

Part 24: "NOW WE TAKE POSSESSION!"

Part 6 - "Experiencing the Life-Changing Power of Prayer"

Text:

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 (NKJV) - "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.***"

A. Prayer is one of the greatest privileges that is available to us.

1. Think about it! We can come boldly before the King of kings to make our requests known and find mercy and grace to help in the time of need. We can actually come directly to God! We don't have to go through someone else!
2. Prayer is such a privilege, never waste this opportunity to come before God with words that are effective and powerful! You surely don't want to offer a request like this:

3. **Joke:** "Bedtime Prayer"

Now I lay me down to sleep.

I pray the Lord my shape to keep;

Please, no wrinkles; please, no bags;

And please lift my backside before it sags.

Please, no age spots; please, no gray,

And as for my belly, please take it away.

Please keep me healthy, please keep me young,

And thank You, Lord, for all You've done.

Amen

Part 3 - "The Power of Prayer to Change Your Space"

B. Jabez asked God for five specific requests.

1. We have talked about Jabez's first two prayer requests: that God would "bless him indeed" and "enlarge his territory," or space. The other three requests would not increase his space, but would help him retain his new level of authority.
2. If God increases our authority, we certainly would not want to lose it. To continue walking in the full measure of God's gifts, this is what Jabez requested:
 - a. God's Hand would be upon him.
 - b. God would keep him from evil.
 - c. God would keep him from causing others pain.
3. After reading Bruce Wilkinson's booklet, *The Prayer of Jabez*, several people have offered critical comments. These self-styled experts of theology claim that the author is promoting "self-focused" prayer. I smile when I read their accusations.
4. I read this booklet several years ago when it was first published, but I have deliberately chosen not to read it again until this series on prayer has been completely developed. I want to hear what God is speaking to our church—right now. This week, I bought another booklet and I'm truly looking forward to reading it again.
5. But how could anyone find fault with a prayer that is taken straight from the pages of scripture? Apparently, the prayer must have

pleased God, since “He granted Jabez’s request.” Today, I want to help you understand how much God **wants** to bless you!

C. Any prayer that involves a measure of desperation is usually “self-centered.”

1. Jacob told the angel, “I won’t let you go until you bless **me.**” Israel cried out to God for deliverance from **their** Egyptian oppressors so they could inherit **their** Promised Land. And what about Hannah’s prayer for a son—or David’s prayer to be delivered from **his** enemies.
2. When you’re sick, you pray for God to heal **you**....or when you’ve been laid off from a job, to help **you** find another job. I’m thinking that our prayers must be self-centered if we’re praying for God’s help. But, since we’re mere mortals, we all have needs and limitations.
3. I believe God is honored when we come to Him for things we need. He **wants** to be our “Jehovah Jireh.” Didn’t Jesus teach the disciples to pray for God to give **us** this day **our** daily bread? In the epistle of James, (who happened to be the brother of Jesus), we’re instructed to call for the elders to pray when **we** are sick and to anoint **us** with oil so **we** can be healed!
4. Scripture does not endorse this teaching about self-centered prayers from those who are ‘spiritually superior’ to the rest of us. Of course, religion does that quite frequently! The tragedy is that church leaders actually encourage people to pray according to this false teaching.
5. Even though God teaches us to pray, we often eliminate His blessings when we fail to pray.

- a. **James 4:2 (NLT)** - "You don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it."
6. Another problem with this teaching is that it discourages believers who are already struggling to believe that God actually wants to hear their prayers and pour out His favor and blessings upon them.
 - a. **2 Chronicles 16:9 (NKJV)** - "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him."
7. If you have been taught that God is a loving, Heavenly Father, consider yourself "blessed!" Many of us were never taught that He looks for opportunities to answer our prayers. We were told that He is more like a motorcycle policeman hiding behind a billboard, waiting for a chance to arrest us. The enemy has done quite a 'smear' job on the true character of God. It can take years to abolish this negative programming and replace it with the fact that God really does want to bless us!
8. Those who oppose the prayer of Jabez usually identify it with the so-called "prosperity" gospel. While I agree that some have erred by transforming God into a heavenly Santa Claus, their error does not negate the fact that our God **does** hear and answer prayer. Nor does it disprove the biblical truth that God loves to bless us!

D. Here are a few of the many reasons God desires to bless His people:

1. Scripture teaches that it is God's will to bless His people. Every time He formed a special relationship with someone, it always included a blessing. His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 was to bless him and make his name great. David's psalm about the goodness of God also includes numerous blessings:

- a. **Psalm 23:5-6 (NKJV)** - "You prepare a table before **me** in the presence of **my** enemies; You anoint **my** head with oil; **my** cup runs over. [6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow **me** all the days of **my** life; And **I** will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."
2. Because God is our Heavenly Father, like any good father, He wants to bless His children.
 - a. **Luke 11:11-13 (NKJV)** - "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish. [12] Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? [13] If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"
 - b. This scripture suggests another important question: If God will give us the greatest of all gifts—the gift of His Holy Spirit, why would He hesitate to give blessings of lesser value, such as: a job, a godly companion, a healthy marriage, or to heal us when we're sick?
3. When God blesses us, we become a 'living advertisement' of His goodness. This is one method He uses to receive glory and recognition.
 - a. **Isaiah 26:15 (NKJV)** - "You have increased the nation, O LORD, You have increased the nation; **You are glorified;** You have expanded all the borders of the land."
4. If God's people were **not** blessed more than others, unbelievers would question His love and commitment to us.

a. **Deuteronomy 9:28 (NLT)** - "If you destroy these people, the Egyptians will say, "The Israelites died because the LORD wasn't able to bring them to the land he had promised to give them." Or they might say, "He destroyed them because he hated them; he deliberately took them into the wilderness to slaughter them."

5. God delights to hear and answer our prayers.

a. **Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV)** - "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

6. His blessings are intended to lead us to 'repentance,' or *metanoia*.

This Greek word means: *to change our mind*.

a. **Romans 2:4 (NKJV)** - "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

b. Why would we want to "change our minds"? That term usually refers to changing our mind about sin—and that is correct. But it also means: to change the way we think about God. Since He is such a good God, when He blesses us, we **change our thinking and understanding** about who He is.

7. God enjoys seeing His people prosper.

a. **Psalms 35:27b (NKJV)** - "Let them say continually, 'Let the LORD be magnified, Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.'"

E. Even though God desires to bless His people, Jabez made it clear that he wanted a relationship with God—more than His blessings.

1. Jabez did not want 'success' unless it included God. So, his third prayer request was:
 - a. **1 Chronicles 4:10c (NKJV)** - "...that Your hand would be with me..."
2. I'm reminded of Moses' prayer: if God did not go with Israel, he was not about to move forward. Moses had no desire to go to the Promised Land without the Presence of God! He is the One who makes everything else worthwhile!
 - a. **Exodus 33:15-16 (NKJV)** - "Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. [16] For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."
3. I want God to bless me, but I want **Him** more than His blessings. His blessings should draw us closer to Him—not pull us away from Him!
4. When some people are blessed, they tend to drift away from God. His blessings cause them to become more independent, rather than prompting them to lean upon Him even **more!**
5. How many Christians assume that God's Presence in their lives is not really that important. They act as if He only intends to be a 'problem-solver' or a 'back-up insurance plan.' But His desire is to have a close relationship with us.
6. A couple of weeks ago, Bishop Joseph Mattera from New York City was in Houston for a meeting. He asked if I would have dinner with him on Saturday after I had returned to Houston. I was honored

with this request from a man who is so highly regarded as a great spiritual father and theologian.

At our meeting, he said, "Pastor, I'm a God Chaser." Then he asked for more details about the visitation we had in our church several years ago.

His next question was, "What had you been teaching before that visitation occurred?"

My answer was that for an entire year, I had been teaching about "knowing Christ." God wants us to know Him personally, not as some distant Deity in heaven, but as the best Friend we could ever have!