

The Prayer of Jabez (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, my friend. I am so glad that you have chosen to join me. We're going to be looking at something in the Scriptures in just a moment that, in my opinion, is astonishing. It's an amazing story. It's amazing in part because it just sort of rises out of obscurity. We're reading along from 1 Chronicles 4. It has this just sort of nondescript, mediocre, boring sort of genealogy. This so-and-so was the father of so-and-so, who bore this person, and that person, who was the father of so-and-so, who had two sons, and it's just like, okay, alright. The next verse, next verse, and you're just reading along, and then, suddenly, we find these words in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10 NKJV.

⁹ Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." ¹⁰ 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.

Then, it goes right back to so-and-so was the brother of so-and-so. He begot so-and-so, who was the father of so-and-so. It's like just this sort of boring landscape, and all of a sudden, this majestic mountain thrusts up in the middle of this nondescript boring landscape, and we find the prayer of Jabez. It really is one of the great prayers of the Bible, and it says that God granted him what he requested. Jabez distinguished himself by this prayer he prayed. There's not a lot, besides this, that we know about the guy, except that he asked God for five things. He boldly asked for five things, and God granted these things to him. Number one, he prayed to be blessed. Number two, he prayed to be enlarged. Number three, he prayed to have God's hand with him. Number four, he prayed to be kept from evil. And number five, he prayed that he might not cause pain. Some translations put it this way. They say, "Keep me from evil, that I might be free from pain." God answered the prayer. It's great in one sense because Jabez recognized God as the source of all of these things. He looked to God as the source of blessing. He looked to God as the source of enlargement. He looked to God to keep him from evil, etc. It says that he was more honorable than his brothers.

Why? Well, we're not told why, but maybe it was because they were trying to enlarge themselves. Maybe because they were trusting in themselves, their own strength, and their own resources to protect them and to bring blessing into their life. Their focus was on themselves and what they could do or what another person could do rather than having their focus on God. I just want to encourage you right now. We understand that God uses people, certainly. We understand that God can bless us through our place of employment and give us favor with our employer or with our company. That God can bless us through the people who are in the church that we go to, and He can bless us through strangers. Men become the hands of the Lord, but we still need to take our eyes off of the men, off of the fallible men and women who God uses. We need to keep our eyes on God. Maybe, though, Jabez was more honorable because he chose not to be a self-made man. He looked to God to work things out in his life. He looked to God to guide him. It says that Jabez called on God. He didn't call on man. He didn't call on his own intellect. He called on God, and God answered him. Again, I'm just stricken by

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the place we find this prayer. Somebody suddenly stands out from the mediocre. Suddenly, someone stands out from and above the crowd. They wrap their fingers in the garments of God, and they go after God. You may just be a faceless person in the crowd right now, and you feel like that. But, friend, make the decision that you're going to go after God with all of your heart and all of your soul. He sees you, and He will answer your prayers. This prayer in many ways, I believe, can become a pattern for things that we can ask God for, things that are available to anyone who will petition God. The Bible says in Romans 2:11 NKJV

¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.

So, if Jabez can arise out of the multitude that's not doing anything, that's not saying anything, and reach up and grab ahold of God, so can we. Let's talk about these things that Jabez requested of God that were granted to him by God. First of all, he prayed, "Bless me." Every child of God has a right to be blessed and has a right to experience God's prosperity. The Scripture says this in Proverbs 10:22 NKJV,

²² The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.

"The blessing of the Lord makes rich. He adds no sorrow with it." Psalm 67:6b–7 NKJV says,

⁶ God, our own God, shall bless us. ⁷ God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

So, apparently, when the blessing of God comes into our lives, it's something that can be tangible. It's something that can be seen. It's something that causes the ends of the earth to stand up, recognize, and fear that God is involved in this person's life. God is involved in the life of this church. God is involved in the life of this nation. There is no explanation for the blessing that has come except that God has laid a hand of blessing upon them. Ephesians 1:3 NKJV says,

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

The truth is, whether it is a spiritual blessing, a blessing of peace, of inward contentment, a blessing of spiritual insight, a blessing of growth in faith, things that maybe can't be seen in the sense that they're invisible, though they do produce visible results. Be it things in those categories or be it something that is very tangible. Let's say getting your rent paid, or the healing of your child, or you're trusting God for a job, and there seems to be no jobs available. But, God opens a door, gives you favor, and gives you a job, or whatever it is, something that's tangible. Even those things, my friend, come from God, but they are Holy Spirit conferred. Some translations of that verse talk about, "He's blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Some people think, "Oh yeah, these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places," having no idea what that might mean. Again, it does include the things that we look at as spiritual, the unseen things, blessings of peace, spiritual growth, and faith in the heart, etc. But it includes all the tangible, physical blessings that God brings into people's lives as well. Because whether it is spiritual in nature to begin with or whether it is some direct physical benefit that God brings, it is Holy Spirit conferred. It comes through the agency of the Holy Spirit. That's what this is talking about.

Now, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every Holy Spirit conferred blessing in Christ. We have a right to say, "God bless me." It should go without saying, God blesses us to

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be a blessing. The book of James says, "You ask and you do not have, because you ask amiss. You want to just consume it for your own pleasure." We can ask with the wrong motivation and it will thwart our prayers, certainly. But the truth is, God does want you blessed. He does want to bring you peace. He does want you to be able to pay your bills and to stay current with things. God doesn't want you to be under a mountain of poverty that you can never get out from. God doesn't want you to be fearful and to be filled with anxieties. God wants to bless you so that He might be glorified. He wants to bless you because He is interested in meeting your needs. He is a good Father. Jesus said, "Hey, don't worry about what you're going to eat, what you're going to put on, or what you're going to drink. Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things, physical, tangible things." Jesus said, "Hey, put first the kingdom of God, seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and all of these things will be added to you." The inference is they'll be added to you by God through whatever means, through whatever channel He chooses.

But the truth is, God, does want you blessed because He's interested in meeting your needs, making sure you have a roof over your head, that you have clothes on your back, and that you have sufficient to take care of whatever immediate needs you have with enough left over to bless someone else. Now, to me, that is a good biblical definition of prosperity. I have enough to meet my needs with sufficient left over to help somebody else. That, my friend, is prosperity. We should pray just like Jabez did, "Oh, God, bless me." We should be open to receiving the blessings of God. The second thing Jabez prayed was, "Enlarge my territory." Literally, that is expand my borders. I believe that we can expect God for increase. We should pray for enlargement. I think that as a church, we should pray to be enlarged. Let me say this: I don't think a church is necessarily significant because there are large numbers attending. God is interested in the individual. And to the pastor who's pastoring a small congregation, you may have 30–40 or 100 people in your church. Your work is sacred, and those souls who you are shepherding, those people who you are feeding, and who you are guiding are so important to God.

Yet, every church should pray to grow. You see, the church that doesn't evangelize will fossilize. Numbers are important just because those numbers represent people. They represent Jane, and they represent Edgar, and they represent Ricardo, and they represent Alice, and they represent Friedhelm. They represent Paco. They represent people for whom Christ died. So, as a church, we should be praying, "Lord, expand our boundaries. Give us more influence. Give us more souls. Help us to reach precious people who You died on the cross to redeem." I think it's right that we should pray for an increase. Not that having a small flock is insignificant, but there are people around us every day who we work with, who we live next to, who we are related to, who our kids play sports with, who need Christ. So, we should pray for enlargement, pray for souls, that the kingdom would be enlarged, and that our churches would grow. We should pray and expect God to enlarge us in our businesses. Somebody says, "But I'm completely content. I have all I can handle." Well, that's good. Hopefully, you are honoring God from your business and giving Him the first part of everything that comes through your business. The first part does belong to God. The Bible says the tithe is holy. It belongs to the Lord, and a tithe is the first tenth. The Scripture teaches us to honor the Lord with the first fruits of all of our labor, with the first part of our income. "So, our barns will be filled with plenty, our presses will burst forth with new wine," it says in the book of Proverbs.

We need to honor God with the first part. So, back to your business. Why not pray for enlargement in business? Maybe you're satisfied and say, "Hey, I'm good for retirement." All right, that's great. But what about the kingdom? Why not pray and say, "Okay, I have all I need, but I'm going to pray for increase and enlargement. I'm going to put all of the profit into the

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kingdom. I'm going to support mission works. I'm going to support Christian orphanages. I'm going to support the work of my church. I'm going to help my pastor to fulfill his vision." Say, "Pastor, you have big dreams. You want to reach our city. You want to bus kids into the church. You have this idea and that idea. You want to expand in social media. I'm going to fund you, Pastor. I'm going to fund the work of God." God does raise up businessmen and businesswomen. They have a knack for business, but it's for the glory of God. It's to support God's work, and so we should pray for increase in business. Increase comes from God. I think especially in our own walk with God, an enlargement in our understanding of the Scriptures, our enlargement in influencing other people, and the enlargement of our heart to draw close to God. Let me just give you a little list. This is a short list, but these are some of the things that the Scripture teaches that we can increase in.

These are areas that the Bible teaches that we as believers can and should be enlarged in. Are you ready? Psalm 119:32 says that we can be enlarged in heart. Proverbs 1:5 teaches that we should be and can be enlarged and increase in wisdom and in understanding. Proverbs 13:11 and Proverbs 3:9–10 teach that we can be enlarged and we can increase in goods and material resources. First Samuel 29:19 tells us that we can be enlarged and increase in joy. Luke 17:5 says that we can increase in faith. Second Corinthians 9:10 says that we can increase in the fruits of righteousness. First Thessalonians 3:12 says that we can increase in love and influence. That's just to name a few. Pray to increase. Maybe you have all you need for your own life right now, but pray to be a blessing to someone else, and as that blessing flows through you, God is glorified, and you do what you do in the name of the Lord. Listen, believer, you ought to increase. The truth is, if we're not going forward, we're going backward. If we're not increasing, chances are we're decreasing.

If you're not growing in faith, if you're not growing in your relationship with God, chances are you're losing ground because there's really no such thing as being static in the Lord. You don't just get to this place, "Okay, this far and no farther." No, the devil would like to put a cap on your spiritual growth, put a cap on the blessings you have in your life, and make it so that you can't be any greater blessing than you are right now to those who are around you, to your church, to your family, and to your community. God wants you to increase. If we're not increasing in some of these areas, like I said, chances are we're going backward. So, you should pray. Be like Jabez and say, "Oh God, enlarge me. God, enlarge my heart. God, give me more influence. Increase me in goods so that I can be a blessing to others and help the kingdom go forward." And yes, I'm talking to you. You may be sitting on your couch right now. You live in your little flat. You barely get by. Listen, Jabez called on God. Maybe you can't do it in your own power. Maybe you can't do it in your own strength. Maybe you do not have the connections in your own life to make any of these things happen. You can't see any way for it to come to pass. Call on God. God is not limited. He is the mighty God. He breathes stars into existence. He can certainly help you and give you favor in your circumstances and in your situation. Pray to be blessed, to be a blessing, and pray to be enlarged.

The next thing that Jabez prayed for, he said—Well, let me—before I jump onto that I just had thought about something that happened years and years ago. I can honestly tell you that we wouldn't be sitting in the studio. We have a team here. They're working on things and making everything happen. I'm doing my part in front of the camera, but we wouldn't be here in the studio. We wouldn't be doing all that we're doing with television and social media platforms around the world. We wouldn't be in this facility and on this campus. We have an amazing campus here in Southern California. Some of you may have heard of a place called Disneyland. Disneyland, one of their little slogans is "We're the happiest place on earth." No, no, no, no. The happiest place on earth is just about seven miles, maybe 10 kilometers down the road. We're on

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the same road that Disneyland is on in Southern California. The same avenue runs right in front of our church building. It runs right to Disneyland. Here's the happiest place on earth. I believe it's Cottonwood Church.

We have a beautiful 33–34, almost 34-acre campus here. Thousands of people come every week to hear the Word of God and to grow. They're involved in small groups. We have men's groups and women's groups. We have a singles groups. We have groups for retired people and just on and on. We have a beautiful bilingual service. We have church in Spanish and English. There's just so much that goes on. I could go for a long time talking to you about it. In fact, I was just looking at a statistic a few days ago. We baptized over 800 people this last year. Now, that may not seem like a lot to you, but it's an increase for us from the last year. Eight hundred people who have given their lives to Jesus, who have had their lives turned around, baptized in His name for His glory, dying to their old life and coming up out of the waters of baptism with family and friends and co-workers around, encouraging them. It was a marvelous thing to see. But I trace all of this back in part to something that happened. We were in another facility. One, we had purchased the property. It was about two and a half acres. We had, through much trial and tribulation, built a marvelous church building there. The main auditorium seated close to 700, but we had a lot of overflow places. We had a huge kid thing built. We had a whole old Western town, like from the old West here in the U.S., built for the kids up there. It was a marvelous facility. We actually ran seven services every weekend. We had two on Saturday and five on Sunday. At the end, we were running that many.

I had a friend come from Australia. His name was John Lewis. I just felt in my heart that I needed to have him come. John has been in heaven for a while now. John came and preached a message about the blessing of Abraham and about how if we're in Christ, we're Abraham's seed and heir according to the promise. He talked about the types and shadows and the similarities. He brought something out in the service that God had promised land, physical land to Abraham. I don't remember exactly how John said it. He was speaking to the congregation, but to me, God spoke through him to me. When he talked about the part of Abraham's blessing that included land, he said something to the effect of, "You need to trust God for land, for more land." He said, "Land will give you influence." It just hit my heart like a hammer. So, I lifted up my eyes. We'd been looking for property, but I decided we were going to look big. Today, we sit on this campus, and I trace a lot of that back to that encounter that I had with the Holy Spirit as John Lewis preached in our church that Sunday morning. I really began to pray, "God enlarge me. Give us more. Give us something, something big, something significant. We've done our best to be good stewards over this, and truly, all glory and honor go to God because I'm very well aware that God can get along okay without me. He has a lot of servants that He can use, and I'm just thankful to be used by God at all in any way. So, our whole team, our whole staff, the church here, we just endeavor to stay small in our eyes. We serve a great big God.

We're just thankful for what He's done. The truth is, one day, I know God's going to burn everything up. He's going to make a new heaven and a new earth. Even the beautiful equipment, we take care of it here, but we don't bow down and worship it, and having a bunch of stuff or a large piece of property certainly doesn't make us great. The only greatness around here is the God who we serve. One day, this is all going to be gone, but in the meantime, we are thankful for it, and we're going to continue to use it for God's glory. I trace it back to a Holy Spirit moment when John Lewis was preaching in our church, and I think you should pray for enlargement. The next thing that Jabez prayed about was that "Your hand would be with me." Now, "The hand of God" when that phrase is used in the Scripture, it's a metaphor for the Spirit of God. The hand of God was upon Elijah, and he outran Ahab's chariot to Jezreel. The hand of God was upon this person, and he prophesied. The hand of God was upon this person, and

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they did thus and so. It's a metaphor. It's symbolic language for the Spirit of God. So, he literally is praying for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be upon him and to flow through him. It represents God's power, God's strength, God's comfort, and His guidance.

Do you know what? You're just going to have to join me next time as we continue on this. I have a lot to say about the remaining things that Jabez prayed about, but I don't have a lot of time remaining. So, let me just close with this. I don't think it's a coincidence that you're watching me right now. God does want to enlarge you. God does want to bless you. God does want to put His hand upon you. You could have been doing anything else in the world right now, but here we are. You just need to know that God sees you, my friend. He has a gift for you. He has a life for you. He has a way for you. He has a plan for you that you can discover. It all starts with surrendering your life to Jesus Christ, that's the beginning of everything. You say "Yes" to Jesus. Listen, if you've never opened your heart and received Him as your Lord and Savior, do it now. The Bible says, "If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and if you confess Him with your mouth as Lord, you will be saved." Call on the name of Jesus today. It'll change everything, my friend. I love you. I'll see you again.

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