

HAVING AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

by, Henry Blackby

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Henry Blackaby

The following is edited from a message given at the Midwest Prayer Conference of Harvest Prayer Ministries, in October 2006 at Maryland Community Church in Terre Haute, Indiana.

The theme for this conference is very significant – "Praying for a Change." Most of those in the Scriptures who had an encounter with God were immediately and forever changed. When we are in the presence of God, He brings about a radical change. We see this all through the Scriptures, but somehow we don't understand that the God of the Scriptures is the One who is encountering us. Our primary purpose for coming into the house of God ought to be to have an encounter with God. We can say that we are in the presence of God, but there may be no transformational change that indicates that we are.

The moment of God's encounter with you is determined by God and not by you. It may be through a Scripture. Suddenly the Spirit of God takes the Word of God, and like a two-edged sword, pierces the soul and spirit and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of your heart (Heb. 4:12). It exposes you fully to God. When God encounters you, you will know it because He will stir every ounce of your being. God knows the timing and He comes in the fullness of time.

Isaiah's Encounter with God

In Isaiah chapter six we see a remarkable encounter Isaiah had with God. God knew exactly where Isaiah's problem was, and so God matched the encounter with the need for radical change in Isaiah's life. Suddenly Isaiah was in the presence of the holiness of God. Some people talk about being in the presence of the holiness of God, and we sing about the holiness of God, and yet somehow we're not experiencing the holiness of God. If we got into the presence of the holiness of God I would guess that a number of us would have to respond with Isaiah: "*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips*" (Isa. 6:5).

The presence and holiness of God always expose the specific need in your life that is keeping you from a deeper encounter with God. God's immediate response with Isaiah was to deal with his lips. Something had to come from the altar of God and that is a life-transforming moment. Coals from off the altar touched his lips, and an amazing thing happened. When his lips were cleansed, his ears were opened. God didn't touch his ears; He touched his lips. That was what was keeping Isaiah from hearing. God had been speaking all along, but for the first time Isaiah heard God saying, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*" Because of the encounter and because of the radical change, there was a spontaneous response from Isaiah: "*Here am I! Send me*" (v. 8).

Could that encounter happen to you? Do you suppose God has someone to whom He wants to send you? Do you suppose that the unreached multitudes around the world have not

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been on the heart of God but rather, He has been trying to find someone who will hear Him say, "*Who will go for Us?*" and He has yet to remove from our heart that which is keeping us from hearing and responding to Him? Maybe this is God's fullness of time for you. Maybe for weeks or months there has been a holy restlessness in your heart, and you are saying, "Surely God has more for my life than just attending services and religious activities. Surely there is something else." God would say, "There is and there always has been, but you have let the culture of the day get you into religious activities and out of the intimate relationship with Me." Maybe at this time is God's special moment like He had with many in Scripture. Maybe this is the time of your encounter!

The key is not Isaiah. The key is the God of Isaiah, just as the key was not Abraham but the God of Abraham. The same God who encountered them is the same God who is here to encounter us. Are you ready? Are you anticipating a life change in you as has happened to so many in the Scriptures that give us an understanding of what's in the heart of God?

"Praying for a Change" in Our Nation

I have been deeply involved across our nation and across the world. I think God in His grace has granted me a sensitivity, an insight into what is happening, and at least a measure of understanding why some things have happened the way they have.

Think about this conference theme – "Praying for a Change." My mind and my heart have said, "Whatever we have been doing or have not been doing has brought the nation to where it is." Our nation is in terrible shape, and there are hundreds of directions that the nation is taking to go down and down and down.

The questions come, "What kind of praying have we been doing that has not made a difference in the nation? What kind of praying are we doing that has left the nation in the condition it is in, knowing that God has said that all heaven is moved in answer to prayer? One person with passionate praying can turn a nation around! Why then is the nation not being turned around if we keep saying that we're praying?"

Do we not need to be praying for a change in what is happening around the world? Some of you may receive the magazine called, "Voice of the Martyrs." I read a copy sometime back and there was a young Chinese pastor who had been given a 3-year prison sentence and a large fine for printing "*Experiencing God.*" Of course, there has run through my mind that what I have done has brought about great persecution to some of God's children who have printed my book.

I thought to myself, "How then should I pray for our fellow believers in China?" My uncle and aunt were missionaries in northern China during the great Shantung revival. God added that as part of my heritage and that has profoundly affected what I have been doing in my life. When I read about the Chinese pastor, I said, "What kind of praying have I been doing?" The Lord brought me under an indictment about the qualitative difference in my praying that must take place. We don't need more praying as much as a qualitatively different relationship with God. Are you ready for God to take you into a qualitatively different relationship to Him when you pray? Do you want to be the kind of person God could call on to pray because He

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knows the quality relationship you have to Him and that through your praying huge changes would take place in the nation and around the world? Think about your own personal walk with God and about your own personal prayer life and what kind of changes need to be made in your life so that God could work profoundly through your life.

Moses' Prayer Life

Look with me at some praying that was done by Moses and what was at stake. The God who invited Moses to stand in His presence and hear from his heart what is on the heart of God, literally broke Moses' heart and set him in motion to stay in prayer before God for forty days and forty nights. What he had heard from God was so significant that he neither ate nor drank anything for forty days but was in agony of soul. Moses stood between the sinning people and God, and pled for them, even asking God to take his name out of the book of life but to spare theirs. According to the Scriptures, the prayer life of Moses changed the heart of God.

When was the last time you went to pray and God laid His heart over your heart and it broke your heart? In Romans 8:26 Paul says one weakness we have is we do not know what to pray for as we ought. What is God's provision for our inability to know what to pray? Paul says that God has granted us the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit who knows the mind of God and the heart of God and knows the immediate activity of God, will guide you so you will know what you ought to pray. When was the last time you got on your knees to pray, and you had to cry out, "Lord, I don't know what to pray as I ought! What should I pray for my president? What should I pray for the upcoming elections? Our nation is being shattered. How then shall I pray?" And if God were to lay over your heart what you ought to pray, would you passionately pray consistently until you knew that God had heard and answered?

We are about to get the kind of nation we are willing to pray it to be. But we may have the kind of nation that results when we fail to pray. Your prayer life and mine and your church's prayer life and mine can determine the course of history and certainly can turn the corner on many of the destructive forces that are so debilitating in our nation today.

Our nation is experiencing an incredible breakdown in family life, in ethics in high places and in other unprecedented ways that we never dreamed we would ever even hear about, but which are now commonplace. Where is the praying of God's people? God intends that a nation become the product of the praying of His people. Right now, as I've seen in hundreds of prayer times, our nation is the result of careless and casual praying and God's people no longer believe that when they pray, God can powerfully affect the nation.

Moses was one who knew God well enough to know that he could persist in his praying. He had learned what was on the mind and heart of God. Here is what Moses says in Deuteronomy 9:8: "*You provoked the Lord to wrath...*" God's people, the ones whom God had called to Himself and had assigned to them such an intimate relationship to Himself that they would always know what was on His heart and mind, had a tendency to depart from Him. They no longer had intimacy with God. Do you know what happens when the people of God no longer have an intimate relationship with God? It provokes Him to anger, because God knows

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what is at stake eternally when His people do not function in a relationship to Him. So Moses said, "...you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you."

But do not look at the Israelites now. Look at the God of the Israelites. If you are a spiritual leader of any kind, and if you are a parent you are one, remember God's people can provoke Him to anger where He would destroy us. Of all the times in history when this nation can be destroyed, it is now! Only the mighty hand of God will prevent it.

Many ask me about the end times. I'm not a student of the end times, but I am a student of the Scriptures and I do know that in Matthew 24 Jesus gives one evidence of the increasing nearness of the end times. He says there will come a time when there will be such tribulation that if God did not intervene, no flesh would survive. Then He adds that for the elect's sake, for the sake of God's people, He will not let it happen.

I'm very much aware that we live in an unusual time when there are countless multitudes of terrorists who are willing to expend their life if only they could take the lives of others. Now we have the potential of nuclear weapons, biological weapons, and chemical weapons, and from time to time we hear word of a substance so deadly that if it were ever released, we have no antidote for it, and it would be an endless chain of death. Do you realize we live in a generation when the potential of tribulation if unchecked, is that there would be no flesh survive? But there is a moment when God will intervene, and I'm grateful for that. But I'm saying, "Lord, in the meantime, what kind of relationship do You want me to have with You?"

God told Moses He was so angry with His people because of their sin that He was going to destroy all His people, and begin all over again with Moses. If you were on the mount and God said that to you, what would you do? It would depend on your track record in your prayer life. How well do you know God and how well do you know God's invitation to stand between Himself and men on behalf of their survival? In Deuteronomy 9 and 10, Moses describes to God's people that he went into the presence of God, and there he pled with God for forty days and forty nights, and he did it twice. And the God who said that He was going to destroy every one of His people, as Moses prayed with persistence and with passion and from his heart – that God heard and did not destroy His people.

What Is on the Heart of God?

When was the last time you felt it was significant to know what was on the heart of God? What's on the heart of God for your children? What's on the heart of God for your church? Could God call an end to one of His churches because they have sinned? Can God let a church die? He warned the church in Revelation 2, "*You have left your first love.*" He was telling them that they no longer loved Him enough to gather together to pray. The deacons and elders didn't pray, and the pastor didn't pray with his staff, and the leaders didn't gather for a concerted time of prayer anymore. So God told the church at Ephesus, "*You have left your first love,*" and He told them that if they did not remember the height from which they had fallen, did not remember what used to be but was no more, and if they did not repent and return, He

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would remove their candlestick. They would be taken out of existence. He would not permit them to claim to be His child or His church and not be a people of prayer.

I have recently gone back to John 3:16 and I've had a huge sense from the heart of God that you cannot understand John 3:16 unless you understand the heart of God concerning one word in that verse, and that's the word "perish." What does God know about the person that is going out into eternity for ever and ever without a saving relationship to Him through Jesus Christ? What does God know happens to a person who perishes? There are a number of pictures in the Scripture. Any one of them should drive us to the place of prayer. He says a person will go into outer darkness forever and forever, no possibility of changing. He talks about fire and brimstone forever. He talks about a great gulf that is fixed between heaven and hell and no one can pass to it or from it.

Now go back and read John 3:16: *"...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* Is God's heart concerned about one that should perish? Second Peter 3:9 says, *"The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* How then should that motivate your prayer life? How then, knowing what God knows about perishing, should a church marshal itself with God so that none would perish?

God Raising up People for Himself

Many of you know that I have been granted the privilege by God to work with about 170 top Christian Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) of the Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies of America. These are most committed people. But these top executives have never been disciplined. Nobody has taken time to help them understand the ways of God. So they came to me, and they said, "Would you help us to understand what Matthew 6:33 means to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and watch God add everything else? We read it, and we are impacted by it, but we don't know how to do it." Then they said, "Would you establish for us a spiritual leadership institute for developing spiritual statesmen for the corporate leadership for America?"

Don't get too hard on corporate executives who are God's children. God has put in their heart an incredible compassion to return to God. They established a verse that would be characteristic of all our study, and it is from 1 Samuel 2:35, and it reads like this, God speaking: *"...I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever."* These men and women are saying, would you help us to understand? How would we know if God is raising us up and how would we know what it is like to be raised up for Him, and how would we know when God is laying His heart over our heart? In that verse God is saying He is going to raise up for Himself someone who will be faithful before Him, to know what is on His mind and heart and then immediately to do it.

Let me ask you, with that as God's definition, has He raised you up? If not, why not? Or is God raising you up? Do you sense that God has begun to pursue you for a level of praying that you have never known, and in that new relationship to Him He is going to lay over your

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heart what it means to have His mind and His heart in our day? I am convinced that nobody could have that relationship to God and not pray for change. Moses did. When Moses knew what was on the heart of God, he immediately went into intense intercession.

Billy Graham says, "The greatest untouched resource in America today is prayer." Let me say it again, whatever we have been doing or failing to do has brought the nation to where it is. There's got to be praying for a change in that. Somehow God has to find somebody somewhere who believes Him when He speaks through His Word.

That is what God is looking for and that is what our nation desperately needs. God's people are the only ones who can fill that role. The politicians are not going to fill that role. God's people have the divine opportunity to sense when God is moving in their heart and drawing them to a deeper relationship with Him than they have ever had because He wants them to know and then do what is on His mind and His heart. Are you ready for God to do that with you? Did you hear what God says in His Word, what He is looking for, and what He will initiate? Do you sense any of that being laid over your heart? Are you willing to come before God and say, "I want You to know my life is totally and wholly available to You"? You can trust God to put His heart over your heart, and if He ever does, He's going to enable you to do it.

Let God use you to express His powerful presence in the midst of our nation through your life. I'm watching God do that in my life. I'm finding that He's ruling my life in directions which I would never have chosen on my own. I'm watching Him lay over my heart His heart to the ends of the earth in a way that I've never known before, and I'm sharing that with my children, and I'm watching my children experience the moment when God lays over their heart what's on His heart. Can you say that's how you are guiding your children? Are you wanting them to be simply good Christians and attend church and have a good job, and you'd be happy with them? Where is your heart for the will of God for your children?

You remember when God gave a covenant to Abraham? Ever after, you hear it said, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." How many generations does God want to touch when He touches one? He touched at least three. Have you set in motion your relationship to God that is so attractive to your children that they wouldn't want to do anything other than to serve God with all their heart? What's happening in the next generation that is following your life? I have to watch to see what is coming on behind me. Is there any intensity in the life of those who are following because they watch my life? If not, why not? And why not make a difference now in the way that I live so that the generation following will have an intensity that far exceeds my own? So far, that's what I have the privilege of seeing.

Passionate, Persistent, Prolonged Prayer

Prayer is not for you to have the opportunity to tell God what you want Him to do. Prayer is to be in the presence of God where He graciously tells you what is on His heart and what's on His mind. And that encounter so radically changes you that everything about your life changes – the way you live, the way you talk, the way you plan, the way you invest your time.

Do you think your nation is in a crisis moment? Do you think it needs a radical change? Do you believe that it needs a mighty touch of God through somebody who knows Him, and

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knows what's on His heart and has a passion to pray until God responds? Little prayers will not do it. Passionate, persistent, prolonged prayer will.

In Luke 18 Jesus said that we ought always to pray and never to quit. He gives the illustration of the woman who came to the judge and persisted until he granted her request and then He said that your heavenly Father hears those who cry out to Him day and night. Then comes one of the most pathetic statements in all the Bible as He ends by questioning: "...will He really find faith on the earth?"

If God were to expose our hearts, will He find those who know Him and believe Him and have already made a commitment to spend passionate time in His presence? Surely in an hour like this, in the condition of our nation, and with elections coming up, and with the terrorists threatening to do harm to us, certainly God has something on His heart and on His mind that He wants some of His children to know so that when they go to pray, they pray from the heart of God and from the mind of God. I ask you, in your prayer life personally, as a family, as a couple, as a church, could you say with all honesty that you know what is on the heart and mind of God concerning what is about to be? Has that set in motion in your life an incredible burden of prayer that intends to be involved with whatever God is about to do. Or would you have to say, "I am a child of God but I would have to say, 'I am not sincerely involved in prayer.'"

All the way through the Bible, when God is about to do something, He looks for someone who will come before Him in prayer so He can lay His heart over theirs in prayer. Will you in this critical hour be one of those? You may not know what it may involve, but you do know one thing, the Spirit of God is saying to you, "Do not let this moment go by." God is seeking your life. He is pursuing you, and He wants to instruct you and teach you how to pray so that your life will be known as one through whom God made a difference and turned the course of history. The apostle Paul stated it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11:

"We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...."

What is the motivation or lack of motivation in your life to be a person of prayer through whom God will change the course of history, or change the course of your family or your church or your city or state or nation? I am convinced that God has enough if we would yield to Him, to turn the corner in this nation. Would you be one of those? I cannot make that decision for you. God waits to see what you do next. Once you know the truth of God, what you do next is what you believe about God. There is much at stake. Eternity hangs in the balance for man, and you hold the balance. I have never had a time in my life when God has been dealing with me so radically and so thoroughly as now, and I weep before the Lord lest I not come to the level of what He is looking for. I yield myself again and again to Him.

Source: Herald of His Coming