

"This work begs to be read by anyone who wishes to see the invisible God."

—Dr. Tony Evans, president of The Urban Alternative,
senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

DIVINE APPLAUSE

Secrets and Rewards
of Walking with an Invisible God

JEFF ANDERSON

Praise for
Divine Applause

“God’s love isn’t based on our performance. But He does want us to actively engage with Him, to get His ‘attention’ through prayer, devotion, and acts of service. *Divine Applause* offers practical guidance to help readers make that a deeper reality in their lives.”

—JIM DALY, president of Focus on the Family

“Jeff Anderson reminds us that God doesn’t just sit in the bleachers of your life. He’s paying close attention. He applauds. He gets involved.”

—DOUG BENDER, coauthor of *I Am Second*

“Unlike human applause, ‘divine applause’ is a receipt, not a bill. Jeff Anderson shows us how to have a real relationship with God that is not based on bill paying but on bountiful receipts of God’s favor and pleasure.”

—LEONARD SWEET, best-selling author, professor,
and chief contributor to Sermons.com

“Attention is something children will cry for and adults will die for. Jeff Anderson shows us how we can connect with God’s blessing and applause.”

—JIM STOVALL, best-selling author of *The Ultimate Gift*

“Jeff Anderson has creatively placed our personal experience with God on the lower shelf for all who desire to reach it. This work begs to be read by anyone who wishes to see the invisible God.”

—DR. TONY EVANS, president of The Urban Alternative
and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

“What a bold encouragement! We are often looking for intimacy with our Creator, and in *Divine Applause* Jeff Anderson illuminates just how close we really are to Him.”

—TOM ZIGLAR, president/CEO of Ziglar, Inc.

“Jeff unpacks the truth about what it means to truly walk alongside the One we call Lord. His creative and intuitive look at the Bible is rejuvenating.”

—JARRID WILSON, next-gen pastor at LifePoint Church

“If you have wondered how you can know Someone you can’t see, and if you’re curious about what an invisible God thinks of you, then you need to read this book.”

—JEFF GOINS, author of *The In-Between*

“Jeff Anderson has addressed an issue that many people know intuitively but rarely verbalize: God is invisible. At last we have a book that addresses this reality in a creative, refreshing, and encouraging manner.”

—DR. RICHARD BLACKABY, author of *Unlimiting God*
and coauthor of *Experiencing God*

“Real intimacy with God changes everything, and this book clearly moves people in the right direction. *Divine Applause* appeals to your deep longing for God and takes you on a practical journey.”

—RANDY GARISS, senior pastor of College Heights
Christian Church

“*Divine Applause* delivers moving stories and fresh insight. This transparent work will satisfy those who want to draw near to God.”

—CHUCK BENTLEY, CEO of Crown Financial Ministries

“So many Christians are striving to find a stage, microphone, and lights where they can offer their gifts. Ironically, they miss the connection they long for and the divine applause we were meant to hear.”

—GARY BARKALOW, author of *It's Your Call*

“Jeff’s engaging and honest approach will challenge readers to explore more deeply the intimacy of their relationship with God, look for Him in the ordinary moments of life, and make the most of each encounter.”

—MICKEY RAPIER, directional leader at Fellowship Bible Church Northwest Arkansas

“To be able to relate to personal stories that introduce biblical insights is absolutely the best. Jeff Anderson has bestowed great joy as I read this book. In your heart you will hear God’s divine applause.”

—DR. TED KERSH, author of *The Blessed Life*

“Jeff leads the reader to an honest and true relationship with the Father. He gently lays aside the fallacies we believe about God and ourselves. He reminds believers at every stage that God does delight in you.”

—DR. ALEX HIMAYA, pastor of theCHURCH.at

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MULTNOMAH
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DIVINE APPLAUSE
PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

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Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-60142-530-0
eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-531-7

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Cover design by Mark D. Ford; cover photo by Benjamin Rondel/Corbis

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, New York, a Penguin Random House Company.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Anderson, Jeff, 1970 February 5–

Divine applause : secrets and rewards of walking with an invisible God / Jeff Anderson.—First Edition.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-60142-530-0—ISBN 978-1-60142-531-7 (electronic) 1. Spirituality—Christianity.
2. Spiritual life—Christianity. I. Title.
BV4501.3.A5283 2015
248.4—dc23

2014031323

Printed in the United States of America
2015—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*To my earthly father, Jack Anderson.
Your constant love and attention in my life
have helped me relate to my Heavenly Father.*

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Acknowledgments

To my wife, Stephanie, for the journey we have shared together and the secrets along the way. The biggest buzzer-shot prayer I ever prayed, God answered. You were the answer.

To my sons, Austin, Cade, and Gunnar, whose stories fill these pages and continue to teach me about being a child and walking with God. You boys make me proud. And you are book stars now, like your sister Autumn.

To my parents, Jack and Lois Anderson, for your love, prayers, and watchful ways when I was young. . .and still today.

To Matt Benjamin, Monty Cavanagh, Keven Partin, Clay Thompson, and Keith Tracy—your investment and verbal applause for the past decade has sustained me. And to Jeff Hoemann, your encouragement has been refreshing and timely.

To the partners of Acceptable Gift, because of you, I am able to undertake projects like this one.

To the many Roosters in my life, such as Howard Dayton and Chuck Bentley, who have called me out to greater things in my walk with God.

To my agent Mike Loomis, for your Spirit-led vision, wisdom, coaching, counseling, correcting, rebuking (as needed), and editing in helping me to shape this book. You're a true servant, a gift from heaven.

Introduction

Connecting with a God We Never See

When does God see us? All the time, right?

But when does God look at us? I mean *really* look.

In my mind, God always sees me. But it seems He's also looking for something...in us. You may have heard this verse before: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Besides the imagery of two giant eyeballs galloping around the globe, I'm intrigued by the idea that God looks, and even takes action, in response to us.

Scripture is full of examples. As early as the first generation of earth-born humans, God was caught gazing upon Abel and his gift. There are times God sees a person do (or even think) something and seems to respond with "I'm going to get involved."

Just as we would expect from a loving Father, God is interested in us. When I am with my kids, I always see them. But there are times when they really get my attention. That's when my simple awareness shifts from watching...to focusing on...to gazing at them. At those times I'm often moved to action.

If our Father sees us at all times and in all situations, might there be

circumstances that invite His special, focused attention? Could we start living in ways that capture God's attention?

For those who love God, it's a comfort to know we can never drift beyond His sight. King David relished knowing "the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love" (Psalm 33:18). Jesus reminds us that God enjoys wildflowers and cares about sparrows, but His care for us is far greater.

Unfortunately, these truths can lose impact over time. It's like watching reruns on television. Even if you're watching your favorite program, if you've seen the episode already, it will be less funny, less suspenseful, less captivating.

When we reread familiar passages of Scripture, we can take mind-blowing truth for granted: God is always and everywhere seeing us, and He is always and everywhere loving us. We know God can count the grains of sand on every beach, and He knows the number of hairs on your head and mine. We have known these truths since childhood, but sometimes we want more than what the Sunday school answers tell us.

We believe God sees and loves us, and we trust that He notices the details of our lives. But sometimes we want to know—and I mean *really* know—that He delights in us.

After all, what child of God wouldn't long for more direct, more personal encounters with his or her Father?

It's inspiring to read about heroes in Scripture, some of whom were called friends of God (Abraham and Moses), rewarded with a unique description such as "a man after God's own heart" (David), or given new names (Jacob became Israel) after some direct dealings with God.

One thing all of these biblical figures shared in common was an audacious hunger for more. They would not settle for a silent or distant relationship with God. Later on, we will look more closely at the stories of Moses, Gideon, David, John the Baptist, Peter, and many others. (While

we're at it, we'll even take a look at Steve, Abraham's servant. Yes, there are some surprises ahead.)

What Do We Desire from Our Father?

We seek God's attention and long to experience a close relationship with Him. Why do we feel, then, that He is not interested or more noticeably involved in our lives? It's because God cannot be seen or heard, at least with our physical senses. But like any dynamic personal connection, walking with God requires two-way engagement. And because we know God to be invisible, we tend to lower our expectations. But no one should be content with a one-sided relationship. God isn't.

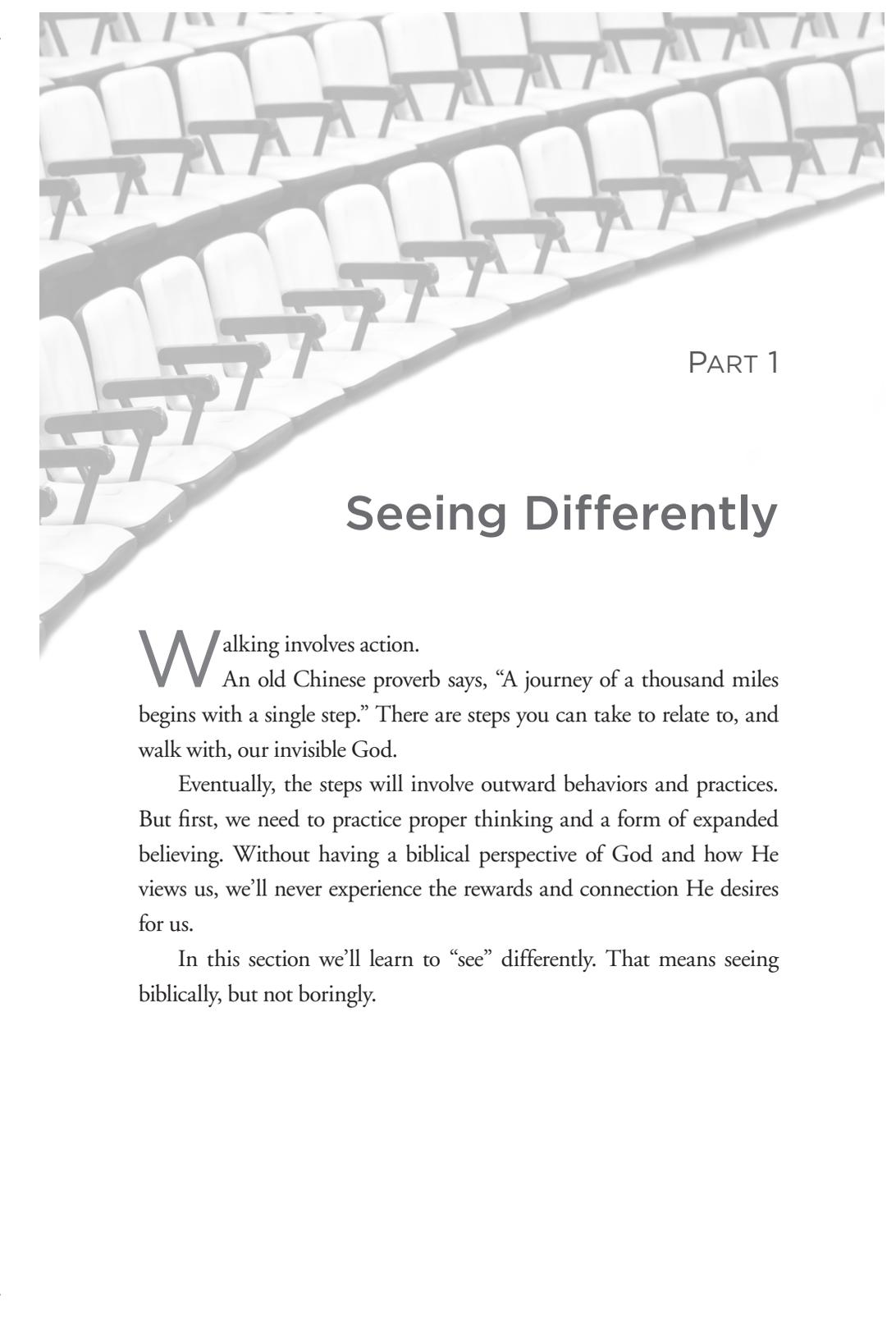
I've made it my life's ambition to walk with God, and I continue to be inspired by the story of a man named Enoch. Scriptures don't tell us a lot about him, but one characteristic stands out: he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24). We know that Enoch never died, in the way we think of death. It seems that he simply walked straight into heaven.

A page later in my Bible I find the story of another man who caught God's attention: Noah, like Enoch, "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). He didn't get snatched up at the end of his life, but he did get that first-ever cargo-ship ride, which extended his life on earth, as well as his walk with God, for many more years.

Ever since childhood I have looked and listened for this invisible God. The search is different for each of us, but one aspect of it holds true for us all: we want to know we are seen—noticed by our Father. Wouldn't you love to hear God's applause?

Surely we can expect more from our loving Father than a vacant stare. We *can* walk with God in a way that draws His spotlight to our lives and gives us the close connection we're looking for.

Let's take our first step down that path.



PART 1

Seeing Differently

Walking involves action. An old Chinese proverb says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” There are steps you can take to relate to, and walk with, our invisible God.

Eventually, the steps will involve outward behaviors and practices. But first, we need to practice proper thinking and a form of expanded believing. Without having a biblical perspective of God and how He views us, we’ll never experience the rewards and connection He desires for us.

In this section we’ll learn to “see” differently. That means seeing biblically, but not boringly.

Compensating for Loss

As a kindergartener I walked from home to school every day after lunch. I felt like a big boy as I ventured off on my twenty-minute journey. After heading out the front door, I'd turn left on the street in front and then take a left down another street. After another left turn and another street, my path finally opened into the school grounds and on to the single-story brick building.

One day as I passed through the giant double doors into the school, something didn't feel right. The lockers lining the walls seemed to stare me down. Big kids (sixth graders) filled the halls and their presence freaked me out more than usual.

Then it hit me. I couldn't hear.

At least not like I was used to hearing. Panic spun me around. I held in my tears until I got back outside the building, then I took off across the playing fields, into the neighborhood, and eventually down my street.

Sprinting into the house, I cried out to Mom, "They're gone!" From the wet tears all over my face, she knew instantly what was the matter.

Mom wrapped me in her arms and explained that everything was okay. Unlike other mornings, she had not inserted my electric "ears" before she sent me out the door. The hearing devices were miniature plastic molds that had to be carefully positioned into my ear canals. They were connected to a clunky receiver resting behind each ear. The batteries

needed to be powered up and the settings adjusted just right. It was part of the daily routine of getting little Jeffrey out the door.

But on this particular day, Mom had sent me to school without the electric ears. (They were at the shop for adjustments.) When I arrived at school and noticed the hallway sounds were different, I melted in fear.

Special Ears

Just before I began kindergarten, Mom and Dad learned I had a hearing impairment—about a 60-percent loss in both ears. I was sitting on my dad's lap at the kitchen table one evening while Mom talked on the phone and scribbled on a yellow notepad. When I asked Dad what was going on, he mentioned something about me getting “special ears.”

For Mom and Dad, it would involve a crash course on hearing-aid technology, speech therapy, and child-development patterns. They jumped on these issues early, helping me to experience as normal a childhood as possible. Still, there are limits to what parents can do in a situation like this.

When you have a hearing impairment, you make adjustments and relate to the world differently. You learn to read lips—which works wonders when you need to decode what soft-spoken people are saying. You learn to read mannerisms; sometimes a certain look speaks louder than the words you miss. And you learn to enjoy silence too. (Silence is not all bad.)

Of course, when you relate to the world differently, you live differently. When I was in first grade, as soon as the bell would ring for recess, kids would bolt for the playground. But my routine began by stopping at the teacher's desk to remove my “ears,” wrap them in a tissue, and put them in a safe place. Then I'd dash outside for a game of kickball. When recess was over, it was back to the teacher's desk to retrieve my ears.

When you can't relate to the world in the same way others do, you

experience separation. Life is filled with awkward moments, and it can be a real bummer unless you learn to compensate. Thanks to loving parents who pumped esteem into my bloodstream, I learned to compensate in other areas. Whether it was scoring goals in soccer, winning footraces on the playground, or acing my spelling tests, I was able to find some peace about the thing that set me apart.

Still, I often felt separate from much of what went on around me. Even with my special ears, I missed so much.

Spiritual Separation

Our journey with God is a lot like my journey as a hearing-impaired child. We suffer from separation. We seek a God who does not speak audibly. And we can't see Him with our eyes.

This conflicts with the natural way we develop relationships in life. We get together with friends, we play sports with teammates, we work closely with colleagues, and we come home after work to our family. We enjoy a meal together, look one another in the eye, tell stories, and share experiences.

And then there is God.

Relating to God can feel like having to wear a blindfold at the same time your hearing aids are sent to the shop, then facing the chaos of a crowded school hallway. You are told that God is near and that He is eager to spend time with you. So you do what feels like pushing through crowds, feeling your way in silence down a long hallway, and locating the right door. And then, maybe, God will be in the room you happen to enter.

It's not easy to relate to a God you can't see or hear. We can't see the reaction on His face. We can't feel His touch when we need it. We can't see the look of approval in His eyes.

We also can't see the compassion on His face when He hurts for us.

We can't see His look of concern when we're in danger. And yet we're called not only to believe but also to follow and to actually *love* God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

It's tough being separate from God. It's even tougher because we don't know what we're missing. Separation is all we've ever known. Of course, that does not keep us from longing to hear God's applause and to see our Father's delight.

For those who refuse to settle for a life that is disconnected from God, there is hope. Just as I learned to read body language, expressions, and reactions, we can learn to encounter God by hearing, seeing, and living differently. If we learn to compensate, we can see Him even though our physical eyes can't. We can hear Him even though our physical ears don't. We can sense that He is noticing us, even though His face is unseen.

When we relate to God differently, which in this context means biblically, we can have much more of the connection we're looking for.

Choosing Silence

Throughout grade school I continued to tolerate my special ears. When I played football or basketball or soccer, I didn't wear them. In summer when I swam at the neighborhood pool, the hearing aids sat on a desk in my bedroom.

The older I became, the more the look of these gizmos bothered me. I started wearing my hair long enough to cover my ears. By seventh grade, I found ways to minimize the presence of these devices that set me apart from others. Each morning as I stood in front of my locker at school, I did a two-way traffic check. Then I pulled out my ears, slid them into a leather case, and hid them in a pocket.

Sometimes I wore just one of them, usually in the ear that faced the wall when I was seated in a classroom. Eventually I began to leave them

both at home. For most of my junior high and high school years, I simply chose not to hear. I chose silence.

My grades remained solid despite my limitations. Still, there were awkward moments. One day in eleventh grade I was reading a literature assignment at my desk and enjoying the sounds of solitude. Suddenly I looked up. The entire class, teacher included, was staring at me. They were talking to me, at me, and about me, desperately trying to get my attention.

I had been oblivious to it all.

Wanting More in Your Walk with God

By the time I left for college, I knew I couldn't go through life choosing this kind of separation, so I put in my special ears and began to reengage. Likewise, we have a choice in applying our spiritual senses to relate to and walk with God. Jesus referred to this as having eyes that see and ears that hear (see Matthew 13:16). We long to see and hear clearly, so why do we often settle for silence? I think it's because we grow used to spiritual separation to the point that living in relative isolation from God seems normal.

But I want more, and I know you do as well. I desire experiences with my heavenly Father like the ones we read about in the Bible—but different. I want personal encounters with God that are just for me.

Occasionally I'll hear a story about someone who had a unique experience with God. Some are simple, straightforward experiences, while others seem outrageous. I don't dismiss anyone's experience with God. It's just that I need my own. And I presume you want to hear and see God in your own life too.

Here is the good news: when it comes to walking more closely with God, a desire for more will work in your favor. You are not the only one who wants more. God does as well.



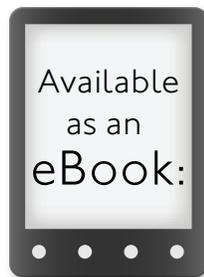
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