

“America Under Attack” September 11, 2001

GAINING GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

*An interview and dialog with Dr. Henry Blackaby, moderated by John Beckett,
Chairman, Intercessors for America, September 18, 2001.*

John Beckett: This is John Beckett, Chairman of Intercessors for America (IFA). I’m here today with Gary Bergel, the President of IFA, and with Dr. Henry Blackaby, the author of “Experiencing God.” We’re together on a phone conference call - just one week almost to the hour after the tragic terrorist attacks that occurred in New York City and in Washington. We specifically asked Dr. Blackaby if he would be so kind as to give us his perspective, insights we feel America needs to hear from an esteemed and senior leader in the body of Christ.

In this interview we will dialog and discuss the issues that are on people's hearts, and the areas of concern that we want and need answers to at this critical time. So I'm going to begin, and Dr. Blackaby and Gary, both of you, thank you so much for being part of this conversation.

One of the critical issues at a time like this, I sense, is that we would really be hearing what God is saying. Of course, our hearts are going out to the many who have suffered great loss and to the shock that has impacted all of our lives. But is it not important to step back, and just try to see what God is saying at such a time as this?

Dr. Blackaby: There's no question about that. In the midst of this particular horrendous time the heart first goes out to the people in their loss and their grief, and then our heart turns to the President and the leaders of the nation, and those things are spontaneous. But for a serious Christian who's in the middle of this tragedy, his first direction is to go to the heart of God.

All through Biblical history, and all the way through world history, it's been God's people in the middle of a crisis who have turned to God to know His heart. The purpose of turning to God is not just for information but, when you hear the heart of God, a Christian then responds and makes major adjustments in his life to God.

As we look in the scriptures we find Jesus’ statement in John 6: “The words I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.” And in Revelation 2:7 he says, “Let the churches hear what the spirit is saying to the churches.” There is so much in the scripture showing us that God, who is sovereign, does speak to His children. But He always calls on them to seek Him with all their heart, and with all their mind and all their soul. So when God reveals His heart to His people, then you have a perspective that you can't get anywhere else, and it usually requires some major adjustments on the part of God's people to what they hear from God.

John Beckett: So we could actually say that our hearing accurately from God at such a time as this has everything to do with the appropriateness of our response, does it not?

Dr. Blackaby: Absolutely. You cannot respond accurately without a word from God. And, for a Christian, his or her first spontaneous response is not the television set, but rather to go alone with God and

get God's perspective. Unfortunately, such a time as that will not create a sensitivity toward God; instead, it will reveal if we have one.

Too many Christians, when they go to God at a time like this, are totally bewildered, and they don't know how to hear from God. They don't know how to know that it is God who's speaking. They don't know where to turn in His word. So, there is another dimension to this – those who have seriously walked with God long before this, and have been seeking the mind and heart of God, need to be ready not only to hear in this tragedy but to communicate that with God's people who don't quite know how to do that.

John Beckett: That's very helpful. Now, coming closer to the heart of this specific issue – as you have had a week to process what's happened, as you have heard what other Christian leaders are saying, as you have tried to assimilate and take meaning out of it, I expect that you have developed your own sense of what God is saying – is there a theme or message that you sense is on the heart of God for us?

“Lord, what are You trying to say to us?”

Dr. Blackaby: Well, whenever God allows and permits something of this nature, we're all faced immediately, and especially those who don't know God that well, with a dilemma: either God is all good and He could have prevented it but didn't, and He is all-powerful and didn't, or He can't be all good.

The Christian knows God is sovereign, and the scripture indicates there are times when God not only permits something, but He often will move towards something, especially if He knows that there's a greater dilemma because of the sin of His people, or He knows that His people are hardening their hearts toward Him.

And of course, such a condition is so totally disastrous for God's people – those who are in a covenant relationship with Him, and are the ones through whom He works to bring the rest of the world under his sovereign rule. If God's people start to move away, He will quite often begin a process of speaking to them. And He has a thousand ways to speak.

So, in this time, I believe first of all that God is trying to speak to His people. Others will get a message, but they will not be able to understand it if they don't know the Lord. But God's people ought to know what God is trying to say. I think He is giving a warning. And I think He's giving a clear word about His relationship to the nation.

In Isaiah 5 we read of when God's people turned away and God said, “I've been protecting you. And that was part of a covenant that I made with you – I would protect you. But if you do not follow in My ways, I will remove that protection.” In the first verses of Isaiah 5, He describes His people as a vineyard, and He declares, “I'll take the hedge away, I'll take the wall down, and you won't have any protection, and then the enemy can come.”

Therefore, a sensitive Christian, one who knows the scripture, knows that there's no way that the enemy could do such a disastrous thing without the permissive will of God. And that truth immediately then prompts us in our relationship with God to say, “You have spoken, and You want us to hear and to listen carefully to what You're saying, because it determines the future of our nation. It determines our life, and it determines this nation's relationship to the rest of the world.”

There is a huge picture, I think, that God has brought before us as we have watched the nations respond, watched the leaders respond, and we've watched people turn to God in prayer. There's a bigger

message. It is not only, “God, will you comfort us and bless us?” But, “Oh, Lord, what are you trying to say to us? Have we departed? Is this the first major message?”

“If we don’t listen, the Lord sends remedial judgment.”

As I read the scripture, I see a progressive word from God as it relates to the judgment of God. He does not bring a final judgment on the nation in one shot. He will speak to them and the Holy Spirit will convict them of sin. If they don't respond He will send someone to warn them. If they still don't respond, He may send a much more severe messenger like a prophet. If they don't listen to him, we see that He sends remedial judgments upon the people of God and upon the nation. That is, judgments that are not final, but are designed to catch their attention and cause them to return to Him.

If they will not listen and respond to the remedial judgment, He withdraws the sense of His presence from them. And, if they don't recognize that step, He then withdraws His actual presence. And then, if they don't respond and return, the final step is full judgment and death.

I think we may be quite a way from the final step, but I think God has now definitely said, “I am progressively allowing some remedial judgment so that you will listen and you will turn.” But when the people of our nation begin to turn, there have got to be some key, strategic leaders who understand the ways of God, and who will guide people to know how to repent. What is it we need to repent of? Where have we departed? How do we need to return? How can we return to God so that the blessing of God will continue?

“God’s dealings and judgments are always redemptive.”

John Beckett: Dr. Blackaby, you are speaking about progressive judgment, remedial judgement, yet the context in which you're speaking of that aspect of God's dealings with His people is still redemptive, isn't it? He's trying to call us back to Himself.

Dr. Blackaby: Yes, it is always redemptive, and if we were ever really aware of what could be, we would thank Him for the moment that He caught our attention and drew us back. It's like a surgeon. He has to allow some pain in order to prevent a greater disaster down the road. He sees something that the patient doesn't see, so he begins the process of working through that because the doctor's concern is the total health of the patient. God is always redemptive. He is always preventing something that could be if we do not turn, and the tremendous blessing He wants to bring if we do return.

John Beckett: Gary, I'd like to give you an opportunity to jump in here if you have any questions or comments.

Gary Bergel: I would just like to amplify what I think is an important point Dr. Blackaby brought out from Isaiah 5 – that when God's people stray, the Lord declared, “I'll take the hedge down and the wall of protection down.” There is presently confusion over whether the terrorist attacks were judgment in any way. I think this dialog will continue because God is also trying to awaken us to reinvestigate, to biblically reexamine God in His full nature, including the remedial dealings that Dr. Blackaby was outlining to us.

I have made a personal discipline of watching the calamities that have afflicted our nation over the course of IFA’s ministry, almost 30 years. After a natural disaster some 25 years ago, a word from God was received by a number of prayer groups in Chicago, independent of one another. They had sought the face of God in the wake of the disaster. The message they all received from the Lord was, “I will first use

weather to begin to deal with and to judge America, to try to draw her back. But if she does not listen and return, you will see warring in the midst of the nation and war itself come to the nation.”

That message has stayed written on my heart, and has helped me “track” developments. While the intensity of some recent floods and droughts have broken 100-year records, an even more significant thing I have noted over the years is an increasing loss of human life in our disasters. Earlier, while there was often a great loss of property, there was a minimal loss of human life. We are seeing then, the reality of what Dr. Blackaby pointed out – the taking down of the hedge, the removing of the wall of protection. Some of our Founders phrased it as “God's protective hand being drawn back from the nation,” or as the “canopy of Divine Protection” being lifted from our nation – making us ever more vulnerable.

In these recent terrorist attacks we have seen one of the greatest single losses of human life in the history of our nation, parallel to the days of loss in the Civil War.

“Even small enemies defeat us when we turn from God.”

Dr. Blackaby: If you will read Deuteronomy 28, you will see that a part of the basic covenant that God made with His people involves blessing – He gives about 12 or 14 verses of blessing, and concludes “everything you put your hands to I'll bless.” Then He gives a long list, over 50 verses on what happens if the people turn their hearts away from Him. And, in these days I have thought of how the Lord said, “If you're walking with Me it doesn't matter who comes against you, or who you go against; you will always win. But if you're not walking with Me, it doesn't matter how small the enemy is, you will always be defeated.”

For the first time in our history, all of a sudden, we went against little nations – Korea, Viet Nam –and were defeated. Note that it is progressive, and that it involves not winning.

This hit a chord in me to say, “Then are there other areas in that covenant with God's people that we need to pay attention to?” Because, if we miss the message, it will move to another dimension. In Leviticus 23 God goes on to say, “If you do not respond here, I'll multiply the judgment seven times.” And He says that four times. Basically, if you want to look at the best that is in that message, it's that God is not willing that people perish. He really wants them to experience the fullness of His blessing. When God blesses a nation, what He does is incredible. But, at the same time, if we use that blessing to turn away from Him, then God is not mocked. Whatever a nation sows, it reaps.

A sensitive Christian in a time like this must be going beyond the headlines into the presence of God, with an open Bible, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the counsel of other believers to say, “Is this a time – for the first time – that the enemy is not out there across the ocean. For the first time, the enemy has come to our land. Do we need to help God's people and our nation's people to return to God?”

“Has the Cross changed the nature and ways of God?”

John Beckett: Thank you. But, before we move on from this topic, might I bring up what might be a sensitive issue? I believe this conversation will primarily be listened to, or be read by mature and sincere Christians, and I know there are many who are still grappling with this whole area of judgment, and how it relates to the Old and New Covenant. Some would say that God clearly sent judgments in the Old Testament – “I will send the Chaldeans,” as recorded in the Book of Habakkuk for example, or the passage that you cited from Deuteronomy 28. Even the oft-quoted passage from 2 Chronicles 7:14 “If My People”

is actually picked up mid-sentence. The full sentence begins in verse 13 which talks about “when I send my judgments.”

My question is, “Has anything changed in the nature of God and the way He deals with people and nations as we come through the Cross and into the New Covenant?”

Dr. Blackaby: God does not change. I believe that the way He deals with our sin has come to a completeness and a fullness. It ought to be that the Christian – one who has gone beyond the Old Testament and, because of the Cross, the resurrection, the ascension and Christ’s intercession, now knows how serious sin is to God – is a person who is much more sensitive to sin and to sin’s consequences. And, it is recorded in the New Testament that God dealt with Ananias and Sapphira in an immediate way. You might say, “Well that sounds more like Old Testament.” I’d say, “No, it sounds like God.”

God knew that the redemption of the rest of the world rested on that first church in Jerusalem. And He also knew that sin, when left in the midst of the people of God, would have a devastating effect on His capacity to work through them. So, He dealt with Ananias and Sapphira immediately. That scripture passage records, “Fear came upon all the people.” Now, in our generation, I would say we have lost that fear of God. We have made a god in our own image, and we have used the transition from the Old to the New Testament as a means of doing it, which could be fatal.

Two other things come to mind. In the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul talks about God’s people not dealing properly at the Lord’s Supper. The apostle says, “Because of that many have died and many are sick.” The judgment of God was coming upon them. And, in Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus turns to the churches and says, “It is very, very serious for you to take sin lightly, because I stand in your midst and I have a purpose for you. And I cannot fulfill My purpose unless you return to me. But if you don’t return to Me, I’ll remove your candlestick from you.” Or, in effect, “I’ll judge you.”

I think the God of the New Testament is a God who lets us see the full rainbow of His love which is included in the Cross and the resurrection. But it does not remove the consequences of sin. Christ’s atonement removes the eternal penalty for sin, but not the consequences. In Galatians 6 it says, “You ought to be very careful how you live because God is not mocked. Whatever you sow, you reap. If you reap to the flesh, you’ll reap corruption. If you reap to the Spirit you’ll reap life.”

“Was God judging the people who died?”

There’s another very sensitive issue here, because some will respond, “Are you saying that all those who died, that God was judging them?” And I say, “Absolutely not!” Luke 13 records how the people asked Jesus a similar question. They asked, “What about those Galileans, where Pilot killed them? And what about those killed by the tower that fell? Were they worse Christians or worse sinners than others?” And Jesus answered and said, “Not at all. They were not worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered such things. But I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

So, in the mind of Jesus, a tragedy was actually a message intended way beyond the ones who most suffered from the tragedy. It was for a people and a nation. I would stress that we ought never to say that these who lost their lives – that God is judging them. Not at all. Especially in light of what Jesus Himself said. Be very careful. He said that you do not attribute the disaster to the sin of those who died any more than Daniel and his friends, who were godly people, were able to avoid the consequences of the nation’s sins – they were faithful and obedient, yet they were taken into captivity because their nation had strayed.

But I do feel that your question is a very, very sensitive one, and one that needs to be answered very, very carefully.

“The consequences of God’s love are enormous.”

John Beckett: It is important also to see that all of this is happening within the overlay of His love.

Dr. Blackaby: Absolutely.

John Beckett: Romans 8:28 and the verses following have been much on my heart through all of this – that there is a redemptive purpose in the midst of all these things. The Apostle Paul says, “All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” Paul then goes on to try to define the enormity and depth of that love. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” It is interesting that in the last verse of Romans 8, if I might paraphrase it this way, he declares, “Nothing in the time realm, nothing in the dimensional realm, nothing in the spiritual realm, nothing in the created realm...” I mean, it's a comprehensive list of those things that, even at their very most influential, are incapable of separating us from the love of Christ!

Dr. Blackaby: Right.

John Beckett: So we have to see *that* aspect of God to fully understand His dealings, and to see that even at their extremity, they are within the context of His love.

Dr. Blackaby: The consequences of God's love are enormous as long as we get the full spectrum of it. As you were talking, my mind was going to Hebrews 12 where the writer talks about the discipline of God, which he says is not joyous, but grievous. He instructs that the whole reason for the discipline of God is because He loves you. He also writes, “He wants to create holiness in you without which no one can see the Lord.”

So whatever God permits is an expression of His love in the biggest and the most profound dimensions of His love. By nature He cannot permit or do anything that is not an expression of love or He would have to cease to be God.

John Beckett: So it's really important for us to try to have a proper understanding of God, isn't it?

Dr. Blackaby: Oh, I'll say.

John Beckett: And if that understanding is not balanced and full, then our responses are going to be unbalanced and incomplete.

Dr. Blackaby: Yes. And this is a time where those who walk with God need to speak the truth in love. The Spirit of God can take the truth of God and bring it to the heart of a seeking, searching individual who honestly wants to know, “Where was God in all of this?”

And, if He was in the midst of it, what is He trying to say?

John, I've raised five children as you have, and in their youngest days if my children saw me disciplining them because I knew that, for their best interest, I had to deal with what I saw, they often would turn to me and say, “Dad, then you don't love me.” And I would say, “Son, one day as you get a

little older you'll understand that love has to discipline, and that it is for your best interest that I have to discipline you at this time.”

But in a tragedy of this nature it is very, very difficult for many to grasp the love of God. Yet I think the message of the love of God must be proclaimed in its fullness. And the fullness of God's love is incredible.

“What direction should we be taking in prayer?”

John Beckett: Thank you. Now, Gary, being just outside Washington, DC, you saw first hand the impact this all had on people in your area. Close friends of ours in New York were on the streets just after the planes hit, praying for people and providing practical helps. Comment on what you feel we should be saying to those who are linked together with Intercessors for America – people who are serious about prayer, and serious about trying to understand what God is saying in this.

Gary Bergel: Well, we always try to seek the mind of Christ for what His intentions would be toward the church at this time, toward believers, and to call the church to intercessory prayer, even fasting. Many are hearing to just humble themselves with fasting, and to stay before God, praying as He directs.

Being positioned near Washington, DC, and having our ministry mandate drawn from 1 Timothy 2, we pray for “all men” which, when kept in context, means praying for the body politic, the citizens of the land. Then we are directed to pray for “kings,” heads of state, and “all in authority,” all other officials.

We continue looking to the Lord to see how He would have us pray and invest prayer toward the church, the civil realms, toward our magistrates, our officials, those in authority. I find that hearing Dr. Blackaby share is helping me, and I’m noting prayer points for the church, the body of Christ. In terms of the civil spheres, we feel we've got to stay in an attitude and posture that is supportive and honoring, even if we have questions in our own minds and hearts. Theologies and doctrines are colliding. We're seeing the just war issue surface again. Some ask, “Should America turn the other cheek?”

But, we're clearly called in scripture to stay in a posture of honor and support toward those offices of delegated authority that the Lord has set into the earth. One very practical prayer tool that we have just brought forth for God's people to use is the listings our government has done of the state sponsors of terrorism, and the 28 identified terrorist networks that are operating in some 60 nations. These have gone out in e-mail alerts and are available on our Web site www.ifa-usapray.org, “The New Face of War.”

It is important to pray for groups and individuals by name, and to use these lists as prayer guides. God answers specific prayer specifically and general prayer generally. So, we're trying to formulate very specific prayer points for God's people to use at this time – both toward the church and then towards the civil realms. Prayer points are issued each week via IFA’s “On Watch In Washington” alerts.

John Beckett: I've looked over a number of the recent IFA newsletters, and have seen how time and time again we have been asking people to pray specifically about the threat of terrorism. It's as though God was nudging all along to be attentive to that whole potential threat.

Dr. Blackaby: I think it's so important to let the scriptures be the foundation of our praying and that we pray from the scriptures. That's what you were doing there, Gary, when you were mentioning those verses from 1 Timothy. And if you come through David's prayers, there are times David prays that God would come against the enemy who would seek to destroy, and that God would come quickly and soon. It's

not that we don't want terrorists to repent, but there's a point where we could even pray and say, "Oh, God, if you know that their hearts have gone beyond the point of no return like Pharaoh, Oh Lord would you step in and would you intervene in those whose hearts have become so hard that they cannot hear your voice anymore? They now are under another dominion, and they are seeking to destroy your people. Oh, God, would you intervene, and would you spare us?" We know that God acts absolutely justly. And He's not willing that any of them perish. But He also knows there's a point beyond which they have come under another control, and they will not respond. David cries out, "Oh, Lord, would you intervene?" And then he says, "You heard my cry, and you delivered me."

I think to pray from the scripture is to pray a lot more safely than it would be to pray from our own emotion, and to try to guess at what God might do and might not do.

Gary Bergel: There are a number of passages in the Psalms that speak about those who would strike terror into the earth, some very specific references to terrorist activity. I think too of Romans 13 which notes that the magistrates are ordained of God to punish evildoers. We should be praying and expecting righteous officials, God-fearing officials in this country and in other countries to be doing their God-ordained job right now. That ultimately will protect human life, and will maintain the harvest fields that the church is going out into. In some of these very regions – the 10/40 Window as it's called, and in some of the closed Islamic nations – we are seeing the very first harvest brought in, the first churches established, worship occurring for the first time.

“The outcome of this war may well rest on the holiness of the people of God.”

John Beckett: This raises another point because there's every indication that, as a nation, we're going to war. And, as praying people, we really have a role in that whole dimension as well, do we not? I think of the sanctifying preparation and the imagery of the choir going out before the army in the Old Testament. I wonder if there doesn't need to be an initiative on the part of the church, one having to do with the sins of our nation that is a necessary step before we can expect victory in a military conflict.

Dr. Blackaby: Certainly, for in the teaching on covenant that you see throughout the scripture, as go the people of God, so goes the nation. Somehow the spiritual leaders need to make that connection between the incredible purposes, the eternal purposes of God to bless nations through His people, and that if the nation goes to war, the outcome of that battle may well rest on the holiness of the people of God.

There is a direct connection between the holiness of the people of God and the success of the nation in which they live. I think it's time to call God's people very specifically, as our churches have great sin within the congregations. The scripture says, God will not hear the cry of His people simply because there is an emergency. But if there is an emergency and He has a great host of godly, holy people then, when they pray, He can save and deliver a nation.

I think of the book, Rees Howells, Intercessor. It records an incredible dimension of intercession that may have turned the course of history because there were some holy people and some godly people, those who knew the connection between the success of a battle or a war and the holiness of God's people.

We are going to war, and you are absolutely right, John. There will be an extension of our country's military out toward the terrorists and the nations. As the people of God we must put our own holiness on the front burner, so that when we pray, we have the assurance that God will hear and regard us. It's the effectual, fervent prayer of a *righteous* person that is very powerful in its working. (James 5:16)

I think the connection between what may transpire in war in our nation ought to drive God's people to their knees. But they're going to need help, to know what it is that we need to repent of – what it is that would bring us to the holiness through which God works to bring a nation to victory.

John Beckett: Which really is going to require not only teaching and instruction, but also revelation. So often, we cannot see the sin that we're caught up in. We're caught in deception, caught in darkness, and yet we need to come to the place where we can deal effectively at the foot of the Cross with those sins. This will enable us to put on that garment of holiness that you're speaking of.

“This is a time we must all be cleansed.”

Dr. Blackaby: I am feeling the weight in my own personal walk with God because of the platform that God has given me to speak from. My life must be cleansed and holy before God. Otherwise, I have a mixed message – mine and God's – when I send it, deliver it to the people. I cannot afford that. This is not a time when spiritual leaders do not repent. This is a time when spiritual leaders must themselves be cleansed, or they cannot bring a message that is clear. The trumpet will blow an uncertain sound if the one blowing it does not hear from God, because they have not turned thoroughly to God in their own life.

The spiritual leaders of America are the first order of business with God. And so I bring myself before God.

John Beckett: As do I. I think each of us needs to be very sensitive in that area. I've been pondering the Psalms, the words of David, when he said, “Examine me. Create in me a clean heart, Oh, God.” (Psalm 51)

Let's move to a final area, then we'll have opportunity for some final thoughts. Have we already seen redemptive aspects of what occurred a week ago? Or can we project into the future the kinds of things that God may want to work redemptively that would help us put what transpired in proper perspective?

“There is much good to come.”

Dr. Blackaby: Certainly, I could not have watched what was happening this week without being aware that, never in my life, have I ever seen leaders come together and people come together in prayer. Many many people have turned to God in prayer. They may not be familiar with God when they pray, and to many of them it may be something that they now know they need to do with their families. I think this has created sensitivity in family life, to help our children understand the connection between what's happening in their lives as a family.

First, I am grateful to see a unity in the government that we have not seen in a long time. My prayer is that spiritual statesmen will be raised up, not politicians, but that from across our land some will move from being a politician to being a statesman, and that these will continue this openness to have one heart and one mind and not party politics. I believe there is much good to come.

Second, I think these attacks have done something globally. I think we have more of a global community than we've known in my lifetime. Nations are coming together around a common threat, and they are seeing our nation as a partner in global peace. I think there is a new way of looking at our world, and we suddenly have felt that we're not isolated by distance or by water. We're one people.

My prayer is also that this will affect the whole Islamic world, that many will see the need to deal with the extremes. This is also presenting a picture for me to rethink some things. I do pray for our missionaries who are strategically located. There have already been some very significant redemptive signs that God has already brought to pass.

A primary prayer would be to have praying people standing in the middle of what is unfolding, to gently, firmly, clearly, unmistakably continue the process until we see a nation turn back to God.

John Beckett: So perhaps there is a direct link here between what has transpired and true revival, not only in America but in other parts of the world?

Dr. Blackaby: Yes. I think this has a tremendous potential to proceed in such a redemptive way that great revival could break – because we see our total dependence on God, and we've seen our own sin, and we've turned to God. That's the essence of revival – when people, especially God's people, feel so helpless that we've got to turn away from where we've trusted, and turn back to God who alone is so trustworthy. At that point, when God returns in all of His manifest presence and power, revival begins.

So, I think this has created an atmosphere in which revival could certainly happen.

John Beckett: Well, that's certainly a wonderful note to conclude on. But before I do, I would just want to ask whether you, Gary, or you, Dr. Blackaby, have any final thoughts that you would want to bring to our discussion.

Dr. Blackaby: I'd like to hear from Gary because I've spoken.

“Works of common grace and God-seeking are going on all around us.”

Gary Bergel: I'd just comment on an experience I had last night. I was out in the community with a group of primarily unbelievers. Some were formerly inmates in our prisons. Many shared amazing stories about how the terrorist attacks have impacted them and are changing their lives. Theologians would call it the work of “common grace” in the hearts of unbelievers. There is a lot going on in people around us right now, unseen to us, that we really need to prayerfully be aware of. God is at work far beyond what we can see, or even imagine.

One man shared that he was raised as a military child, and had lived in many nations with many ethnic groups, and did not think that he was prejudiced. He said that after the attacks last Tuesday, the worst racism you could imagine surfaced in his heart. But, after a couple of days, he said he came under deep shame and guilt about it, and he prayed. He announced to the group that over the course of these seven days he was set free of it. This man is not a believer, but is a God-seeker. He's not a follower of Jesus Christ yet, but he's a God-seeker. Others shared that the reality that there is a God in the universe hit them in a way that they never before have been impacted. There is an awakening to “God consciousness” going on. I recall that David Pawson from England years back said, “We're going to see an awakening to God-consciousness before we see full revival and a full, effective propagation of the gospel.” In our modern nations we've lost the sense that there is a God behind creation – a sense of supernatural realities. In Third World nations, it's still very common for them to sense the supernatural.

So, there is an awakening of God-consciousness and works of common grace going on that we must be sensitive to in prayer. This is a time to just go out and lovingly listen to our neighbors. I came home

with an understanding of my neighbors I've never had before. Because of the attacks they shared their hearts in utter, raw honesty.

Dr. Blackaby: Seeking.

Gary Bergel: God-seeking.

Dr. Blackaby: Yes, that's the heart of revival. God creates a God-seeking in the hearts of all people.

John Beckett: I heard a congressman being interviewed last night who had to drive back to Ohio from Washington because he couldn't fly. He observed that every bridge overpass in Pennsylvania had a banner saying, "God bless America." And that can be a prayer, can't it?

Dr. Blackaby: Yes, even if they don't understand where to go from there. They, at least, are acknowledging that unless God does bless America we don't stand a chance.

John Beckett: I thought about that in contrast to what could have happened, "Death to bin Laden" signs perhaps. But it wasn't that. It is "God bless America."

I have had a couple of impressions from the Lord out of this. I woke very early the morning after the attacks, and I had a great sense of faith in my own spirit that out of this God was going to redeem not just thousands or tens of thousands, but millions of souls! I believe that had to be from the Holy Spirit. I find in myself a growing faith for that great harvest.

Dr. Blackaby: Yes.

"We are being told to wake up for the sake of God's ultimate redemptive purposes."

John Beckett: I would also say that I wonder whether, in the providence of God, He has awakened us to this massive and insidious and entrenched terrorist threat at this point in its development because He knows where it would go unchecked. The capacity of these groups to use nuclear devices, to engage in chemical and biological warfare – God right now knows where their hearts are inclined. Might He be saying, as harsh as it was, as harsh as Pearl Harbor was in its time, that we must wake up and get serious for the sake of His ultimate redemptive purposes?

Dr. Blackaby: I think God gave us a huge object lesson about the ultimate heart of evil. The ultimate heart of evil on any level, and with any dimension that goes unchecked, will always bring death. We saw it, like an object lesson, on a huge scale. Sin, unchecked on any level, has a capacity for evil that we have seen an object lesson for. We've been through the world wars, and we've seen things in Africa and other countries, but when this reality touches home it says that eternal vigilance and holiness is the only guarantee against ultimate destruction.

I think there's a word from the heart of God that all of us are aware of. It might be helpful for us to hear it again: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord." I think that passage, Jeremiah 29: 11-13, is a very helpful one.

John Beckett: Thank you. Dr. Blackaby, would you close our time in prayer. There will be those listening to this dialog – whether it's days or weeks or months after we record it – but I'm going to ask if you who are listening, you who are reading, would just join in prayer as Dr. Blackaby leads us.

“Let us unite in prayer.”

Dr. Blackaby: Heavenly Father – and we call You Father because You have opened a way for us to become Your children through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord – we come to You and hear You say, “Without Me you can do nothing, but with Me all things are possible.” So, Father, we recognize our frailty. We recognize the truth of Your word concerning sin and concerning Your love and Your redemptive purposes in our world. And we turn to You with all of our heart, and we do what You have said from the beginning, we search for You, and we cry out unto You with all of our heart and our mind and our soul and our strength.

And Father, for those of us who know You, give us an incredibly sensitive heart toward those who are seeking You, some for the first time, others with a new sense of urgency, but they don't quite know what to do. Father, I thank You for your Holy Spirit who takes the things that are Yours and opens the mind and the heart and the will to bring us to faith in You. Give us a faithfulness in our walk with You, that we would hear from You, we would hurry to share what we've heard, that our heart would be filled with Your kind of love, that we'd be able to have the capacity to explain it and to share it – trusting in Your Holy Spirit to take a faithful witness and cause another heart to be opened and another mind to understand and another person to respond to You.

Oh, Father, we pray for an anointing of Your Hand across our land, and across Your people, and across the ones who are grieving and seeking answers. Oh, Lord, we ask for a restraining Hand on the enemy that we would have time and opportunity to respond fully to You. And we pray with the Lord Jesus that Your kingdom would come and Your will would be done all across our earth, even as Heaven is experiencing it.

And we turn to You, and we trust You to show us how You want to implement it. We release our lives personally with a new sense of commitment to You – to know You, to share You, and to love You and to walk with You until Your kingdom, Your rule, has come as extensively as Your heart has desired it across our land and our world.

To that end we release ourselves to You confidently and to You faithfully, and in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

John Beckett: Amen.

Gary Bergel: Amen.

John Beckett: Thank you both so much. And, a thank you to those who are listening to this, or who are reading it. I trust that we will all use this responsibly to further God's purposes at this incredible time in our nation's history. God bless you.

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