrine and theology but struggle to translate that head knowledge into a real, life-transforming experience. The pastor explained that his work, particularly the Bible study "Experiencing God," was created to help people bridge this gap. The subtitle of that study is "knowing and doing the will of God," which speaks to a spiritual DNA God has placed in every person. We are often restless until we know and are actively participating in God's will.

The pastor recounted how the publisher initially wanted to title the study "Knowing God," but he insisted on "Experiencing God." The term "knowing" often implies intellectual knowledge, whereas "experiencing" points to a relational, active reality. He was writing not for seminary professors, but for the common person earnestly seeking to know and do God's will.

The Seven Realities of Experiencing God

The structure of "Experiencing God" is built on seven realities, which are a progression of how God works in a believer's life.

1. **God's Initiative:** God is always at work around you.
2. **Love Relationship:** God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal. He wants to bring you into the middle of His activity.
3. **God's Invitation:** God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. **God Speaks:** God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
5. **Crisis of Belief:** God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action. What you do next reveals what you truly believe about God.

6. **Major Adjustments:** You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.

- **Example (Abraham):** He could not stay in Ur and follow God's call.
- **Example (Amos):** The prophet had to leave his work as a shepherd to deliver God's message.
- **Example (Disciples):** They had to leave their fishing boats and tax-collecting tables to follow Jesus.
- **Example (Historical Figures):** Hudson Taylor and William Carey had to leave their lives in England to follow God's call to the mission field.

7. **Obedience and Experience:** You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.

The Role of the Holy Spirit: Your Guide into All Truth

The pastor emphasized that every time we open the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is present to ensure we understand what God is doing in our lives.

- **Scripture Focus: John 16:12-13**

- **Context:** Jesus is preparing His disciples for His departure. He tells them He has more to teach, but they are not yet ready to receive it. He promises the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- **Sermon Application:**
 - Jesus said, *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."* This should prompt us to ask, "God, is there more you want to say to me, but my current spiritual state prevents me from receiving it?"
 - Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *"the Spirit of truth."* The Holy Spirit's primary role is to take the truth of God's Word and apply it to every area of our lives, setting us free.
 - *"He will guide you into all truth."* This is an all-encompassing promise. The Spirit guides us in truth concerning our marriage, family, work, church, and even our understanding of national and global events.
 - *"He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak."* The Holy Spirit listens to the Father. When the Father has a purpose for your life, He directs the Holy Spirit to communicate that to you so you don't miss it. The Spirit speaks with the Father's authority.
 - *"He will tell you things to come."* God knows our future and wants to prepare us for it.

- **Pastor's Example: The Busy CEO**

- The pastor counsels top CEOs and encourages them to have an “unhurried time with God” each morning, as God is the only one who can properly orchestrate their day.
- One CEO initially resisted, claiming he was too busy. The pastor replied, “It’s obvious you don’t know who you’re going to meet.”
- A month later, the CEO reported he had started getting up at 4:30 a.m. for this time with God. For the first time, he had led one of his employees to the Lord.

God’s Purpose For Your Life

God has a specific and incredible purpose for your life, and it would be tragic to live without discovering what He intended for you. The pastor shared stories of how God is using ordinary people and resources in extraordinary ways to accomplish His global purposes.

- **Example (Christian Businesspeople):** A retired female CEO felt a burden to hold a conference for Arab and Israeli Christian businessmen in Lebanon. The retreat was life-transforming. She concluded that “the transformation of many nations of the world will be done by Christian businessmen in the marketplace.” The pastor is witnessing this firsthand, as the global CEOs he works with are leveraging their influence to make a radical difference in countries where missionary work is difficult. They have access to presidents and leaders and are using that access for God’s kingdom.
- **Example (Military & Prison Ministry):**
 - The “Experiencing God Day by Day” devotional was adapted for military personnel. The pastor received a picture of soldiers in Iraq holding the book and was told by one young man that the devotional “got me safely through my term in Iraq.”
 - A special prison edition was also created. Carla Faye Tucker, a woman on death row in Texas, was transformed by “Experiencing God” and began teaching it to other inmates, who renamed their section “Life Row.”
 - The warden of Angola Prison, once the nation’s bloodiest, implemented the study for all 5,300 inmates. The prison is now a model for others. On a visit to death row, the pastor met a man who had brutally murdered 19 women but had since become a believer and been baptized. Another inmate, at the pastor’s request, sang a moving rendition of “Amazing Grace” that filled the cell block.

Discerning the Time: Are We Ready for Christ’s Return?

The pastor turned to a critical passage to challenge the congregation about their spiritual awareness.

- **Scripture Focus: Luke 12:54-56**

- **Context:** Jesus addresses the multitudes, pointing out their ability to predict the weather by observing the clouds and wind. He then rebukes them for their inability to interpret the signs of the times.
- **Sermon Application:**
 - Jesus calls them “hypocrites” because they could discern the face of the sky but could not discern the significance of the moment—that the Savior of the world was standing in their midst. The religious leaders, who had the Scriptures, not only missed Him but crucified Him.
 - The pastor challenged us to ask ourselves a serious question: If we are hard on them for missing Jesus’s first coming, how are we doing at discerning the signs of His second coming?

- **Scripture Focus: Matthew 24**

- **Context:** The disciples ask Jesus about the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Jesus provides several signs to look for.
- **Sermon Application:** The pastor urged a careful reading of this chapter, highlighting four signs that indicate the nearness of the Lord’s return:
 - a. **Earthquakes:** We are seeing and hearing about an increase in significant earthquakes around the world.
 - b. **Pestilence:** Pandemics like AIDS and H1N1 are running rampant.
 - c. **Unprecedented Tribulation:** Jesus prophesied tribulation so great that “no flesh would survive” if the days were not shortened. The pastor noted that we live in a generation with terrorists who have access to biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons and are determined to cause mass destruction. This may be the generation alive when the Lord returns.
 - d. **The Gospel Preached to All Nations:** Jesus said the end would come after “the gospel of this kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations.” The pastor noted that major mission-sending agencies recently collaborated to ensure that every known unreached people group is targeted with the Gospel.

This convergence of signs strongly suggests that we may be the generation that sees the final return of the Lord. This reality should profoundly impact how we live and how urgently we pursue God’s calling on our lives.

God's Covenant with Families

The pastor shared a personal testimony about his family and God's faithfulness. He and his wife, Marilyn, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on June 3rd, 2026. They have five children (four sons and one daughter) and fourteen grandchildren (seven boys and seven girls).

- All four of his sons have felt called into ministry, and his daughter is a career missionary in Germany. This legacy is now extending to his grandchildren, with the eldest graduating from seminary and the second eldest enrolling in another.
- The pastor shared a pivotal moment in his prayer life while reading the book of Isaiah, when he felt a profound earnestness for his children and grandchildren.
- **Scripture Focus: Isaiah 59:21**
 - **Context:** This verse is a promise from God, a covenant.
 - **Text:** *"As for me," says the Lord, "this is my covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."*
 - **Application:** The pastor took this as a personal covenant from God for his family. He understood it to mean that the same Spirit and Word that God gave him and his wife would be passed down through their children and grandchildren. He has since watched this promise unfold.

Who God Is: He is a God Who Makes and Keeps Covenants

- God loves His people enough to enter into a binding covenant with them and their families.
- When God makes a covenant, you can immediately look for Him to begin implementing it.

Who We Are and How We Should Live: Recognizing the Time

The pastor transitions to a central question Jesus posed: Do we recognize the time in which we live? This isn't about understanding geopolitical events but about recognizing the **activity of God**.

- **Key Question:** Where do you see God at work in your life, in our nation, and in the world?
- **Core Principle:** What you believe about God's current activity will determine how you live. If you see God moving toward the end of all things, you will not

live “business as usual.”

- **Self-Reflection:** Would your children say that the way you live—your priorities, your finances—reflects a belief that the hour is short and an urgency to extend God’s kingdom?

Application to Our Nation: Remedial Judgments

The pastor suggests that God has been trying to get the attention of His people in America through a series of “remedial judgments.”

- **Historical Precedent:** Throughout history, when a nation sins, God judges it. He has blessed America immensely, but the nation has also sinned grievously. The key to national revival is God’s people recognizing the hour.
- **Examples of Remedial Judgments:**
 - i. **9/11:** God pulled back the curtain to show the nation’s vulnerability and the intent of its enemies. For a short time, people prayed, but then they stopped.
 - ii. **Hurricane Katrina:** This was a judgment against a sinful city (New Orleans). Again, God’s people prayed for a while and then stopped.
 - iii. **The Economic Crisis:** When the nation turned to Wall Street and investments for security instead of God, He brought judgment on the economy.
- **The Purpose:** These judgments are designed to get the attention of God’s people and lead them to radical repentance and intercession. The pastor questions what God might need to do next if His people do not respond.
- **A Warning:** The pastor relays a story from a politically knowledgeable man in his church who learned that top Al-Qaeda leadership has threatened immense destruction on America by 2020 if the nation does not adopt their doctrines. This serves as a stark reminder that God comes not only to bless but also to judge.

God’s Heart: He is a Friend, But He Requires Obedience

God’s desire is not to judge, but to have a relationship with us. He wants to be our friend.

- **Example from Moses:** God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”
- **Scriptural Clarification:** The pastor references a popular song lyric, “I am a friend of God.” He points out that the scripture it’s based on (likely from **John**

15) includes a condition: *"If you keep my commandments, then you are a friend of mine."* Friendship with God is not automatic; it is tied to our obedience.

- **God's Invitation:** God is trying to get our attention. He is asking if we recognize His presence and activity and if that recognition is shaping the way we live and the decisions we make in every area of our lives.

Counseling from the Heavens — God's Love, Authority, and Transformation

Scripture Foundations and Key Assertions

- **On Sin and Spiritual Death**

- **Ephesians 2:1-7 & Romans 6:23:** These passages affirm that sin results in spiritual death ("wages of sin is death") and that we were "dead in trespasses and sins." Counselors must not ignore sin's nature or consequences, even among believers. Sin brings "death" to marriage, family, prayer, and faith life.

- **On God's Mercy and Our New Position**

- **Ephesians 2:1-7:** While we were dead, God, being "rich in mercy" and because of His "great love," made us alive and "made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Believers must live and counsel from the reality of this present union with Christ—seeing from God's perspective, not from circumstances.

- **On God's Authority and Our Confidence**

- **1 John 4:4:** "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."
- **Matthew 28:18-20:** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me..."
- **Application:** Believers should not fear the enemy; Christ's authority surpasses all, and Satan is limited. Counsel in confidence—Christ's authority governs every situation, and He is present to give wisdom.

- **On God's Initiative in Salvation and Counseling**

- **John 6:44-45, 65:** "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him... no one can come... unless it has been granted by My Father."
- **Application:** Recognize and join the Father's active work. No one comes to Christ apart from the Father's initiative—watch for signs of His activity. Do not attempt to do something "for God" and ask Him to help; rather, join what He is already doing.

- **On Christ's Church**

- **Matthew 16:15-18:** After Peter's confession, Jesus responds, "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father... I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."
- **Application:** The local church is God's creation under Christ's authority; when aligned with Him, it overcomes darkness in the community.

- **On God's Unbreakable Love and Purpose**

- **Romans 8:26-39 & Ephesians 1:3-4:** These passages provide assurance of God's sovereign love, purpose, and intercession. He "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," and works "all things work together for good" for those He has predestined, called, justified, and will glorify. His love is unbreakable: "nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- **Application:** Counselors and counselees are held by God's unbreakable love; His purposes aim to conform believers to Christ's image.

- **On Choosing Life**

- **Deuteronomy 30:19:** "I have set before you life and blessing, death and cursing; therefore choose life..."
- **Application:** In counseling, call people to choose life in Christ for themselves, their families, marriages, and churches.

Illustrations and Examples from the Pastor

- **Pastoral Experience in California (1960s):**

- In the East Bay area of San Francisco, the pastor's ministry dealt with gangs, the mafia, and frequent trips to San Quentin. His approach was grounded in his relationship with Jesus, counseling with confidence in Christ's authority. He witnessed God's transforming grace among those involved in severe crimes.

- **"Untouchables" Gang Transformation:**

- A gang of ~26 angry young adults disrupted a Sunday service. The church had been taught about Christ's authority and to be ready to join God's activity.
- Within 6–8 months, 23 of the 26 came to faith, and the gang dissolved.
- Law enforcement recognized a dramatic drop in crime calls in that area, attributing it to the church's impact. This illustrates that when Christ builds His church, the gates of hell do not prevail.

- **Ministry in Canada:**

- Using a similar counseling approach—friendship leading to Christ—he saw scores of people transformed.

Principles and Applications for Our Lives

- **Who God Is and How He Responds**

- God is rich in mercy and great in love; He makes the spiritually dead alive with Christ (**Ephesians 2**).
- He has all authority; Christ reigns and intercedes for us (**Matthew 28; Romans 8**).
- The Father is actively drawing people to Jesus (**John 6**); His sovereign love predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies (**Romans 8; Ephesians 1**).

- **Who God Says You Are**

- You were dead in sin; now you are made alive, raised, and seated with Christ (**Ephesians 2**).
- You were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1**).
- You are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you; inseparable from God's love (**Romans 8**).
- You are indwelt by the One greater than the world; not enslaved to fear of the enemy (1 **John 4:4**).

- **How to Live and Counsel**

- Live God-centered, not problem-centered; minister from the “heavenly places” perspective.
- Address sin candidly—its wages are death—even among believers (**Romans 6:23**).
- Watch for and join the Father's activity in every conversation (**John 6**).
- Rely on Christ's present authority and presence; expect wisdom in the worst situations (**Matthew 28**).
- Aim for transformation, not mere behavior modification—seek encounters with the living Christ (**Romans 8**).
- Choose life in every situation (**Deuteronomy 30:19**).

Key Points

1. Sin's wages are death—even for believers—so counseling must address sin biblically (**Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2**).

2. Christ's authority is total; do not fear the enemy—minister from confidence in His indwelling power (**1 John 4:4; Matthew 28:18–20**).
 3. Believers are seated with Christ now; counsel from a God-centered “heavenlies” perspective (**Ephesians 2:6**).
 4. The Father draws; effective counseling discerns and joins God's present activity (**John 6:44–45, 65**).
 5. Christ builds His church; aligned churches overcome darkness and transform communities (**Matthew 16:15–18**).
 6. God's love is sovereign and inseparable; aim for transformation through encounter with Christ, not mere behavior change (**Romans 8:26–39; Ephesians 1:3–4**).
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*This sermon summary was generated by **auto** on June 30, 2026. A follow-up sermon on hearing God's voice will be preached on July 1, 2026.*