

How to Ask for a Wonderful Life, *Part 3* A Study of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Characteristic of Completeness: Christian Life

Big Idea: “Help me.”

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 30:15-16; 41:10; Mark 1:35; 3:14-15 cf. 9:14-29; Luke 5:16; 6:12; John 15:5; 17:4

Introduction:

- A. For the past few weeks we’ve been trying to figure out ► how to ask God for a wonderful life. Let me take a few minutes to review what we’ve learned so far.

Tucked away in one of the least-read portions of the least-read books of the Bible are two little verses that can change your life. Two verses that can usher you into a wonderful life. The two verses are ► 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. That’s what we’ve been studying. These two little verses contain a little prayer that can produce big changes. It’s the prayer of a little-known man named Jabez.

- B. All we know about Jabez is provided in these two verses of the Bible.

1. We know that Jabez lived an extraordinary life because Verse 9 ► says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers,
. . .

What makes this statement remarkable is that it comes right in the middle of a boring genealogical list of over 600 weird names. The author of 1 Chronicles was inspired by God to pull up and provide a glimpse of this man Jabez. And, to put it here is to emphasize that this man was extraordinary. We need to know something about him.

The text says that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. He was a highly respected man. A godly man. A spiritually weighty man. He stands head and shoulders above the rest.

2. We also know Jabez wasn’t always that way. In fact, we learned that the Hebrew name, “Jabez” literally means “he causes pain.” ► Verse 9 says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:9 . . . and his mother called his name Jabez, saying,
“Because I bore *him* in pain.”

I gave a number of reasons why I believe Jabez had a history of causing pain for people, not only at birth, but also for the first part of his life. He didn’t start well. He had a bad habit of making wrong turns in life that harmed other

people.

But, the good news is that he experienced a remarkable change—a change from pain to honor.

3. How did he do it? ► Verse 10 says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel . . .

Jabez prayed. He prayed in a way that God honored. He asked for a wonderful life and God gave it to him. We know because later in ► Verse 10, it says,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . So God granted him what he requested.

- I. What did he pray? Well, we covered the first part of Jabez’s prayer two weeks ago. It goes like ► this:

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, . . .”

- A. Although this may sound a little selfish, I gave a number of reasons why I believe Jabez must have prayed this with an attitude of complete surrender and obedience.
- B. We used the metaphor of a ► river to show what it means to ask God to bless us. The river represents God.

If I stand on the riverbank, keeping my distance from God, I’ll never experience the wonderful life there. I’ll never feel the power of His current carrying me. I’ll never be immersed in His goodness. It’s a dry existence that seeks to remain in control and not get carried away with God.

But, when Jabez cries “Oh, that you would bless me indeed” a modern paraphrase which captures his attitude ► might go something like this:

*I’m diving in
I’m going deep
In over my head I want to be
Caught in the rush
Lost in the flow
In over my head I want to go
The River’s deep, the River’s wide
The River’s water is alive
So sink or swim
I’m diving in¹*

¹ Stephen Curtis Chapman, “Dive,” *Speechless* album, Sparrow Records, 1999.

That's what "bless me" means. It means I'm diving in. I'm surrendering myself to whatever God wants. I'm jumping into whatever blessings God has planned for me as I surrender to the current of his will. The current may be swift, scary, even dangerous. But, I'm going in, Lord. Bless me. Take me. I'm yours.

That's the first part of the prayer of Jabez.

- II. Now, ► the second part of the prayer that we studied last week is just three simple words. Jabez says to the Lord in ► Verse 10,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . " . . . enlarge my territory . . . "

- A. What does that mean? I believe Jabez was asking for more territory so he could do ► more for God. Jabez was asking for ► greater influence, and ► more opportunities, and ► increased responsibility in working for God. So, to say, "enlarge my territory" means in essence, ► "I want to do more for You, Lord."
- B. This second request of Jabez goes hand in hand with the first.
1. The first request, ► "bless me," essentially means ► "take me." Jabez was jumping into the river of God's will and blessing.
 2. The second request, ► "enlarge my territory," essentially means ► "use me." "Lord, I want to do more for You. Please give me greater influence, increased responsibility, and more opportunities to love You, to love others, to help people follow You. Enlarge my territory. I want to do more for You, Lord."

When we do that, we're opening yourself up to a wonderful life. And, that's where we left off last Sunday.

- III. Only one problem. The ► river in the photo I've been using looks like you'd drown in it if you jumped in. I deliberately chose one that looks that way because it points up an important truth. If we pray the first two parts of the prayer of Jabez without praying the third, we're bound to be overwhelmed. If we pray, "Bless me and enlarge my territory" and leave it at that, we may find ourselves taking on water so fast that we sink because God will open up new opportunities that we feel compelled to add to our already overloaded schedules. If we're maxed now, and we pray, "Take me and use me" how are we ever going to handle it when God says, "Okay, you asked for it"?

The key lies in the third part of the prayer of Jabez. In ► Verse 10 Jabez prays to God,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "Oh, . . . that Your hand would be with me, . . . "

- A. What does this mean? In the Bible, “the hand of the Lord” is a metaphor that symbolizes God’s power. As such, Jabez was asking for God’s power to do what would be impossible for him to do on his own. Jabez was prayerfully, even desperately, dependent on God to grant him the power to do God’s work.

► Let me give you a couple of examples that demonstrate what “the hand of the Lord” means.

1. Last week I mentioned to you that God directed the Israelites to enlarge their territory by taking the Promised Land. As they were about to enter the Land, God miraculously parted the Jordan River so that the Israelites could cross it on foot. Joshua, the leader of the Israelites took 12 stones from the bed of the Jordan River, and after crossing, he used the stones to build a little memorial. The purpose of the memorial stones is recorded in ► Joshua 4:24 which says that it was erected so . . .

^{NKJ} Joshua 4:24 “that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it *is* mighty, . . .”

The hand of the Lord enabled the Israelites to do what they could not do on their own in accomplishing God’s will.

2. Over ► in the New Testament, the success of the early church in telling people about Christ is similarly tied to the hand of the Lord. ► Acts 11:21 says,

^{NKJ} Acts 11:21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

The hand of the Lord enabled those in the early church to do what they could not do on their own in accomplishing God’s will.

- B. ► Let me show how asking for God’s hand fits with the first two parts of Jabez’s prayer.

1. The first request, ► “bless me,” essentially means ► “take me. I am Yours.”
2. The second request, ► “enlarge my territory,” essentially means ► “use me. I am willing.”
3. Now, this third request, ► “that Your hand would be with me,” essentially means, ► “help me. I can’t do it without You.” That’s the ► big idea of my sermon: “Help me.” It’s a prayer to God. “Help me.”

- C. Asking for God’s hand—asking for His power and depending on His empowerment is crucial for us in living the wonderful life because it is impossible to do God’s work on

our own. ► The first two requests without the third is a recipe for burnout and depression. It's like saying to the Lord, "I'm Yours. I'm willing. And, I can handle it from here. I can be a good person and do good things on my own." But, that's just not the truth.

An availability and willingness to do God's work, without a prayerful dependence on God to do it, is worthless. Here's another way to say it: the first part of the Jabez prayer, plus the second part, minus the third, equals zero. This is an important key to living the Christian life. Indeed, the ► Christian Life is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week.

1. The rationale for prayerful dependence and asking for God's hand is explained by Jesus in ► John 15:5 where He says,

^{NKJ} John 15:5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Jesus is saying that unless we abide in Him, we have no power to do any of God's work. And, the primary way of abiding is prayer, asking for God's hand.

2. We can forget this so easily. The first disciples of Jesus did. Let me show you.
 - a. ► Mark 3:14 says,

^{NKJ} Mark 3:14 Then He [Jesus] appointed twelve [that is the 12 disciples], that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, 15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:

Here, we've got twelve disciples diving in. They're ready to go. Ready to do God's work. Anxious to kick a dent in history. "Take me. Use me."

Notice Jesus called the disciples to do three things in order:

First, ► be with Him.

Second, ► preach.

Third, ► heal sickness and cast out demons.

So, the ► first work they had to do was be with Him. This is really another way of saying that their priority was prayer. That's what Jesus is telling them to do. "Pray. Stay connected. Stay close. Keep asking

for My hand. Prayerfully depend on Me for your power.”

- b. So, Jesus sends out His twelve disciples, and they experience success. Pray, preach, cast out demons. Pray, preach, cast out demons.

Then, the disciples began to do what we often do. I can almost hear one of them thinking, “You know, my preaching schedule is getting full, and the number of demons to be cast out is growing. I need to cut back on prayer so we can do more preaching and cast out more demons.”

The logical extent of this thinking is to crowd out prayer altogether so more work can be done, all the while, not recognizing that prayer is a crucial part of the work.

Well, it had to happen sooner or later. The disciples skipped prayer altogether, and reached a point where their ministry became impotent. They tried to cast out a demon from a boy and couldn't. Jesus was irritated with their prayerlessness. He says in ► Mark 9:19,

^{NKJ} Mark 9:19 . . . “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.”

Bewildered, the disciples asked Jesus why they weren't able to cast out the demon. ► Mark 9:29 records,

^{NKJ} Mark 9:29 So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer . . .”

Whoops. The disciples got caught with their prayers down. They ► stopped asking for God's hand. They failed to prayerfully depend on God. The point is, we must ► prayerfully depend on God's hand to do His work.

- D. When we find ourselves burned out, exhausted, and disillusioned, most likely, ► we've drifted from God's hand, or we've never taken it to begin with. The Bible speaks right to our situation. ► Isaiah 30:15 says,

^{NKJ} Isaiah 30:15 For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” . . .

God is saying that when the pressures of life conspire against me, when the tasks of life

seem overwhelming, my source of strength and salvation from these things is returning to God's hand, to experience His rest, His quietness, His confidence. It's prayerful dependence. A quiet communion with God. God is calling me and you to prayerful dependence on Him. He's waiting for us to ask for His hand.

But, ► Verse 15 continues,

^{NKJ} Isaiah 30:15 . . . But you would not, 16 And you said, "No, for we will flee on horses"—Therefore you shall flee! And, "We will ride on swift *horses*". . .

That's describing me when I say, "I don't need God's hand. I don't need to pray. I just need to run. I need to run faster to keep pace with life. Swift horses. That's what I need. I'll go faster. That's the answer. Swift horses!"

Then ► Verse 16 describes the inevitable result,

^{NKJ} Isaiah 30:16 . . . *Therefore* those who pursue you shall be swift!

If I want to cut prayer out of my life so I can run faster, what happens? My troubles run faster, too. I can't outrun trouble apart from God. Neither can you. I think God expects us to work hard. But never prayerlessly. Never independent of Him. Never without God's hand.

- E. ► Asking for God's hand to be with us is not only crucial for having the power to do the things God wants us to do. It's also crucial for recognizing and saying, "no" to things that God doesn't want us to do. That's also part of the wonderful life.

When Jesus neared the end of His life on earth, He was able to say to God the Father, as recorded in ► John 17:4,

^{NKJ} John 17:4 "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."

That is a remarkable statement. Jesus is saying that He was able to do *all* that He was supposed to do. Everything. And, yet He didn't do many things that would've been good things to do. He didn't heal everybody. He didn't convince everybody to believe in Him. He didn't make everybody followers of Jesus. How did He know what He was supposed to do? And, just as importantly, How did He know what *not* to do?

Prayerful dependence on His heavenly Father was the key. Jesus modeled a life of prayerful dependence. This is remarkable because, if there was ever anybody who needed to pray less than we do, it seems like it would be Jesus. You can't get much tighter with God, the Father than by being God, the Son. And, if there was ever anybody who had more important things to do than we do, it seems like it would be Jesus. Jesus had "Save the world" on His job description! Nevertheless, Jesus prayed. Listen

to just a few Verses that typify Jesus as a person of prayer.

▶ Mark 1:35 says,

^{NKJ} Mark 1:35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

▶ Luke 5:16 says,

^{NKJ} Luke 5:16 So He Himself *often* withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

▶ Luke 6:12 says,

^{NKJ} Luke 6:12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Jesus regularly took pains to be alone with God in prayer for significant periods of time.

F. ▶ By now, I hope you're getting the impression that asking for God's hand is a crucial part of living a wonderful life. Jabez ▶ prayed,

^{NKJ} 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "Oh, . . . that Your hand would be with me, . . ."

Some of you may even be thinking of going home and giving this a try. Let me warn you about something. Remember, the ▶ Jabez prayer is a package deal. All the parts are interdependent aspects of ▶ surrender to God. We've seen that, in asking for a wonderful life, ▶ we can't pray Parts 1 and 2 without praying Part 3. That is, we shouldn't expect a wonderful life when we pray "Take me" and "Use me," but not "Help me." So too, ▶ we can't pray Part 3 without Parts 1 and 2. That is, we shouldn't expect much if we pray "Help me" without praying "Take me" and "Use me." Praying for God's hand is not a magical formula for getting whatever we want. We can't really be on the bank of the river of God and ask for His hand. Doesn't work. Let me give you an example.

1. Remember, God had commanded the Israelites to enlarge their territory by taking the Promised Land. Last week, I explained that the Israelites failed to enlarge their territory to the full extent of God's will. In particular, the Israelites failed to displace the Philistines from the Mediterranean coastal region.
2. Israel was not surrendering to God, nor were they interested in enlarging their territory for God. As a result of Israel's disobedience, God withdrew His hand of blessing from them, and the Philistines proved to be a constant thorn in their side. For years the Philistines antagonized the Israelites.

3. Fed up with the bothersome Philistines, the Israelites decided to fight and defeat them, as recorded in 1 Samuel 4. Israel was defeated and lost about 4,000 men in the battle.
4. In trying to figure out what went wrong, the Israelites seemed to overlook the fact that they were no longer crying out to God, “Take me and use me.” Instead, they turned to outward religious symbolism to try to help them out. They said in effect, “Hey, let’s fight the Philistines one more time. But, this time let’s take the Ark of the Covenant with us.” The Ark of the Covenant was an ornate, gilded box which represented or symbolized the very presence and power of God. They reasoned that if they took the ark with them, then God’s hand would automatically be with them and they would prevail.

First Samuel 4:10-11 tells the story of Israel’s second attack on ► the Philistines:

^{NKJ} 1 Samuel 4:10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 Also the ark of God was captured . . .

The Israelites got their tails whipped and the ark taken from them. Why didn’t it work? It didn’t work because they were trying to use the ► help-me step without first taking the take-me and use-me steps.

Similarly, *we* can’t expect God’s hand to be with us if we’re not surrendered to doing His will. Our faith should not be in a magical prayer. Our faith should be in the God to whom we surrender.

- G. When we ► put the three pieces of the Jabez package together—take me, use me, help me—God will deliver. He will answer us just as He answered Jabez.

Conclusion:

Do you want a wonderful life? Perhaps what I’ve been talking about sounds appealing to you but, at the same time, it seems strangely inaccessible. It seems somehow beyond your reach. There seems to be something missing. What’s keeping you from making the prayer of Jabez your own? What’s keeping you from a wonderful life?

- A. I need to tell you that all the elements of the prayer of Jabez have an underlying assumption. It’s a critically important assumption. To pray, “Take me, use me, and help me” assumes that you believe in God and that you trust Him. You see, the wonderful life as God designed it is simply not available to those who don’t believe.

You say, “Well, I believe there is a God. Isn’t that enough?” Not really. Two thousand

years ago, God reached out to us in the Person of Jesus Christ, inviting us to receive Him, to trust Him. Believing in Jesus makes the prayer of Jabez possible.

If you'd like to know more about what it means to trust Jesus, I invite you to let us know by marking the appropriate box on the Connection Card on your chair and dropping it in the little wooden box in the back. Or simply ask me after the service. It would be our privilege to help you discover a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

- B. Many of you already believe in Jesus, but you still don't seem to be tapping into the wonderful life. What's the problem? What's keeping you from taking the prayer of Jabez as your own?

I wonder: Are you afraid?

1. Are you afraid of praying, "Bless me; take me" and jumping into the river of God because you just don't know what God would do with you or where God would take you? Are you afraid of giving up control and being harmed?

Me, too.

2. Are you afraid to pray, "Enlarge my territory; use me" because you're afraid you might be overwhelmed with responsibility? Are you afraid of trading *your* life agenda for *His*?

Me, too.

3. Are you afraid to pray, "Oh, that Your hand would be with me; Help me" because you're afraid it just won't work? Are you afraid that if you stop long enough to pray, you'll never catch up to where you want to be?

Me, too.

The prayer of Jabez is a fearful prayer. It goes against the grain. It flies in the face of our self-protective, self-sufficient, self-governed, self-centered way of life. Surrender is scary.

- C. But, many of us are old enough to realize something that we don't like to admit: Our own efforts to make a wonderful life ain't workin'. When you hit thirty-something, forty-something, fifty something, that haunting reality emerges: Our own wonderful-life plan is a bust.
- D. Do you want a wonderful life? I mean the real thing. The wonderful life that God intends. Do you want that?

Don't let fear keep you from jumping in and asking for it, as Jabez did. In ► Isaiah

41:10, God Himself encourages us to jump in, saying,

^{NKJ} Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”