



HENRY  
BLACKABY

WHAT THE  
*S*PIRIT  
IS SAYING TO THE  
CHURCHES



LIFE CHANGE BOOKS

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L I F E C H A N G E   B O O K S

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*To the many dedicated pastors and spiritual leaders  
who long to experience God's fullness  
in their lives and ministries.*

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### *About the Author*

Henry Blackaby was pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, from 1970–82, after serving two churches in California. He went on to hold denominational responsibilities in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and in Atlanta, Georgia, until his retirement in 2000. He is now president of Henry Blackaby Ministries. Henry and his wife, Marilyn, live in Atlanta. They have five children, all in ministry, and thirteen grandchildren.

## *Acknowledgments*

I express my deepest gratitude to the faithful and loving people who made up the fellowship of Faith Baptist Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, during my twelve-year pastorate there, and to the many precious people who became part of the mission churches and the work that unfolded. Much of the labor was done by the laypeople, by pastors of the missions, and through student work at the Theological College. God will give full reward to them.

To my wife, Marilyn, I owe the deepest gratitude. In those years she carried the heaviest of the load at times, spending much time alone while raising our five children.

And to my children I owe a debt too large to pay for their openness to God in their lives and in our family. It was God who called us to be instruments of His activity in our world, and each of our children responded uniquely, making God's assignment more rich and meaningful.

Also, to the hundreds of people who have heard my testimony of God's grace and who have encouraged me over the years to put it in writing, I say, "Thank you."

Finally, Bill Shadle, former minister of music at First Baptist Church, Denton, Texas, who brought his youth choir year after year. He helped to begin and build many of our mission churches. The debt to him, and Maxine his wife, and to his church, is immeasurable. To Lynda McLeod, a Mission Service Corps volunteer and my former secretary, I express my deepest appreciation for her many hours of typing, which made this manuscript possible.

*Preface*



# WHEN GOD WORKS

*Jesus answered them,  
“My Father has been working until now,  
and I have been working.”*

JOHN 5:17

When God does His mighty work in the midst of His people in a particular place, it's overwhelming to those who are there to experience Him. Though it often brings much hard work for them, His presence makes everything worthwhile.

Such an experience also brings a desire by those involved to humbly tell other Christians about the wonderful works of God, though it's too much to be fully and adequately communicated. They share the psalmist's excitement:

The works of the LORD are great,  
Studied by all who have pleasure in them....  
He has made His wonderful works to be  
remembered.

PSALM III:2-4

This book is an account of what happened when the people of one church heard what the Spirit was saying to them and obeyed. They saw God accomplish things that could be explained only in terms of His divine presence and activity.

I was part of that experience, and many have urged me to share these things with others. As I have done so, some respond with skepticism and doubt, often because they've never experienced His work in their lives and do not completely understand it. Still others seem to determine that such things are irrelevant and continue to pursue the world's principles, never knowing what God could have done through them.

But for many others in many churches, the story has helped them come into a new relationship with God and new experiences of His power at work. With excitement they give themselves more fully to God, so that through them He can accomplish even greater things than those described on these pages.

May this account be a witness unto the Lord and an encouragement to you and your church to hear what the Spirit is saying. May you respond in faith and obedience...and experience His presence working through you in revival.

And to Him be the glory.

*Henry T. Blackaby*

*Introduction*



GOD SPEAKS  
TO HIS PEOPLE

*Thus says the LORD of hosts:  
"Return to Me," says the LORD of hosts,  
"and I will return to you,"  
says the LORD of hosts.  
ZECHARIAH 1:3*

I have been privileged to visit Christians worldwide. As I do, I'm usually asked to be a Bible teacher. I share with them the great truths of God's Word using practical illustrations from my own life and ministry. God's people always respond with a hunger for His reality in their lives and in their churches.

In fact, the question most often asked of me across the Christian community is this: "How can Christ become

more real and personal to me?” The next most common question is, “How can I clearly know God’s will for my life and my church?”

We must help one another with these concerns. In addition to strengthening our individual walk with God, we must attain a fresh and renewed understanding of how God carries out His will in our world.

God’s primary means for achieving His will is the local church, which is a living body of Christ. And the churches that are being mightily used of Him are the ones that have learned to “hear” God.

It is time in all our churches for God’s people to experience the real presence of our living Lord guiding us collectively, and to adjust our lives to His purpose and activity. Many believe (and I’m one of them) that we may be the generation of those who are alive on earth when Jesus returns. Therefore, we may indeed be a most significant generation. If we are looking for Christ’s return, we of all people must be alert and responsive to all He is doing around us. I have lived with this sensitivity all of my life; I’m now more alert to God than I have ever been, and this

—————  
*It is time to  
 experience the  
 real presence of  
 our living Lord  
 guiding us  
 collectively*  
 —————



biblical awareness governs my messages to God's people.

God is at work around us, and to accomplish this work He personally communicates His will to His people, inviting each church to join in His activity in specific ways. It is not for us to dream our own dreams of what we want to do for God. This is never the pattern in the Scriptures. God already knows what He is purposing to do through those He calls to Himself. And He's waiting for us to adjust our lives to His purposes so He can work powerfully through us to redeem our lost world.

When we hear His call and respond appropriately, there will be no limit to what God can and will do through His people. But if we do not even recognize when He is speaking, we are in trouble at the very heart of our relationship to Him.

This is true at all levels of our walk with God and with each other. If we in our churches cannot sense what God is telling us, then in moments of crucial decisions we'll continue to have only the opinions of men, not the mind of Christ, to direct us. Our entire mission will be in peril.

### **THE SPIRIT SPEAKS**


God is present in the midst of our churches, just as He was present among the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2–3, where we find this repeated command to

each congregation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The Spirit is indeed continuing to speak to the churches! He has always revealed His purposes to those He would use, and He does so still today. He will tell us, just as He told those first-century Christians, all about our church’s strengths, our specific need for adjustment to Him, and what He intends to accomplish through us. We, too, will hear God’s voice saying that He is present among us, that He alone knows what He wants to do through us, and that He alone is to be followed.

Just as those churches in Revelation that heard and responded and were used of God to transform their world in a great revival, so also will it be in our time.

How desperate is the need in our world for churches  
 \_\_\_\_\_ that hear and follow what the Spirit is  
*How desperate* telling them! The world in our day  
*is the need for* His people, but unless we hear and  
*churches that* obey in the things He assigns us  
*hear and follow* (things that only God can accom-  
 \_\_\_\_\_ plish), the world will not experience  
*what the Spirit* Him; they will see only “religion” and  
*is telling them!* be turned away.

\_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_ This is true also on the personal  
 level. As individuals we must learn

how to hear God's voice. Without such personal fellowship with God, we'll be practicing mere "religion" rather than living in a relationship with our risen Lord.

### **"RETURN TO ME"**

The churches of our day seem to be at a crossroads. Many appear somewhat afraid to release their lives and their people to God. But others truly desire God's presence and activity and are praying for a great touch from God.

They are discovering that this requires repentance. These believers are being deeply moved by the Spirit of God to return to Him with all their hearts. They hear Him say, "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:7); "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8); "The LORD is with you while you are with Him" (2 Chronicles 15:2).

Hear carefully and thoughtfully the heart of God! It is always a cause for trembling to think that our sovereign God, who is holy and just, would ever "plead" this way with His people when they have deliberately departed and strayed from Him.

Jesus issued this same plea from the heart of the Father as He began His ministry: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). At the end of the New Testament, we hear the same call in the Lord's words to the churches in Revelation; to four of these seven churches He

had to say, “Repent” (Revelation 2:5; 2:16; 3:3; 3:19). He has continued to issue this solemn invitation throughout history and to this very hour.

A repenting church is God’s condition for revival, and it is always corporate repentance!

God has always desired to work through His people, but they have not always recognized His initiative in their lives or His activity around them. But for those churches who repent—those who take time to hear the Spirit; to believe what He tells them; to adjust their plans, structures, and programs to Him; and then to follow the Lord regardless of how impossible it may seem—these are the churches that will be spiritually renewed and that will experience God’s mighty deeds through them to bring a lost world to Himself in a great spiritual awakening.

*Chapter 1*



GOD TAKES THE  
INITIATIVE

*“You did not choose Me, but I chose you  
and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,  
and that your fruit should remain.”*

JOHN 15:16

On a cold Saturday morning—April 4, 1970—my family and I arrived in the city of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, Canada, where God had called me to pastor a tiny band of His people.

By most outward appearances, Faith Baptist Church was dying. It had been without a pastor for a number of years and had dwindled to only a handful of people. For months a For Sale sign had stood on the front lawn outside their small, white wood-frame building that was several

blocks from any major street. Inside the building was a tiled-floor sanctuary where, on Sunday mornings, the walls echoed with the scooting noise of a few metal folding chairs. Mostly empty Sunday school classrooms were below, in a basement prone to frequent flooding. And in the month previous, total giving to the church amounted to only ninety dollars.

But we were sure this was a strategic congregation. A cross-denominational mission study group, Outreach Canada, had indicated that Canada desperately needed 10,000 more church plants immediately just to keep up with population growth. Our denomination (the Southern Baptists) believed that we must do our part—while praying that God would use others as well—and we knew we had our own unique assignment from God. Faith Baptist was our only church in Saskatoon, a city of 135,000 people. In all of Saskatchewan—a province of 950,000—we had as yet only one other church, a mission to North American Natives more than ninety miles away. And in all of Canada, we had no work or presence among two-thirds of the country's 24 million people. We therefore saw Faith Baptist in Saskatoon as a church on the cutting edge, an assembly with a great responsibility for expanding ministry throughout Canada.

For the remnant of people at Faith Baptist, however, thoughts about the future must have seemed about as excit-

ing as the drooping overhang that kept the church's front door from fully opening. The horizon before them indicated little if any evidence of great expansion.

A few months earlier, the ten people who had been hanging on, trying to keep this church alive, had called a meeting to consider disbanding. It seemed impossible that they would ever be able to secure a pastor. As they went to their knees in prayer in that meeting, they thought God wanted them to close the church's doors. But while kneeling, God touched their hearts. They got up saying, "God wants us to try one more time."

*They got up saying, "God wants us to try one more time."*



And with the possibility of my coming to serve them—I was ministering in a church in Southern California at the time—they told themselves, "If Henry will come to be our pastor, we'll know God isn't through with us yet!" And God wasn't.

### PREPARED BY GOD

That cold Saturday morning when we arrived in Saskatoon was a moment God had long ago prepared me for. I grew up in the small city of Prince Regent, British Columbia, on Western Canada's north coast. I had heard the heart cry of

my father and mother as they longed and prayed for an evangelical church in our community. During World War II, my father, a businessman, started a church in a dance hall. He preached, my mother played the piano, my older brother ushered, and my younger brother and I were the congregation. It was eight months before we had our first adult visitor. We continued faithfully and experienced slow growth. With much prayer, we were able to see a pastor

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*Suddenly,  
we were faced  
with an  
enormous and  
immediate  
spiritual  
challenge.*



come to lead us after eight years.  
During those growing-up years, I also became aware of many other towns and villages that had no evangelical witness and often had never had a church. This left a deep impression on my heart that was continuing to shape my life as I responded to God's call and returned to Canada.

But the Blackabys weren't the only new faces to show up at Faith Baptist on that April Saturday in Saskatoon. On the same morning, a car with five men pulled up to join us for lunch. They had come from Prince Albert, a city of thirty thousand people ninety miles to the north. These men had been meeting regularly for Bible study for almost four years and had become convinced God wanted to use them to help start a

church in their community. Not only that, but God had laid on their hearts a burden for the numerous other towns, villages, and North American Native reserves in our region that had little or no gospel witness. From their study of the Scriptures, they could foresee God establishing many churches in these places, filled with people of one heart and one mind and one soul, people who would release their lives to Him for the reaching of the unreached.

When these men heard I was coming to Saskatoon, they began to pray. They became convinced God wanted me to be their pastor too, driving up to Prince Albert twice a week. And they had come down to Saskatoon that morning to share with us this “word from the Lord.”

Suddenly, Faith Baptist Church was faced with an enormous and immediate spiritual challenge.

### **A MAJOR DECISION**

As a church, we had to decide if this was God’s way of speaking to us. It was clear that the yearning in the hearts of God’s people in Prince Albert was due to the activity of God. He had clearly led these men to come to us for help. These were things only God could do. Did this mean God was showing us a ministry He wanted us to undertake? Were we to start a mission church in Prince Albert?

Was this our “Macedonian call,” like Paul’s experience in Acts 16:6–10, when he saw the vision of the man in

Macedonia crying out for help? Was our response to be as Paul's was— "Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them" (16:10)? It appeared that what God had done in the Scriptures was now happening to us!

Another truth was also present. Almost twenty years earlier as a teenager, I had told the Lord, "If You ever call me into the ministry, and if there are people anywhere within driving distance who want a Bible study or a church, I will go." This commitment had grown out of my experience growing up in a remote area of British Columbia and seeing my parents' faithful commitment to ministry there.

My heart had been fashioned by God to do His will. If people asked me to come, I felt I could not say no. So I, too, was now faced with a major decision. Would I keep my vow to God that I made earlier in my life?

### **GOD'S PATTERN**

This was a crucial moment for our little church. God was obviously at work among us. But we felt so helpless and alone, so very weak. And we were so small in numbers.

Faith Baptist had never sponsored a mission church, and I had never pastored a church that pursued this means of ministry. We were certainly not bringing to this situation

our strengths, our skills, or our expertise and experience in starting mission churches.

Moreover, some of the people at our church said to me, “Henry, have you ever been in a Saskatchewan blizzard?”

When I said no, they replied, “You can’t promise those people you will drive up there twice a week.”

All I knew to say was, “The God who could still a storm on the Sea of Galilee can still a storm in Saskatchewan.”

As their pastor, I knew I had to help open our people’s eyes to the ways of God by leading them into His Word. As I did, they began to see that what we were experiencing agreed with the witness of the Scriptures.

God had shown us where He was at work. The very reason He had revealed this to us was because He was inviting us to join Him in His work. We had to decide if we believed Him, if we were willing to adjust our lives to Him, and if we would trust Him to guide and provide for us as we obeyed.

We realized that this was God’s pattern in the Scriptures. We saw it most clearly in how Jesus would

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*He had  
revealed this to  
us because He  
was inviting us  
to join Him in  
His work.*



conform His actions to whatever activity God the Father was revealing to Him. Jesus explained it this way: “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does”; Jesus therefore was doing nothing on His own, but only “what He sees the Father do”; and whatever God the Father was doing, “the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19–20).

The Father’s activity determined the Son’s direction and motivation. The Father took the initiative to show the Son what He was doing, and Jesus then joined Him. And so it should also be for us, we believed.

### **HE IS ABLE...AND HE WILL**

During this critical time for Faith Baptist, a simple, clear word came to us from the Lord as we lingered before Him: “Our God whom we serve is able...and He will” (Daniel 3:17). This confident statement would become an anchor to our souls through the continuing unfolding of God’s invitation. It would be our motto in all we were to do in the months and years ahead.

God had spoken. With such assurance, we saw God’s assignment for us. We knew God had taken the initiative to come to us, and we believed He would continue to reveal day by day what He wanted to accomplish through us.

How new and different such an approach was to the church! It helped us realize that it did not matter what

capacities or abilities our small band of believers possessed or what we thought we could do for God. We sensed rather the truth that God had “chosen the weak things of the world...and the base things of the world and the things which are despised...and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

Could we, as such a small church, sponsor a mission church? We sensed that this was the wrong question. The right question was this: Had God revealed His will for us? And if so, would we believe, obey, and trust Him?

We answered by saying yes. God was at work and He was letting us see what He was doing and how He wanted to work through us. We were ready to experience in a new way His presence and power working through us to reach others.

Over time we came to be convinced that God would indeed use us to accomplish His purposes. And I would learn that a church’s name can mean so much. The months and years before us would prove that the word Faith truly expressed this people’s character. When a church realizes it all depends on God, not them, and will together yield their lives fully to Him, God begins to work. It doesn’t depend on numbers, status, skills, or even resources. The future depends on God and on His people who will hear Him, believe Him, and obey Him.