

I invite you now to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the 1st book of Chronicles, chapter 4: verses 9-10. This can be found on page \_\_\_ in your pew Bibles. As we continue in our series "The Blessed Life," scripture reveals that we can count on the power of prayer to bless us with God's protecting care.

Our Fathers Word

*1 Ch 4:9-10 (NKJV)*

9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain."

10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So God granted him what he requested.

This is the word of God for the people of God

“Ask,” promised Jesus, “and it will be given to you” (Matt 7:7)

“You do not have because you do not ask,” said James (James 4:2)

*Will you please pray with me.*

Father, we cry out to you,

"Oh, that You would bless me indeed,

and enlarge my territory,

that Your hand would be with me,

and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"

In Jesus's name we pray

Amen

God's blessing is limited only by *us*. His blessing is not limited by His resources, or His power, or by His willingness to give. Jabez has revealed to us in the simple, powerful prayer we just prayed -- one that God always answers -- how to be blessed *beyond measure* simply by refusing to let any obstacle, person, or opinion loom larger than God's nature. God's nature is to bless. Prayer, Jabez reveals, is the key that opens up the immeasurable bounty of God. Prayer is our open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. Prayer is our expression of faith in God's power, fueled by our desire for *more of Him*.

Here was a man who had a large concept of God and honored Him by seeking His blessing. Jabez was a man of *faith*, and the Lord took note of it. He took to heart the truth found in Heb 11:6 *6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* Jabez sought God, and he was rewarded.

As we have been opening up the inspirational word of God here in 1 Cron chapter 4, verses 9-10 we have been discovering *His promises*, through *insights* into the Christian life of honoring, glorifying, and pleasing God. An *insight* of how His miraculous power can be released into our lives and into the lives of those we love by diligently seeking God through our prayers, and by prevailing and walking with God. An *insight* is revealed about living with the blessing of true happiness. **Oh, that you would bless me, indeed.** We see an *insight* of how to enter into and enjoy more of the inheritance of the Lord while building His kingdom. **That you would expand my territory.**

Today's *insight* reveals that we can count on God's protecting care. **That your hand may be with me!**

So often believers can find themselves in an unexpected situation as God's blessings are poured out and we have dove into new expanded territory -- and then found themselves in overwhelming circumstances. They often feel afraid, misled, abandoned, or even a little angry. Having dared to ask for an enlarged ministry, more than a few Christians have faltered at this point in their spiritual transformation. They've received blessings on a scale they hadn't imagined possible. Experiencing God *stretching* the *limits* of their influence and opportunities and abilities.

You may feel out of control and weak, nothing like a leader is supposed to feel. You may not be able to shake the feeling that you could be the wrong person for the job.

When you *follow Christ* and accept the role that God is calling you to do, and find *this* to be your *problem*, your *crisis*, there is a vital truth that you must understand. This feeling you're experiencing, that you are running from, is called *dependence*. It means you are walking with the Lord Jesus. The second you're not feeling dependent is the moment you've backed away from truly living by faith. It may be uneasy to hear or even difficult to accept, the feeling *that you just can't do it* is precisely what you are supposed to be feeling.

This is a frightening and utterly exhilarating truth, isn't it? As God's chosen, blessed sons and daughters, we are expected to attempt something large enough that failure is guaranteed, unless God steps in.

Take a moment to put this into perspective, try to comprehend how contrary that truth is to everything you would humanly choose:

- It goes against common sense.
- It contradicts your previous life experience.
- It seems to disregard your feelings, training, and need for security.
- It sets you up to look like a fool and a loser.

Yet it is God's plan for His most-honored servants.

Admittedly, big-screen heroes don't seem to put any stock in dependence – but you and I were made for it. Dependence upon God makes heroes of ordinary people like Jabez and you and me. How? We're forced to cry out with Jabez's third desperate plea:

“Oh, that Your hand would be with me!”

With that, we release God's power to accomplish His will and bring Him glory through all those seeming impossibilities.

Notice that Jabez did not begin his prayer by asking for God's hand to be with him. At that point, he didn't sense the need. Things were still manageable. His risks, and the fears that go with them, were minimal. But when his boundaries got moved out, and the kingdom-sized tasks of God's agenda started coming at him, Jabez knew he needed a divine hand – and fast.

He could have turned back, or he could have tried to keep going in his own strength. Instead, he prayed.

If seeking *God's blessings* is our ultimate act of worship, and *asking to do more for Him* is our utmost ambition, then asking for God's hand upon us is *our strategic choice to sustain and continue the great things* that God has begun in our lives.

That's why you could call God's hand on you "the touch of greatness." You do not become great; you become dependent on the strong hand of God. Your surrendered need turns into His unlimited opportunity and He becomes great through you.

One summer during my childhood, I decided it was time to learn how to swim. My experience with the water was limited to the shallow side of pools that we visited at the YMCA and other public locations. In the shallow side, I was very confident of my ability to perform all the necessary moves to accomplish what I thought was swimming. I experienced no fear, no stress, completely convinced that I could accomplish the task at hand, and thought I was swimming.

Until one day, when I decided to jump into unfamiliar territory, the deep end. Apparently, they call it the deep end for a reason, did you know this? I didn't.

Once I made up my mind that I could swim, without hesitation, I ran across the deck, and jumped in! Where I immediately began to sink to the bottom. I found myself at the bottom of the pool staring up at the top of the water wondering how I ended up so deep in trouble. Fortunately, the life guard was paying attention and immediately jumped in to bring me to safety. How could this have happened? What could have gone so wrong? I was so sure I knew what I was doing.

This pattern of jumping in and unsuccessfully performing the necessary skills to pull of this challenging task continued for some time. Jump, sink. Jump, sink. At camp Kanastaki, a boy scout summer camp, I decided I would overcome this challenge once and for all, and learn to swim. To my dismay it was a long two weeks of struggling, anger, feeling like a failure, and being pulled from the bottom of the deep end of the pool by a long pole.

Returning home completely defeated, feeling like I was the wrong person for this task, I shared my experience with my father. Embarrassed, ashamed, and feeling like swimming was something I would never be able to do, I asked for his help. *Dad, I said, I just can't do this without you.*

We spent the next several days, together, at the local state park, in the shallow water near the shore of the lake. I laid across the water as my father held me with his hands on my stomach and back as he encouraged me to kick my legs and row with my arms. He carried me across the water as I developed the necessary skills to finally learn how to swim.

That is what your heavenly Father's hand is like. You tell Him, "Father, please do this in me because I can't do it alone! It's too big for me!" And you step out in faith to do and say things that could only come from His hand. Afterwards, your spirit is shouting, God did that, nobody else! God carried me, gave me the words, gave me the power – and it's wonderful!

I couldn't recommend more, highly living, in this supernatural dimension.

God's power under us, in us, surging through us is exactly what turns dependence into unforgettable experiences of completeness. Paul wrote in 2 COR 3:5-6 "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant"

Tragic as it might sound, the hand of the Lord is so seldom experienced by even mature Christians that they don't miss it and don't ask for it. They hardly know it exists. They think of it as something reserved for prophets and apostles, but not for them. When these believers arrive at points of certain failure, as you might expect, they tend to come to the wrong conclusion: *I've gone too far; I've ended up in the wrong place. And since I already have all the resources I'm going to get, I need to exit fast!*

Jabez, by contrast, was so certain that God's hand with him was necessary for blessing that he couldn't imagine a life of honor without it. Let's take a closer look at the meaning of his prayer.

The “hand of the Lord” is a biblical term for God’s power and presence in the lives of His people. We can find prime examples of this in Joshua 4:24

24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God."

Also in Isaiah 59:1

59 Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save,

In Acts, the phenomenal success of the early church was attributed to one thing: “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21). A more specific New Testament description for God’s hand is “the filling of the Holy Spirit.” The church’s growth bears powerful witness to both the necessity and availability of the hand of God to accomplish the business of God.

Consider the natural progression from more blessing to more territory to the need for supernatural power. When Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... and lo, I am with you always” (Matt 28:19-20) He was bestowing on them both an incredible blessing and an impossible task. Into all the world and preach? Certainly this was a disaster in the making! After all, He was commissioning such unreliable people as Peter, who had already proved that a girl by a campfire could get him to deny he’d ever heard of Jesus!

Yet when He sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), Jesus touched these ordinary believers with greatness, filling them with His miraculous power to spread the gospel. Luke's account that the phrase "filled with the Spirit" is often linked to a consequence: They "spoke with boldness". (Acts 4:13; 5:29; 7:51; 9:27). Only God at work *through them* could account for the miracles and mass conversions that followed.

When we ask for God's mighty presence like Jabez and the early church did, we will also see tremendous results that can be explained only as from the hand of God. We will experience church growth, watch our pews fill up, see our ministries increase and expand into more communities. Gods mighty presence *through us* can accomplish more through this church family than we could possibly imagine.

What strikes me about the early church was that believers continually sought to be filled by God (Acts 4:23-31). They were known as a community who spent hours and even days in prayer together, waiting upon God and asking for His power (Acts 2:42-47). They were longing to receive more of God's power that would turn impending, certain failure into a miracle and make their extraordinary assignment possible.

Paul told the Christians at Ephesus to make it a priority to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). To that end, he prayed that God would bless and strengthen them "with might through His Spirit" (3:16)

When was the last time our church got together and pleaded for the filling of the Spirit? When was the last time you petitioned God regularly and fervently, "Oh, put Your hand upon me! Fill me with Your Spirit!"? The rapid spread of the Good news in the Roman world couldn't have happened any other way.

We couldn't choose a better plan if our desire is to see our Church grow, and thrive, as God's hand is with us.

Like any loving Father, God is watching and waiting for us to ask for the supernatural power He offers. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron 16:9) Notice that our God is not scanning the horizon for spiritual giants or seminary standouts. He eagerly seeks those who are loyal to Him. Your loyal heart is the only part of His expansion plan that He will not provide.

You and I are always only one plea away from inexplicable, Spirit-enabled exploits. By His touch you can experience supernatural enthusiasm, boldness, and power. It's up to you.

Join me in Praying the Jabez prayer every day asking for blessings, increased ministries, the Father's touch. Because for the Christian, dependence is just another word for power.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your Love, for your grace,

for your wonderful blessings, and for your protective hand.

Thank you for sending our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into our lives.

We love you Lord, with all our hearts, soul, minds, and all of our strength

Our deepest desire is to serve you, to build your kingdom, to seek the lost,

To make disciples of those you bring to us to minister to.

By your strength may we prevail and walk boldly with you God

confidently completing the tasks that you have appointed us to do.

put Your hand upon us! Fill us with Your Spirit!

Oh God, pour out a spirit of prayer and supplication upon us,

That we may seek you continually in prayer,

to know your will for us.

May all that we do bring you all the praise, all the honor, and all the glory.

Amen.