

THE LIFE GOD BLESSES
1 Chronicles 4:9-10

In the year 2000, BRUCE WILKINSON of WALK THROUGH THE BIBLE MINISTRIES turned the obscure character in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 into an international phenomenon with his little book, *The Prayer of Jabez*. Not only did it become a runaway hit and a longtime New York Times bestseller; it became a franchise. During its heyday, you could go to a bookstore and buy the Jabez book, and *The Prayer of Jabez for Women*, *The Prayer of Jabez for Teens*, *The Prayer of Jabez for Kids*, *The Prayer of Jabez Devotional*, *The Prayer of Jabez Journal*, and *The Prayer of Jabez Leather Edition*, not to mention Jabez music, T-shirts, hats, posters, coffee mugs, calendars – and even a Jabez mouse-pad for your computer. Without a doubt, this obscure Bible personality is now a bona fide star. But even though Bruce Wilkinson has done much to affirm the divine blessings that come to righteous people who practice believing prayer; there have been some unfortunate side effects to Wilkinson's remedy for pain. One of the issues is the fact that *The Prayer of Jabez* has put the spotlight on the wrong person in the text. I submit to you that this text is about God, not Jabez. It's not about the prayer of Jabez; it's about the sovereign, holy, wise, faithful, and gracious God who answered Jabez' prayer. And the message about God that this text proclaims is good news for every believer, not just Jabez: The Lord God is still in the blessing business!

Before we discuss divine blessings any further, let me put a couple of footnotes here. First, let me affirm that God is sovereign, which means he has absolute control, complete authority, and full discretion over everything. R.C. SPROUL has said that the sovereignty of God is God's favorite doctrine. And it would be yours too, if you were God! God is God all by himself. Consequently, we must remember that the blessings of God are the blessings of God. That means that the prayer of Jabez must not and cannot be used as some magical mantra that guarantees that God will grant whatever you ask, desire, or pursue. God is God and we are not. So we must pray, trust, obey, wait, and thank God no matter what. Likewise, the blessings of God are directly and intimately connected to your personal relationship with God. You cannot know the blessings Jabez received if God is not your father through saving-faith in the bloody cross and empty tomb of the Lord Jesus. However, if Jesus is your Savior and Lord, you are already blessed. Ephesians 1:3 says that God has "*blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*" But even though you occupy a blessed position in Christ, you can fail to appropriate the blessings of God in your daily life. So I want to show you how to walk in the blessings of God by retelling you the story of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. This biblical snapshot of Jabez reveals three marks of the life our sovereign and gracious God normally chooses to bless.

I. GOD BLESSES THE LIFE THAT IS MARKED BY PURITY.

Notice the first thing 1 Chronicles 4:9 tells us about Jabez: *“Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.”* The text does not tell us in what sense Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. But the meaning of the word and the context of the passage indicate that the honor of Jabez was spiritual, not physical, material, financial, political, or social. Jabez was a godly man of strong moral character, convictions, and conduct. His motives were pure. His character was blameless. And his ways were upright. Jabez was honorable. And the honorable lifestyle of Jabez was a key reason why God blessed him. God blesses those whose lives are marked by purity. Psalm 1:1-3 says, *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planed by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”* I repeat: God bless the life that is marked by purity.

In his book *Finishing Strong*, STEVE FARRAR tells of a famous author who was attending a lavish dinner party held in his honor. He was seated next to a very sophisticated and stylish young woman. She was stunningly beautiful and elegant. At one point during the meal, he leaned over and discreetly whispered in her ear, “Would you be willing to sleep with me tonight for \$25,000?” The woman smiled coyly and silently nodded a yes. He leaned in once again and whispered to her, “How about \$50?” The woman was horrified. She lost her composure and yelled at the author, “Just what do you think I am?” The author replied, “We’ve already established what you are. We are simply discussing the price?”

Let me ask you something. What’s your price? What does it take to get you to compromise your commitment to God? What is it that moves you to negotiate your devotion to Jesus Christ? I stand to plead with you to take yourself off the market. Stop prostituting your faith in the Lord. Don’t sell out. If you want to walk in the blessings of God, you must hang a sign on your heart that reads, “Not For Sale.” Pray with David the words of Psalm 139:23-24: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* God blesses the life that is marked by purity.

To say that Jabez was honorable doesn’t mean he was perfect. Jabez, like all saints of God, was both sinful and righteous at the same time. Yet he was blessed. This tells us that being pure and being perfect are not synonymous. They’re not the same thing. If being perfect was the requirement for being blessed, none of us would ever qualify – because no person who has live on earth has ever been perfect except the Lord Jesus Christ. But the good news is that God is not looking for perfection from your life; he’s looking at the direction of your life. And God will bless you if you are going in the right direction, progressing in the ways of Christ, and walking according to lamp and light of God’s word.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* This is the principle of blessability. God typically blesses those whom he can trust with his blessings. It is said that D.L. MOODY’S life and ministry drastically changed when he overheard someone says, *“The word has yet to see what God can do through the man who is totally submissive to him.”* Moody responded, *“By the grace of God, I will be that man!”* I challenge you to make that same commitment and watch God bless your life.

II. GOD BLESSES THE LIFE THAT IS MARKED BY PAIN.

One of the fascinating things about Jabez is the meaning of his name. Verse 9 says, *“Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, ‘because I bore him in pain.’”* According to Genesis 3:16, pain in childbirth is a part of the curse of the Fall of humanity into sin. But, apparently, there was something unusually painful about the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jabez. So much so that, while most mothers forget the pain of childbirth soon after the child is born, his mother was still lingering on the pain eight days later at his circumcision, when it was time to name him. So she named him *“Jabez,”* which means pain, grief, or sorrow. In naming this child Jabez this mother was not just making a statement about his birth; she was making a prediction about his life, future, and destiny. This name doomed Jabez to a life that would both experience and administer much pain. Yet, even though he was named Jabez, God blessed him. And I want you to know that God has a way of blessing the life that is marked by pain.

PHIL YANCEY was introduced to the world of lepers by meeting and working with DR. PAUL BRAND. And their ministry work together led them to write a helpful book with an apt title: *Pain: The Gift that Nobody Wants*. That’s the truth. Nobody wants pain. We view the blessed life to be one that is painless, carefree, and happy. We define blessings in physical, material, or financial terms. And we think that blessings bring pleasure, not pain. But the story of Jabez teaches us that the Lord does not have to prevent, limit, or erase your pain in order to bless you. God can bless you in and through your pain.

A.W. TOZER wisely said, *“It is doubtful whether God can use a man greatly, until he has first hurt him significantly.”* He’s right. God uses pain to develop us into what he wants us to be. Psalm 119:71 says, *“It is good for me I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”* Mark it down. There is a purpose in your pain. No, pain in and of itself is not a blessing. But pain does qualify us for a blessing. Your pain is a set up for a blessing. As long as life is manageable in your strength, wisdom, and resources, you don’t need God’s supernatural intervention.

- Candles must be burned in order to give light.
- Coal must be consumed in order to produce heat.

- Grapes must be crushed in order to produce wine.
- Wheat must be ground in order to produce flour.
- And we must experience some pain in order to enjoy true blessedness.

The hammer is a helpful and handy tool in the hand of the workman. It's useful and essential if nails are going to be driven into place. Each blow forces them to bite deeper as the hammer's head pounds and pounds. However, if the nail had reason and emotion, it would give you a different version of the story. To the nail, the hammer is a brutal, relentless master, an enemy that loves to beat it into submission. That would be the nail's view of the hammer. And it's correct, expect for one thing. The nail would have forgotten the most important fact of his painful reality; namely, that both it and the hammer are held by the same workman. The workman decides whose nail will be pounded out of sight and which hammer will be used to do the job. The decision is the sovereign right of the carpenter. Let the nail remember that it and the hammer are held by the same workman and its resentment will fade as it yields to the carpenter without complaint.

III. GOD CHOOSES TO BLESS THE LIFE THAT IS MARKED BY PRAYER.

Verse 9 records JABEZ'S REALITY. He was a godly man with a painful life. But verse 10 reports JABEZ'S RESPONSE: *"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.'"* One of the reasons why Jabez has become so wildly popular with so many people is because he is a person that most of us can relate to. Think about it. The text does not laud Jabez for being wise, strong, or rich. And it does not celebrate him for being gifted, talented, or accomplished. The thing that made Jabez special was the simple fact that he prayed. That's hit. And the prayer of Jabez demonstrates that if you want to experience the blessings of God, it happens after prayer. CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON said, "Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the hand of omnipotence." Indeed, God will bless you if you pray. The prayer Jabez teaches us what it means to be blessed.

A. THE PROVISIONS OF GOD ARE A BLESSING.

Notice the first request Jabez made of the Lord: *"Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border."* Jabez asked that the favor of God would be on him personally (*"bless me"*) and his circumstances (*"enlarge my border"*). And this personal, bold, confident, and specific prayer request encourages us to pray as Jabez did. Pray believing that God is willing to hear and able to answer. Pray believing that God knows what you are going through. Pray believing that God cares about your pains, needs, hopes, goals, and fears. Pray believing that there is nothing too hard for God. Pray believing that God is ready, willing, and able to

bless you. James 4:2 says, “*You do not have, because you do not ask.*” I believe this is the number one reason why God doesn’t answer our prayers. It’s because we don’t sincerely, regularly, and earnestly pray about it. But James 4:3 goes on to say, “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*” Did you get that? God doesn’t answer selfish prayers.

I bought a critique of *The Prayer of Jabez* by GARY E. GILLY that I picked up because of the title alone, “*I Just Wanted More Land*” – *Jabez*. I don’t know if that’s all you really want. But if it is, then you have no biblical reason to expect God to grant your selfish requests or fulfill your selfish desires. The Lord will eventually stop sending blessings to you if he cannot send blessings through you. But having said that, I submit to you that there is nothing wrong, selfish, or unspiritual about asking God for more! Matthew 7:11 says, “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*” Ephesians 3:20 says, “*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.*” And Philippians 4:19 says, “*And my God will supply every need of your according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*” So pray bold, specific, confident prayers. JOHN NEWTON wrote:

THOU ART COMING TO A KING
LARGE PETITIONS WITH THEE BRING;
FOR HIS GRACE AND POWER ARE SUCH
NONE CAN EVER ASK TOO MUCH

B. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS A BLESSING.

Again, verse 10 says, “*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.”*” This reference to God’s hand is what scholars call an anthropomorphism. That is, it describes divine realities in physical terms to help our finite minds understand God’s greatness. John 4:24 makes it clear that God is a spirit. Therefore, God does not have hands, as we do. But Jabez speaks of the hand of God as an idiom that describes the power of God. He prays that the power of God’s hand would be with him. This prayer request for God’s powerful presence compliments the previous request that God would bless him and enlarge his borders. Jabez was wise enough to know that he needed both God’s provisions and God’s presence. God’s provisions without his presence is our problem.

Go to Luke 15 and ask the prodigal son. He foolishly thought he could live independent of his father, as long as he had his father’s stuff to live on. But he eventually spent all that he had. And it was only then that he recognized and remembered the goodness of his father. So he came to himself and concluded that it was better to be a slave in his father’s house than to be a playboy on his own. And in praying that God’s hand would be with him, Jabez is asking the Lord not to allow him to have a prodigal son experience. He prayed that the

Lord would keep him within arm's length. And you ought to pray for the same thing. You don't just need what's in God's hands; you need the hand of God to be with you. Psalm 119:173 says, "Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts." Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." And in John 10:28, Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." Pray that the powerful presence of God's hand be with you.

TIME IS FILLED WITH SWIFT TRANSITION
NONE OF EARTH'S UNMOVED CAN STAND
BUILD YOUR HOPES ON THINGS ETERNAL
HOLD TO GOD'S UNCHANGING HAND

C. THE PROTECTION OF GOD IS A BLESSING.

Notice the prayer of Jabez one more time: "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!" Jabez's final request was a prayer for God's protection. This petition could be read one of two ways. It could be read as a request for protection from various dangers, toils, and snares that would bring him pain. This is how the ESV renders it. But many translations and most scholars understand this petition to be a request for protection from himself, rather than people or circumstances around him. For instance, the NKJV records Jabez to have prayed: "keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" I believe this is the correct rendering of this text. Being the honorable man that he was, Jabez didn't merely pray for God's protection from his enemies around him. He prayed for protection from the enemy within him. He prayed that the Lord would keep him from fulfilling his name. He prayed that his label would not become his legacy. Jabez knew something that you need to know: sin will rob you of the blessings. Did you get that? Sin will take you further than you want to go. Sin will cost you more than you want to pay. Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay. So pray that God would protect you from you!

Duke RAYNALD III, who lived during the fourteenth century, lived a life of indulgence and was extremely overweight. In fact, he was commonly called by his Latin nickname, Crassus, which means "fat." After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother, Edward, led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead he built a room around him in the Nieuwkerk Castle and promised him he could regain his freedom as soon as he was able to leave the room. This wouldn't have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near-normal size, and none was locked or barred. The problem was Raynald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother, and each day he sent him a variety of delicious foods. Instead of dieting his way to freedom,

Raynald grew fatter. He stayed in the room for ten years, till his brother died in battle. But by then his health was so ruined that he died within a year – a prisoner of his own appetite.

There are many of us who are locked up in rooms with open doors. And the reason why many of us are unable to break free from the things that bind us really has nothing to do with our enemies. It's because of our rebellious attitudes, sinful ways, and lack of discipline. Do you want to be delivered? Then join Jabez and ask God to protect you from yourself.

The last line of verse 10 says, *"And God granted what he asked."* This closing line is the good news of the text. God answers prayer. The point of this passage is not merely that Jabez prayed, as honorable as that may be. The point is that God is willing to hear and able to answer prayer. Jeremiah 33:3 says, *"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."* Matthew 7:7 says, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."* And Hebrews 4:16 says *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* God hears and answers prayer.

IF THE WORD FROM YOU WITHHOLD OF ITS SILVER AND ITS GOLD
AND YOU HAVE TO GET ALONG WITH MEAGER FARE
JUST REMEMBER IN HIS WORD, HOW HE FEEDS THE LITTLE BIRD
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

IF YOUR BODY SUFFERS PAIN AND YOUR HEALTH YOU CAN'T REGAIN
AND YOUR SOUL IS ALMOST SINKING IN DESPAIR
JESUS KNOWS THE PAIN YOU FEEL, HE CAN SAVE AND HE CAN HEAL
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

WHEN YOUR ENEMIES ASSAIL AND YOUR HEART BEGINS TO FAIL
DON'T FORGET THAT GOD IN HEAVEN ANSWERS PRAYER
HE WILL MAKE A WAY FOR YOU AND WILL LEAD YOU SAFELY THRU
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

WHEN YOUR YOUTHFUL DAYS ARE GONE AND OLD AGE IS STEALING ON
AND YOUR BODY BENDS BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF CARE
HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU THEN, HE'LL GO WITH YOU TO THE END
TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE