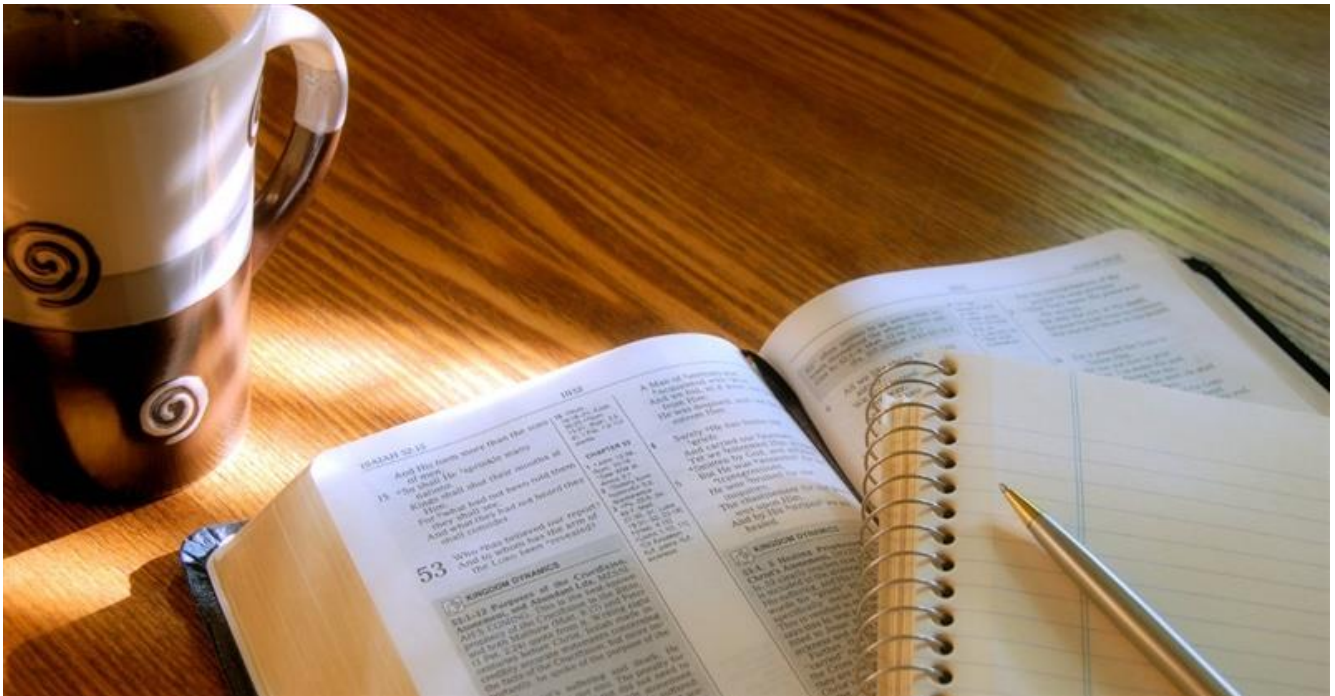


## OUR 'FRIEND' OR OUR 'TERROR' – OUR CHOICE

*By John Gagliardi*



Daily devotionals are great tools and can be a source of timely inspiration, encouragement and help as we live the ups and downs of a normal Christian life. I have to confess to reaching out to devotionals more in the “downs” than in the “ups”, and thereby lies a potential danger in becoming addicted to devotionals instead of going straight to the source – the Word of God itself.

God reveals Himself in His Word through the Holy Spirit, and as the Apostle John says in the beginning of His Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word (*Whom we know to be Jesus, the only begotten Son of God*) was God” (John 1:1).

So this is a roundabout way of saying that our key source and foundation for daily living must be and always remain the Bible, the inspired and infallible Word of God. But devotionals can certainly be a useful adjunct to the Bible, and I can say without equivocation that I have heard God speaking very clearly to me through Godly devotionals from time to time.

Personally, I read from two devotionals in the morning, and one at night, often being amazed at how they illuminate and elucidate passages from my daily reading of the Word itself. And without wishing to promote any particular devotional (go to any Christian bookshop – there is no shortage of them), one that I felt God led me to read daily is Henry T. Blackaby’s *Experiencing God Day by Day*.

Henry Blackaby is an international leader in the area of marketplace ministry, and among the many other things he does, he mentors CEO’s of Fortune 500 companies through an international organization known as the CEO Forum. I have enormous respect for Dr Blackaby, who lists among his other publications a book *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, which has sold more than seven million copies and been translated into 45 languages.

In the introduction to his daily devotional, Dr Blackaby himself stresses that a devotional should not in any way become a substitute for the Word of God: “Nothing can replace the life-changing experience of reading Scripture. This book is not designed to take the place of God’s Word in your life, but to introduce verses for you to consider and meditate upon. The Holy Spirit is your Teacher”

So I thought it was interesting – to say the least – recently when I opened the Blackaby devotional to the dates of June 1 and 2, two facing pages in my copy, June 1 on the left with a heading “**Friends of God**”, and June 2 on the right with a heading “**The Terror of the Lord**”. A fascinating juxtaposition, and I am sure not coincidental!

The immediate worldly – and dare I say intellectual - thought is: What sort of God tells us we are His friends, and at the same time, tells us that He is a terror to us? The Scriptures he uses are, for June 1, John 15:15 - “...I have called you *friends*”, and for June 2, 2 Corinthians 5:11 - “Knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord...”.

But of course, this just simply reminds us of the seeming paradox that continues throughout the pages of Scripture, that on the face of it, appears to contrast such things as the fear of the Lord with the joy of the Lord, and the love and mercy of God with the judgment and severity of God.

God is a loving Father – but He is also a stern and righteous Judge. And the seeming paradox is not solved intellectually – it can only be solved spiritually, with the death and resurrection of God’s own Son, Jesus. God’s righteous justice required retribution and punishment for our sin, and yet God’s love and mercy provided Jesus as the propitiation and full and final payment for that sin.

On June 1, Dr Blackaby says: “By His very nature, God is a friend to us”. On June 2, he says: “The fear of God is the greatest deterrent for sin.” He continues: “We want to present a loving and non-threatening image of God to nonbelievers, in the hope that Christianity will be more appealing to them.

“One of the great condemnations of our day is that we have lost the fear of God. We promote Him as a ‘best friend’ ... but we do not fear Him. It is true that we are God’s adopted children and that we are fellow heirs, even friends, with Jesus (Rom 8:16.17; John 15:14.15), but we are not His equals. He has forgiven us, but we are still His creatures. He is God, we are not!”

Theologian Johan D. Tangelder, in an article *The Fear of the Lord*, says: “What does the Bible mean by ‘fearing the Lord?’ Is God not a God of love? ... Fearing God is not the same as being afraid. Christians are not asked to live in constant fear or dread, to live with a panicky feeling that we are utterly doomed. God is not a whimsical tyrant – we love and fear God at one and the same time.

“Biblical spirituality involves both the love and fear of God, which is at the heart of our covenant relationship with God. To fear God is to love God – the love of God banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence (Rom 8:15).

“We come to God with reverence, aware of His holiness, with a deep sense of wonder and awe of His supreme majesty ... Many Christians refer to Jesus as their friend or even their ‘buddy’, without acknowledging Him as the Lord of Glory ... Awe is the essential element in the worship of God, yet this sense of awe in the presence of God is missing in our day. The casual approach seems to be the rule rather than the exception.

“Oswald Chambers said, ‘The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else’. He was right. When God is feared, every other fear is destroyed’.”

Rev Tangelder concludes his article with a very apt and powerful verse from the pen of Martin Luther:

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten  
To undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed  
His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him; his rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.*

The Apostle Paul summarizes it this way in Romans 11:22 (New Living Translation): “Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who have disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in His kindness.” God is not some sort of cosmic ATM machine, where if we put in the right card, then out will pop everything we want. God is God – He is the Creator of the universe, and no matter what we are told in some of the modern “feel good” literature, it is God’s will that will be done, not ours.

Jesus Himself, God’s own Son, both in the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:10, and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42; Matthew 26:39), bows His will to the Father’s. How much more should we stand in holy and reverential awe and wonder, and follow our Lord Jesus in saying: “Thy will be done!”

In spite of our all-too-common humanistic teachings and postmodern-leaning theology, God ultimately is exactly that – God, the master of all creation, the first and the last, living not in time but in eternity. He says: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). That is unambiguous. “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him” (Psalm 24:1). He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient – in simple language, He is all-powerful, is everywhere at once, and knows everything there is to know.

He chose us, we did not choose Him (John 15:16), and He paid a great price for us (1 Corinthians 6:20). Nothing less than the blood of His Son gave us the free gift of salvation through His grace – his unmerited favour – and He gave us the free will to choose this incredible gift - or reject it.

If we receive it, as Dr Blackaby reminds us, we become friends of God; but if we choose to reject it, which we have every human right to do, then we also must bear the consequences of that choice – and we activate a verse we might not like nearly as much: “There is only the terrible expectation of God’s judgment, and the raging fire that will consume His enemies” (Hebrews 10:27).

God has, from the time of the beginning, given us free will – the choice to go whichever way we want. The first Adam chose disobedience and death; the “second Adam” – Jesus – died that we might have life, and life to the full (John 10:10).

*“Friends of God”* or *“The Terror of the Lord”* – our choice, our freewill - our decision. It is a decision we should make wisely.