

As the snow descends with vigor, we may find our thoughts reaching beyond winter toward the renewal of spring, even as our process of spiritually strategic visioning and imagining reaches beyond the present into the near ends of God's purposes for CBF.

I mentioned Henry Blackaby's best-selling study, *Experiencing God: Knowing & Doing the Will of God*, last week, and I want to add a few more thoughts from Henry into our pondering and praying this week as well. Henry's study is organized around "Seven Principles for Experiencing God," principles that are worth our serious consideration, both individually and collectively. The principles are these:



1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
5. God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
7. You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.

According to these principles, spiritually strategic planning has a lot more to do with listening attentively and looking carefully at things going on around us than it does with trying to generate ideas about things we might want to do. What we're trying to discern is the shape of what God is already doing—to perceive the divine initiatives already underway to which God invites us to join our lives and labor.

When Henry was a young pastor in western Canada, his congregation sensed that God wanted them to help to start new churches all across Central and Western Canada: "We had hundreds of towns and villages that had no evangelical church. Some churches would start with a population study or survey. Then they would apply human logic to decide where the most promising and productive places might be. . . . We tried to find out what God already was doing around us. We believed that He would show us where He was at work, and that revelation would be our invitation to join Him. We began praying and watching to see what God would do next in answer to our prayers.

"Allan was a small town 40 miles from Saskatoon. It had never had a Protestant church. One of our members felt led to conduct a Vacation Bible School for the children in Allan. We said, 'Let's find out if God is at work here.'

"So we conducted the Vacation Bible School. At the end of the week, we held a parents' night. We said to the group, 'We believe God may want us to establish a Baptist church in this town. If any of you would like to begin a regular Bible study group and maybe be a part of a new church, would you just come forward.'

“From the back of the hall came a lady. She was weeping. She said, ‘I have prayed for 30 years that there would be a Baptist church in this town, and you are the first people to respond.’

“Right behind her came an elderly man. He too was deeply moved and weeping. He said, ‘For years I was active in a Baptist church. Then I went into alcohol. Four and a half years ago I came back to the Lord. I promised God then that I would pray four to five hours every day until God brought us a Baptist church in our town. You are the first people to respond.’

“We didn’t have to take a survey. God had just shown us where He was at work! That was our invitation to join Him. We went back and joyfully shared with our church what God was doing. The church immediately voted to start a new church in Allan. As of today, that church in Allan has started one church and two mission churches.

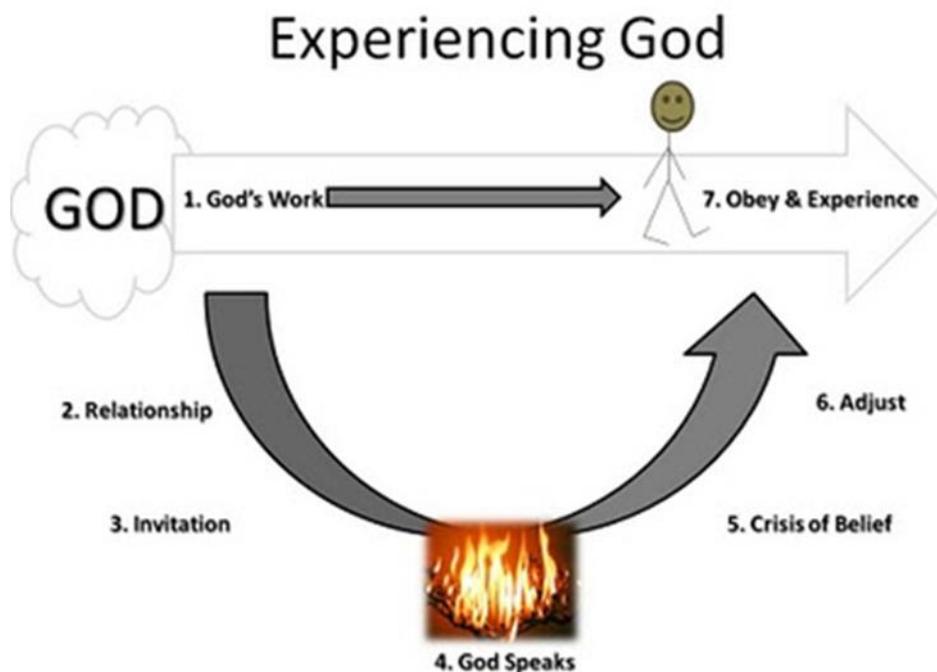
**“God hasn’t told us to go away and do some work for Him. He has told us that He is already at work trying to bring a lost world to Himself. If we will adjust our lives to Him in a love relationship, He will show us where He is at work. That revelation is His invitation to us to get involved in His work. Then, when we join Him, He completes His work through us”** (pp. 66-67, emphasis added).

If our strategic thinking is chiefly concerned with our own survival as a congregation, we will not. Jesus was very clear that if we try to save our lives, individually or together, we will lose them. But if we “put it all on the table” for God’s Kingdom, we will find what our hearts hunger for after all (Luke 9:24).

Look around. Listen well. What is God up to? Where does God call us forth?

Adventure awaits!

Dave



## ***The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know*** **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

### **Week Three: Amazing Grace**

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—  
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—  
not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

Following the Way of Jesus has always been counter-cultural, because God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). All of the religious movements of human history—save one—have emphasized “a balance beam approach” to a righteousness that hopefully takes us to the life to come. Many religions affirm that “we're all going to the same place, just by different paths,” and that if, in the end, our good deeds outweigh our wrongs, then everything will be okay.



The problem with this is that God has told us that “*all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away*” (Isaiah 64:6). And God has warned us that “*there is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death*” (Proverbs 14:12).



Salvation could indeed be described as “the way of the beam,” but it's not the way of a balance beam. Our salvation comes only through the sacrificial Lamb who provided our atonement on the beams of the Old Rugged Cross.

We don't like that way, of course. We'd much rather “earn” our way by good works; but the Scripture gives clear warning to those who refuse to submit to God's righteousness and attempt to establish their own instead (Romans 10:3). God's ways are not our ways.

Billy Graham did a powerful telecast on his ninety-fifth birthday<sup>1</sup> in which he pointed out yet again that the world doesn't like the Cross. We don't like God's way. From the Garden of Eden to this very moment, we have wanted to do things our own way. Yet, while “*the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing . . . to us who are being saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24).

The Good News is that “*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). And once we submit ourselves to God's Way of Grace & Forgiveness, then we also discover that “*we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10).

Thanks be to God for this Amazing Grace!

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<sup>1</sup> You can watch and/or download the telecast at <http://myhopewithbillygraham.org>.