

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

Characteristic of Completeness: Giving Away My Life

Big Idea: Take me.

Related Scriptures: Genesis 32:24-28; Esther 4:13-16; Matthew 16:24-25; John 14:15; Acts 20:22-24; James 4:3

Introduction:

A. (Statements)

1. "I'm sick and tired of the status quo. I want a wonderful life."
2. "I want to make important contributions to my family, to my community and to the world. I want a wonderful life."
3. "I want my life to count for something truly worthwhile. I want to kick a dent in history. I want a wonderful life."
4. "I want to be a part of something far bigger and better than myself. I want a wonderful life."
5. "I want to know that what I'm doing is what God designed me to do. I want His favor. I want a wonderful life."
6. "I don't want to just know about God, I want to experience God. I want a wonderful life."

B. Can you relate to any of these thoughts? If so, you've come to the right place because we're going to be considering ► how to ask God for a wonderful life. And we're going to learn how to ask in a way that is proven to work.

Tucked away in one of the least-read portions of the least-read books of the Bible are two little verses that can change your life. Two verses that can usher you into a wonderful life. The two verses are ► 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. That's what we're going to be studying. These two little verses contain a little prayer that can produce big changes. It's the prayer of a little-known man named Jabez. We're going to learn what this is all about today and in the weeks ahead.

C. But, before we look at ► 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, I want to set the stage and provide a little context which I think is important.

1. Let me fast forward from the beginning of biblical history so that you have an idea of when and why 1 Chronicles was written.

- a. In the beginning, God creates the world.
- b. Adam and Eve sin.
- c. The flood comes; Noah floats.
- d. Noah's descendants include Abraham.
- e. God chooses Abraham to father a people—the Jews—who would represent God to the world. And, God gives Abraham and his descendants the promised land.
- f. Abraham has Isaac. Isaac has Jacob. Jacob has Joseph.
- g. Joseph goes to Egypt. The rest of the Jews join him later because there's a famine in the promised land.
- h. The Jews get stuck as slaves in Egypt for 400 years.
- i. God chooses Moses to set them free so they can go back to the promised land.
- j. God gives instructions to the Jews through Moses saying, "If you follow these instructions, including the Ten Commandments, it'll be really good; I'll bless you. If you don't, it'll be bad, I'll discipline you." This deal is called the Mosaic Covenant or Law.
- k. The Jews go back to the Promised Land. There, they don't follow God's instructions. They violate the Mosaic Covenant. They turn their backs on God. So, it gets bad, just like God said. God allows the Babylonians to come and conquer the Jews, to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and to drag the Jews to Babylon as exiles.
- l. The Jews are in Babylon for 70 years. Babylon fights with Persia. Babylon loses. And the Persians free the Jews to return to the Promised Land which includes Jerusalem.
- m. The Jews were happy to be back in the land, but also they were discouraged. It was the fifth century B.C. They knew that they had fallen out of God's favor. They had been disciplined as God promised. Jerusalem was a mess. They had no king of their own. They were governed by an appointee of the Persian king.

One Bible scholar says,

*By anyone's standards, the fifth century was hardly a golden age for the people of God. Their future as a kingdom and a distinct people of God, in fact, seemed bleaker at that moment than perhaps ever before.*<sup>1</sup>

2. The book of 1 Chronicles was written shortly after the Jews' return from exile. It was written for the primary purpose of encouraging God's people who returned to the Promised Land. One commentator explains this well. He says,

*The Chronicler sets himself to the task of taking the data of . . . history and organizing them in such a way as to answer the burning theological question of the . . . community . . . "After judgment . . . in the exile, is God still interested in us?"*<sup>2</sup>

3. Is God still interested in us? That was the burning question for the Jews who first read 1 Chronicles. And, it's the burning question for many of us isn't it?

"Have I blown it so badly that God is no longer interested in me?"

"Is a wonderful life even possible for me right now?"

"Am I too far gone?"

"How can I make things right?"

"How can get a wonderful life now?"

4. The answer is in 1 Chronicles 4. You say, "Great!" and you quickly turn to 1 Chronicles in your Bible, and you begin reading in ► Verse 1:

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:1 The sons of Judah *were* Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobal. 2 And Reaiah the son of Shobal begot Jahath, and Jahath begot Ahumai and Lahad. These *were* the families of the Zorathites. 3 These *were* the sons *of the father* of Etam: Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash; and the name of their sister *was* Hazelelponi; ► 4 and Penuel *was* the father of Gedor, and Ezer *was the* father of Hushah. These *were* the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah the

<sup>1</sup> John Sailhamer, *First and Second Chronicles, Everyman's Bible Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 13, quoted by Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-September, 1987, 279.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Dillard, "The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (September 1980): 208, quoted by Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-September, 1987, 284.

father of Bethlehem. 5 And Ashhur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah. ► 6 Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. These *were* the sons of Naarah. 7 The sons of Helah *were* Zereth, Zohar, and Ethnan; 8 and Koz begot Anub, Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel the son of Harum.

Right about now you're beginning to wonder what all this has to do with asking for a wonderful life. You seem to be in the midst of some kind of incredibly boring, meaningless family tree. In fact, the first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles is a genealogy that includes over 600 names.

In the middle of this genealogical desert there is an oasis in Chapter 4, Verses 9 and 10. It contains water for those thirsting for a wonderful life. It provides encouragement.

I. Let's consider the first part of ► Verse 9. It says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, . . .

- A. Right in the middle of this list of over 600 names, the author of 1 Chronicles is inspired by God to pull up and provide a glimpse of this man Jabez. This is the only place in the Bible that tells us about Jabez. And to put it here is to say that this man was extraordinary. We need to know something about him.
- B. The text says that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. He was a highly respected man. A godly man. A spiritually weighty man. He stands head and shoulders above the rest.

II. Now let's take a look at the last part of ► Verse 9. It says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:9 . . . and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore *him* in pain."

- A. The name Jabez in the Hebrew language in which this was originally written means "he causes pain." How would you like to be stuck with a name like that?

Our text explains that the pain was tied, at least in part, to his birth. Most babies bring some pain to their mothers when they are born, but somehow the pain from Jabez was so unusual that his mother chose to memorialize it in his name. Maybe it was an extraordinarily difficult delivery. Maybe he was born breech. Maybe he was born into very difficult circumstances at home and his presence was a painful strain on his mother. We just don't know for sure.

- B. But, I think the biggest burden of this name came in the future. You see, Hebrew names often carried a prophetic aspect. They often described a child's character traits

or predicted what the child would do or be.

For example, the name “Solomon” means “peace.” Sure enough, the Solomon of the Bible was the first king of Israel to reign without going to war. The name “Jacob” means “deceiver” or “supplanter.” Sure enough, the Jacob of the Bible was a deceiver for much of his life.

So, it seems that Jabez caused pain for people for at least a part of his life. And, Jabez was probably not innocent. The pain was likely produced by his sin. This would explain why, as part of his prayer in ► Verse 10 Jabez says to God,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:10 “. . . keep *me* from evil, that I may not cause pain!

- C. Now, this would have been riveting to the Jews who needed encouragement because here they had a description of a guy who had apparently made some big mistakes—mistakes that had caused pain for people. In spite of this, he somehow grew to be more honorable than his brothers. He started badly, but ended well, gaining God’s favor. That would have been of keen interest to the Jews after returning from exile because they had made some big mistakes in turning away from God, and they were wondering how they could ever regain God’s favor. How could they ask for a wonderful life? How did Jabez do it?

III. The answer is in Verse 10. Let’s look at the first part of it. It ► says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel . . .

- A Jabez called on God. That’s another way of saying he prayed.
- B. Jabez prayed to the God of Israel. There are a number of Hebrew descriptions of God that could have been used here. The writer chose the word *elohim*. *Elohim* is a descriptor of God that emphasizes His power and majesty. Jabez prayed to the God who had the power to create and maintain the universe. And, therefore Jabez prayed to the God who was and is able to change us—able to empower us to live a wonderful life.

IV. The rest of Verse 10 articulates the specific prayer of Jabez. It is a very simple, one-sentence prayer. Jabez ► says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . “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!” . . .

- A. At first blush, this seems like a nice but unremarkable prayer. Doesn’t seem all that profound or noble.
- B. Moreover, it almost seems selfish. Seems like something you might be embarrassed to

pray.

- C. But, as we look closer at this prayer, I want to show you that this is a critically important prayer, worthy of our study and regular use.
1. Remember, this is the prayer that changed the life of Jabez from one of pain to one of honor. The elements of this prayer hold keys to a wonderful life.
  2. And, it seems clear that God was pleased with this prayer because ► Verse 10 concludes by saying,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . So God granted him what he requested.

- V. The prayer of Jabez has four parts. We're going to cover the first part this morning. The others we'll cover in the Sundays to come. The first part of the prayer of Jabez goes like ► this:

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:10 . . . "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, . . ."

- A. You can't see it in the English translation, but in the original Hebrew the verb "to bless" appears twice, back to back, in slightly different forms. It's a literary device used to emphasize or magnify something. It's tough to translate strictly into English. I suppose it would be something like, "bless bless me." That sounds weird. So, the New King James translators here opted to simply say, "bless me indeed." The idea is that Jabez's prayer is not a sheepish request, it's a desperate plea. "Please, please. Bless me, bless me." In bold letters, underlined, with a row of exclamation points after it. "Oh, that You would bless me indeed."
- B. Sounds a little selfish doesn't it? Selfish and brash. Sounds like something one of those name-it-and-claim-it guys on TV would do. "Bless me with a Mercedes. Bless me with a Rolex. Bless me with my own personal jet. Make me rich. Make me famous. Make me powerful. Give me a promotion. Make me feel good."

Sorry, that's not it. That's not the attitude Jabez had. The Bible denounces that kind of selfishness in places like ► James 4:3 which says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

- C. ► We need to understand a little more about what to bless means here before we boldly go before God and ask Him to bless us as Jabez did.
1. Remember, the Mosaic Covenant? God said to the Israelites as recorded in Deuteronomy 28-30, "Obey Me and I'll bless you. Disobey Me and I'll discipline you."

Jabez had probably experienced the discipline of the Lord for producing pain in other people's lives. What basis did he have now for asking for God's blessing? The only basis at that time would have been to hold up his end of the Mosaic Covenant. To obey God was the only basis he had for expecting God to grant his request and bless him. The turning point for him, the bridge from pain to honor—was to humbly surrender to the Lord in complete trust and obedience.

2. This is important because when Jabez prayed, "Oh, that you would bless me indeed" he must have done so with an attitude of complete surrender and obedience. One commentator writes on this as it applies to us. He says,

*When we ask for God's blessing, we're not asking for more of what we could get for ourselves. We're crying for the wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to know about or give to us . . . When we seek God's blessing as the ultimate value in life, we are throwing ourselves entirely into the river of His will and power and purposes for us.<sup>3</sup>*

The metaphor of a river is so appropriate. Here's a ► photo of a powerful river. The river represents God. Imagine yourself standing on the bank of the river.

I suspect that the most common idea of asking God to bless you would be like asking God to grant you a drink when you're thirsty, when you want a little bit of refreshment from Him, just enough to help you out. That way you remain in control. You don't want to get carried away with God. But, staying on the riverbank is a dry existence. You'll never experience the wonderful life there. You'll never feel the power of His current carrying you. You'll never be immersed in His goodness. That's not the prayer of Jabez.

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

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

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 23-24.

*I'm diving in*<sup>4</sup>

That's what "bless me" means. It means I'm diving in. Take me. That's the big idea of my sermon: ► Take me. It's a prayer to God. Take me. I'm surrendering myself to whatever You want. The currents may be swift, scary, even dangerous. But, I'm going in, Lord. Bless me. I'm yours. All of me. I'm yours. Take me.

This is most closely related to the Characteristic of Completeness in Christ we ► call, Giving Away My Life. It's total surrender to God.

- D. I think the fact that Jabez did not provide a list of blessings desired bears testimony to his total surrender to God. Jabez leaves it entirely up to God to decide what the blessings he would receive, and when, and how, and where. That's radical trust. That's the abandonment of diving in.
- E. There is another clue in our text that points to surrender as a basis for asking God to bless us, and it illustrates what I'm talking about. It's a clue that I had missed entirely until I talked with my former Hebrew professor about this passage. It's back in the first part of ► Verse 10, where it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> 1 Chronicles 4:10 And Jabez called on the God of Israel . . .

Why doesn't it just say Jabez called on God? Why does it go further and say that he called on the God of Israel?

1. It could be that God wanted to remind the Jews that He was still their God and they were still His people, even though they had messed up. That would have been an encouragement.
2. But there may be something even deeper here. The people of Israel were originally named after one of the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. You may recall that God renamed Jacob Israel. The name Jacob which he had been given as a child means "deceiver" or "supplanter." It could be loosely translated "manipulator" or "controller."

What's the significance? Well, Jacob was stuck with a lousy name just like Jabez. Jacob had to overcome a tainted past just like Jabez. Jabez caused people pain. Jacob was a deceiver and a controller. True to his name Jacob wrestled with God for control of his life. Jacob was the guy standing on the riverbank refusing to jump in because he didn't want to surrender control to God.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Curtis Chapman, "Dive," *Speechless* album, Sparrow Records, 1999.

Let's briefly take a look at what happened to Jacob.

- a. ► Back in Genesis 32:24 it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 32:24 Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

Jacob is alone and he wrestles with an unidentified man all night. Who is this man?

Later in the Bible, ► Hosea 12:3-4 tells us. Speaking of Jacob it says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Hosea 12:3 . . . he struggled with God. 4 Yes, he struggled with the Angel . . .

Some have speculated that this is the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ. Whatever the case, this angel is of divine origin, and the wrestling is the culmination of all Jacob's wrestling with God for control.

One Bible commentator says,

*Though the wrestling was physical, it symbolized a spiritual struggle between Jacob and God to determine whether Jacob in self-will and self-reliance and guile was to manage his own affairs or whether he was to bow completely to God's management of his life.<sup>5</sup>*

- b. ► Verse 25 continues:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 32:25 Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him.

It is interesting that Jacob wrestles with the angel all night. It's dark. I don't think Jacob knows this is an angel. Then the angel touches Jacob on the socket of his thigh, and the mere touch of the angel dislocates his thigh.

This is when I think it dawns on Jacob, "I have been wrestling all night with God! I have been wrestling all my life with God! And now God is saying, that's enough; I'm in charge. Surrender to Me."

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<sup>5</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Genesis, Everyman's Bible Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 124

Jacob experiences brokenness.

- c. ► Verse 26 continues,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 32:26 And He [the angel] said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he [Jacob] said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

There’s the headlong plea for a blessing from God—for God to grant His favor.

Jacob is no longer trying to overtake the angel. He’s not wrestling. He’s hanging on, desperately asking for God’s blessing just like Jabez.

- Hosea 12:4 sheds light on Jacob’s brokenness:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Hosea 12:4 Yes, he struggled with the Angel . . . He wept, and sought favor from Him. . . .

Jacob is asking God, he’s pleading with God as he weeps, “Can you forgive me? Even after all the foolish things I have done? Is it too late to surrender? Am I still of some value to You? Do I have a future? Will You still be with me? Will You bless me?”

- d. ► Verse 27 records the response:

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 32:27 So He said to him, “What *is* your name?” He said, “Jacob.”

This seems odd at first blush. Why would the angel ask for his name? Surely he knows his name is Jacob.

God wants him to say it, and face the meaning of it. “Deceiver,” “supplanter,” “manipulator,” “controller.”

God is orchestrating this entire event to bring into focus Jacob’s problem. He’s been a controller. He wants Jacob to face it and confess it.

- e. ► Now, in Jacob’s brokenness, we might be tempted to think that making Jacob say his own name is rubbing salt in the wound, but it serves to set up the wonderful truth that Jacob needs to see in ► Verse 28. It says,

<sup>NKJ</sup> Genesis 32:28 And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; . . .”

Now, for God to change a person's name is a very significant thing. It signifies a radical change. A new direction.

What does "Israel" mean? It means "God rules."

I think this is why it is written that ► Jabez called on the God *of Israel*. He called the God of Jacob. He called on the God who is able to change people like Jacob. He called on the God who is able to make him rise above his past, to rise above his sinfulness, to give him newness of life, a wonderful life.

Conclusion:

- A. ► Do you want a wonderful life? Pray this prayer: "Oh, that You would bless me, indeed." Take me. Bless me, God.

But, you can't pray it effectively while you're standing on the bank. It must be your cry as you're jumping into the river of God.

- B. When you pray "Oh, that You would bless me, indeed," when you jump in, you never have any problems again. Right? Wrong!

I have found that sometimes the River is calm and restful. Sometimes it's swift and scary and it takes my breath away. Sometimes I can see where I'm going. Sometimes I can't. Sometimes I'm afraid I'm going to drown, but I never do. Sometimes it feels as secure as a warm bathtub. Sometimes the rocks hurt. Sometimes I feel like getting out and climbing up on the bank, but if I stay there for long I just dry up.

It's wild, but it's wonderful this surrendering to God. There's no place I'd rather be than carried by the current of God will, totally immersed in what He wants for me.

- C. I wonder. Where are you now? Are you on the bank? Or in the river? That's a very important question because it's the difference between dry and wonderful.

I invite you to ask God to show you where you are right now. Are you on the bank? Or in the river? Do you have a toe in? Or are you totally in? Do you need to jump?

In this moment, if you're able to say it with desperate, reckless abandon, I invite you to join Jabez in calling out to God, "Take me; bless me."