

## Jabez the man who DID NOT want to live up to his name. 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website, along with quotes copied from The Prayer of Jabez, " by author Bruce Wilkinson

Before I begin, for most of this message, know that I relied heavily on, and quoted often from Bruce Wilkinson's book, The Prayer of Jabez, which is in our library. So if, later, you would like to explore these ideas more deeply, I recommend the book to you.

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Were you ever given a childhood nickname that you just hated? Children can be really cruel to each other at times; most childish nicknames are intended to hurt! Growing up in the age of Dick & Jane first-grade readers, you can guess what nickname that followed me around: *Hey Sally where's Dick and Jane*. But what if that bad name was given to you at birth by your ownparent, how would that affect the rest of your life? Today we are going to meet such a man, determined not to live up to, but to live down his hated name.

We find this man in the middle of one of the most boring sections of the Bible. The opening nine chapters of the first book of Chronicles, beginning with Adam, simply lists over 500 names according to the family trees of the twelve tribes of Israel. These lists are historically important in tracing the lineage of Judah's kings and also of Jesus as the son of David, but for us they make wonderful bedtime reading in that most of the names mean nothing to us and very few are given with any explanatory comments.

- There was a man named **Peleg**, who apparently lived during the time of dispersion after the tower of Babel. (1:19)
- There was also **Er**, Judah's wicked first-born son whom God killed. (2:3)
- And there was **Achar**, "*who transgressed in the matter of devoted things.*" (2:7)

Then after the forty-fourth name in the fourth chapter, comprising the list of Judah's family tree, we meet a man named **Jabez**. While he apparently had brothers, of whom Ezra the chronicler noted "*he was more honorable than*" – which doesn't say much for the brothers - their names are not given nor were either of Jabez's parents or descendants. So why was he included here in the middle of Judah's lineage?

Something that Ezra remembered about Jabez caused him to pause and say, *wait a minute, he is not otherwise important, but you ought to know about this man and the prayer he prayed.*

Reading between the lines, you can figure out that things had started out quite poorly for Jabez. We have already learned that his brother's weren't much good for anything and that he was named by his mother, which means that his father was no where around. Was she a young woman, perhaps a servant who had been raped and must now live with the shame? Or had her no good husband walked out, leaving her and the boys to fend for themselves? Whatever the reason, when Jabez came along, his mother was in great distress; and according to the tradition of the times she gave him

an appropriate name. The name Jabez means, "**he causes pain**," or simply, "**Misery**."

It was bad enough that his name thereafter would remind both mother and son of how hard their life has been (*Hey Misery, get in here and eat your breakfast before I throw it out to the pigs*), but such names also tended to be prophetic of the recipient's future.

- Last week we met Solomon, so named because he would rule during a time of peace.
- Earlier we had met Jacob, named "Usurper," because he would steal his twin brother's birthright.

Understandably this was not a name Jabez wanted to live up to, so he cried out to the God of Israel with a simple prayer.

Oh that You would bless me,  
and enlarge my border,  
and that Your hand might be with me,  
and that You would keep me from hurt and harm!

1 Chronicles 4:10

For one who had started out so badly, things ended extraordinarily well. Clearly, something about Jabez's simple and direct plea to God changed his life enough to receive a permanent notation in the history books of Israel. Let's take a look at these four requests in the prayer of Jabez that Ezra the Scribe thought worthy of our attention and perhaps our imitation ... if we want God to also bless our lives.

**Lord, please bless me!**

The first thing that Jabez prayed for, was God's blessing on his life. Now we may think it is selfish to ask God to "bless me." But realize that the word '**blessed**' means to have God's favor upon your life; it isn't selfish to ask for that. In fact, **all Christians should be asking for God's blessing, especially if it is for the purpose of being a blessing to others.** If you want to have more so that you can give more, then that is an acceptable prayer.

The apostle Paul wrote, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...*" (Ephesians 1:3) God wants to bless His people, especially spiritually; so it wasn't wrong for Jabez and it isn't wrong for you or me to ask God for such a blessing.

If you want wisdom so that you can help other people, then – like Solomon - pray for wisdom. The Bible says, "*If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you..*" (James 1:5) If you want success, or

want to be a leader, in order to serve others with the greater resources available to you, then pray for those things. Jabez knew that God had told his ancestor Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing," and Jabez wanted to share in that blessing too. (Genesis 12:2)

Do you ever feel unworthy of being blessed? Maybe you've gotten in some past trouble, undergone some difficulties, or felt that life has dealt you a bad hand. Perhaps, trials have led you to believe that God doesn't work on an individual level to protect us, let alone care enough to bring good things, or "blessings," to our life. Jabez certainly could have felt that he got the short end of the stick. But he didn't want to end up there. And so he cried out, "dear God bless me!"

*Ask, and it will be given to you...  
how much more will your Father in heaven  
give good things to those who ask him!*

Matthew 7:7-11

Matthew's gospel records Jesus teaching,

*Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? **If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*** (Matthew 7:7-11)

According to Jesus, God is longing for us to ask Him for what we need and like a good father He will freely give good things, or blessings.

Alternately, if we fail to ask for God's blessings, we might not receive any. James, the brother of Jesus wrote "**you do not have, because you do not ask.**" (4:2) God's bounty is only limited by us, not by His resources, power, or willingness to give. Jabez was blessed simply because he refused to let any obstacle, person, or opinion loom larger than God's nature.

God, our heavenly Father, wants to bless His sons and daughters. If you're not closer to God now than you were last year, then somehow you have missed a blessing. You need to pray for God to bless you & bring a new fire into your soul; a new passion for God; a new zeal for serving Him and a new desire to have your life be a blessing to others.

**Lord, please bless me!  
Please enlarge my border!**

What did Jabez mean by asking God for more territory? A plea for an enlarged border is asking God to enlarge your life so you can have a greater impact for Him. From both the

context and the results of his prayer, we can see that there was more to this request than a simple desire for a bigger piece of real estate. Jabez wanted more influence, more responsibility, and more opportunity to make a mark for God.

While his request was probably for actual land, our territory doesn't have to be land. It can be our profession or occupation. We may be a professional, a farmer, or a high school student, but we still have territory. A professional's territory is their office. A farmer's territory is the farm and local feed store, and a high school student's territory is the hallway, classrooms, and sports fields. Our territory is our social sphere of influence in which God has placed us to impact others lives.

If we know our Westminster Catechism, when asked what should be the main goal in our Christian life, we would probably answer that it is, "*to glorify God and enjoy Him forever,*" But God also wants us to be enlarging His borders, to be taking in new territory for Him, and reaching people in His name. Why would Jesus teach us to pray, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done*, if He didn't want us to work at growing God's kingdom here on earth?

No matter what your vocation, your Jabez territory prayer might sound something like, *'Dear God, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such a way that I touch more lives for Your glory. Let me do more for You.'*

One of the things I'm praying for this Church, for us, is that we will grow a new found passion for God, so that we might be used in a greater way, by Him, in serving the needs of others. I want us to be a part of what God wants to do in this world. God wants us to see beyond our current circumstances to what might be accomplished if we will join in seeking His blessing.

**Lord, please bless me!  
Please enlarge my border!  
may Your hand always be with me!**

The third thing Jabez asked, was for God's continuing presence and help. Why would Jabez feel the need to ask that God's hand to be with him, or why might anyone who asks for more territory require God's hand to with them?

The answer is that whenever our territory increases, we are placed in a position in which we cannot handle the responsibility on our own. It seems like it is too much or too overwhelming; and it is at such times that we especially need God's help; His hand in our life.

If we ever find ourselves in a situation in which we feel like we have too much to handle in God's work, does this mean that we have done something wrong and we need to back out of something?

Keep in mind that if we have just asked God for more territory, sometimes we might feel like we've bitten off more than we can chew; and at times like this we are tempted to back out. We usually want to do only what we know we can easily handle; what we can do by our own means, through our own talents and abilities. But if we behave like this, then we are ignoring our dependence on God's provision. The second you're not feeling dependent is the second you've backed away from truly living by faith . . . Feeling that I just can't do this alone is exactly what we are supposed to be feeling.

It's a frightening and utterly exhilarating truth, isn't it? As God's chosen and blessed sons and daughters, we are expected to attempt something large enough that failure is guaranteed . . . unless God steps in. Take a minute to comprehend how contrary that truth is to everything you would humanly choose:

- It goes against common sense;
- It contradicts your previous life experience;
- It seems to disregard your feelings, your training, and your need for security;
- And it sets you up to look like a fool.

But the apostle Paul wrote, "*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; so that no one might boast in the presence of God.*" (1 Corinthians 1:27a, 29).

When we cry out to God, "*Oh, that Your hand would be with me,*" that is when we release God's power to accomplish His will and bring Him glory through all the seeming impossibilities He has asked of us: going into all the world, baptizing disciples, and teaching them everything Jesus taught us! Asking for God's hand upon us is our strategic choice to sustain and continue the great things that He has begun in our lives.

**Lord, please bless me!**  
**Please enlarge my border!**  
**May Your hand always be with me!**  
**Keep me from hurt and harm!**

Lastly, Jabez asked for God's protection. Why would Jabez ask God to keep him from hurt and harm? Well, there was that prophetic name that had cursed him from birth. We never learned his brother's names or why he was more honorable than them, but we do know that the path of pain and misery was one he had walked and did not want to continue walking. So, he cried out to God asking for something better: for God's blessing both personally and of his labor and for God's daily presence along with His protection from being either the victim of, or doer of evil.

That is a prayer that we ought to be asking as well. Because, as your life starts to encroach on new territory for the kingdom of God, guess whose turf you're invading?

The answer is, the devil's turf! Satan doesn't want you to take territory for God; therefore, he will start tempting you to sin.

And, the further along in a life of Godly service you get, the more you'll need that final plea. You are going to experience more attacks on you and your family. You are going to become familiar with the enemy's unwelcome barbs – distraction, opposition, and oppression, for starters. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, *And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.* (Matthew 6:13) According to Jesus, we are to ask for deliverance, not just from the "evil" we might do, but also from "the evil one."

Most Christians seem to pray solely for strength to endure temptations. **Somehow we don't think to ask God to simply keep us away from temptation and keep the devil at bay in our lives.** Jesus taught that the most effective war against sin we can wage is to pray that we will not have to fight unnecessary temptation. And God offers us His supernatural power to do just that.

So, if you want God's kingdom to come and that His will might be done on Earth as it is in Heaven, if you want more of His power in your life, then there are four important things to be praying for:

- You need to ask God to bless you according to His will for your life.
- Also ask Him to increase your sphere of influence, in order to bring glory to His name.
- And ask for God's hand to be with you, so that you'll rely totally on His help instead of your own abilities.
- Finally, ask God to block not only the devil's temptations, but his very presence in your life, so that he does not cause you to stumble.

These are four keys from the prayer of Jabez that can lead you to a life of blessing and influence as you strive to walk in God's will.

Jabez must lived up his prayer, since Ezra's editorial comment on his life simply concluded that ***God granted what he asked.***

In closing, let's take another look at Jesus' instruction to ask, seek, and knock, but this time as it is recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

*... if you then, who are evil,  
know how to give good gifts to your children,  
**how much more will the heavenly Father  
give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"***

Luke 11:9-11, 13

If you'll recall, in Matthew's version, Jesus spoke of praying for God's blessing in having your basic needs met; but Luke's version speaks of praying for God's blessing in giving us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into a person's life as a result of confessing

Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. So, **the greatest blessing we can ask God for is the forgiveness of our sin, the salvation of our soul and an eternal life with Him and our Lord Jesus Christ.**

According to Luke, if you ask for salvation it will be given to you; if you seek the Lord, you will find Him; if you knock, the gates of Heaven will be opened to you. But you are not the only one doing the knocking. According to John's vision in the book of Revelation, Jesus is also knocking, asking to come into your life.

*Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.* (Revelation 3:20-21)

And surprisingly while Jesus seems to be speaking to us as individuals, according to John's vision, He was also speaking to the church as a whole.



Many years ago now, Ron Morris shared with me a wonderful copy of William Holman Hunt's famous picture of Jesus knocking at the door; it hangs on the wall outside my office. While the original picture is too dark to see clearly, on any of its many copies, you can easily notice that there is no handle on the outside; that door can only be opened from the inside. **Certainly if you have never opened that door, never personally asked Jesus to come into your life by confessing Him as Savior and Lord, then that is the first prayer you need to be praying;** and that is a prayer that He will always honor. (Romans 10:9-10) After that, Jesus prayer for us, as echoed by the apostle Peter, has always been that you might

Grow in the grace and knowledge  
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
To him be the glory both now  
and to the day of eternity.  
2 Peter 3:18

And for that task, the prayer of Jabez can serve as a good guide. Let's give his prayer a try.

*Oh Lord, indeed we ask that You would bless us so that we might be an even greater blessing to others. We also ask that you give us a new vision leading to a larger responsibility, both as individuals and as this church, for bringing Your kingdom to be on this Earth. And in so doing, we ask that Your presence might be known and daily felt in our lives, protecting us both from the evil one and from doing evil ourselves. Help us to grow in Your Grace and our knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so that His name might be glorified both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*