

## Title: The Prayer of Jabez (I)

On the first Sunday of this year, we explored the connection between our real identity in Christ and spiritual power toward our New Year's resolutions. When Moses in the Old Testament and Peter in the New Testament came to understand who they were in God, they were able to keep their commitments, despite the challenges they faced. I believe remembering our true identity in Christ empowers us to live as a royal priesthood in spirit, to overcome difficulties, and to fulfill the God-given dreams He has placed in our hearts for His glory in the days to come.

As we begin this new year, I believe that some of us, myself included, tend to make decisions based on our own abilities and circumstances. That may seem reasonable. However, as followers of Christ, we are called to include God in our visions and seek His guidance and strength. We are also called to present our hopes and desires for 2026 to Him through prayer. I would define prayer as an expression of our faith in God. Through prayer, we invite our mighty and merciful God to be involved in our dreams.

In God's economy, five loaves and two fish can be more than enough to feed five thousand people. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can have limitless expectations of the Lord and experience miraculous outcomes in Christ. God's prosperity can be thirty, sixty, even one hundred times more than we could ever imagine—when we pray, while also putting our effort, energy, time, and resources into what God desires for us. With this divine principle in mind, I pray that each of us will continue to pursue our God-given visions throughout this bright year while doing our best in all things. Let us pray together that God may open Heaven's doors wide and pour out His abundant blessings upon each of us, our loved ones, our church, our community, and our country.

In our primary text for today, we find a simple yet profound example of prayer from Jabez, teaching us to anticipate God's provision and protection on our journey of faith. Jabez prayed for three things: first, God would bless him, second that God would enlarge his territory; and third that God's hand would be upon him, protecting him from evil. Through this prayer, Jabez came to know God's might and mercy and was transformed from a man of sorrow to a man of blessing. Today, and over the next two Sundays, we will examine each of these prayer petitions and apply them to our own God-given desires and hopes for both today and the coming days.

Before we explore each of Jabez's petitions, I'd like to share some background about this scripture. As far as I know, the Book of 1 Chronicles "opens with the most complete genealogical record in the Bible." From chapters one through nine, we find many names mentioned—historical records from Adam to the twelve tribes of Israel. Over 500 names are listed in this family tree. This account was written for the people of Israel who had returned to their homeland after the Babylonian captivity in 538 BC. Can you imagine how they might have felt returning to their country after seventy years of exile? Many of them might have felt hopeless as they began to rebuild God's broken temples and restore their damaged homes. I believe the author of 1 Chronicles wanted to remind the people of Israel who they were in God and encourage them to live as His chosen people, despite the challenges they faced.

In the midst of this genealogy, the author makes a special mention of Jabez, describing him as “more honourable than his brothers” (1 Chronicles 4:9). Broadly speaking, Jabez and his brothers were part of the tribe of Judah, the royal line of David, which is introduced in the first half of chapter four. These two short verses in this section suggest why Jabez was considered a righteous person. Interestingly, the name “Jabez” in Hebrew means “pain.” He was given this name because his mother bore him in pain. Aside from this detail, the scripture provides no further explanation for why Jabez received this somewhat unusual name. In ancient times, names often represented a person’s identity and future, so Jabez may have struggled with sorrow due to the negative meaning of his name. Because of his name, Jabez might have even questioned God’s love for him from time to time. Yet, by faith, I believe Jabez was not defined by the negative connotations of his name. Instead, he chose to view himself through God’s eyes as a precious child of God. Jabez believed in the might and mercy of God and cried out to Him for transformation. He kept praying that God would turn his painful life into one of blessing and unlock His abundant gifts, such as prosperity, provision, and protection, throughout Jabez’s journey of faith. And the Lord granted all the requests Jabez made.

What is your first impression of these petitions? To me, Jabez’s prayer initially seems somewhat selfish because it includes many words that refer to me. The word “me” is repeated five times—three “me”s, one “my”, and one “I.” At first glance, it might seem like a self-centered request. We have learned that when we pray, we must do so according to God’s will. For example, when we reflect on The Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us a model prayer where the first request focuses on God’s glory: “Hallowed be thy name.” In other words, we are supposed to pray for God’s sake first. Another example is the acronym JOY—we are advised to seek the following order to experience true happiness: Love Jesus first, love Others second, and love Yourself last.

So, how could the prayer of Jabez be considered one of the recommended prayer patterns in the Bible? If you, like me, have wondered about this, I want us to listen to Jabez’s request with the heart of someone who is desperately seeking God’s blessing. Let me read it again: “Oh, that You would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain” (1 Chronicles 4:9,10). I hope that, this time, you will see this prayer from a different perspective. To me, the prayer of Jabez seems to be one of the few sincere and significant prayers I have ever encountered. In a moment, I will explain in more detail why I view this prayer in such a positive light. Jabez simply expressed his complete and absolute faith in God through this short prayer.

This morning, I want us to focus on the first part of the prayer of Jabez: “Oh, that You would bless me.” Jabez cried out to God, asking for His blessing. But what did the phrase “bless me” really mean to him? I believe Jabez confessed through this petition—whether directly or indirectly—that the Lord his God was the only true source of blessing. When we read the Bible carefully, God’s blessing is what the people of God have consistently pursued for true satisfaction on their journey of faith. I’d like to share a few stories that illustrate this truth, beginning with today’s Old Testament reading.

The first account comes from the life of Jacob. As Lizz read the story of Jacob at the Jabbok River, and as we watched the children’s Bible video this morning, we were

reminded of Jacob's character. Jacob was the second son of Isaac and Rebekah, born after his older twin brother, Esau. Early in life, Jacob wrongfully took the blessing that had been intended for Esau. When Esau discovered this, Jacob was forced to flee his homeland because of his brother's anger and bitterness. During his journey, Jacob met Rachel, his future wife, and worked diligently in order to marry her. He desired wealth and possessions, and eventually, he obtained nearly everything he wanted. One day, God instructed Jacob to return to his homeland. As usual, Jacob planned, prepared, and relied on his own wisdom. But when he reached the Jabbok River, he learned that Esau was coming to meet him the next morning—with four hundred men. This news made him anxious and fearful, and that night, he found himself alone. Whether in a dream or in physical reality, Jacob encountered an angel of God and wrestled with him until daybreak. When the angel wanted to leave, Jacob refused to let go. In desperation, he cried out, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

Have you ever been in a situation like Jacob's—so desperate that you cried out to God with the same urgency? As we reflect on Jacob's life, we see that he had pursued many things and had achieved them through his own efforts. Yet, when he faced the fear of death and the unresolved conflict with his brother, his soul was restless. In that moment, Jacob realized that God alone was his Savior, and that God's blessing was the only thing that could truly satisfy him. That is why he humbly and honestly asked God for guidance and strength.

At that moment, God heard Jacob's prayer and changed his name to Israel. The name Jacob means "deceiver," reflecting how he had obtained power, possessions, and pleasure—often deceiving others, including his own family. But the name Israel means "one who struggles with God." The place where Jacob encountered God was called Peniel, which means "face of God." These names tell us that Jacob had been transformed into a new person. After receiving God's blessing, Jacob was freed from his fear and anxiety. He was even able to see God's face reflected in the face of Esau. Nothing outward had changed—Esau was still there with his four hundred men, and his character may not have changed immediately. But God's blessing—specifically, the transformation of Jacob's heart and mind—enabled him to see everything through God's gracious eyes.

The second example of a person who tried to rely on his own strength is found in the journey of the Apostle Paul, as we read in today's Epistle. Paul wrote many letters in the New Testament, including this powerful letter to the Roman believers. He was highly educated in religious matters and was well-trained as a Pharisee, part of a spiritual elite of his time. One of the titles he was given was "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5). This expression, I believe, could be used for someone being named "Person of the Year" due to their determination to fulfill their goals. Paul was especially "eager for righteousness" based on God's law (Philippians 3:6). As a godly leader, Paul was knowledgeable about many sacred principles and applied them to his life with his own strength to live righteously before God. He seemed to be nearly perfect in his pursuit, yet despite all his commitments and achievements, he faced inner struggles over and over again. Paul honestly admitted that the sin living inside him caused him great shame. Even though his spirit was willing, his flesh was weak. He tried to walk away from the things he didn't want to do, but found himself falling into them anyway. Despite his vast spiritual

knowledge and discipline, the Apostle Paul was still lost in this inner battle when he tried to fight it on his own. In desperation, he cried out to God in prayer: “What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:24).

Does Paul’s cry sound familiar? It seems to echo a similar struggle to the one Jacob experienced in Genesis. Once again, despite Paul’s deep religious education and spiritual discipline, Paul found himself constantly defeated from his invisible battle. I think we can all relate to that kind of struggle at times—wanting to do right, but feeling powerless to do so. So, how did Paul overcome this internal war and become a conqueror? In verse 25, he writes, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25). Paul was thanking God not just for his salvation through Jesus, but for God’s blessing in his journey of faith. Paul had come to realize that there were things he couldn’t overcome on his own—no matter how hard he tried. Like Jabez, Paul desperately asked for God’s blessing, acknowledging that only Christ, who has all power in heaven and on earth, could help him. Later, Paul also declares this truth in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

What does this “Bless Me” petition signify to each of us? The challenges Jacob and Paul faced are not unique to them; we can all identify with their struggles in our own lives. No one worshipping in this sanctuary or joining us via Zoom is immune to these kinds of obstacles, whether they are related to physical, emotional, or spiritual matters. One way or another, we’ve all experienced them. And on our own, once again, we cannot escape them. Our willpower alone is not enough to defeat our old nature. To win the inner battle, like Jacob and Paul did, we need to ask God to bless us—to help us control our thoughts, words, and actions in our daily walk with Him. Allowing Christ to lead us is not a one-time event on Sundays; it is an ongoing, daily request. Every day—or every moment—we need to ask the Lord to bless us so that we can think with His mind, see with His eyes, hear with His ears, and do with His hands and feet what He calls us to do in this sacred adventure of life.

Over the years, my wife and I have become more aware of our roles as part of the “sandwich generation.” ...On top of these blessings, on many occasions, God has often helped me to imagine the Good Shepherd Good holding me and my loved ones in His mighty and merciful hands. What an awesome God I have! Friends, do we request God’s blessing and rely on His wisdom and strength? One of the ways we express our total dependence on God is by acknowledging our helplessness before Him and placing our full trust in His presence. Please understand, I’m not suggesting we should diminish our self-esteem. God values each of us as the apple of His eye. He has given each of us creative minds and powerful bodies, and He desires for us to use all of our God-given talents and gifts for His Kingdom ministry and for those around us.

But asking for God’s blessing is a recognition that we are not gods, and that God is our Creator and Lord. The more I have followed the Lord, the more I’ve come to realize this truth: “There are things and situations only God can handle for me, regardless of how much effort or energy I invest in them. These are the moments when I must ask God for His blessing, and in doing so, I can experience His prosperity, provision, and protection while giving my best to the Lord in my faith journey.” Do we feel overwhelmed due to a lack of wisdom in our recent challenges? Do we feel weak because we lack the power to

confront today's circumstances? As we remember God's mighty and merciful presence, we should place our unwavering trust in Him instead of relying solely on our own understanding.

To conclude, God desires for us to adopt the humble and honest attitude that King David displayed in today's psalm. One day, David asked himself: "Where does my help come from?" And then he answered: "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2). If we were a king or queen, how would we respond to this question about the true source of our strength? David could have answered something like: "My power originates from my fame, my resources, my talents, my soldiers, and so on." But he didn't list any of those things. Instead, he confessed that God was the true owner of everything he had, and the real source of the happiness he needed. In Psalm 23, when David reflected on why he lacked nothing—and in other words, why he was truly content—he answered, "The Lord is my shepherd." David didn't find his true satisfaction in what he had or enjoyed. He was truly satisfied because the Lord blessed him abundantly—making him lie down in green pastures, leading him beside still waters, refreshing his soul, and guiding him along the right paths for His name's sake. The LORD's blessing provided David with everything he needed. It helped him become a person whose heart was after God's own heart. We, too, need God's blessing in many areas of our lives.

Since the beginning of this year, many of us have been working to improve various aspects of our lives—whether it's our health, finances, family, or spiritual matters. Once again, are we feeling discouraged in these areas? Do we need strength and encouragement as we move forward into a new chapter of our lives this year? If so, look to Jesus, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who we can absolutely rely on. Come to Christ, the Maker of the universe, who knows each of us intimately and continuously ask for His special blessing, just as Jabez did. Without God's blessing, we could be nothing in a spiritual sense. We need God's blessing upon whatever we do.

Let us pray to God every day for the next thirty days—if you will—something like this: "Bless me with your healing power. Bless me with Your strength, wisdom, and guidance. Bless my loved ones with physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Also, bless my church and my community." Let us also pray that God would help us remain faithful—with His abundant blessing—to our privileged responsibilities for all that we have, until we are called home to Heaven.

\*In this sermon, I have used some thoughts from the book entitled "The Prayer of Jabez," written by Dr. Bruce Wilkinson.