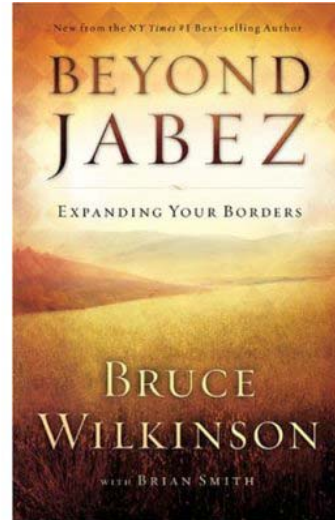


Beyond Jabez

by Bruce Wilkinson

Hardcover
Feb 2005,
Multnomah Publishers
208 pages



Excerpt:

Introduction

The Little Prayer That Could

When *The Prayer of Jabez* was first published in the spring of 2000, if you had told me that this little ninety-three-page book would become “the fastest-selling book of all time”—as *Publishers Weekly* dubbed it in 2002—I wouldn’t have believed it. But the response has been, and continues to be, incredible. Even now, I employ a full-time assistant to answer e-mails and letters from people writing to tell me of their *Jabez* experiences! And the stories continue to flood in from those who have tasted the miracle of answered prayer.

Wherever I go, wherever I teach, the question is always the same: “How can you explain the sales of your book?” After a couple of years, I felt that the answer had become apparent; after all, nearly everywhere I went, someone rushed up to share their own story: “You should hear what God did when I prayed the prayer of Jabez...”

I remember speaking at the Billy Graham Cove where an informal poll revealed that more than 80 percent of the audience had purchased multiple copies to give as gifts to their family and friends. One man had given away more than eighty cases! Why? He told me, “For some reason, God is answering this prayer in the life of everyone I have given it to—and I want everyone I know to experience the reality that God answers prayer!”

The phrase “You should hear what God did” may be the key to the unprecedented success of *The Prayer of Jabez*. Millions of people have told millions of others what God has done in their lives in answer to this simple prayer. And when one person tells another what God has done, that’s giving God the credit He so richly deserves.

Jabez in Africa

I'm also convinced that the prayer of Jabez is directly linked to the call to launch a global movement called Dream for Africa. After the success of the book and its follow-up, *Secrets of the Vine*, our family unexpectedly felt called to move to Africa and help with efforts to stop the AIDS epidemic, perhaps the greatest crisis to hit mankind since the great Flood. When the call came, I inquired of the Lord, "Are you sure? After all, I'm not in my twenties anymore. Or my thirties. Or my forties."

I had to smile from the gentle nudge that came back: But aren't you the Jabez guy? Haven't you been pleading with Me for decades for much, much more territory? Are we going to debate where the boundaries of that territory lie?

During this season, I returned to Matthew 28:18–20 and meditated on the Great Commission for months, asking the Lord to reveal to me if I had missed anything vital to the next chapter in my service for Him. I discovered in that study something very significant—something that I knew, yet didn't know—that would change my life forever.

Jesus commanded His followers to disciple all "nations," or people groups. Not just individuals or families or cities, but nations. For the first time in my ministry, I asked a totally different question: "How can I obey the Great Commission by discipling a whole nation for God?"

When one draws a circle around the borders of a nation with the intention of discipling that whole nation, it doesn't take long to realize that the most strategic person in that nation is the president or king. But how could I ever hope to even meet the many leaders of Africa?

Yet when I was training ninety-five hundred leaders in Nigeria, I found myself invited to lunch with the president of the nation, who told me that everywhere he traveled in the world, someone would give him a copy of *The Prayer of Jabez* and that the book had changed his life.

Then when I was in Zambia training more than seven hundred leaders, the president of that nation invited me to his office and told me he had just finished reading *The Prayer of Jabez*—twice. He came around his large desk and asked me to place my hands on his shoulders and pray for him.

Later I was to speak with the president and first lady of Uganda to find out firsthand how they had achieved a remarkable turnaround and stemmed the tide of HIV infection in their nation. The president was unexpectedly called north to an outbreak of fighting, but his wife gave me the warmest welcome and said, "Oh, we love *The Prayer of Jabez*! But *Secrets of the Vine* is my favorite."

As of this writing, I have just returned from Malawi, where we were launching another Dream for Africa ministry. Just before we were to fly back to Johannesburg, we received word that the first lady of Malawi wanted to meet with us. As we were introduced, the first lady's adult daughter enthusiastically said to her mother, "This is the man I've been telling you about, the one who wrote the book I just gave you!"

One leader said to me recently, "The Prayer of Jabez is your John the Baptist for your work in Africa!" Who could have guessed?

Why Another Book About Jabez?

If you were inspired by *The Prayer of Jabez*, or even if you've never heard of it, my hope is that this book will deeply encourage you and enable you to live at a new level of meaning, service, and significance. As I have been praying this little prayer for more than thirty years, my heart is overflowing with not only my own experiences but also how He has answered this prayer for untold millions of people around the world, and so I have shared a number of their stories in these pages.

But *Beyond Jabez* was written for three primary reasons.

First, I wrote it to further develop the concepts in this prayer so that they can produce even more fruit in your life. The original book was only a brief overview of the prayer, and so many people have asked for additional teaching on the topic. In response, I developed an eight-part small-group video series (available at www.brucewilkinson.com) and now this book.

Second, I wrote *Beyond Jabez* to clear up some of the misconceptions that have arisen out of the success of the first book. Frankly, the amount of false teaching and preaching that surrounded the book came as a complete shock to me. Why? Because in twenty-five years of preaching on the prayer of Jabez, I never heard one negative comment. And no one ever even suggested that asking God to bless you was prosperity gospel. Only after *The Prayer of Jabez* became a runaway bestseller did I begin to hear this kind of criticism. The secular press, in particular, had a difficult time handling the overwhelming success of a book on prayer.

The third reason I wrote this new book was to encourage you to rekindle the habit of praying the prayer of Jabez. So many have been touched and their lives changed, but the Jabez experience is hardly over; in fact, it's just beginning!

Rarely does a week go by when we don't see numerous instances of God's answering this prayer in our family's lives and at Dream for Africa. My good friend and publisher, Don Jacobson, encouraged me to include in this book a number of these stories from the past few months, just so readers would see and understand that the prayer of Jabez can be an ongoing part of a vital and effective prayer life.

A Life That Is More Honorable

Just as you ask God to bless your food, my hope is that after reading *Beyond Jabez*, you will make it your habit to ask God to bless you. Then, as you come to realize that your life is meant to be ever growing in its influence and impact, I hope you will ask God daily for more territory in which to serve Him. This will lead you into the Land of the Unknown, where you may feel overwhelmed and perhaps even incapable of handling the opportunities; if so, I hope you will pray as Jabez did for the hand of the Lord to intervene on your behalf. Finally, when the reality of life on another plane causes your heart to falter—leaving you vulnerable to temptation that, if acted on, would hurt the Lord and others and stop the miracles you've been experiencing—my hope is you will know to ask the Lord to keep evil from you so that you will not cause pain.

In this book, you will discover the power of this unbroken linkage. And if you will pray the prayer of Jabez and live according to its biblical principles, you too will discover the indescribable joy of experiencing the words, "And God granted him that which he requested."

As you lose yourself in serving the King, you may find to your surprise that heaven describes

you, as it did Jabez, as “more honorable.” I’m convinced, from Scripture and personal experience, that Jabez revealed one of the remarkable secrets of a life that is honorable before God and man. May your heart sing and your life explode with the joys of living in the fullness that lies potentially before you.

1

Catch God’s Dream!

Not long ago and not far away, a Nobody named Ordinary lived in the Land of Familiar. For the most part, not much happened in Familiar that hadn’t happened before. Ordinary thought he was content. He found the routines reliable. He blended in with the crowd. And mostly, he wanted only what he had. Until the day Ordinary noticed a small, nagging feeling that something big was missing from his life.¹

The Dream Giver

“I need twenty-five volunteers,” Pastor Denny Bellesi announced to his unsuspecting congregation. He scanned the packed auditorium for responses.

The members of Coast Hills Community Church sat in puzzled silence.

What in the world was their pastor up to now? Worshipers slouched in their seats, trying to look inconspicuous.

Eventually, twenty-five curious people stood before the congregation—some willingly, some reluctantly. The pastor then handed each a crisp \$100 bill.

“I invite you to take part in this Kingdom Assignment,” he told the astounded volunteers. “The rules are simple. One, this is not your money; it is God’s. Two, you are to use this money to further God’s kingdom beyond the four walls of the church. And three, you must report back in ninety days and share with everyone how you invested the money.”

He further surprised his congregation by announcing that the church didn’t want a penny of this money back. He repeated the exercise in the following three worship services, eventually distributing \$10,000 to one hundred members of his church. Men, women, and even children were recipients of this “investment cash.”

Pastor Bellesi had recently finished preaching a series about how to use money for God’s purposes. He felt that his church was ready—financially and spiritually—to take on the exciting challenge of investing in God’s kingdom.

Denny knew the risk he was taking. He was well aware of the unusual responsibility that he had placed on his congregation. But the people rose to the challenge, and the Kingdom Assignment impacted more lives than anyone anticipated. What began as a simple lesson in

stewardship for one church is still touching lives around the world.

One man raised \$10,000 by sending e-mails to friends and old classmates, challenging them to match the original \$100 amount. He donated the funds to a couple whose two young daughters had just died from a rare blood disorder.

What began as a simple lesson in stewardship for one church is still touching lives around the world.

A woman told several friends about the Kingdom Assignment during a birthday celebration. She and her enthused companions raised \$1,800 and donated the cash to a struggling single mother of three, who worked during the day and attended college at night.

A nine-year-old girl sent her money to a four-year-old girl in Oregon to help pay for the ailing child's heart surgery.

A local chiropractor elected to take his portable massage table and a hundred Burger King hamburgers down to skid row once a month and adjust the aching backs of those who live and sleep on the streets.

Another man was inspired to invest \$50,000 in a Bible seminary in China after hearing about the Kingdom Assignment.

One young man who had grown up in an abusive home invested his money in a mentoring program for abused kids. He also participates in the program, which has helped him discover a part of God's purpose for his life.

Just a few weeks after giving his congregation their Kingdom Assignment, Pastor Bellesi read The Prayer of Jabez and it impacted him deeply. He then gave copies to all his staff. Denny Bellesi and his wife, Leesa, began to pray together, asking the Lord to "expand their territory." They had no idea that their territory was about to explode.

First, a regional newspaper caught wind of the good deeds coming out of the church and ran a feature story on their front page. Soon after, the Associated Press picked up the story, and papers around the world printed the heartwarming tale. Woman's Day and People magazines wrote articles about the wonderful happenings as a result of the Kingdom Assignment. Denny and Leesa began receiving calls from all over the world with requests for magazine and radio interviews.

And their territory just kept expanding.

One day, the Bellesis got a phone call from an associate producer with NBC's Dateline. She asked if they could follow the story for a year. Denny and Leesa agreed, so a film crew showed up at the church to interview Denny and several of the Kingdom Assignment participants. The church members made the most of the opportunity to expand God's territory by sharing what God had done for them.

In the midst of this flurry of activity, Leesa wrote a proposal for a book chronicling the results of the Kingdom Assignment. Leesa and Denny soon landed a book contract with a major Christian publisher.

The Bellesis were so overwhelmed by the enormity of God's blessings that they were being forced to depend on God. And that was good! The Kingdom Assignment had become so big that only God could take the credit.

Like the proverbial pebble making ripples in the pond, the impact of the Kingdom Assignment continues to spread. These ripples have touched the lives of people in many countries, including Sudan, China, Vietnam, and Mexico.

And it shows no sign of losing momentum.²

Never Too Late

Since the publication of *The Prayer of Jabez* in 2000, I have received numerous letters with stories of how God has used people who prayed with the faith of Jabez. Like the Kingdom Assignment, some of these are big, splashy stories of spectacular miracles from the hand of God. But many of God's miracles happen in quieter, but no less eternally significant, fashion.

Let me tell you about a special seventy-year-old lady named Mamie. Her faith in God had always been strong. But when declining health required that her family place her in an assisted-living home, Mamie began to manifest negative traits they had never seen before—resentment, suspicion, emotional withdrawal. Her children wondered what had happened to the woman who had raised them.

About this time, Mamie's daughter JoAn read *The Prayer of Jabez*. She was encouraged by its teaching and became convinced that her mother needed the perspective it provided. The irony was that, all her life, JoAn could remember her mother frequently exhorting the family, "Trust the Lord to enlarge your territory." But JoAn had never known the source of the quote. Until now.

The next time she visited her mother, JoAn was shocked to see the bitterness and despair etched into Mamie's face. The ailing woman felt she had lost everything of importance—her home, her possessions, her independence—and was certain she had nothing left to live for.

Mamie's expression began to change, however, as JoAn reminded her mother of the perspective Mamie had spent her life teaching her children: God is faithful and He loves to give; He will be with us as we step out boldly in faithful obedience.

JoAn read 1 Chronicles 4:10 to her mother: "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."

"Yes," said Mamie softly, as though talking to herself. "That's what He does."

"Mom, God has set you right in the midst of people who need you," JoAn said. "Here you are with thirteen other women, all under the same roof. You've spent your whole life influencing others for good. I'm not going to just stand by and watch the devil rob you of your joy and ministry during the last years of your life!"

At that, Mamie smiled for what may have been the first time in months.

Many of God's miracles happen in quieter, but no less eternally significant, fashion.

JoAn challenged her mother to share with her fellow residents what she had learned about God's love throughout her seven decades of life. They prayed together for God's direction and strength, and by the time JoAn left, Mamie was a new woman with new purpose.

A few days later, Mamie called JoAn and asked her to bring cookies and tea for a meeting she had organized. She had invited a Christian friend named Esther to come speak to her fellow residents in the nursing home's living area.

On the day of the event, anticipation shone on each woman's face as a parade of thirteen walkers and wheelchairs made its way down the corridor. Not one of them could remember the last time they had been invited for tea!

The atmosphere in the home was transformed. Esther's sharing and then a series of subsequent events—including a mini-concert by Mamie's grandchildren—brought hope and new faith into the lives of several of the elderly ladies.

Some time later, when Mamie became gravely ill with congestive heart failure, she was certain she was on her way to heaven. But when her condition improved, she told JoAn, "I guess God isn't finished with me yet. There must be something more He wants me to do."³

Whether you have six days or sixty years remaining, God still has you here on earth for a purpose. I pray that this book will help you catch the vision for what God wants to do in your life, that you will experience incredible fulfillment and produce results of eternal value.

Jabez the Man

You'll notice in both of these stories that people were already learning to trust God to see His hand of power in their lives even before The Prayer of Jabez came to their attention. In fact, Jabez's prayer has been in our Bibles, influencing people's lives, for thousands of years, and it will still be there long after the little book I've written has crumbled to dust and been forgotten. People have been praying Jabez's prayer and living by these principles for centuries, but God has seen fit in the last few years to let Jabez's example change millions of lives around the world—perhaps including yours.

So let's take a moment to look again at the man whose heart of faith has made such an impact in our day. In the book of 1 Chronicles, we find only two verses about Jabez, nestled in the middle of a long list of names—within the genealogy of no less a personage than King David himself. The second of these verses contains Jabez's prayer. But if we step back one verse, we learn more about the man and his circumstances: "Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain'" (1 Chronicles 4:9).

First, note the meaning of his name. The word jabez literally means "pain." Maybe his mother had difficulty giving birth. Or maybe other painful circumstances overwhelmed her at that time. In any case, imagine growing up and hearing over and over, "Hey, Pain! What's up?" Or introducing yourself, "Hi, everyone. I'm Pain." No doubt the boy had some significant obstacles to overcome before he developed into a man of strong faith! Jabez's legacy has encouraged

millions whose lives started in pain, teaching them that they can overcome their circumstances and become a person whom God calls “honorable.”

Jabez serves as a worthy example for us to follow even today.

Indeed, Jabez was known to be “more honorable than his brothers.” The word honorable as used here means “respected.” Jabez lived in such a way—with maturity, wisdom, and a sense of honor—that he stood out from the crowd. He was admired for all the right reasons. And so he serves as a worthy example for us to follow even today.

We also learn from this passage that Jabez “called on the God of Israel.” The word call here means “to cry out for help.” The prayer of Jabez was not an off-the-cuff inquiry (“Oh, Lord, by the way...”); his was a heartfelt, passionate plea. Given what we’re told about Jabez in the Bible, I think we can infer that this prayer represented an overriding theme in his life—a constant, deep desire.

A Passion So Great...

Have you ever wanted anything that badly? For a moment, try to imagine a desire so intense that it drives everything else from your consciousness. Then imagine asking God, day after day with fervent intensity, to fulfill in your life four very specific yet seemingly audacious requests.

Imagine that you long for God’s blessing—spiritual or material, or both—abundantly poured out, according to His eternal riches and generous wisdom.

And then, as He pours out His blessing on your life, imagine aspiring to take new territory—not primarily for yourself, but for Him and His purposes.

And as your borders expand and the responsibility God entrusts to you grows to the point that it becomes overwhelming, picture yourself crying out desperately for His hand of power to enable you to steward the responsibility well.

Now consider that under these conditions you might become so sensitive to sin’s destructive effect that you plead with God, Keep me from evil! so that you might pursue His best for your life without hindrance.

If you can begin to grasp this passion, this mind-set, this wondrous habit of faith-filled prayer, then you’ve already started to expand your borders into the next stage of God’s adventure for you.

Part I

Blessing from God

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.*

People Who Prayed

Mourning into Dancing by Cathy Davis

It was not a good year.

After twenty-two years of marriage, I was alone. I had lost both my house and my car. My son seemed bent on self-destruction through alcohol and drug abuse. And as if that weren't enough pain for one year, my beloved dog died.

But I picked up the pieces and labored to earn a college degree, determined to land my dream job.

It didn't take long for that bubble to burst. Once in the job market, I learned that the wages available for my level of experience—or, should I say, inexperience—weren't nearly enough to make ends meet. I took a risk and started a business. Which failed.

No matter how I tried, I felt as though I kept sliding back to the bottom of the heap of life.

I had already been fasting and praying that God would give me more of Himself—the greatest blessing of all. And now, my every plan thwarted, I opened myself completely to His direction: I'm in a desperate place, Lord. I want You to quiet my heart so that I can hear Your will for my life. My plans haven't taken me anywhere. Please bless me...the way You choose.

For some time I sought the Lord, hoping He would just write the answers on the wall, as He had done in the Bible for Daniel the prophet. But He simply kept me clinging more and more desperately to the promise of His goodness.

Finally, while I was fasting, I thought I sensed God's leading, and with no tuition money in hand, I began to apply to complete my master's degree at the local university. I was told early in the process that all grants had already been claimed, that there were no jobs available, and that even the academic adviser I had requested would be gone on sabbatical.

But God gave me peace. If this was His plan for my life, it would somehow come to pass; He would work out the details. So I finished applying for admission and financial aid.

The next day—only ten days after I had prayed for God's choice of blessing and direction—I received a call from the graduate school dean. “Cathy, I just wanted you to know you've been accepted into our graduate program. I believe we can help you with finances as well.”

In fact, I received a full scholarship, with a stipend for teaching, and a part-time job. What's

more, the adviser I had requested canceled her sabbatical and was now available!

Throughout my life, my heavenly Father has never ceased to be the One who loves to give and to bless. But it was when I asked Him for abundant blessing—according to His plan, not mine—that He showered down all I needed and more.

Please note: This excerpt cannot be copied or reproduced without said written permission from the publisher.