

## “A Prayer for the New Year”

About 7 years ago I preached about a man named Jabez, and a prayer he prayed. Jabez is only mentioned in 2 verses of the Bible! 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. I’m reading from the New King James Version:

“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.”

These 3 sentences are tucked away in the middle of a long, boring genealogy! The first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles gives the family tree of Hebrew tribes. While it may have been of interest to the Hebrew historian, quite honestly, it’s dull reading for us! (In fact, if you’re having trouble getting to sleep at night, you might try reading this rather than taking a couple of sleeping pills!). It’s like the writer is plodding along, giving family histories, then all of a sudden he says, “Oh, by the way, here’s something I don’t want you to miss...let me tell you about Jabez and his prayer.”

Some years back Bruce Wilkinson wrote a little 93-page book called *The Prayer of Jabez*. The book was a #1 best seller, and sold millions of copies. It created quite a stir, with a spinoff of Jabez posters, jewelry, back packs, music, and more! Today I’d like to revisit Jabez, and see how his prayer might be an important prayer that we can pray every day of the New Year!

1 Chronicles 4:9 begins, “Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers...”. *Here’s a man who stood head and shoulders above the rest!* Jabez wanted to excel. He wasn’t satisfied with mediocrity. He wanted to be the best he could be for God! Is there anything wrong with wanting that kind of greatness? Most of us set our sights too low. God has bigger plans and dreams for most of us than we have for ourselves! Jabez wanted to stand out above the crowd...and that’s reflected in his prayer.

Note that Jabez did not have a very promising beginning! “His mother called his name Jabez, saying ‘Because I bore him in pain’” (1 Chronicles 4:9). The name “Jabez” means “pain” – literally “he will cause pain”. Why he was named that, we don’t know? Maybe there was something extra painful about his childbirth. Perhaps the delivery was traumatic. Or, maybe there was some situation going on at the time. We don’t know. Whatever it was, can you imagine the embarrassment in being named “pain”? Imagine the excited grandparents, asking the parents, “What did you name our new grandson?” Or friends asking, “What’s the name of your new baby?” “We’ve named him ‘Pain!’” You wonder if Jabez had to put up with kids teasing, “Here’s come the pain!”

What’s even worse: for Hebrews, a person’s *name* signified one’s *character*, in some cases the name *defined a person’s future*. Like every time mom called, “*Jabez.....*”, it was like saying, “Son, you’re such a pain.” “You’ll always be a pain”.

Some of us may have had unpromising beginnings. An unhappy childhood. Kids who bullied us or made fun of us. Feelings of not being good enough, or pretty enough, or smart enough. Surely Jabez must have felt the sting of his name. But he turned his pain into a *prayer*. “And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, ‘O that you would bless me indeed’” (1 Chronicles 4:10).

In spite of his less than desirable past, Jabez must have grown up hearing about the God of Israel – and His love, and power. Because he prays, “*O that you would bless me indeed...*”. There’s an urgency about this prayer. The word “indeed” in Hebrew is like adding an exclamation point. Please, bless me *a lot*.

Here’s where many think this a *selfish prayer*. Bless me a lot! Perhaps we need to understand what the word “bless” means in the Bible. Dr. Wilkinson says, “to bless in the biblical sense means to ask for or 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 crying out for the wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to know about or to give us...to ask for God’s blessing is ‘wanting for ourselves nothing more and nothing less than *what God wants* for us.’”

Why would God not want us to ask for that kind of blessing? There’s nothing wrong with asking God to bless us a lot, so that we can have all of what God wants for us, and be able to bless others as a result!

Jabez’s prayer continues: “*Oh, that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory*” (1 Chronicles 4:10). Here too, this seems like a *selfish* request. The word translated “territory” in some translations is the word “borders” – enlarge my borders! He’s praying for more land. Bruce Wilkinson suggests that this is more than just a request for land. Jabez wants more responsibility and more opportunity *to make a mark for God*. *In this part of the prayer, we are asking God to enlarge our life that we may make a greater impact for Him!*

Now if we really want to make a difference in our little slice of life for God, this often takes us out of our comfort zone. We may feel like we’re in over our head. We’re never sure what God is going to give us to do! This leads to the next part of the prayer: “That your hand would be with me” (1 Chronicles 4:10). The idea of God’s hand being with us is a Biblical way of saying we want God’s presence and power!

People who pray the Jabez prayer are forced again and again to depend on God, for God has a way of stretching us, giving us more opportunities and responsibilities. How much are you doing that you couldn’t do without the direct intervention of God’s supernatural power? 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.”

After asking God to be with him, Jabez concludes his brief prayer: “And that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain” (1 Chronicles 4:10). Jabez wants to make sure that if God blesses him and increases his sphere of influence, that he will be kept from evil. That he won’t become selfish, or boastful – and cause any pain for others.

So, let's pray this prayer together: ***"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!"***

Bruce Wilkinson has said that when he discovered this prayer and began to pray it, it changed his life and his experience of God. When we sincerely pray this prayer, exciting things begin to happen. God brings people across our paths whom we can help – *"Jabez appointments"*.

I began to pray the Prayer of Jabez in 2002. And since then it has led to some amazing instances where God has used me, far beyond what I could have done just relying on my own strength or wisdom. 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 pastor of another church in town, asking me if I would be his mentor for his senior year of seminary. I hadn't even known this young man that well!

I started praying the Jabez prayer about 5 years before my first trip to Kenya. God stretched my territory, my boundary, from Lancaster County to Africa! I never ever thought I would be on Kenyan soil, teaching pastors and church leaders!

I will be honest, and say that the last few years I have gotten away from praying the Prayer of Jabez, and as we start a new year, I have determined to start again.

Do you want to be used by God to bless and influence people? Chances are, He's not going to send you to Kenya, but He will put you in situations and bring people across your path that God can bless them through you! I realize that this is an elderly congregation. You may think, "Why preach this to us? Our age limits what we can do for God. This may be true in a sense. But I like to say, instead of, "Our age *limits* what we can do for God", rather, "Our age *may change how* God uses us!" You're not dead yet!

I pray the Jabez prayer for *this congregation*: "O that You would bless Community UMC and enlarge our territory...". God wants to use this church to bless people beyond our walls! Don't you want that for this church? Some of us may be satisfied just to have a church where we can come and have 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 that God wants for this church!* So I pray that God will enlarge our territory.

When I gave my Pastor's Report to our Church Conference last month, in that report I said this: "I hope and pray that we can find more ways in the year ahead to serve others beyond our doors, to give unselfishly to worthy causes and human need beyond our church walls...and not to forget evangelism. Jesus said we are to go and make disciples. I'm convinced that one of the prime reasons churches die is because they forget this command of Jesus: 'Go make disciples of all nations.' I've said different times, if in the next year every active member of the church would be instrumental in having one new person become active in our congregation, we would double the number of active members. I want to challenge every one of us to do that in 2026. Invite

people to church, and if one of those invited comes, and stays, there you have it.”

Would you be willing to ask the Lord to “enlarge your territory” in the next 12 months to have one new person get connected with this church because you invited them to come? (This may mean you need to invite more than one person, so at least one of those people visits, and continues to come).

Let’s pray that prayer for this church: “Oh, that You would bless Community United Methodist Church indeed, and enlarge our territory, that Your hand would be with us, and that You would keep us from evil, that we may not cause pain!”

And now once more for ourselves: “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!”

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*December 28, 2025*