

“The Prayer of Jabez” (Part 2)

Last week I talked about a little book called *The Prayer of Jabez*, by Bruce Wilkinson. The book has sold millions of copies. Jabez is a man mentioned in just 2 verses in the Bible, yet his brief prayer has inspired many to pray the same prayer, sometimes with astonishing results. Let’s take another week to look at Jabez and his prayer.

The two verses about Jabez are found in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10: “Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, ‘Because I bore him in pain.’ And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, ‘Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!’ So God granted him what he requested.”

This says Jabez was “*more honorable than his brothers*” – he stood head and shoulders above the rest! He prays a bold prayer: “*Oh, that you would bless me indeed...*” In other words, bless me *a lot!* That sounds selfish, but Jabez wants God’s blessing so he can be all he can be for God! There’s nothing wrong with wanting that blessing – to crave *all God wants for us!*

Then Jabez requests that God enlarge his boundaries: “*And enlarge my territory...*” Again, that sounds self-serving: Give me more land! But it seems this honorable man is asking for more responsibility, and more influence for God. When *we* pray this part of the Jabez prayer we’re asking God to expand our life so we can impact more people for God.

Last week I said that when we pray this part of the prayer exciting things begin to happen. God brings people across our paths whom we can help – “*Jabez appointments.*” Right after I first read *The Prayer of Jabez*, I began to pray the prayer and ask God to expand my territory for Him. Within a few days I got a call from a young man, an Associate Pastor of a neighboring church, and a student at a theological seminary. This young pastor asked me if I’d be willing to be his mentor for his senior year of seminary, and work with him on developing his skills for ministry. I really didn’t know him that well. He was from another denomination. But I firmly believe that his request was a direct result of my praying the Jabez prayer.

Do you want to be used by God? One of the signs that we’re growing spiritually is that we’ll desire for God to use us more and more. We will be praying that that God will expand *our* territory. That God will bless us so you we can be a blessing!

Before we leave this part of the prayer, let’s remember that the request to “enlarge my territory” can be applied to any *church* and any *ministry*. I pray the Jabez prayer for *this congregation*: “O that You would bless Community UMC and enlarge our territory...”! God wants people to be saved! God wants churches to make an impact for good on their communities, and beyond. Don’t you want that for this church?

Some of us may be satisfied just to have a church that will simply provide a worship service for us on Sunday, and a pastor available when we need one. Maybe that’s all some of us want. *But that’s not all God wants for this church!* So I pray that God will enlarge our territory.

Now here's something to consider: ***We will find that once God begins to expand our territory and increase our influence for Him that this often takes us out of our comfort zone.*** This can be scary. We may feel we are in over our head. We're never sure what God is going to give us to do! This leads to next part of prayer: "*That your hand would be with me*" (1 Chronicles 4:10). To say God's hand is with us is a Biblical way of saying we want God's presence and power!

For those who trust Christ and are believers, God has made available to us His own power and presence! How? *Through the Holy Spirit living in us.* Before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He told His little group of followers to share His message with the world – i.e. to "*expand their territory*"! And in order to do this, He promised to give them the Holy Spirit! In Luke 24:49 there are these words of Jesus: "See, I am sending upon you what my Father promised (the Holy Spirit); so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Jesus' also said this to these disciples: "But you will receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). God was expanding the territory of these first believers to include the world! And He was promising that His hand and His presence would enable them to do it!

People who pray the Jabez prayer are forced again and again to depend on God. Let me ask you this: How much are you doing that you couldn't do without the direct intervention of God's supernatural power? It can be unnerving to be utterly dependent on the intervention of God for something – to know we don't have it within ourselves to accomplish. But this is *good*, because it teaches us to rely on God! Phillips Brooks once said: "You never become truly spiritual by sitting down and wishing to become so. You must undertake something so great that you cannot accomplish it unaided." It's like someone has said, "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space."

Ask: What are we doing here at this church, what are we attempting, that we absolutely cannot do unless God intervenes supernaturally? A pastor by the name of Lance Watson pastors a church in Richmond, Virginia. That church had been in a building program for about 10 years. They started out by just adding some classrooms to the existing 110 year old facility, which was located in the historic section of Richmond. While doing that, the church continued to grow and they had to rethink their plans.

They decided to try to buy the block and build a whole new facility. But the zoning laws, the cost of acquiring, razing and reconstructing was so high, they had to rethink their plans. Eventually they decided to go out and buy some land. They wanted about 10 acres, but the least amount of land they could find was a 46 acre tract. They bought it and paid for it in 3 years. But while raising the money to put a building on the land, the Richmond International Raceway was sanctioned by Nascar for 4 races a year, and the raceway was less than a quarter mile from the site for the church. When the first race was held, all they could hear for 2 miles around them was "VROOM"! They could envision themselves sitting in their sanctuary singing "Nearer My God to thee" at the top of their lungs and hearing "VROOM"!

Well, let's allow the pastor to tell us the rest of the story: "I might as well admit to you that by

that time I was pretty discouraged. Didn't I hear from God? Didn't we pray? Why did this happen? How could the people continue to trust my leadership when I led them to purchase 46 acres of land at one million dollars and now we were not going to be able to build on it? Whenever a pastor leads people to buy a million dollars worth of land that is suddenly rendered useless, it usually does not bode well. I was down in the dumps. I was really depressed. My trustees decided to search for another site. They found a 47 acre tract just off the interstate in a growing area of town. They told me about it. They asked me to go by and see it so they could get my input...I did not go by because I was too discouraged...and too confused. At the next trustee meeting, the board gathered there and asked, 'Pastor, what is your input on this new piece of land?' I said, 'What is *your* input on this new piece of land?' They said, 'We think we should move on it.' I said, 'I think it is fine by me, so go ahead.' We bought it and decided to have a sunrise consecration service at the crack of dawn on Easter Sunday morning. There I was in the dark, driving around lost, trying to find this piece of property that I had never seen. I got there late. We prayed and the excitement began to build."

Pastor Watson goes on to say that the building committee started to work, but he was still feeling he had somehow missed God's signals. He complained to God. He doubted God. Then something happened! The Richmond International Raceway made the church an incredible offer to buy back the original piece of land for *three times* what the church paid for it! Lance says, "Let me give glory to God. It was as though God was saying to me, 'I'm going to do this how I think it ought to be done. If you just take the jump, if you just...ask ...and if you just trust me to work in the process and through the process, I am more than able to provide...I've discovered that God loves to bless you by surprise."

When we pray the Jabez prayer, God often puts us in situations where we know we need to rely on God and that God's hand will be with us! *Having God bless us a lot and expand our boundaries of influence for Christ is not so much about our ability, but about our willingness to let God's supernatural power work through us!*

This short prayer that Jabez prayed closes with these words, "*And that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain*" (1 Chronicles 4:10). Many people praying the Jabez prayer find that God is using them in exciting ways. The work of God is getting done. But when great advances are being made in the spiritual realm, we need to be on guard against 2 things: first, *within us* - that human pride kicks in, and we begin to think, "Look at what *I'm doing* for the Lord!" The second risk is *outside us* - that the devil or Satan will oppose the good that's taking place. Satan doesn't have to worry about people who say they're Christians, but aren't living like Christians or are lukewarm in their commitment. The devil doesn't have to be concerned about churches that are ingrown, self-centered and spiritually dead. But when people are praying the Jabez prayer and God's working in them, Satan's is busy! So Jabez prays, "*That you would keep me from evil*" (1 Chronicles 4:10).

One of the things that can short-circuit our usefulness to God and His expanding our territory of influence is *sin*. Dr. Wilkinson, the books' author, says, "The only thing that can break the cycle of abundant living is sin. Sin breaks the flow of God's power." How many times have we seen a

spiritual leader fall into some sin and lose his or her ministry or credibility? It is so important that we pray for protection against evil. We do that when we pray the Lord's Prayer! Jesus said to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (the literal reading in this Scripture is really "the Evil One") (Matthew 6:13).

Jabez prays, "That you would keep me from evil", then he adds, "*that I may not cause pain*" (1 Chronicles 4:10). Jabez wanted God to keep him from evil, that he wouldn't cause pain to anyone. When people do bad things, it causes pain and hurt. Think of how many good things done for the Lord have been tarnished because of someone falling into evil, and the pain and anguish it can cause. In last week's message I said the name Jabez means "pain", or "he will cause pain." That's what Jabez' mother named him, and in Hebrew thinking that defined his character and destiny. But Jabez was able to rise above that. He prayed that God would keep him from doing anything that would cause him to fall back into that destructive mindset and destiny. If there is sin or evil in our life that needs to be confessed, come clean with it, so we can get back into a Jabez mode where we receive God's blessing so we can *be a blessing* to an increasing number of people around us!

So there we have it: the prayer of Jabez! God is looking for people who want the fullness of His blessing, not for selfish purposes, but that we can touch more and more people for God. *This is no magic prayer!* It's not that we just recite this prayer and then God is obligated to give us all kinds of nice things. That really *is* selfish. But it's a powerful prayer for those who want to be used by God in a greater and greater way.

I've been praying the Jabez prayer for a number of years now. I started praying it in 2002. As I was preparing this message, I reflected back over the years that I've been praying the Prayer of Jabez – some of things that has happened since then. The most notable expression of God answering this prayer for me is connected to the mission work in Kenya. Kenya was not at all in my mind. I was about a year away from retirement. But in a miraculous way God brought some pieces into place, and the mission to Kenya got started. I was praying the Jabez prayer for the church I was serving at that time, and as a result that congregation in Lititz connected with a church in a little village called Musese. I prayed the Jabez prayer for the first church I served after retirement, and God got them involved in the mission to Kenya in an extraordinary way without my even pushing it or asking that church to be involved. Likewise, the next church I served. They already had a mission emphasis, so I didn't want to push Kenya. But a remarkable turn of events opened the door for that church also to get involved in the Kenya mission (and to send a young lady from the church on one of our trips) – again, without my pushing it! It is a humbling thing that God expanded my territory to the other side of the globe, being able to minister to them through teaching and preaching. Even today I regularly email copies of my sermons to church leaders there.

What about you? Will you dare to pray the Prayer of Jabez, for yourself, for this church? Would you be willing to make this a daily prayer? "O that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain."

