

The Prayer of Jabez – It's not the Model Prayer

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Prayer of Jabez

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Bible Text: 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

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I am going to ask you, please, to turn in your Bibles to 1 Chronicles chapter four. We have here a genealogy and in the midst of it we come to verse nine, speaking of the sons of Judah it says in verse nine:

And Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, "Because I bore him with pain." Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from harm, that it may not pain me!" And God granted him what he requested.¹

Let's pray together.

Dear heavenly Father, we ask now your blessing upon the reading of your Word, Lord, the truths that we will share tonight from your Word. We pray that you would speak to our hearts. Lord, help us to faithfully do what you have called us to do in 1 Thessalonians chapter 21, to examine everything carefully and to hold fast to that which is good.

Lord, may you glorify yourself in this service, may you magnify your Son Jesus Christ in our thoughts as we declare your truth tonight. Lord, may you convince where convincing is needed. Lord, may you lead to repentance where there is sin and disobedience toward you. Father, for anyone with us tonight who is not a Christian, may tonight be used by you, Lord, to lead to their salvation. We ask you this all in Jesus' name. Amen.

There is a movement sweeping across the country and, indeed, it is beginning to have influence all over the world. It is a movement that was started by a book that has been written about the prayer that we just read in 1 Chronicles chapter four verses nine and 10. The name of the book is *The Prayer of Jabez* and the author is Bruce Wilkinson.

¹ 1 Chronicles 4:9-10.

To say that it is an extremely popular book at the moment would be an understatement. At last check, July 26, 2001, at the website of the book, the book by Bruce Wilkinson had sold 7,400,000 copies and they had 5,734,000 more to ship at the end of July.

And a mention in his next book *Secrets of the Vine* had already sold 2,200,000 copies. The book has been advertised in connection with the Billy Graham ministries. It has been promoted by the Focus on the Family ministry. There have been churches that started with the book as an impetus and kind of guiding principle, sort of a strategy. There are pastors that are encouraging their entire congregation to begin to pray the prayer of Jabez on behalf of their ministries. In fact, as I will share in just a moment, the website lays out a ministry strategy whereby not only can an entire church join together in praying the prayer of Jabez, but they encourage us to call upon our city to join together individuals in the city, Christians in the city to join together and pray the prayer of Jabez. There are prayer of Jabez conferences that are scheduled all over the country. In fact, tonight in the city of Houston at a church Bruce Wilkinson is speaking about the book that he has authored. September the 7th and 8th he will, along with Beth Moore, be at Lakewood Church. That, by the way, is not an advertisement encouraging you to attend.

And as they advertise the conference they say you are only a prayer away from a revolutionary new mindset in God.

There are websites dedicated to the book. There are testimonials all over the internet in response to the book. It is not uncommon for these testimonies and stories to be called Jabez testimonies and for people to talk about Jabez appointments. In fact, again, the website, the official website Prayer of Jabez dot com that is how they refer to these testimonies. They have a whole list of them Jabez testimonies.

Not only can you get the book, there are many other products being promoted on the website, in bookstores associated with the book. You can get the leather bound *Prayer of Jabez* for 15.99, the *Prayer of Jabez* devotional for 10.99, the *Prayer of Jabez* journal for 10.99, the *Prayer of Jabez* Bible study for 4.99, the *Prayer of Jabez* Bible study leader's edition for 6.99, the *Prayer of Jabez* gift edition for 16.99, the *Prayer of Jabez* for teens, the teen edition for 9.99 and the *Prayer of Jabez* audio for 8.99.

Quite a product list given these two verses, wouldn't you say?

How are these products being promoted on the website? Well, the entire series is promoted under the heading, "The breakthrough series," but under the various products, under the audio Jabez it says "Join Bruce Wilkinson to discover how the remarkable prayer of a little known Bible hero can release God's favor, power and protection. You will see how one daily prayer can help you leave the past behind and break through to the life you were meant to live."

Let me just insert a thought here. The promoters want to leave the impression, the definite impression, despite any claim to the contrary, that this prayer is a special prayer that brings special effects. That is why they say, "One daily prayer. You will see how one

daily prayer can help you leave the past behind and break through to the life you were meant to live.”

Under the devotional it says, “Takes you even further in a personal encounter with God’s extravagant best for you, daily readings, inspiring quotes, practical suggestions and problem solving will enrich your resolve to take more territory for God.”

Under the Bible study it says, “It reveals how to make the Jabez prayer a lifetime habit. In a four week study readers will broaden their understanding of the four components of the Jabez prayer by investigating key Scripture passages and learning how to apply them to their lives.”

I will show you tonight that, again, the book is intended to form a prayer habit. And we will make more comment about that in a moment.

Troubling to me, I guess, more than anything was under the teen edition where it says, “Now teens can receive extravagant blessing also as they discover in peer based stories, supporting Scriptures and interactive questions, how to pray the remarkable prayer of the obscure Bible hero of 1 Chronicles 4:10.”

I don’t know about you, but that should trouble us, beloved, when he says, “Now,” or the promoters say, “Now teens can have this extravagant blessing also,” as if they were shut off somehow from the blessing of God until the teen edition came out. Now they can get in on it.

Is it any wonder with such extravagant claims that the book is number one on the *New York Times* best seller list, number one on the *USA Today* best seller list, number one on the *Publisher’s Weekly* list, number one on the Barnes and Noble’s list, number four on the Amazon dot com top 100 books list and number one on the Amazon dot com hard back non fiction best seller list?

On the website under church ministry opportunities it says this. “Thousands of churches are praying the prayer of Jabez and seeing amazing results. Here are some ideas to help your congregation break through to the blessed life.”

Now, beloved, I don’t want to shut you off from the blessed life. So we ought to listen to this, right? Thirty day challenge. Organize a church wide or city wide effort to have everyone pray the prayer of Jabez for 30 days. Post prayer of Jabez testimonies in your church bulletin. Play a video of author Bruce Wilkinson talking about the prayer of Jabez. Contact us about prayer of Jabez pocket cards to give out to the congregation. Audio CD with inspirational messages from Bruce Wilkinson. Tell us what you have done in your church to encourage patrons to pray the prayer of Jabez.

You do know what a patron is, someone who buys the goods or uses the services offered by an institution.

Beloved, the Church is not made up of patrons. The Church is made up of believers who form a spiritual body and are a part of the family of God.

The site advertising coming soon to the site are Jabez songs, songs that were inspired by the prayer of Jabez. I don't have one for you tonight. May try out for the CD, who knows?

It also says not the site where you can see video testimonies. It says thousands experience God's miraculous intervention. And those testimonies are not any more encouraging than what I have already read.

You know, if this was just a book popular in denominations and in churches that did not claim to be Bible believing, that would be one thing. But this book is sweeping through Baptist life and finding its influence in Baptist churches and churches that claim to be Bible believing that are not Baptist. And it deserves to be examined.

Is the prayer of Jabez, was it ever intended by God to be a model prayer for believers today? Was it ever intended by God to be a prayer that we repeat not only on a regular basis, but we will see in a moment, the book encourages us to repeat the prayer on a daily basis. Was this God's intention? That is what we are going to look at tonight.

Let me begin with some preliminary remarks. First of all, I want to make clear what the motivation here is not. This is not an attack on Bruce Wilkinson. I don't know Bruce Wilkinson. I don't know really a lot about his doctrine or anything else. As far as I know, I believe we ought to accept Bruce Wilkinson at face value as a brother who loves the Lord and loves the Word of God and perhaps put this book forth with the best of motives, no doubt. So this is not an attack on Bruce Wilkinson.

Second, this is not... I do not have a problem. We should not have a problem with the prayer of Jabez. I think that is obvious, isn't it?

1 Chronicles chapter four verses nine and 10, what is it? It is the Word of God. It is inspired of God and:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.²

There is no problem with the prayer of Jabez and no doubt there are principles that can be gleaned from those verses that will benefit our walk with God. So the problem is not with the prayer itself.

I also want to make clear that the things we are going to talk about tonight, even though some of them will be specific to the book, the lessons that I believe we need to learn as a

² 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

church go far beyond this particular book. It has to do with every other book like it and every other movement like this one and every other thing, every other trend that seems to fly through the church every so many years.

There is a discernment that we need to develop. There is a way of looking at things when we have a handle on the Word of God that needs to characterize our life. And so this goes beyond this particular book.

Something else I would like to say is this is an examination that is needed. It is not wasted effort. Sometimes people take the attitude, well, why do we even take a Sunday night to address a book like this? I mean, couldn't we just keep on preaching the Word?

Well, first of all, I hope to preach the Word tonight. But in addition to that, this is not wasted effort. We haven't said anything about it for a long time, but there comes a point when it continues to gain influence and there are churches around us holding conferences on it and no doubt you are running into people, maybe even family members, who love the book and recommend the book. I think that deserves our attention.

And 1 Thessalonians chapter five verse 21 says, "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."³

And my role and my calling as an under shepherd is to shepherd the flock of God, to be a guardian as it were, to watch for souls. And a part of doing that is not only to preach sound doctrine, but to test what is being taught in the name of Christendom by sound doctrine and help God's people discern right from wrong. That is one of the roles of a pastor. And so this is not wasted effort tonight.

Now I will just say right up front because I like cutting to the chase, I have a problem with the book. I do not recommend the book. I did not find the book edifying to my own life. Needless to say we will not be organizing the 30 day effort any time soon.

So I believe that even though perhaps there are some good things said in the book and some things that could benefit someone perhaps, I believe over all the effect of the book is so much more negative than positive, I could not recommend it to anybody.

And I want to tell you why. I want to give you some reasons tonight. If you have got a pen or a pencil I want you to jot these down and think through them, not just tonight, but as you have more time because I know the book will be recommended to you or perhaps you have already read it. Perhaps you have already found it enjoyable and if so then think with me tonight and think if you can do this—and we all ought to be able to do this—set your prejudices and what you have already determined for a moment off to the side and just give me a fair hearing and listen to what I am going to share with you and think about it in light of the Scriptures.

Here is the first thing that troubles and I believe should trouble all of us about the book.

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Number one it makes a model prayer out of a prayer that there is no evidence in Scripture was ever intended to be a model. What he does in this book is he take the prayer of Jabez that we have just read and he makes it a model prayer. And there is no evidence in the entire Old Testament... and get this. Number one, there is no evidence that Jabez every prayed this prayer more than once. The only record we have is of Jabez praying this one time. There is no evidence that he ever repeated it again. There is certainly no evidence that he repeated it daily or on a regular basis. So right away we have done something with the prayer that there is no evidence that Jabez did with the prayer.

In addition to that, you don't find this prayer anywhere else in the Old Testament. There was no evidence that it was ever repeated in the Old Testament. And when you come to the New Testament and you come to the teaching of the apostles, there is no evidence that the apostles ever taught anyone this prayer or taught them to repeat this prayer.

In all the New Testament letters in all the gospel records in the book of Acts, you never find reference to the prayer of Jabez. In addition to that, if you go back in church history you will find occasional sermons preached on the topic. In fact, Charles Spurgeon preached a message on the prayer of Jabez, a totally different message than what you will find in this book. But he preached a message on it. Yet you will never find anywhere in Church history that this was ever used as a model prayer.

So if the author has discovered the key to breaking through to the blessing of God, you understand, he is the first one. All through the Old Testament, all through the New Testament, all through Church history, he is the first one to uncover this nugget that the Church has been missing.

I want to say that nobody ever does that and he hasn't. But now think about something else, beloved, we do have a model prayer. In Matthew chapter six our Lord said this in verse six. Let's back up to verse five. Matthew six verse five.

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.⁴

And, by the way, before our Lord ever gives the model prayer do you notice he sets it opposite the praying of the heathens. And he says one of the characteristics of the prayers of the heathen is they are characterized by repetition, mindless repetition of words, formulas in prayer. And our Lord said, "Our praying is not to be like that."

⁴ Matthew 6:5-8.

In fact our praying is very personal as you... and it is relational as you can see at the very beginning of the pattern of prayer that he gives us.

Look at verse eight.

“Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then...”⁵

Now notice this. What are the next three words? “In this [what?] way.”⁶

He does not say, “Pray these words.”

Even when our Lord gives us the model prayer and notice, this is given to us by divine directive. Nowhere does God say of the Jabez prayer, “Pray this way.” But of this prayer, our almighty God in his inspired Word says, “Pray in this way.”

But even then when he gives us the model prayer, it is just intended to be an outline of prayer. It is an instructive pattern of prayer. It was never meant to be repeated word for word. That is why he doesn’t say, “Pray these words. Rather he says, “Pray in this way or pray in this manner.”

Here is a teaching tool he is about to give us. Here is an outline of prayer to let us know what the character of true prayer is and what certain aspects of true prayer should be, not something to be repeated every day.

Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’⁷

You will notice in this pattern of prayer there is no mention of the extension of borders, right? And so this prayer does not... if you look at 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 and look at this prayer, this pattern of prayer does not match Jabez’ prayer.

Now if the Jabez prayer was meant to be our pattern for prayer today, if it was meant to be our model of prayer, when the disciples asked the Lord how to pray, don’t you think he would have simply referred them to 1 Chronicles 4:9-10? But he doesn’t. He doesn’t.

So the first problem I had with the book is it makes a pattern, it makes a model out of a prayer that there is no indication in the Scriptures was ever intended by God to be the

⁵ Matthew 6:8-9.

⁶ Matthew 6:9.

⁷ Matthew 6:9-13.

model. And while he makes that prayer the model, he never even makes reference to the disciples' prayer that was given by divine directive as a model.

That... and that really we could just say, sermon over, go home, right? I mean, that is enough. That is enough. But there is more. There is more.

Second, it teaches us—and I made reference to this—it teaches us to use the prayer of Jabez in a way that even our Lord's model prayer was not to be used. The prayer of Jabez was not given as a model, but even if you were to say it was given as a model, I won't grant that, but if we were to grant that, we are encouraged in the book to pray that prayer verbatim every day.

Our Lord did not even teach us to do that with this model. He doesn't teach us to pray it word for word and he doesn't teach us to pray it every day.

I am not overstating it. Let me share this with you. This is from the bottom of page 10, page 11. He says this.

"I picked up my Bible," talking about when he first as made familiar with the prayer of Jabez, he says, "I picked up my Bible and read verse 10, the prayer of Jabez. Something in his prayer would explain the mystery."

He is talking about why did God bless this man. What brought this incredible favor from God? He is looking for the answer. He said, "Something in this prayer will unveil mystery and had to. Pulling a chair up to the yellow counter, I bent over my Bible and reading the prayer over and over I searched with all my heart for the future God had for someone as ordinary as I. The next morning I prayed Jabez' prayer word for word and the next and the next. Thirty years later I haven't stopped. If you were to ask me what sentence other than my prayer for salvation has revolutionized my life and ministry the most, I would tell you that it was the cry of a gimper named Jabez who is still remembered not for what he did, but for what he prayed and for what happened next."

So there the author tells us he prayed that prayer word for word that day, the next day, the next day and has been doing it of 30 years. The Lord did not even tell us to do that with the disciples' prayer.

And then when you go to page 16 he writes this.

"What I have to share with you has been opening up lives to God's mighty working for many years. Recently I as in Dallas to teach on the Jabez blessing to an audience of 9000. Later over lunch a man said to me, 'Bruce, I heard you preach the message of Jabez 15 years ago and I haven't stopped praying it. The change had been so overwhelming I have just never stopped.' Across the table another friend agreed. He said he had been praying Jabez' little prayer for 10 years with similar results. The man next to him, a heart surgeon from Indianapolis said he had been praying it for five."

In wonder what the significance of him being a heart surgeon.

Anyway, "I told them. 'Friends, I have been praying Jabez for more than half my life.'"

Then, if you wonder whether that is just his personal testimony, page 86, making his... chapter seven making Jabez mine.

"I challenge you to make the Jabez prayer for blessing part of the daily fabric of your life. to do that I encourage you to follow unwaveringly the plan outlined here for the next 30 days. By the end of that time you will be noticing significant changes in your life and the prayer will be on its way to becoming a treasured life long habit. Number one, pray the Jabez prayer every morning and keep a record of your daily prayer by marking off a calendar or a chart you make especially for that purpose."

I have humorous thoughts running through my mind. I am sorry. If you don't want to make the chart, we offer a journal for 10.99

Point number two. Write out the prayer and tape it in your Bible, in your day timer, on your bathroom mirror or some other place where you will be reminded of your new vision.

Three, re read this little book once each week during the next month asking God to show you important insights you may have missed.

Number four, tell one other person of your commitment to your new prayer habit and ask him or her to check up on you.

Number five, begin to keep a record of changes in your life, especially the divine appointments and new opportunities you can relate directly to the Jabez prayer.

Number six, start praying the Jabez prayer for your family friends and local church.

Daily habit, word for word, 30 years in his life. You make sure you do it for at least 30 days.

There is no such teaching ever in the New Testament, ever in the Old Testament taking any prayer and repeating it day after day after day.

There is a third reason we ought to have a problem with the book. And that is it teaches a poor handling of the Word of God. This is to me one of the most significant issues of all. If you handle the Word of God the same way this book handles the Word of God, you will mishandle the Word of God. It teaches poor, a poor handling of the Word of God.

You say, "In what ways?"

Let me give you some specific ways. Number one, you take a narrative and you make it normative. That is what you have in 1 Chronicles chapter four verses nine and 10 is historical narrative. God is telling us what Jabez did and what God did in response to Jabez' prayer. It is an historical record, divinely inspired, given to us for our spiritual profit, given to us for our spiritual learning, yes, but still it is not a doctrinal portion of Scripture. God is not telling us in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, "Now this is what I mean for you to do in my church."

That is not the intention of the passage. So what the author did is he took God's record of what Jabez did and what God did in reference to Jabez' prayer, in response to it. He takes that record and he says, "Now, this is what you ought to do every day."

So he takes narrative and he makes it normative.

Now if you and I do that with other narrative portions of Scripture do you realize where we might end up? I mean, if we go to historical narrative passages and we see where someone did something and God blessed it and then we say, "Now we are going to keep doing that," do you realize where we will end up?

Let me just show you one place. Go to Isaiah chapter 20. Let's see if we want to have a new evangelism strategy patterned after Isaiah. And look at verse one.

In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it, at that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips, and take your shoes off your feet." And he did so, going naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, "Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt."⁸

Anybody want to volunteer for the Isaiah evangelism ministry?

God told him to do it. He did it. God was honored by his obedience, but I am telling you. That is not to be normative. That is not to be carried on. Amen?

So he takes a narrative portion and he makes it normative.

There is a second thing he does that has to do with how you handle the Word of God. He has taken a selective example of prayer and answered prayer and he has exalted it above every other example of answered prayer without any warrant. There is no doubt that 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 is an illustration of God answering prayer. Thanks be to God he answers prayer. Amen? No doubt about that.

⁸ Isaiah 20:1-4.

But what gives us the right and the mandate to take this one example of answered prayer and say, "Now this is the prayer that is to be repeated every day," when there are so many other prayers in the Old Testament that God answered the exact same way and we don't make them the prayer to pray every day.

Let me give you some examples. Go to 2 Chronicles chapter one. Look at verse seven.

In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask what I shall give you."

And Solomon said to God, "Thou hast dealt with my father David with great lovingkindness, and hast made me king in his place. Now, O LORD God, Thy promise to my father David is fulfilled; for Thou hast made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can rule this great people of Thine?"

And God said to Solomon, "Because you had this in mind, and did not ask for riches, wealth, or honor, or the life of those who hate you, nor have you even asked for long life, but you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge, that you may rule My people, over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge have been granted to you. And I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings who were before you has possessed, nor those who will come after you."⁹

There you have prayer. And there you have answered prayer. Why aren't we praying that prayer every day?

Look at 1 Kings chapter 17. And look at verse 17.

Now it came about after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to put my son to death!"

And he said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. And he called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, hast Thou also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?"

⁹ 2 Chronicle 1:7-12.

Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD, and said, "O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child's life return to him."

And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive."

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."¹⁰

That would be a great evangelism ministry, too, wouldn't it? People are convinced of the truthfulness of the words that we speak. They are convinced of the fact there we are men and women of God. Why don't we just prayer this prayer every day?

And then if you look at 1 Samuel chapter one, look at verse nine.

Then Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. And she, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."

Now it came about, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli was watching her mouth. As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk.

Then Eli said to her, "How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you."

But Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant as a worthless woman; for I have spoken until now out of my great concern and provocation."

Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him."

¹⁰ 1 Kings 17:17-24.

And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

Then they arose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned again to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah had relations with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. And it came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD."¹¹

Now I know that in this church body and other dear Christian brothers and sisters I have known through the years, I know there are people who have found out they have not been able to have children. Why don't they just pray Hannah's prayer every day?

You see, all these examples and many others, do you know what they are? They are examples of prayer, God hearing, God answering in narrative portions of Scripture. They were never intended to be made normative prayers that you pray day after day after day.

But that is what the author has done.

By the way, let me mention one other if I could and then we are going to kind of speed up. Let me mention one other prayer that isn't prayed very often. This is bother John Mahon's favorite. If he ever writes a book and gets rich, you will know, you know, it started here.

Look at the book of Habakkuk chapter three. This entire chapter is a prayer. I would encourage you to read the entire chapter. But I want to point out one aspect of this prayer.

Habakkuk three verse one, "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth."¹²

So I want you to see this is a prayer that you have recorded in this third chapter.

Now look down in verse 17.

Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in
the stalls, Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my
salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like
hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.¹³

Amen?

¹¹ 1 Samuel 1:9-20.

¹² Habakkuk 3:1.

¹³ Habakkuk 3:17-19.

Even if your borders are not extended, in fact, if everything goes wrong and nothing bears fruit and the cattle don't live and everything else, do you know what? I am going to rejoice in the God of my salvation because he is my strength. He is my strength.

And so not only does he take a narrative and make it normative, he takes one example of answered prayer in the Old Testament and he ignores all the other examples of answered prayer in the Old Testament. He doesn't take any of those other prayers and say, "Pray them ever day," but he takes this one. And he says, "Pray it every day."

Let me give you a third thing to think about in terms of how we handle the Word of God. In order to teach this prayer every day you have to spiritualize aspects of the prayer to make it a normal part of every day living.

One of the things we ought to guard against as we handle the Word of God is allegorizing passages that are not allegory. When you take literal accounts and you spiritualize the details without New Testament warrant... And it is true, you have some New Testament passages that the Holy Spirit takes Old Testament facts and makes spiritual application. Now you are on solid ground when you do that.

In the book of Galatians you will read about Hagar and Sarah and there the Holy Spirit takes the details of Sarah and Hagar and spiritualizes and makes application to the Church and Israel and that is absolutely fine. But when take an Old Testament passage that has not been spiritualized in the New Testament and you spiritualize it, you allegorize it, now you are on dangerous ground. And, see, this is what the author does in the book. The one request which is, "Extend my border," how do you apply that? What you have in 1 Chronicles chapter four is a genealogy of those descended in the line of David. And so the extension of a border had to do with god's covenant promises.

Now how do you take that extending of a border that Jabez was talking about and how do you make that a daily prayer? Well, here is how the author does it on page 31.

He says this. "When Jabez cried out to God, 'Enlarge my territory,' he was looking at his present circumstances and concluding, 'Surely I was born for more than this.' As a farmer or herdsman he looked over the spread that his family had passed down to him, ran his eye down the fence lines, visited the boundary markers, calculated the potential and made a decision. 'Everything you have put under my care, oh Lord, take it and enlarge it.' If Jabez had walked on Wall Street he might have prayed, 'Lord, increase the value of my investment portfolios.' When I talk to presidents of companies, I often talk to them about this particular mindset. When Christian executives ask me, 'Is it right for me to ask God for more business?' My response is, 'Absolutely. If you are doing your business God's way, it is not only right to ask for more, but he is wanting for you to ask. Your business is the territory God has entrusted to you. He wants you to accept it as a significant opportunity to touch individual lives, the business community and the larger world for his glory, asking him to enlarge that opportunity brings him only delight.'"

Now one of the things also I want to say is there tends to be this mixing of motives throughout the book. I mean, if we are asking God to take your business opportunities and use them for ministry opportunities, hey, I can say amen to that. But, you notice, that is not what he talked about at first.

Should I ask God to increase my portfolio values?

Well, certainly, God would certainly want to do that for you, because that is your territory. And you need to ask God to extend your borders.

Well, whenever we interpret a passage of Scripture in such a way that it puts us in direct contradiction to another passage, we have got to be careful because in Matthew chapter six verse 11 in our Lord's pattern of prayer for us, the disciples' prayer, we are taught to pray in this way, "Give us this [what?] day our [what?] daily bread."¹⁴

Lord, what I need are... you know what I need, first of all. I am not praying as the heathen do. You know what I need and I ask you meet my necessities. Lord, you know what my daily bread is and I ask you to meet it.

But in addition to that Proverbs chapter 30 verse five says this.

Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.

Two things I asked of Thee, Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God.¹⁵

There the writer of Proverbs says, "God, you know what I need and don't give me what you know I couldn't handle on the too much side of the scale. And don't give me what you know I would fail under in the too little side of the scale. God, you know what I can handle and I trust you to provide what I need."

Someone must not have taught him the prayer of Jabez because he would not have prayed in such a way.

So in order, you see, to make the extension of borders applicable to us, we have got to spiritualize that. We have got to allegorize that.

There is something else that has to do with how we handle the Word of God. You see, in order to do this, to take one prayer in the Old Testament and make it a series, you have

¹⁴ Matthew 6:11.

¹⁵ Proverbs 30:5-9.

got to create a context that communicates to your audience. I mean, obviously we are not in Jabez' situation. So how do you communicate this to our audience? Well, here is an example of the context, page 22.

Let me back up.

Despite his dismal prospects, Jabez found a way out. He had grown up hearing about the God of Israel who had freed his forefathers from slavery, rescued them from powerful enemies and established them in a land of plenty. By the time he was an adult, Jabez believed and fervently hoped in the God of miracles and new beginnings.

And, by the way, beloved, do you realize that you read about Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 that is all there is in the Bible about him. There is nothing else. That is it. So why not ask for one? That is what he did. He prayed the biggest, most improbably request imaginable. Oh, that you would bless me indeed. I love the urgency, the personal vulnerability in this plea. In Hebrew adding "indeed" to this prayer was like adding five exclamation points or writing the request in capital letters and underlining it.

In my mind's eye I picture Jabez standing before a massive gate recessed into a sky high wall weighed down by the sorrow of his past and the dreariness of his present. He sees before him only impossibility, a future shut off. But raising his hands to heaven he cries out, "Father, oh Father, please bless me and what I really mean is bless me a lot."

With the last word the transformation begins. He hears a tremendous crack, then a groan, then a rumble as a huge gate swings away from him in a wide arc. There stretching to the horizon are fields of blessings and Jabez steps forward into another life.

Where is that at?

It is certainly not in the text, is it? And so in order to make this a daily thing, you have got to create a context that communicates to your audience.

There is a fifth thing that has to do with how we handle the Word of God. If you practice what the prayer of Jabez practices, you end up searching for the obscure and the hidden things of the Bible instead of paying attention to the things that are clear.

Now I say with sadness, this is what we have been doing in Baptist churches now for decades. We will ignore the clear teaching of the Word of God, things that we ought to be bowing our hearts to and submitting to. We will ignore that and ask questions about the most obscure possible passage we can find. And you have to wonder if it is not a defense mechanism, if it is not a way of really avoiding truth. We don't want to deal with the obvious so we are going to ask questions about the obscure.

And I believe this is one of the real... what is the word I am looking for when you draw to the book? I think one of the real attention getters when it gets to the book, is that it is a prayer that is uttered in obscurity. Here you have this genealogy and you are heading

down there and not much is said about any of these people and then all of the sudden there is these two verses about this one man and then the genealogy continues. And so the author says, “See there? God put that nugget there of the special purpose. It wouldn’t be there otherwise.”

And so here is this hidden, secret nugget that really no one has tapped into, like we are going to show you how to tap into.

I admit those are my words, not the author’s words, but to me when you consider the website, when you consider the breakthrough series, when you consider breaking through to the blessed life, all of it communicates the idea: here is a key. Here is something that is going to allow you break through. And it is found in a very obscure place in the Bible.

I will say one more thing about how we handle the Word of God. Something else he has to do is he uses experience to validate his message.

You see, we ought not to ever say, “This is the truth.”

How do you know it is the truth? Because I have experienced it.

No, this is true because the Word of God declares it. And as you practice any sound method of interpretation you will come to the same conclusion. I can demonstrate it. I can defend it. I can illustrate it from the Scriptures. I can compare it with the rest of the bible and it holds together. That is how you communicate truth, not this is true and let me tell you five stories that prove it is true.

But that is what he does here. Page 11.

“In the pages of this little book I want to introduce you to the amazing truths in Jabez’ prayer for blessing and prepare you to expect God’s astounding answers to it as a regular part of your life experience. How do I know that it will significantly impact you? Because of my experience and the testimony of hundreds of others around the world with whom I shared these principles.”

I know you will because I have.

So why do I have a problem with the book? First of all it makes a model out of a prayer that was never intended to be a model. Second, it uses that supposed model in a way that we were not even told to use the model which is repeating it word for word every day. Third, if you practice what you find in this book, it teaches you wrong principles about how to handle the Word of God.

Let me give you a fourth thing. It teaches a false concept of prayer. What is prayer if it is not communion with God? Prayer is not a magic wand that if you wave it the right way you get results.

It is true the Bible says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”¹⁶

And it is true that God responds in answer to prayer, but prayer is never presented in the Word of God as some kind of formula that moves the almighty. Prayer is a redeemed person communing with the God who has redeemed his soul.

That is why even the disciples’ prayer is a pattern of prayer because we were meant to pray from a redeemed heart, lifting words to God that flow from us, not words that have been memorized and are just repeated.

You see, as soon as you advocate repeating a prayer you have moved out of the realm of communion into the realm of mysticism, magic and pragmatism, just getting results.

Let me give you an illustration. What if I see you this morning and I use some very specific words. I see Dion Snyder this morning. I say, “Hell, Dion, did you sleep well last night? Good to see you.”

Dion says, “Yes, I did, Rich. I slept well last night. By the way, I didn’t tell you this, but I have got a check here for your for 5000 dollars.”

“Wow. Thank you, Dion.”

Tomorrow morning I see Dion and I say, “Hell, Dion. Did you sleep well? Good to see you this morning.”

And I repeat that every day. Dion sees me for 30 straight days and I repeat the same words.

Before long don’t you think Dion is insulted?

“Rich, what, are you just trying to get something from me? I mean, are you manipulating me? I mean, do we not have a relationship? Can you not talk to me?”

That is why prayer was never meant to be a repetition of words. It is communion. It is a relationship. It is not something you learn to get something you want. It is communing with the God who has saved you.

And so it teaches a false concept of prayer.

Something else it does. It creates a division among believers because it promises a key to blessing that others might not know.

¹⁶ James 5:16.

I men we ought to be grateful, I guess, that 10 million have gone out. Well, what about the millions that don't have it? If we had to wait for the teen edition for the teens get in on it, what about people who don't even have the book?

This is one of the clearest implications of the book, that there is blessing waiting for you that you have discovered that you will discover in this little prayer, breaking through to the blessed life.

The Bible, on the other hand, makes clear that every believer already possesses all the blessings anyone could imagine.

See, it teaches a whole wrong perspective of the Christian life. You are not a beggar begging God for blessing. You are a people who have been redeemed by precious blood, reconciled to God, have a standing in grace and according to Ephesians chapter one verse three, you already possess every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us,"¹⁷ not who will bless us, "who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."¹⁸

2 Peter chapter one verse three says, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."¹⁹

You are already blessed. At one point he talks about standing at the edge of a river and you are not just satisfied any more with one drink a day. And now you want to jump into the river of grace and let God just carry you along in this river of blessing.

What that pictures us as is a people who are outside of the river of blessing, sitting here content with crumbs and now we have the opportunity with this little prayer to jump into the ocean of God's blessing when Ephesians chapter one verses three says you already are in the ocean of God's blessing. In fact, it is an infinite blessing that is already to your spiritual account.

You are not waiting for some Gnostic key to get you into more blessing. God has already given you the one in whom we have all blessing and his name is Jesus. If you want the answer, the door to blessing, his name is Jesus and when you have him, you have all blessing.

Well, pastor, doesn't it say you have not because you ask not?

Go to the book of James. Read that passage in its context and it is right in the middle and it is right in the middle of a passage. We are going to deal with it in the book of James on

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ 2 Peter 1:3.

selfishness. And a people who are trying to fight and scratch and claw to get for themselves what they ought to be taking a humble position of trusting God for what they need.

Here is another thing. I have said this so I am not going to spend much time on this one. It teaches a formula. It teaches a method that then obligates God.

If you pray this prayer, God must, God will.

Again, I am not overstating it. Here we go. This is in the preface.

“Dear reader, I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers.”

I guess no matter what your spiritual condition is. I guess no matter whether you are saved or not. He says, “Dear reader,” what if the person who picks this book up is lost? You will learn a prayer God always answers.

A method, a formula that then obligates God.

Page 29 says, “Through a simple believing prayer you can now change your future. You can change what happens one minute from now.

I want to close with this. It is true there is more that could be said about the book that I haven't said. I know there is. But let me wrap it up and just say that beyond just this book, to me what saddens my heart and I am telling you times as I look at the site and saw the stuff, I just felt like I wanted to cry, because what saddens my heart is it points to some real, real disease in the church of our day, troubling churches of our time.

I want to give you three, three ills that this movement and other movements like it, the Church growth movement and all the other movements point to.

Number one, there is no discernment. There is no discernment. What should be obvious to God's people it seems is not obvious anymore.

I say it as humbly as I know how, but if you know the Word of God and handle it rightly, if you are someone who loves to study the Bible verse by verse and you come to understand how God gave his Word, it should not take 15 minutes to know that what you have here is not something that is real. It shouldn't take long.

But what is... what should be obvious today seems to not be obvious.

Why is that? How could that happen in our churches?

Hebrews, I think, chapter five answers. Verse 12 says this.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.²⁰

The writer of Hebrews is telling us that if you just stay in the milk of the Word you remain a spiritual baby. But if you get into the meat of the Word and you mature in the Lord and you grow in the Lord, what happens? It is as you use the Word of God, as you practice the Word of God, not just have it sitting on your shelf at home collecting dust, not just carried around in your car, not just bring it to the church service and to your Sunday school class, but as you read it on your own and take it into your heart and live it out every day and compare every thing you see with this book, by use of the Word of God you are able to see right from wrong, good from evil. And we have taken as the church of our day and made entire congregations because we have learned it is good for business. And now we have entire congregations that almost anything can be introduced from the pulpit and they don't know good from bad.

They have an appetite that is without discernment. It is frightening.

Here is a second thing. And this may even be more frightening. Not only is there a lack of discernment in our churches, but there seems to be no desire for discernment. What does it hurt?

You see, that is the question you hear whenever you talk about something like this. Or, as I heard two weeks ago, when one of our members encouraged his family member to come hear this sermon, that is Legalism.

What is wrong with them? We may even have some good testimonies who talk about how it is has worked.

I think about Jeremiah chapter five verse 31. It says, "The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority,"²¹ not God's. And listen to this. "And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?"²²

We have moved away in our churches from a deep preaching of the Word of God, from a careful preaching of the Word of God, from verse by verse exposition. I talked to a good pastor friend of mine this last week. I have known him all my life. He is a faithful man of God. He said to me, he said, "You know, Rich," he said, "I am a Southern Baptist." And he said, "I am grateful for what the Lord has done at Southern Baptist Life."

²⁰ Hebrews 5:12-14.

²¹ Jeremiah 5:31.

²² Ibid.

These are his words, not mine. He said, "But, Rich, we are shallow." He says, "We Southern Baptists are shallow." And he said, "And I am talking about the preachers." And he said, "The reason why people preach error is because they are not preaching the book, because if you force yourself to go verse by verse through the Bible and to dig out the details of the text, it keeps you straight and it sharpens your discernment."

What is scary is not only is there a lack of discernment, but when you say, "Listen, there is something wrong with this. I don't care if 10 million people have bought it. I don't care if it is sweeping through our churches. There is something wrong with this and I can demonstrate what is wrong with it."

People say, "I don't care. What does it hurt?"

Anything that doesn't line up with the Word of God hurts. It hurts. And what has happened in our churches is we have diseases that are eating away at the inside of us. We don't even know how they got introduced, but I can tell you how they get out. It is the Scriptures.

And we have churches that the diseases need to be brought out by the Word of God. And things need to be set in order. You think about the book... and here is another amazing thing. People often will raise verses. For example, from the book of 1 Corinthians to demonstrate the righteousness of their position. What they forget is the church at Corinth was a church in total disorder. They take not a model church, they take a church in total disarray.

Do you know there is not one reference to an elder in the book of 1 Corinthians? Do you know why? Because they didn't have God's leadership structure even recognized in that fellowship. They had leaders in the church, but they weren't... they did not know what it was to follow the biblical pattern.

When you go to the book of Titus Paul says specifically to Titus, "I want you to set things in what? Order." And he says, "I want you to appoint elders in every city."

Do we want to know what is right?

And there is a third thing. And this is the preeminent thing. What these kinds of movements reveal in my opinion is a blatant lack of understanding concerning who our God is and what his church is.

If you believe the Bible you know our God is a sovereign God. He cannot be, he will not be manipulated. You cannot force the work of the Holy Spirit. And when you talk about the Church growth movement, what is it? If you learn the methods, if you learn the formulas then church growth will come.

Where is the sovereignty of God? Where is the work of the Holy Spirit? Oh, we have learned, you see, we have learned the methods that the Holy Spirit responds to.

Well, that method isn't in the New Testament. And, you know, he was doing a lot in the New Testament.

Why worry about it?

We have a prayer and it unleashes God's unbelievable blessing on your life.

Oh, but wait. That prayer isn't a pattern anywhere in the Old Testament. That prayer isn't a pattern anywhere in the New Testament. That prayer doesn't match the model prayer that we are given in the New Testament and that model prayer isn't to be repeated every day.

Oh, don't worry about it. Our God will not be manipulated. He is not just sitting around waiting for the right words or the right formula and then he releases his blessing. In fact, stop and think about this. He is the God, according to the New Testament, who when you don't know how to pray, he intercedes on your behalf with words you can't even utter.

I don't know Jabez' prayer. That's all right. Our God knows, doesn't he? He knows. The Church...

Listen, church. The Church is not a business. It is the family of God and we are not looking for the next hot trend and we are not measuring our action by what seems to work. The trend catching, pragmatic mindset that has absolutely flooded the church is not from the Bible.

So it is not an attack on the author. It is not saying that there is not anything that is good in the book. It is saying there is much cause for concern and I can say I know with the full support of our elders that we do not recommend *The Prayer of Jabez*.

Let me ask you before we dismiss tonight. We talked about a book about some verses. But, you know, the most important thing that anybody in this place tonight could consider is this. Do you belong to God? Are you his child? Have you come to know him through faith in his Son Jesus Christ? The Bible declares bad news and good news to every human being. The bad news is this. You were born a sinner and the penalty for your sin is death. You not only choose to sin, but you are a sinner by nature. And because you are a sinner and God's standard is holy perfection, there is not one thing you could ever do to earn your way to heaven. But our God who is such a gracious, saving, loving God, he did something so that sinners like you and I could be saved. He gave his only begotten Son.

Jesus Christ who is eternal God came from heaven 2000 years ago, was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life on this earth for 33 years and died on a cross as a substitute for sinners. Three days after they put him in the tomb he was raised from the dead. He has ascended to the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit has been sent and God has sent out messengers with the gospel declaring this, that if you will repent of your sins and put your faith in Christ, you will be saved. God will forgive your sins. He will change

your wicked heart and make you a new creation and make you a member of his family forever.

Salvation is something that comes from God. A prayer does not change your life. An almighty, sovereign God changes your life. And when you come to see that you are lost and you call out to the living Son of God, the Bible gives you this good news in the book of Romans chapter 10 that if anyone will call on the name of the Lord, he shall be saved.

Now I want to ask you, have you ever done that? Have you ever come to understand your sinfulness? Have you ever come to understand your need for Christ? Have you received him as your Lord and Savior? And the good news is tonight we are about to have an invitation time.

If you have never come to Christ there are people who are ready to share with you and counsel with you and we invite you to come tonight. When the invitation is given you just come, meet me here and say, "Brother Richard..." that is my name, Richard, preacher, that is my need. I need to be saved. And there is someone here ready to speak with you.

If you are here looking for a church home, this is not a perfect church, but praise be to the Lord he is making it a good church and it is a place where you can be taught and you can grow. If the Lord would have you to be here, we would rejoice in your coming.

Let's bow together for prayer.

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for your Word and thank you for your Spirit. Thank you, Lord, that greater is he that is within us than he that is in the world. And because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we overcome all false teachers. Lord, may you lead us and guide us into all truth in accordance with your ministry in our lives. May you bless this time of decision, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.