

“Praying for God’s Blessing”

1 Chron 4:9-10

5.29.22

Did you know that you have the potential to be three completely different people? There is the person you are right now. There is the person you would be if you followed the ways of the world and there is the person you could be if you fully surrendered yourself to God.

None of us can truly remain where we are. For we are either becoming more like Jesus or less like Him. We are becoming more like the world or less like the world. There is no stagnant state. Left alone to ourselves we would go down the path of the world.

But being fully surrendered to God can result in becoming an amazing person, and experiencing an amazing life. God wants you to experience this kind of life but He will not force it on you.

Look deep inside, do you truly want God to change you? Are you willing to give up what you think is best for you in order to gain what is God’s best for you?

Listen to this verse, “...No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)

This morning, we are going to study a prayer offered by someone who didn’t want to be a follower of the world. He wanted God to change Him. He wanted to see God bless him so that he could be a blessing. He wanted to make a difference for God’s kingdom.

This person’s story shows up out of nowhere. The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles lists the genealogy or family tree of the Hebrew tribes, beginning with Adam. It lists more than five hundred names.

Chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3 genealogies. Then after forty-four names more names listed in chapter four, a two verse story suddenly pops up out of nowhere. For it to be listed like it is these lists of names highlights that these two verses are very important. They are so important that God placed them in the Bible.

Please turn to 1 Chronicles 4:9–10 (ESV). Page 336 in the Red Bibles. “Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.”¹⁰ Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, “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 harm so that it might not bring me pain!” And God granted what he asked.”

As far as we can tell, Jabez lived in southern Israel during the time of the judges. He was born into the tribe of Judah and eventually became the notable head of a clan. Yet his story really begins with his name.

Naming a child in OT/NT times was important. Israelites seemed to name their kids as a way of sending a message, or of describing something unique about the child or a hope or a prophesy they had for the child’s future.

- “Rebekah gave birth, the first baby was covered with red hair, so he was named Esau [Hairy]”
- Rachel was dying during delivery. With her last breath she named her son Benoni (which means “son of my sorrow”). Jacob, didn’t want their son to have such a tragic name so he named him Benjamin (which means “son of my right hand”).
- The angel told Mary to name her son Jesus for “He will save his people from their sins.”

A heavy burden was placed on Jabez. “His mother called his name Jabez, saying, ‘Because I bore him in pain.’” In Hebrew, the word Jabez means “pain.” A literal rendering could read, “He causes (or will cause) pain.”

We don't know if the birthing process was especially painful. Or if the time in which Jabez was born was a difficult or painful time? Or if Jabez was born with a disability. Whatever it was, on the 8th day when he was circumcised, his mother felt like "pain" should be his name.

Can you imagine the upward battle required to overcome a name like pain? Meeting someone for the first time. They introduce themselves and ask your name. And you hesitantly say my name is Jabez? Jabez? You must've been a real pain.

Imagine going to school with a name like that. Would the teachers have a preconceived notion about you? Would they think that you might become a pain in their class?

Have you ever been labeled something negative? How you respond to that label says a lot. Some people accept the label and start living it out. If I am labeled, "never amount to anything" I might as well live that way. If I am labeled "Dumb" no sense in trying to become smarter.

Others don't accept the label and rise above it. Jabez chose to rise above his name. In verse 9, it tells us that he was "more honorable than his brothers." He had better character than his brothers. He stood out among them.

What did Jabez do to overcome his name? He "called upon the God of Israel." What Jabez prayed is found in verse 10. As we delve into Jabez' prayer it is important to know the results of this prayer. The end of verse 10, "So God granted him what he requested."

It seems that Jabez became someone important because a city was named after him. 1 Chronicles 2:55 (NLT), "and the families of scribes living at Jabez." Matthew Henry added, "The Jews say that he was a famous doctor of the law and left many disciples behind him. And it should seem, by the mentioning of him so abruptly here in 1 Chronicles, that his name was well known when it was written."

If Jabez' requests were granted that means he prayed according to the will of God.

Want to live a life of significance? Want to experience God's blessings? Want to rise above a label or a poor reputation? Do what Jabez did. Call upon the God of Israel. Pray the prayer of Jabez.

We are going to break Jabez' prayer down into four parts. The first part is:

Oh that you would bless me.

Jabez had an understanding of the God of Israel. He understood that God desires to bless His people. He knew God was generous and extravagant with His blessings.

To bless in the biblical sense means to "ask for or to impart supernatural favor." When we ask for God's blessing, we're not asking for more of what we could get for ourselves. We're asking for the wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to give to us.

Jabez demonstrated complete trust in God. Notice this prayer is not a specific request for things. It is not Lord, bless me with a larger house and bigger paycheck. Lord bless me with that amazing car or truck that I dream about.

Jabez believed what God would give him would be for his best. He didn't need to tell God how to bless him. Jabez's request left it entirely up to God. He wanted nothing more and nothing less than what God wanted for him.

God wants to give you more blessings than you can imagine. But a couple things hinder those blessings.

The first hindrance is **lack of faith**. Maybe you don't have a right perspective of God-that He is that generous. Maybe you have a hard time believing God wants to bless you.

God is extravagantly generous. Romans 8:32 (ESV), “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him **graciously give us all things?**”

Maybe you think you have done too many bad things for God to want to bless you. When you come to Him in faith, your sins are washed away and you become His forever child. God is generous to His children. Matthew 7:11 (NLT), “So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.”

Do you have faith that God wants to bless you? Do you believe God has your best in mind? Do you trust Him enough to say, “God bless me with the blessings you want to give me?”

The second hindrance to receiving all of God’s blessings is **not asking for them**. Matthew 7:7 (ESV), “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” James wrote, “...You do not have, because you do not ask.” James 4:2 (ESV)

Even though there is no limit to God’s goodness, if you don’t ask Him for a blessing you won’t get all that you were supposed to receive.

Isn’t that how it is as parents? We don’t give all things to our children. We hold some things back until they ask. That asking strengthens the relationship and unleashes the generosity.

So too with God the Father. He is so ready to bless us and does bless us often without asking. However, there are some blessings that He withholds until we ask. If we don’t ask, they remain with Him.

Bruce Wilkinson in his book, *The Prayer of Jabez* by tells a small fable, “Mr. Jones dies and goes to heaven. Peter is waiting at the gates to give him a tour. Amid the splendor of golden streets, beautiful mansions, and choirs of angels that Peter shows him, Mr. Jones notices an odd-looking building. He thinks it looks like an enormous warehouse—it has no windows and only one door. But when he asks to see inside, Peter hesitates. “You really don’t want to see what’s in there,” he tells the new arrival. Why would there be any secrets in heaven? Jones wonders. What incredible surprise could be waiting for me in there? When the official tour is over he’s still wondering, so he asks again to see inside the structure. Finally Peter relents. When the apostle opens the door, Mr. Jones almost knocks him over in his haste to enter. It turns out that the enormous building is filled with row after row of shelves, floor to ceiling, each stacked neatly with white boxes tied in red ribbons. “These boxes all have names on them,” Mr. Jones muses. Turning to Peter he asks, “Do I have one?”

“These boxes all have names on them,” Mr. Jones muses aloud. Then turning to Peter he asks, “Do I have one?” “Yes, you do.” Peter tries to guide Mr. Jones back outside. “Frankly,” Peter says, “if I were you....” But Mr. Jones is already dashing toward the aisle to find his box. Peter follows, shaking his head. He catches up with Mr. Jones just as he is slipping the red ribbon off his box and popping the lid. Looking inside, Jones has a moment of instant recognition, and he lets out a deep sigh like the ones Peter has heard so many times before. Because there in Mr. Jones’s white box are all the blessings that God wanted to give to him while he was on earth...but Mr. Jones had never asked.” (The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life)

Do you ask for God’s blessing daily? If you don’t you are missing out. Will you ask for what God wants to give you? Will you open your hands to receive what He wants to give you?

Lord, as you bless me, may I be a blessing. That is the second part of Jabez’ prayer. He prayed

Oh that You would enlarge my territory.

The word for territory also means “border” or “boundary.” From the context and result of Jabez’ prayer, we recognize that it was more than a desire for more land or territory.

Now, there is nothing wrong with praying that God would provide a place to live, land to care for. But that is not what Jabez ultimately was praying for. He was praying for a greater impact. He didn’t want to be a pain. He wanted to increase his influence and usefulness.

Hudson Taylor, one of my favorite missionaries- who was a missionary to China prayed, “Lord, give me wider usefulness.” And God blessed him with great usefulness.

What is your territory? What is your sphere of influence?

Some think their territory is themselves. It is all about them.

Others think their territory ends with their family. Life is about only us.

Others may include friends within their territory.

Churches have a tendency toward inwardness. They make their territory themselves. They end up being more of a social group than a church.

What do you think is God’s territory for us individually and as a church? **Our border is the world.** “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19 (NLT)

We, as a church, have been praying the Prayer of Jabez each week for several years now. We pray it corporately and then we pray it for ourselves.

God has been answering that prayer and expanding our territory. We planted this church in DWT and yet God has brought families from 14 communities into this campus. I believe He will continue to expand our territory because we keep asking.

I have also seen God expand my territory. Here is just one example. A few years back I received a call from Schultz Funeral Home here in DWT. The staff at Schultz didn't know me. We had not crossed paths yet.

They needed a pastor to do a funeral service for someone in the community who didn't have a church. The pastors they normally called were busy. So I was contacted. Though my schedule was busy, I believed God wanted me to do it. So I met with the family and brought comfort to their situation and explained the hope we have in Christ. At the funeral, I honored their loved one and shared the good news with many unchurched people.

Following the service, the funeral director told me that I preached the gospel very clearly and that he now knew who to contact to preach the good news at a future funeral. He has contacted me several times since and I have been given the opportunity to share with others how great Jesus is. That is expanded territory.

Your Christian life is meant to be expanded to impact others. You are meant to be light in the dark. You are meant to share the reason for the hope you have.

Maybe your heart says, "Lord I want you to expand my territory. I want you to use me." But your mind says, "I am not capable. I don't know enough. I will fail."

Will not God provide what you need to fulfill His will? Yes, He will. He provided His Spirit who lives in you. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline." 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

His Spirit will provide the wisdom, the power, and even the words to say. Jesus said, "When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour." Matthew 10:19 (ESV)

The same Spirit who gave the disciples what to say when preaching or in court is the same Spirit who will give you the right words to say before those whom God has placed before you.

Your willingness for God to expand your territory plus your weakness plus God's power plus His will equals an expanded territory.

When Isaiah saw God's glory in chapter 6, He recognized his sinfulness and unworthiness to be in the LORD's presence. "Woe is me of unclean lips." God cleansed him. And then God asked, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" God was looking for a messenger to take His Word to His people and wanted to involve one of His children in this important task. He wanted someone who was willing to have his territory expanded.

Isaiah responded, "Here I am! Send me." Expand my territory. Make me more useful for You. I am willing.

8 years ago, I would wake up in the middle of the night with the thought, "What am I doing? This is crazy." It was crazy to leave a great church in ELD. It was crazy to leave a good ministry position working with a wonderful staff. It was crazy to leave something so safe for something that was unknown. But God wanted to expand mine and others' territory. And the result is Cornerstone DWT. I have never regretted saying "Yes" to this new territory.

Are you asking God to expand your territory? Are you willing to accept what He wants to do through you. Are you willing to say, "Lord, use me—give me more ministry for You!"

If you say no, you will miss out on so many blessings. You will miss out on seeing God use you in ways you could not imagine. I implore you- don't say no. Ask in faith for God to expand your territory.

It is a scary thing to ask God to expand your territory. Jabez knew he would fall flat on his face without God so that is why He prayed

That Your hand would be with me.

Hand represents power and authority. Hand represents presence.

“He did this so all the nations of the earth might know that the Lord’s hand is powerful, and so you might fear the Lord your God forever.” Joshua 4:24 (NLT)

“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.” Acts 11:21 (ESV)

There is a natural progression from asking for more blessing to increased territory to the need for supernatural power. God’s power is essential for influence and effectiveness in an expanded territory.

Jesus commanded His disciples to “make disciples of all the nations.” To reach the world is an impossible task on our own.

Jesus included something so important in that command. He added, “I am with you always.” The world can and will be reached because of God’s power and presence.

We need God to show up when He expands our territory. We need Him so that we don’t fall flat on our faces in failure.

Did you know that **“God will never send someone your way that He cannot help.”**

God wants to do incredible things through you. Are you trusting God for something that if He doesn’t show up it will fail?

Success brings with it greater opportunities for failure. At the mountaintops of spiritual success is the danger for failure. That is why Jabez concluded his cry to God with the prayer,

“That You would keep me from evil that I may not cause pain.”

When God expands your territory, you are encroaching on satan’s turf. He doesn’t like losing. Satan is a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Jesus taught us to pray against the devil’s power. “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13).

But it is not just the external temptations from satan. There are also internal temptations. In any spiritual success, there is the temptation to take the credit. “I did this.” That is pride. Pride is sin. God deserves the credit.

In spiritual success, there is increased confidence. You feel so spiritually alive that you don’t take precautions and become vulnerable to falling to temptation. Too many Pastors have allowed their spiritual successes to go to their heads. And they believe all the good things people say to them. They become too important in their own eyes and that power corrupts. This power often turns to sexual sin.

The last phrase of verse 10 in the ESV, reads, “that it might not bring me pain.” The NKJV has, “that I may not cause pain.” Which one is correct? They are both correct. When you and I sin we create pain for ourselves. But not just ourselves. Our sin hurts others. It causes pain to others. So sin brings me pain and causes others pain.

Jabez asked God to keep him from evil. He **didn’t want to cause Jabez to himself or others**. He needed God’s strength. God desires to help up overcome evil and temptation.

If you are a Christian, you have God's Spirit living inside you to help. "So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions." Galatians 5:16–17 (NLT)

Listen to this prayer, "Lord, keep me from making the mistakes I'm most prone to when temptation comes. Lord, keep me safe from the pain and grief that sin brings. For the dangers that I can't see, or the ones that I think I can risk because of my experience (pride and carelessness), put up a supernatural barrier. Protect me, Father, by Your power!"

Will you let God work in your life regardless of what He chooses? It will always be for your best. Will you surrender to His power and love and surprising plan for you? I hope you choose to do just that. You will experience the joy of knowing that God experiences deep pleasure and joy in you! And you will live a life of significance!

Let's pray

o.b.g.