The Prayer of Jabez

Questions of Faith
May 11, 2014
A Little Review

Jesus said: “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; (but) apart form me you can do nothing”  John 15:5

The third secret of the vine:
If your life bears much fruit, God will invite you to abide more deeply with Him.
Today the Prayer of Jabez

- Jabez was an Old Testament character that asked God for an opportunity to produce much fruit and he invited God to assist him in doing so.
- I Chronicles 4: 9-10
So from this we learn:

• Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.
• When Jabez was born his mother experienced a painful delivery.
• Jabez asked God to bless him and expand his territory.
• God granted his request.
Was it fair that Jabez should be given more territory?

• Yes! As long as God is in control!
• The Parable of the talents: the faithful servant was blessed with more responsibility.
• It is the very nature of God to bless us abundantly!
Who is in control here?

• Jabez was willing to let God be the senior partner!

• Wilkinson: “Oh God and King, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such a way that I may touch more lives for your glory. Let me do more for You!”
God leads us!

God encourages us
The magic formula for abundant living:

• My willingness and my weaknesses + God’s will and supernatural power = my expanded territory.

• Without putting God’s will and supernatural power into our lives we cannot achieve the abundant living God wants for us.
Examples:

• Sally Gresham and Beth Cayce + *God’s will and supernatural power* = The Divine Providence Training Center!

• Do you think Sally and Beth could have accomplished this on their own? No way!

• Second example: The disciples after Pentecost. Twelve insignificant men started a new church that changed the world!
“And keep me from evil”

- “Keep me from temptation” according to Bruce Wilkinson.
- The nature of evil is to deceive us!
- Jabez knew the power of temptation and he knew that he needed God’s help to avoid it.
Detrich Bonhoeffer story

- Wealthy family background
- Became a determined Christian theologian.
- Imprisoned by the Germans in WWII.
- Died for his faith.
- “Christianity teaches us the infinite worth of that which is seemingly worthless and the finite worthlessness of that which seems so valued.”
The Bruce Wilkinson Story:

• Born in 1940.
• Died March 11, 2011.
• Founded the Walk Through the Bible in 1976.
• Founded WorldTeach in 1998.
• He followed the leading hand of God.
The Buzz Aldrin Story:

• Communion on the moon!
• NASA said “No way!”
• Buzz found a way!
• Totally cut off from any earthly treasures, he found God!
So what about the rest of us?

- Fruits on the vine: anything that brings glory to God.
- We all have talents.
- God challenges us to produce much fruit.
- God promises to lead us.
- All we have to do is ask.
- But be prepared for God’s answer!
I. Introduction

A Little Review

Jesus said: “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; (but) apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

The third secret of the vine: If your life bears much fruit, God will invite you to abide more deeply with Him.

A. Several weeks ago I talked to you about a little Bruce Wilkinson book called The Secrets of the Vine based on the familiar verses from the gospel of John.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; (but) apart from me you can do nothing.

B. You remember that our grape vine had three branches: a branch bearing no fruit, a branch bearing some fruit, and a branch bearing lots of fruit. We said that most of us are probably on the second branch bearing some fruit for God’s glory. God is encouraging us to graduate to the third branch, bearing lots of fruit to the glory of God.

C. We related this step to the Third Secret of the Vine:

If your life bears much fruit, God will invite you to abide more deeply with Him.

Today the Prayer of Jabez

• Jabez was an Old Testament character that asked God for an opportunity to produce much fruit and he invited God to assist him in doing so.
• I Chronicles 4: 9-10

D. Today we’ll talk about an Old Testament character named Jabez. Jabez wanted to produce more fruit and he sought God’s blessings to make that happen.

E. We’re using another little Bruce Wilkinson book, The Prayer of Jabez. After our class last time several of you mentioned that you had read this book. To me it’s an amazing little book, presenting God’s message in ways that are simple, direct and very effective.


A. The first nine chapters of I Chronicles are a never ending genealogy of the Hebrew people going all the way back to Adam. I think it’s safe to say that these chapters are seldom used as sermon topics! Thank God for that!

B. Yet there smack dab in the middle of all that genealogy we read about Jabez!

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying: “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request. (I Chronicles 4:9-10, NIV)
C. That’s it. We never hear about Jabez anywhere else in the Bible. He’s right there in the line of genealogy but we don’t know his father’s name and none of his children are listed. On the surface his prayer sounds a little self serving. All we know about Jabez is:

So from this we learn:
• Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.
• When Jabez was born his mother experienced a painful delivery.
• Jabez asked God to bless him and expand his territory.
• God granted his request.

1. He was more honorable than his brothers.
2. His mother experienced a difficult delivery when he was born.
3. He asked God to bless him and expand his territory.
4. God granted his request, but we don’t know what Jabez did with his expanded territory.

D. Bruce Wilkinson says that he begins each day with the prayer of Jabez. This simple prayer has led to the dramatic success of the Walk Through the Bible program headquartered here in Atlanta and a second Wilkinson project called WorldTeach. Wilkinson’s little book, The Prayer of Jabez, made it to the top of the New York Times best seller list.

As we go through today’s lesson you may feel that Wilkinson builds more into the Prayer of Jabez than is found in those two little verses in 1 Chronicles. To that I say, “So be it.” The bottom line in that this simple prayer led Wilkinson into some amazing ministries and his interpretation of the prayer gives us an amazing understanding of what God would have us do with our lives. I think it’s the perfect follow-up on the Secrets of the Vine.

III. Was it fair for Jabez to ask God for an expanded territory?

A. Okay, we know that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, but was it fair to ask for more territory? After all this territory probably belonged to someone else, probably even to his brothers.

1. Let’s suppose that Jabez was a cattle farmer. Jabez saw that he could be more successful if he had more pasture land for his cattle, so he asked God to expand his territory. Would God have a problem with that? “Of course not,” says Bruce Wilkinson, not as long as Jabez was managing his life honorably. God’s plan might be to use the newly found wealth that Jabez was seeking to fund a new mission trip to Africa! God has no problem with wealth as long as it is used properly.

2. Remember the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The servant that invested his master’s money wisely was blessed by the master and given more responsibility. But it was the master’s money! How often we forget that when we look at our portfolios.
B. Brice Wilkinson reminds us that it is the very nature of God to bless us abundantly! God’s blessings are only limited by our stubbornness to be in control. When we finally turn ourselves over to God then we will be ready to receive God’s richest blessings.

C. In my lesson on the Secrets of the Vine I said that turning control over to God was the beginning point of abundant living. That’s where Jabez was. He wanted more territory but he was willing to let God guide him in managing that territory. That’s also where Bruce Wilkinson was when he first began using the prayer of Jabez at the beginning of his ministry.

  God wants us to bear much fruit. God wants to be our partner but he wants to be the senior partner.

Who is in control here?
• Jabez was willing to let God be the senior partner!
• Wilkinson: “Oh God and King, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such a way that I may touch more lives for your glory. Let me do more for You!”

D. Notice that Jabez wasn’t specific about what God’s blessings would be. He wasn’t asking for a parking place at the mall or a winning lottery ticket.

E. Here’s how Bruce Wilkinson interprets this part of Jabez’ prayer (page 32):

  “Oh God and King, please expand my opportunities and my impact in such a way that I may touch more lives for your glory. Let me do more for You!”

III. Living by God’s math:

A. Let’s return to the Secrets of the Vine for a moment. Remember that Christ is the vine providing us with spiritual nourishment. We are the branches and God is the vine keeper.

  1. Remember the second branch? That’s the one bearing some fruit. I think that most active Christians probably are there on the second branch. On the second branch God is functioning through the Holy Spirit encouraging us to produce more fruit. We are encouraged to adjust our priorities to allow more time for God’s work.

  2. On the third branch we actually allow God to lead us into abundant living. In doing so we produce fruit abundantly. Jabez was on the third branch!
3. Bruce Wilkinson describes this in a simple equation:

My willingness and my weakness + God’s will and supernatural power = my expanded territory.

4. The key here is the introduction of God’s supernatural power. It’s the power to do some simply amazing things!

B. Jabez understood that he couldn’t handle the expanded territory on his own. He had to have God’s help, so the next thing he said in his prayer was, “Let your hand be with me.” Somehow adding those few words changes the prayer dramatically. Maybe that’s why God granted his request!

C. As Christians, we have a simple mission in life. Whatever our gifts, education, or talents might be, our calling is to do God’s work on earth. Unfortunately most of us, myself included, often limit ourselves to our own capabilities. Our range of effectiveness, our territory, is limited by our own perception of what we can do. How much more could we accomplish if we really got God involved! I think that that is the secret to abundant living.

D. Let’s look at a few examples:

1. A few years ago two women in our church (Sally Gresham and Beth Cayce) had a vision. Their vision was to establish a Christian training center in Africa, a training center for native African ministers. Do you think they could have succeeded through their own abilities? No Way! It was their willingness to serve plus God’s will and supernatural power that led to the establishment of the Divine Providence Training Center in Kenya. Talk about expanded territory! The work of these two North Georgia women is now expanded into the remote regions of Africa was these young ministers go back to their native villages.

2. Think about the early church. We are often amazed that twelve basically uneducated, insignificant persons could start a movement that changed the world. Without God’s help in never would have happened (Acts 11:21 & 1:8). And think about the endless challenges the Church has faced during the last 2000 years. These challenges could not have been handled by man working alone. God working through man made it happen. And God will not fail!

E. Bruce Wilkinson reminds us that God is there all the time, just waiting for us to ask for His help and guidance. Jabez asked for God’s guiding hand. We can do that also, but we must be willing to respond to God’s leadership. We must be willing to reach beyond our own gifts and talents. God wants us to do greater things.
IV. “And keep me from temptation...”

A. Okay, let’s move on to the next section of the Prayer. The NIV records it as: “…and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.”

B. Bruce Wilkinson prefers the American Standard Version here: “…and keep me from temptation, that it would not be to my sorrow.”

How wise of Jabez! He understood that even with God’s hand leading him temptation could be a problem!

1. Far too often in today’s world we see very successful people yielding to temptation. Be it politicians, movie stars, business men or even preachers, somehow the glamour of success and fame leads us into terrible problems.

2. Most often it is sexual immorality that makes the headlines but there’s another peril associated with success. I think that financial success often distracts us from our dependency on God. We become too satisfied with our self-sufficiency! Who needs God when you have a net worth of $1m in your IRA! Net worth, what a deceiving term. Think about your net worth when you stand in front of the pearly gates!

C. Bruce Wilkinson reminds us that the very nature of evil is to deceive us. He offers this simple prayer that seems so timely:

“Lord, keep me safe from temptations that pull at my emotions and my physical needs, that call out to my sense of what I deserve, what I have the ‘right’ of feel and enjoy. Because You are the true source of all that is really life, direct my steps away from all that is not of you.”

D. I was impressed a few weeks ago with Bob Moore’s lesson on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous theologian imprisoned by the Germans in WWII. Bonhoeffer’s family was immensely wealthy. He understood the temptations that power and wealth could bring. He also experienced the pain of solitary confinement in a German prison. He died in that Nazi prison totally at peace with the Lord. Bonhoeffer left behind a great statement about the Christian faith:

“Christianity teaches us the infinite worth of that which is seemingly worthless and the finite worthlessness of that which seems so valued.”
V. The Bruce Wilkinson story.

The Bruce Wilkinson Story:
• Born in 1940.
• Died March 11, 2011.
• Founded the Walk Through the Bible in 1976.
• Founded WorldTeach in 1998.
• He followed the leading hand of God.

A. Sometime following the leading hand of God calls for us to leave behind those things that we love the most. Bruce Wilkinson tells us that after twenty successful years with Walk Through the Bible he felt God calling him into another direction. Bruce says that this was the toughest thing he ever had to do. Walk Through the Bible had brought him fame and some level of personal wealth. Unfortunately, it had also become the total focus of his life and his ego. It was difficult for Bruce to acknowledge that Walk Through the Bible could survive without him! But God was leading him elsewhere. God wanted to expand Bruce’s territory. (Secrets of the Vine, p-83)

B. And so in 1998 he launched WorldTeach. His goal was to establish a Bible teaching faculty of 120,000 teachers spread throughout the world. Today WorldTeach has offices in thirty-eight countries mostly in Southeast Asia where the Islamic faith is firmly established. (Prayer of Jabez, p-89)

C. Bruce Wilkinson died on March 11, 2011 at the age of 71. He left behind a living legacy of books and Christian ministry. He never failed to follow the leading hand of God.

VI. The Buzz Aldrin story.

A. Remember forty-three years ago when we first sent a man to the moon? Actually there were two of them, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. Well it turns out that Buzz Aldrin was a very strong Christian.

The Buzz Aldrin Story:
• Communion on the moon!
• NASA said “No way!”
• Buzz found a way!
• Totally cut off from any earthly treasures, he found God!

1. In the months before their mission Buzz realized that they were about to do something hugely significant. He wanted to use the opportunity to give glory to God. What better way than to have Communion on the moon!

2. Of course he had to ask NASA. You can imagine their response. “No way,” NASA said. The government was already embroiled in a legal battle with Madelyn Murray O’Hare, the celebrated atheist. Sending a Christian message from the moon was just not the thing to do.

B. Aldrin would not be deterred, however. He went to his minister and had the Communion elements consecrated. And he smuggled them aboard the space craft.
C. On the moon he sent this very politically correct message back to earth: “I’d like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own special way.”

D. Then when the moon turned away from the earth and all radio contact ended, he celebrated Communion on the moon. The scripture he used was from the gospel of John. Jesus is speaking to his disciples:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”

E. The amazing message here is that even on the dark side of the moon, totally isolated from any treasures or powers on the Earth, Buzz Aldrin was able to commune with his God.

F. So who do you think won the debate here, Buzz Aldrin or Madelyn Murray O’Hare? She is still on the dark side of the moon!

VII. So what about us little guys?

So what about the rest of us?

• Fruits on the vine: anything that brings glory to God.
• We all have talents.
• God challenges us to produce much fruit.
• God promises to lead us.
• All we have to do is ask.
• But be prepared for God’s answer!

A. All of us aren’t called upon to organize a world mission effort or to walk on the moon, but we all have a job to do.

B. A few weeks ago we said that the fruits of the vine could be anything that brings glory to God. We are all given certain talents. God challenges us to use those talents to produce much fruit. God is ready to lead us. All we have to do is ask God what he would have us do.

C. But we had better be prepared to stretch ourselves beyond what we may consider to be our comfort zone! Remember Moses? He wasn’t at all ready to lead the Hebrew nation out of slavery in Egypt.

D. Max Lucado has written a little book called The Applause of Heaven. Lucado says that any time we do something significant toward the glory of God, the angels in Heaven applaud. I find that pretty exciting!