

HENRY &
RICHARD BLACKABY

CLAUDE V. KING

EXPERIENCING
GOD

Knowing & Doing
the Will of God





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To my parents, Mr. and Mrs. G. R. S. Blackaby,
and parents-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Wells, Sr.,
for their faithful example before me;

and to my wife Marilyn,
for her faithful companionship,

and my children, Richard, Thomas, Melvin, Norman, and Carrie,
as we have been experiencing God together.

—Henry T. Blackaby

To my amazing children, Mike, Daniel, and Carrie.
May you always enjoy experiencing God the way
your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents have.

—Richard Blackaby

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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

Warning!

I need to warn you of something at the outset as you read this book. What you encounter in the following pages, or, more accurately, whom you encounter, could dramatically change your life. God does not focus on giving people heartwarming devotional thoughts. He intends to save and radically transform lives. He does so all the time.

Moses was a veteran shepherd until he encountered God in the backside of the desert. David was the youngest son in a family that didn't expect him to amount to anything special until a grizzled prophet visited his home. Elisha was a farmer until God's servant came calling. Mary was preparing to be a typical small-town Jewish wife and mother until an angel appeared with an important message. Peter and Andrew were fishermen until Jesus passed by their boat. Saul of Tarsus was on a fanatical crusade to stamp out Christianity until the risen Christ intercepted him during a trip to Damascus. One encounter with God changed everything. Perhaps that's why God asked, "Do you not tremble before me?" (Jer. 5:22 CSB). God also declared, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2 CSB).

I must hasten to add that though encounters with God can shake you to the roots of your being and transform you, the change is always for the better. God is your Creator. He fashioned every molecule of your being in its place (Ps. 139:13–16). He understands

the maximum potential of your life. He knows the exact number of your days on Earth. He is also fully aware of His eternal purposes for your life and the enormous heavenly resources He is prepared to invest in order to ensure His will for your life comes to pass. He is someone you dare not ignore or treat carelessly.

God Pursues You

Becoming a parent helped me to understand God's heart for His people. Marilyn and I were married in the 1960s while I was attending seminary near Berkley, California. It was a tumultuous time in the nation. We had our first child, Richard, a year later. Some people tried to discourage us from having children in light of the uncertain future. But we had noticed in Scripture that whenever society was experiencing difficult times, God's answer was often to send a child.

I'll never forget the first night we had our baby in our home. I spent most of the night praying over my son, seeking to know what was on God's heart for him. God impressed upon me that Richard would walk with God and one day serve Him in ministry. I never told Richard what I heard that night. I sensed he needed to hear it from God first.

Through the years, I observed God pursuing Richard and gently drawing him to Himself. I served as a pastor during Richard's childhood and youth. I remember seeing Richard sitting in the front row of the auditorium listening intently to my sermons even though much of what I said was probably beyond his youthful comprehension. I recall being surprised one Sunday to see Richard timidly make his way to the front of the church during an altar call. He desired to pray and ask God to forgive his sins and become his Lord. I also remember when Richard entered his teen years! He faced some difficult years as a Christian when most of the people in his school were not following Christ. He faced persecution at times and trials and temptations we did not always know about as his parents.

When Richard entered the university, I sensed he was running from God's call on his life. He was afraid of what God might ask him to do if he surrendered everything to Him. Richard wasn't living in open rebellion against God. He still attended church. But he wanted to follow God on his terms, not God's. Richard began his undergraduate studies intending to be a schoolteacher. In his mind,

teaching was a noble calling that enabled him to evade the one profession he was desperately trying to avoid: pastor! I kept praying that God would draw Richard closer to Himself and that He would help Richard understand how wonderful it was to walk in God's love and will.

At 2:30 one Sunday morning, Richard came into my bedroom and awakened me. He had a friend at our house that night who was in severe spiritual bondage, and Richard had been unable to help him. The experience rattled Richard to his core. He had learned that night that it would cost others if he rejected God's call on his life. During the Sunday service later that day, I extended an altar call for people to make public decisions in response to what God was doing in their life. Richard sat at the back of the auditorium in one last effort to resist God's call. But during the third verse, I noticed Richard tearfully making his way to the front of the auditorium. He came up to me and simply said, "Dad, I've been running from God, but I'm not going to run anymore." From that point on, I saw a change in Richard. He began responding to whatever God initiated in his life. That obedience ultimately led him to earn three degrees and then serve as a pastor and a seminary president. I have had the joy of sharing the stage with him as we have spoken together around the world in diverse places such as Ireland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Israel, South Korea, the Philippines, and Cyprus. We have written many books together. Today, he leads Blackaby Ministries International. What a joy it has been as his father to see God draw him into a dynamic, personal relationship and then sweep him up into God's activity! And what a joy it has been to watch Richard subsequently teach his three children, and now his six grandchildren, to do the same!

Settling for Less

Sadly, there are many people just like Richard who are in danger of missing out on the intimate love relationship and abundant life God intends for them. Some people treat God as an unknowable, generally benevolent deity who inhabits nature and can be called upon in prayer when needed. Such individuals typically live according to their own standards and only call upon God when they feel they need his help. Scripture is clear, however, that people cannot

understand God's ways until they are born again. Furthermore, God is holy, and people are sinful (Rom. 3:23). The only way for people to have access to God is for them to repent of their sin and to yield their lives to Christ's Lordship (1 John 1:9–10, 13). It is only then that people can relate personally to God and become His beloved children. The apostle Paul explained, "But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Cor. 2:14 CSB). The first step to knowing and hearing from God is to repent of your sin and to place your trust in God as your Lord and Savior. Then, as a born-again child of God, you will have full access to Him and all He makes available to you.

Unfortunately, many professing Christians do not know how to relate to God in a personal manner. Some were baptized into a church as infants but have never made a conscious choice to follow Jesus. Others treat God as if He is merely a theological concept rather than a person who desires a close relationship with them. They embrace religious activities such as attending church services, trying to live a moral life, and agreeing with certain theological doctrines. They assume they will finally be personally introduced to God when they eventually enter heaven. It does not occur to them that God wants to interact with them in this life or that He has something to say to them now. They treat God as a theological doctrine to believe but not as a person to know and love.

As a result, many self-professing Christians attend church services but don't encounter God. They say prayers, but they never hear God respond. They do their Bible readings, but they don't anticipate God speaking to them through its pages. They try to live the best life they can, just like an atheist might, but they don't anticipate God guiding them in their decision-making. The unfortunate result is that many Christians live a religious life, but they never experience God. Surely this distant, impersonal relationship breaks God's heart, for He created us to bring Him glory and to enjoy fellowship with Him. Yet many Christians are disoriented to God. They don't recognize His voice. They might believe in God, but they do not truly love Him. For you cannot genuinely love someone you do not know.

There is a third category of person who might be reading this book: people who used to enjoy a close walk with God but whose

relationship with Him is now distant. I have met many such people through the years. They once had a vibrant walk with God but, through various circumstances or their own spiritual carelessness, their relationship with God has become distant and lifeless. Perhaps they made some mistakes along the way or failed to keep a commitment to God. Eventually, they resign themselves to never know God well or to have a vibrant walk with Him. Thankfully, God pursues us when we drift away from Him! He is undaunted by our mistakes and failures. In fact, He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly more in our lives than we could imagine, if only we would believe him (Eph. 3:20). Hopefully you will refuse to be satisfied with your relationship with God until you are experiencing everything that He intends for you. Many have told me that God used the words on these pages to reignite their love for God. People claim that after reading this material, their walk with God grew closer than it had ever been. I hope the same will be true of you.

Challenge

This material has been widely and warmly received by countless people through the years. Believers from around the world have told us, “I have been a Christian for many years, but I had no idea that the Christian life was intended to be so personal and exciting.” The purpose of this book is to help guide you to know and experience God in ways He always intended. As you read the following pages, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as He opens your understanding to spiritual truth and reveals God’s thoughts and intentions to you. The Holy Spirit will be your teacher (John 14:26). Though you will be reading words I have written, you need to listen to what God says through these pages. I could write the most amazing and profound words about God ever composed in human language, but unless the Holy Spirit opens your spiritual understanding, you will miss the truth they contain.

Jesus said that he came so people just like you could experience abundant life (John 10:10). He didn’t die on a cross so you could “get by” or “hang in there” or do “okay.” He wants you to walk so closely with Him that His joy overflows in your life (John 15:11). He wants you to know Him so well that His peace guards your heart and mind regardless of what troubles you face in life (Phil. 4:7).

Take a moment to pray before you proceed further. Ask God to open your spiritual understanding so you see clearly what He has for you. Take time to answer the questions at the end of each chapter. Don't race through the material. Allow these truths to move from your head to your heart. And finally, don't be satisfied with knowing about God. Allow the Holy Spirit to do a fresh work in your life until you have come to a place in your life where you are truly experiencing God.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you certain that you have been born again and made spiritually alive? If not, meet with a pastor or mature Christian friend and settle that matter immediately. Only when the Holy Spirit is actively working in your life will you be able to understand what is shared in the following pages.
2. Has your Christian life been characterized by religious activity and ritual or by a personal and growing relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ?
3. In what area of your Christian life are you currently struggling? Would you take time in prayer and in Scripture to ask God for direction and victory for that area? Then expect Him to act!

(Written January 2021)

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

(PUBLISHED 2008)

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 okay, 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

to be true in your head and experiencing the reality in your life. When we finally arrived at our destination that evening, I had a profound new, experiential understanding of God as my Protector.

Scripture is filled with descriptions of God's character. You can read these accounts and believe them to be true about God. Yet God does not merely want you to read *about* Him, He wants you to *know* Him. For the Greeks, to know something meant you understood a concept in your mind. It was an academic process. For example, a Greek orphan might grow up and know the concept of a father. He could describe what fathers do and what it looks like to relate to one. He could conduct research and know all the nuances of the Greek word for father. Yet a small child who had a loving father would know much more about fatherhood than the expert who had studied the concept abstractly his entire life.

In contrast, for a Hebrew person—like Jesus—knowing something entailed experiencing it. In fact, you could not truly say you knew something unless you had dealt with it personally. The small child who had a father might not understand the various grammatical uses of the word “father,” but he would know a great deal about what it was like to have one. So it is significant that, when Jesus spoke about knowing God, He was speaking as a Hebrew.

When Jesus said eternal life is knowing God—including God the Son, Jesus Christ—He did not mean that eternal life is knowing *about* God. He was not referring to someone who has read many books and attended numerous seminars about God. He was talking about a firsthand, experiential knowledge. We come to truly know God as we experience Him in and around our lives. Many people have grown up attending church and hearing about God all their lives, but they do not have a personal, dynamic, growing relationship with God. They never hear His voice. They have no idea what God's will is. They do not encounter His love firsthand. They have no sense of divine purpose for their lives. They may know a lot about God, but they don't really know Him.

Merely knowing about God will leave you unsatisfied. Truly knowing God only comes through experience as He reveals Himself to you through His word and as you relate to Him. Throughout the Bible, we can see that God took the initiative to disclose Himself to people through their life events.

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Knowing God through His Names

In biblical days, a Hebrew person's name represented his character or described her nature. Peoples' names gave insight into what they were like.

Similarly, biblical names, titles, and descriptions of God identify how men and women personally came to know Him. The Scripture is the record of God's revelation of Himself to people. Each of the many names for God represents a different aspect of His nature.

The Lord Will Provide

Genesis 22:1–18 tells us that God was in the process of developing Abraham's character so he could be the father of a new nation. God put Abraham's faith and obedience to the test by asking him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. This brought Abraham to a crisis of belief. He had to decide what he really believed about God. Until this time, Abraham had known God by experience as "God Almighty," for God had miraculously provided him with a son when he and his wife, Sarah, were old and beyond the human limits of childbearing. It was wonderful to know God as "Almighty," but God wanted to expand Abraham's understanding and his experience of who He is.

The command from God to kill Isaac seemingly contradicts everything we know about God. However, in Abraham's day, people sometimes would sacrifice children on altars dedicated to their idols. They believed that demonstrating such devotion to their gods would earn them divine pleasure and, in return, bring bountiful crops. Nowhere else does the Bible record God ever asking someone to sacrifice a child to Him. Clearly, God was testing Abraham to see if he was as devoted to the true God as his neighbors were committed to their false gods.

Of course, any such sacrifice would be horrendous, but putting to death your only child—for whom you had waited twenty-five years—would have been an agonizing assignment. Obeying such a command required Abraham to trust God at a new and deeper level of faith than he ever had before. On the way to the place of sacrifice, Isaac asked his dad, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). Can you imagine how sobering this moment was for Abraham, knowing his beloved son Isaac was to be the sacrifice?

“Abraham answered, ‘God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son’” (Gen. 22:8). We don’t know all Abraham was thinking as he trudged up the mountain with his son, but clearly he trusted God to provide everything he needed for the imminent sacrifice. He acted on his belief that God was his Provider. He did what God told him to do. When God saw that Abraham did not merely claim to have faith in Him but that he was willing to act out his trust through obedience in this excruciating task, He stopped Abraham and provided a ram for the sacrifice instead. Abraham named that place after the characteristic of God he had just come to know by experience. This is the first time we see the name *Jehovah Jireh* in Scripture, meaning “The Lord Will Provide.” Abraham came to an intimate knowledge of God that day through the experience of God as his Provider.

This is how we, too, grow to know God. As we experience God firsthand, we come to know Him in new and increasingly deeper dimensions. We can learn that God provides as we read this story about Abraham’s walk, but we really know God as Provider once we experience Him providing something specifically for us.

God’s Perfect Provision

For twelve years I served as a church pastor in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. When we started our first mission church, we called Jack Conner as our mission pastor. Although the new congregation needed a full-time pastor, we had no money for moving expenses and no provision for his salary. But we knew God was asking us to invite Jack to come. He had three children in school, so we needed to pay him at least a modest salary with which to care for his family. We began to pray that God would provide for his moving expenses and his salary once he arrived.

Jack had a secure job as a senior pastor in California. Yet we were asking him to move his family to a new country with no guarantee of a steady paycheck. Jack and his wife Bonna prayed, and they, too, sensed God’s hand at work. Jack began to take his family up a mountain just as Abraham had done, without knowing just how his need would be met when he arrived. I did not have an extensive list of contacts I could canvas for Jack’s financial support. I felt the full weight of what I was asking Jack to do, and I began asking myself,

“How in the world will God make this provision?” Then it dawned on me that as long as God knew where I was, He could cause anybody in the world to help me. He could place my need on the heart of anyone anywhere.

Jack was approved by Canadian immigration and began his trek of faith. As he prepared to move, I received a letter from a church in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The pastor said, “God has laid it on our hearts to send one percent of our mission giving to Saskatchewan missions. We are enclosing a check to use however you choose.” I had no idea how they became involved with us at that time, but a large donation was included with the letter.

Not long afterwards, someone called me and pledged to contribute funds every month for Jack’s financial support. That promise brought the monthly financial package to the level we had hoped to pay Jack. When Jack drove into our driveway with his family. I asked, “Jack, what did it cost to move you?” The amount was almost exactly what the church in Arkansas had just sent us.

We began that step of faith by believing what the Bible teaches: that God can use anyone, anywhere, to be His instrument of provision for those who trust Him (Phil. 4:13). We had believed God, and we had followed through in obedience. We already knew *academically* that God was One who provides. But after that event, our whole church came to know *from experience* that God is, indeed, the Provider. Calling Jack by faith and seeing God provide for him led us to a deeper love relationship with an all-sufficient God.

The Lord Is My Banner

The Bible is filled with examples of God helping His people come to know the reality of who He is through their experiences. As Joshua and the Israelites were fighting their relentless enemies, the Amalekites, Moses oversaw the battle from a nearby mountain. While he held his hands up to God, the Israelites were victorious, but whenever he lowered his weary arms, the Israelites would begin to lose.

God gave Israel victory over the Amalekites that day, and Moses built an altar to commemorate the occasion. He named it “The Lord Is My Banner.” A banner was a standard or flag that armies, tribes, or nations carried in their front ranks to identify who they were as

they marched into battle. It could be difficult at times to recognize an army as it marched through dusty fields. But when you saw its banner held high in the air, you could immediately discern if the army was a friend or foe, and you could gain a sense of its strength by understanding which king or nation it represented. The title, “The Lord Is My Banner” indicated that the Israelites belonged to God and that to oppose them was to battle against the power of God.

Moses’ uplifted hands gave constant glory to God, indicating the battle was His and that the people of Israel belonged to Him. Israel came to understand God in a fresh and powerful way that day as they realized anew that they were God’s people and that He was their defender (Exod. 17:8–15).

I Am Who I Am

When Moses encountered God in a burning bush, he asked, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what should I tell them?” (Exod. 3:13).

“God replied to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exod. 3:14). By this God was declaring, “I am the eternal One. I will be what I will be.” In essence this declaration held a promise: “Whatever you need me to be in your life, that is what I will be. I am everything you will need.” During the next forty years, Moses came to experience God as Yahweh, the Great I AM. God was everything Moses and Israel needed Him to be.

A Relationship—Not Just a Name

Whenever God reveals His nature in a new way, *it is always for a purpose*. He created you for a love relationship with Him. When He encounters you, He is allowing you to know Him by experience. Encounters with God are always an expression of God’s love for you. Jesus said: “The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him” (John 14:21).

If you have a love relationship with God, you will experience Him actively working in and through your life. For instance, you could not truly know God as the “Comforter in sorrow” unless you experienced His compassion during a time of grief or sadness.

The various names of God found in Scripture can become a call to worship for you. The psalmist said: “Happy are the people who know the joyful shout; LORD, they walk in the light of Your presence. They rejoice in Your name all day long, and they are exalted by Your righteousness” (Ps. 89:15–16). Acknowledging God’s name amounts to recognizing who God is. Calling on His name indicates we are seeking His presence. To praise His name is to exalt Him. God’s name is majestic and worthy of our praise.

Summary

The names of God in Scripture reveal something of His nature, activity, or character. You come to know God by experience—at His initiative—as He allows you to learn something new about Him. As you experience God, you grow to know Him more intimately and personally. As you grow in your knowledge of Him, you will naturally want to express your praise, gratitude, and worship to Him. One of the ways to worship Him is to praise and honor Him by acknowledging His names.

Experiencing God Today

Watch for ways God may bring you to a deeper knowledge of Him through the experiences of your life. Then take time to worship God as you have come to know Him. To worship is to revere and honor God, to acknowledge Him as worthy of your praise.

The list below and on the next page may help you recall some ways you have come to know God better. As you review the many ways the Bible describes God, try to remember experiences in your life that similarly helped you to know God. Perhaps you will discover some characteristics of the Lord you have not yet acknowledged or experienced, but it may surprise and encourage you to realize the numerous facets of God’s nature you have experienced.


Names God has revealed to me:

- my witness (Job 16:19)
- bread of life (John 6:35)
- Comforter in sorrow (Jer. 8:18)
- my hope (Ps. 71:5)
- Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6)
- defender of widows (Ps. 68:5)
- the strength of my salvation (Ps. 140:7)
- Faithful and True (Rev. 19:11)
- our Father (Isa. 64:8)
- a sure foundation (Isa. 28:16)
- my friend (John 15:14)
- Almighty God (Gen. 17:1)
- God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3)
- God who avenges me (Ps. 18:47)
- God who saves me (Ps. 51:14)
- our guide (Ps. 48:14)
- our head (2 Chron. 13:12)
- head of the church (Eph. 5:23)
- our help (Ps. 33:20)
- my hiding place (Ps. 32:7)
- a great High Priest (Heb. 4:14)
- Holy One in your midst (Hosea 11:9)
- righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8)
- King of kings (1 Tim. 6:15)
- our life (Col. 3:4)
- light of life (John 8:12)
- Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15)
- Lord of the harvest (Matt. 9:38)
- mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)
- our peace (Eph. 2:14)
- Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6)
- my Redeemer (Ps. 19:14)
- refuge and strength (Ps. 46:1)
- my salvation (Exod. 15:2)
- my help (Ps. 42:5)

- the Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
- Lord (Luke 2:29)
- my stronghold (Ps. 18:2)
- my support (2 Sam. 22:19)
- Good Teacher (Mark 10:17)

Questions for Reflection


1. What are some characteristics of God you have come to know by experience?
2. Which name of God currently seems most significant in your life? Why is that?
3. What is one aspect of God's nature you would like to experience more fully in the coming days?



When you open this book, you'll find that you aren't just reading. No, you are being remade, reoriented, restored from the frustration of what you may have known as stale religion. Captured not by a concept but by your Creator, reborn in relationship.

Here's the *Experiencing God* that has already impacted millions of people. Only it's bigger, and better, and ready to lead you again—or for the very first time—into an experience with God. Carefully listening to His voice will anchor you in His plan, and set you free to live it with boldness and freedom.

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