

God's Heart Toward America

Remembering Sept. 11th

an interview with
Dr. Henry Blackaby and Dr. Bill Bright
hosted by
Dr. John Beckett

*Last year, just one week after September 11, we interviewed Dr. Henry Blackaby, noted author of *Experiencing God*. His views have helped many to understand how fully God was active during and after that horrendous attack. But many serious questions remain—what is God saying in these days?*

At IFA, we now have had the real privilege of once again interviewing Dr. Blackaby, and with him Dr. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. These two have demonstrated a lifetime of faithfulness to the Lord and to His people. We trust the insights of these spiritual statesmen will add perspective and clarity, especially as we focus on the first anniversary of September 11, 2001.

John Beckett (JB): *Dr. Bright, as we come up on one year; what do we have to especially thank God for in our nation? Could you give us your insights?*

Dr. Bill Bright (BB): I think that the September 11 event drew millions of Americans together in a unity that we've not experienced for probably generations since the War. And of course out of it came tremendous leadership on the part of President Bush and his marvelous cabinet, many of whom are very devout. So, even though there is not much evidence as far as I can see of repentance nationally among most believers and turning back to God for revival, it was at least a first step—unity and harmony that had not existed prior to that. What was intended for evil, in fact, God used for good. And it opened the door for witness to millions of people.

Dr. Henry Blackaby (HB): I agree. I've watched a sudden heart cry from people across America and I, with you, have not seen the follow through. But at least it caused people to come together, and to pray together. Prayer groups arose, and prayer ministries for the President arose. I would probably say that the thing I have rejoiced in as much as any has been the President. We had lacked a national statesman who had spiritual strength about him.

BB: Yes.

HB: I think 9-11 created the opportunity for a leader to be a pacesetter in prayer, scripture and boldness. President Bush has been very bold in his personal faith, and I've seen the fallout of that in corporate America with Christian businessmen who have almost mirrored what he is doing, and that I think is a wonderful difference. We had not seen that up until now.

BB: There are a lot of people in high places who are closet Christians. They believe but they have been told, "don't wear your religion on your sleeve... don't be aggressive, just live the life, go to church," but that is not what the Bible teaches.

HB: Yes, exactly.

JB: *How have we responded as a church and as a nation? What might we have done better? And what opportunities were lost?*

BB: Well for the last nine years, beginning in 1994, I have fasted and prayed 40 days each year, for revival for America, the world, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. I long for the day when we'll see the kind of revivals that swept our country during the first, second and third Awakenings. As yet, that



Left to right: Dr. John Beckett, Chairman, Intercessors for America, Dr. Henry Blackaby, author of *Experiencing God* and Founder of Henry Blackaby Ministries, Dr. Bill Bright, Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International. The interview was conducted and recorded on June 17, 2002 in the home of Bill and Vonette Bright in Orlando, Florida.

has not happened. There are isolated churches, isolated groups where there is a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit in America. Individual pastors have been transformed. Some churches have been transformed. But for the masses there yet remains a tremendous need for awakening and for revival.

HB: Bill, I felt the same thing. My heart cry for revival goes back a long way and to a specific assignment in 1998. I have been not only praying but leading conferences, leading others to pray, guiding them to know what to pray, and I sense that we may have missed the opportunity to have a larger fellowship of God's people unite in serious intercession for revival. I keep sensing that we are a covenant people, and that's a corporate identity.

But, since the '60s everyone has functioned individually. It's almost like spiritual anarchy where everyone does what is right in his own eyes. If there was ever a time when there ought to have been a covenant kind of response right across the Christian community, it was in the wake of 9-11, but we lost it.

BB: I think most of the problem goes back to our understanding of who God is and our view of our biblical heritage as a nation. You know most of our founding fathers were Godly men, even though there are secular writers and biographers who never mention that or even reject it. Patrick Henry said, "This is not a nation built on religion, it's built on the Lord Jesus Christ." He was expressing the feelings of Washington and Madison, Monroe and even Jefferson — who was probably a deist—and Franklin, who was not a true biblical believer yet had a profound sense of the sovereignty of God. When you read their writings you have to know they've been influenced. This nation has a biblical heritage. I've been praying that somehow the masses today would have opportunity to be exposed to our heritage. Like Ancient Israel forgot it's spiritual heritage, sinned, and turned away from God, it was not until they were brought back to the basics and again discovered their covenant with God that they had national revival.

JB: *Why did we hear so many differing messages from church leaders and should we be expecting to hear one voice from our leadership?*

BB: Well, of course. Our nation has, for the most part, been a 'leaderless' nation for the last several years, from the local precinct to the White House. And that's the reason we're so excited about President Bush—he's giving leadership, strong leadership, so strong that some people think he's too aggressive. But I believe that's what we need—stronger leadership in education, the media, and in the business world. We need stronger leadership like yourself, John, as a businessman. You make your testimony match your business, and not enough have that commitment. I often say that a man or woman who's filled with the Spirit, surrendered to the Lordship of Christ, is as much in full time Christian work as I am. I believe that.

HB: After 9-11 I listened to many of the spiritual leaders of America—they did not have one voice. And I looked a long way to find anybody who called God's people to repent. Leaders were comforting, and they ought to have been, but it was almost like a sociology, as the leaders of God's people began to

speaking what they thought the world and media wanted to hear. But you can always tell when someone has been in the presence of God, it has a whole different tone to it, and a whole different focus to it. The message delivered by the leaders of God's people needs to be one message, so no matter where the people of God turn, the message from God's heart will come through no matter how different ones have expressed it. I think we missed delivering that solitary message from the heart of God. Too many of the spiritual voices had differing messages, so the people were confused.

"Most of the problem today goes back to our understanding of who God is and our view of our biblical heritage as a nation." *—Bill Bright*

JB: *There has been an increase in talk of God and consciousness of Him, but how much real turning back to God has taken place?*

HB: I was greatly moved when Joseph Stowell of Moody Bible Institute stated that "9-11 has created a new religious paganism." I asked him about this, and I listened. He was saying that though people turned to God, many were insisting that we not mention Jesus, because He is controversial. Christ creates difficulties. Our response, of course, is that our spiritual identity is in Jesus Christ. As Christians, that is who we are. What many are saying is to leave Christianity out because of the uniqueness of Jesus, and we'll all turn to God. After 9-11 this suddenly began to permeate, certainly in the liberal churches and in other circles. They would pray, but not in the name of Jesus. They were afraid to use His name. I, as well, call that a new religious paganism.

BB: It's true.

HB: That turns to a god, but not to the one God and Father of our Lord Jesus.

BB: To me, one of the greatest arguments for the deity of Christ is the fact that the secular world, influenced by Satan, the enemy of our souls, causes people to profane Him and to try to in any way demean Him, while they don't say that of Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, or Plato. But Jesus? Don't mention Jesus! Well, there's power in the name of Jesus; in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; to Him God has given all authority in heaven and earth, so when He's in charge miracles happen.

When He's in charge revival comes. You can be assured that if Christ is in charge of the men in the pulpit, and all the people in the pew, they're having revival because wherever He is, there is revival.

HB: A crisis like 9-11 doesn't make a person strong, it reveals whether they are. I believe 9-11 revealed an awful lot about the spiritual leadership in the churches.

JB: *Do you see that priorities for the church have changed since September 11?*

HB: They ought to have changed. I've watched it very, very carefully. I've been in many, many, many churches. I go and look at the bulletin, and I look at the topics of the sermons—you'd never know in most of the churches that 9-11 ever happened. I am convinced that a number one priority ought to have been a huge movement of prayer in the life of the churches—youth prayer, men's prayer, women's prayer, corporate prayer, prayer for revival. The priority of the church being, like Jesus said, "My house will be a house of prayer." It hasn't been, but it ought to have been the priority after 9-11. A confidence in God's sovereignty over the events ought to have permeated the churches. I didn't see that either.

BB: Sadly, that has also been my experience.

HB: Yes, the church's priorities ought to have changed. They changed in the White House, in the Congress, in the Senate, and they changed their priorities in the Pentagon, in the economy, in Homeland Security—you name it, almost every area of American life changed their priorities, except the people of God. That broke my heart. Bill, would you comment on that?

BB: The church is sick. And the reason the church is sick is because it has not died to self. You see, whenever I die to Bill Bright I come alive to Christ. You have to have death before resurrection. Jesus said unless a grain of corn falls into the ground and dies, it can't bring forth fruit. So, unless I die, unless

the members of the church and the pastor in the pulpit say no to self—and yes to Christ as Lord, Master, Savior and King—there is no life and revival. We're going to go on perpetuating mediocrity and frankly in a sense, blasphemy, because of all the great and glorious things our God has done for us. To think, we who have so much to offer the world, are strangely silent. As someone said, "You can't give what you don't have." I'm a member of the church. I hold the church and local pastor of any community in the highest esteem. I truly believe that a Spirit-filled pastor who preaches the Gospel and the word of God is indeed the most influential person in any community. There is no one more important than the pastor. But until the pastor humbles himself if needed, the people in the pew will not humble themselves. Like begets like. Like pulpit, like pew.

HB: Two exceptions to what I previously said is the emergence of the Presidential Prayer Team which has enlisted over a million people to pray for the President—that's unprecedented. [Enroll at www.presidentialprayerteam.org; or call 1-800-295-1235.] The other I've noticed is a tremendous surge in the rethinking of personal priorities. Many have entered missions or volunteered for community service. Businessmen are retiring early. I don't know when I've seen the evidence of so many people taking seriously the urgency and shortness of life.

JB: *How should we interpret the fact that as of this interview date there haven't been other major terrorist incidents such as at the Superbowl, or at the Winter Olympics?*

HB: I don't think we've been spared from terrorism. I think terrorists have used a different tactic. I watch every time they threaten—it sets the nerves of the nation on edge, from the President down to the janitor. And I think what they've done is two things: they've shifted some of their attacks against America to sites and installations around the world, instead of within our shores. But they've threatened, and it costs hundreds of millions of dollars every time a credible threat is received. Then, they can just stand back and laugh and...

BB: They're having a ball.

HB: ...that's a different kind of terrorism. But it's creating a psychology of fear. I think that is a form of terrorism that is very real, and they're exercising it, though we have not yet seen more direct attacks.

BB: I don't believe the terrorist acts are over, and we need to be prepared for them. But, here again, I would plead with the Christians—be ready, get your own heart right, get your heart in tune with God. Be walking in the light as He is in the light and be prepared to reach out. Pastors and laymen, reach out to these people who are crying out for security and hope, because in Christ Jesus alone, there is hope.

"The Christian needs to walk in peace, so no matter what happens they will be able to bear witness to a watching world." *—Henry Blackaby*

HB: Christians ought not to be smothered in fear. Bill, like you were saying, there is a spiritual readiness—where we return to having the peace of God stand guard over our hearts and minds. What an incredible witness it is to a lost and fearful society when the Christian acts like a child of God, living under the loving sovereignty of the heavenly Father. I think that's the real challenge.

BB: You mention a word that is very important—peace. I say to anyone receiving this message: If you want to know how to have peace in your heart, get right with God, He is the Prince of Peace. And, if you allow the Lord Jesus to have control He will flood your life with peace, forgive your sins, give you assurance of eternal life. Frankly, when the doctor announced I was going to die, I began to praise the Lord because you can't lose as a Christian; heaven is much better than earth, and if I die I go to heaven to be with Jesus.

HB: That's why He created you.

BB: Sure. And if I keep living I can serve Him all the more. You know, it's wonderful to have that peace—but any believer can have that peace.

JB: Don't you think that Christians will have a tremendous opportunity to speak out if there are further incidents?

HB: Yes. And what we have been talking about is that the settled choice to walk in peace will prepare us. What the terrorists have done is unsettle the nation, so that when people hear warnings and attacks never happen, it's like crying wolf, and the guard is let down. Much of the American public might lower their guard, but the Christian ought never to do that. Some very serious attacks are going to come, and the terrorists have a growing capacity for destruction such as we have never seen. But the Christian needs to walk in peace, so no matter what happens they will be able to bear witness to a watching world. And, church and civil leaders are going to have to help their people in that.

*"Return to the Scriptures."
—Henry Blackaby*

BB: There is no doubt that we in our generation now live with terrorism. There will be no end to this, for the hatred of Jesus Christ is such that the fanatical fringe will always be seeking to destroy Him and destroy those who follow Him.

JB: *This is such an important subject, how we prepare. Do you have any further suggestions on how God's people would prepare for further times of crisis?*

BB: For me, I think the most important thing is to study the attributes of God. One's view of God determines everything—the way you live, your friends, your literature, your music, your lifestyle. If you understand who God is, this great Creator God of the universe who so loved us that, while we were yet in our sins, He died for us on the Cross. He personally came to this planet Earth, God in the flesh, Jesus of Nazareth—God/man—perfect God, perfect man. And if we understand who He is, His character and nature, everything is different. Jesus taught that we're to love. This is the key to me. Love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Love our neighbor as ourselves. Love our enemies. As believers, we dare not allow animosity, antagonism, resentment or attacks on even those fanatical fringe groups—we're to love them. We are to love those with whom we disagree in their lifestyle, but that doesn't mean we condone what they do. We simply are to love them with Christ's love. I've learned through the few years of my life that a soft answer turns away wrath, and that there is nothing more powerful than love.

HB: There has to come, as Bill was saying, a return to the Scriptures. The Bible is a God-centered book. It will absolutely show us the nature of God, and the ways of God, so that we can make a major adjustment back to God. Without this book, we're just going to create a god in our own image, and that is unacceptable to God. I believe families, and fathers in particular, have got to begin to return to teaching their children like the Scripture tells us. Husbands and wives need to pray together, and talk about the great truths of Scripture together, and then live out those truths before their children and ask their children to bring their neighbors in and live it out before them. This can work like leaven, if the families and the churches return to a serious study and application of Scripture—a living out of the Scripture—then God Himself will be enthroned and His ways will be followed, and revival will begin to sweep from a home, or a neighborhood, or a little community. Like Jesus said, "My kingdom is like leaven"—but it's got to start with the Scripture and what God reveals of Himself and His ways. If that standard does not find itself being lived out in your life, change it immediately!

BB: Without an understanding of this holy inspired inherent Word, and daily meditating on its truths, it is impossible for any of us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. You can have a great life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit, but after a while, unless one is feeding on the Word of God, there will be the loss and deterioration of that relationship. And, unless this holy inspired Word is a part of

our thinking, we cannot walk in the light and the joy of the Resurrection for long.

HB: Your focus on the Holy Spirit is crucial—He is the Spirit of truth and He was assigned the responsibility to guide us into all truth, to teach us all things, to empower us to walk in the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit is to not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. To walk in the Spirit is absolute freedom.

BB: I like to think of the wings of an airplane, one wing represents the Bible, another wing represents the Holy Spirit. The plane won't fly without two wings, and the Christian won't soar without the Word of God and the Holy Spirit—the wedding of the two.

JB: *What we're saying is that our understanding of God is important if we're to have the right response in times of crisis.*

HB: Yes, the one whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and He scourges every child of His. The writer of Hebrews in Chapter 12 says, "Have you forgotten that God will discipline the one he loves?" When God sees you getting off, He'll discipline you. And the discipline of God can be very severe and often uses crises like we're seeing in our nation—we have seen floods and fires and drought and earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes. In the Bible we learn that God uses such natural phenomena to catch the attention of His people. But the wonderful thing about the discipline of God is also seen in Hebrews 12: "Your fathers discipline you as it seems good to them, but when God disciplines, it's to produce holiness, without which no one can see the Lord." That's revival. So, if we let the discipline of God bring us to holiness, we'll come face-to-face with God, and that's the beginning of revival.

BB: And holiness—we must repent of all of our sins and be filled with the Holy Spirit before we can ever even dream of being holy, because in our own effort there is no way to be holy.

HB: It will be a tremendous cleansing, won't it, Bill?

BB: Yes.

HB: Jesus said that He would sanctify and bring His people, the church, to be a perfect Bride with the washing of the water by the Word. [Ephesians 5:26] That must return to the churches.

BB: I believe that some of the serious things that are happening in our country are a result of God trying to get our attention.

HB: It's a loving discipline, but we've got to know that God's love includes discipline—otherwise you don't have the God of the Scripture. This 9-11 experience is thrusting us back to the Scriptures to come to know the God who was present and permitted this to happen, and then to understand that He still is a God of love, but that love disciplines. If we biblically understand that, and the pastors teach their people the nature of God, then the people will not resent and get angry with God. Rather, they'll have a loving sense of the gracious kindness of God—that He didn't let us go farther into our sin than we were already going.

*"Study the attributes of God."
—Bill Bright*

BB: Reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom. I live in a state of holy fear. I use that in a good sense, fear like I'd be afraid to jump from the top of the Empire State Building. I'd be afraid to violate the commandments of God.

HB: A holy trembling.

JB: *What are the two or three dominant themes that are on your heart for America at this time?*

BB: Repentance, confession of sin, being restored to the light as God is in the light, and love. We need to demonstrate supernatural Agape love—the 1 Corinthians 13 love. We do it starting in our individual lives, in our families, with our spouses and our children, then in the church. Jesus said "I command you to love one another." This is not an option. We're commanded to love, and we start by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and then our neighbors, our enemies, our fellow believers. There's so much conflict and tension in the church, but when we confess our sins and get right with God, then we will love our brothers and sisters.



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HB: That love permeates every side of society, but it does begin in your own heart—as goes your heart so goes every relationship in your life. And as you get the love relationship to God right, then you love your wife right. You can't abandon others any more than you can abandon God. You can't abandon your wife or your children, or your church or the people of God for whom Christ died. I think the focus that's on my heart is for you to have the relationship to God so that when God gives you a wake up call, you know it's God and you know what he's saying and you know how to respond. I don't know that many of the people of God ever got the message—they never thought 9-11 was directed toward them. Even some well-known leaders immediately blamed it all on the godless world around, and I'd say no, no, no!

BB: You know, Henry, I used to do that. I blamed Hollywood, I blamed New York, I blamed the media, I blamed everybody. One day God told me to look in the mirror, and I realized that my fellow believers and I are the ones who determine the destiny of this country. If we get right with God as Christians everything else is going to fall together. I believe that. God is in charge and our nation is going to be blessed, or we'll continue to be disciplined on the basis of what we as believers do.

HB: When Jesus said, "You are the salt and you are the light," He had no alternatives. He didn't say, "and if you're not salt and light, then these are the six alternatives." "If the salt," He said, "loses its saltiness, it's good for nothing but to be trampled under the foot of men." So don't get upset when men trample you under their feet spiritually—it's because you've lost your saltiness. You have let the world marginalize you, so they don't consult you anymore, but they used to. The 9-11 attack is a call to God's people to return to the relationship and holiness which comes from repentance, turning from sin, and receiving a cleansing and a forgiveness at the hand of God. Then our lives and our churches become a highway of holiness over which God can go to the whole world.

BB: Let me add this word, I know you agree, that apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit none of this can happen. We need a greater emphasis, in my opinion, on the person of the Holy Spirit. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—One God, but the Holy Spirit for some wonderful reason has a major role to play in revival. I'd like to make a practical suggestion that everyone who receives this message will go to their pastor and volunteer to pray for them, and to do it in an organized way, such as people coming to meet with the pastor early on Sunday morning, and that he would give them a list of things to pray for each day, and different persons would agree to be responsible for each day. Something like that, because it's tough to be a pastor. Pastors are out there on a limb.

JB: What do you believe that God is saying to the nation, and is that different from what He is saying to the church?

BB: Well I'm thinking primarily of what He is saying to the church, because when we awaken then the whole nation is going to know it and benefit. And I'm reminded today, why did Jesus come? To seek and save the lost. What was his commission to us? To seek and save the lost.

HB: A clear word from God all through the Bible is to hear Him and to obey Him. I believe He's coming to His people today to say, "What more could I have done for you than what I did on the Cross? My Cross has not lost its power. What more could I have done for you than when I raised my Son from the dead, sat Him at My own right hand to intercede? What more could I have done for you than Pentecost, to pour out my Spirit upon every believer? Now, I'm asking you to be accountable to Me, and take seriously what I have provided for you, and help one another into that relationship—as the last part of that Great Commission says—and teach them to practice everything I have commanded. God's people need to help God's people into the deepest relationship of Christlikeness. When God's people start to let Christ be Lord in their life, the spontaneous response of that will be to take the Good News to the ends of the earth, volunteering at great cost. So, I would say God's people need to return to Him with all of their heart, remember who He is, remember what He has accomplished, that all of that is available to every life and every church

and every worker in the workplace, and then let that be lived out in your life—let the awakening to the presence of God through the people of God become a reality in America.

BB: Amen.

JB: Might we close our time with a word of prayer?

BB: Holy Father, we bow in reverence and awe in Your majestic presence, when we even imagine Your greatness, Your ability to create hundreds of billions of galaxies, and yet in Your humility You became one of us, died on the Cross for our sins, were raised from the dead and now live within us in all Your mighty, wonderful, loving, resurrection power. Now I pray, Holy Father, that You would help each one who views this video, listens to the audio, or reads this message, to want to be totally, absolutely, irrevocably committed to You and to Your holy purpose for their lives, that they will surrender their all to the Lord Jesus Christ our one and only Savior—to Him be all the glory, all the worship and all the praise. Father, Son and Holy Spirit—send revival to your children and through them awakening to our nation and to the nations of earth.

HB: Heavenly Father, all glory belongs to You, and You created this nation, founding it upon some wonderful children of Yours, that over the centuries this nation would bring incredible honor and glory to Your name. You are awakening us to that destiny which You once established and have not rescinded as yet, so I pray that at this time in the history of this nation and Your people, we will come back to the deepest relationship

with You we've ever known, and that our desire would be that the nation turns to You and then touches the nations of the world, that the greatest honor and glory will come to You and to Your name and to Your Son and to your blessed Spirit. We release ourselves afresh and anew at this very moment, that we would be more Your children than we've ever been in our lives as long as You give us breath. And we ask it in Jesus name,

BB: Amen!

HB: Amen!

JB: We want to thank you both for taking time, and for your clear, powerful insights. We have so much to be thankful for as a nation, and we're really a blessed people aren't we? But we also have much to be concerned about, especially the spiritual vulnerability of America. We must not become complacent. We must not rest. Now may millions of people rise to the urgency of this hour. May we work and pray and sacrifice so that all God intends for this great nation might be accomplished. Thank you.



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