

Retreat based on the Prayer of Jabez

Leader's opening remarks:

Welcome:

Arrange in small groups:

Logistics of day:

Have you heard of a book titled "The Prayer of Jabez" by Bruce Wilkinson? It's based on 1 CHRONICLES 4:9-10, which reads like this – *"Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain.' 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."*

There it is, the story of a man who started with almost nothing but gloomy prospects for the future, cried out a simple prayer, and ended up a man of honor in the eyes of God. How do we know that Jabez had such gloomy prospects? In Biblical times, a child's name was often thought to be a wish or prophesy about the child's future. The name "Jabez" in Hebrew means "pain". That doesn't sound like the start of a promising life for him, does it?

No one knows much about Jabez – in fact, all we know about him is written in these two verses. It's found buried among some pretty uninteresting chapters in the Bible. Chapter 4 starts with; "The sons of Judah were Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur and Shobal. And more – Ahumai, Ishma, Idbash, Hazeponi, Anub.... and on-and-on. I know there's a purpose for listing all these names – genealogy. But, for me, the stress of pronouncing them is enough to make me scream (if it doesn't put me to sleep first.). Suddenly, in the middle of everything, the chronicler stops. One name deserves special comment – special attention. It's the briefest of biographies.....just 2 verses. It's as if the author was saying, "Let me tell you about Jabez – now he was special!"

Hear again 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 *"Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." 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.”*

What did he ask for?

- A blessing
- More territory (interpreted as ministry)
- For God to guide his path
- For God to keep him from evil
- For God to help him not to cause pain

And God granted his request.

And then, as if nothing had been said, the roll call continues as if nothing has happened – Chelub, Shuah, and Mehir... the passage is a mystery!

But, you know God is a mystery and He truly works in mysterious ways. Today we will be exploring Jabez and his prayer. Hopefully, when the day is over we will have found new insights into the love God feels for us, and what we can give to Him and through Him.

We will be hearing some brief talks and have some discussions and prayer time about the talks in your small group.

The talks will be witness talks from the speaker out of their own life. They won't be theological teachings. None of the speakers knew whether they would speak at this retreat until our team meeting last night. They “volunteered,” so to speak, because they have a story to share with you -- their struggle to walk with Christ in their environment as it applies to their topic and where they are in their own journey.

When they have finished speaking, there will be time for discussion in small groups. You will share with the others in your group how you feel about what the speaker said. How does it affect you as you attempt to walk with Christ at this time and in this place, in this environment?

We'll give you ample opportunities for breaks, so please wait for the time that is planned into the schedule to go to the bathroom. Thanks...

Pray for the day and retreat.

TALK #1 – “Jabez called on the God of Israel.”
WHAT DOES PRAYER MEAN IN YOUR LIFE?

God is a mystery and He works in mysterious ways. He is truly happy when we talk to him about our lives acknowledging the blessings, seeking comfort and strength for the trials and simply being with him. John 15:1, 4-5 says “*I am the true vine...Abide in me as I abide in you...You are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.*” That word “abide” has special meaning for many who simply want to sit at His feet and drink in His presence. I love this quote “Prayer is a personal relationship in which you and God move from a hello of politeness to an embrace of love.”

The prayer says “Oh Lord, that you would bless me indeed!” The book says that adding the word “indeed” was like putting exclamation points or writing the sentence in all caps. It adds a sense of urgency to the prayer.

The one thing that is difficult about prayer is that sometimes it takes so long for the answer to come. We are not a patient people and we need and want the answer now. And sometimes we don’t like the answer. But Romans 8:28 says “*All things work for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose.*”

Talk here about your prayer blessings and struggles to demonstrate that prayer has changed your life and the lives of those you pray for. Have you changed because of praying?

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main reasons you hesitate to ask God for His blessings?
2. Is there a “skeleton” in your prayer life – someone or some experience that affected your prayer life negatively? Were you able to overcome it?

TALK #2 –“His mother named him Jabez because she bore him in pain.” WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Let’s think about Jabez -- his name means **pain!** What was his mother thinking? For Jewish children, a name was taken as a prophecy of the person’s temperament and destiny. For example, the name Solomon” means peace and he became the first king of Isreal to rule without having to go to war. From childhood on, Jabez would be a prisoner of pain.

Deserved or undeserved, the shame label sticks likes superglue that will not let go, no matter how hard a child tries. At some point in his life, the burden of shame drove Jabez to cry out to God so that he would finally be free from pain. And God answered his prayer.

Yet, the most memorable thing about Jabez’s life is not where he started or what he had to overcome, but where he ended up. Even though he started in pain, he didn’t let his experience or his prospects keep him from reaching, with God’s favor, for another kind of life. Perhaps God used that pain, as He so often does, to nudge Jabez into looking to God for more.

I think that if Jabez were around today he’d be quick to tell you that his little prayer holds no special powers or magical words. But he would also tell you that if you want to step into God’s greater purpose for your life – no matter how unpromising your circumstances might be right now – and you want to seize God’s extravagant best for you with all your heart and mind and will, then you’re just a prayer away.

Testify about how God used pain in your life to drive you to prayer and what happened.

Discussion Questions

1. Name a time when your name or the name used to identify you had a negative effect on you?
2. What labels or attitudes have you placed upon yourself that might be limiting what you see as God’s purpose for life?

Ideas for the speaker to consider when preparing talks.

You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.
Isaiah 62:2

Your Father's name for you isn't Pain or any such word! It is:

- "CHOSEN" – John 15:19
- "MINE" – Psalm 50:10-12
- "BELOVED" – Deuteronomy 33:12
- "SOUGHT AFTER" – Isaiah 62:12
- "FRIEND" – James 2:23

**TALK # 3 – He asked “that You would bless me indeed!
OH, THAT YOU WOULD BLESS ME INDEED**

Personal change begins for each of us when we cry out to God for *what God wants for us* with open hands and expectant hearts. Jabez didn't say bless me with a new car, a bank account or whatever. He asked to be blessed without saying what he thought the blessing should be. We should make our bold request and wait before our loving Father for what he wants to bless us with. Miracles begin here too. And from my own life I can assure you that they will continue as long as you trust in Him and keep the faith.

As you come before the Lord expectantly each day and pray to Him in both desperation and trust, your own story will change. You'll see new beginnings and new opportunities. You'll think new thoughts. The course of your life will shift.

I like to think that we are looking for a blessing from a God who can “*do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*” (Ephesians 3:20). The very nature of God is to have goodness in so much abundance that it overflows into our lives. If you think about God in any other way than that, Im asking you to start changing the way you think.

Testify about what happened when you realized something God wanted for you, and how you now can be expectant of what He will do if you pray.

Discussion Questions

1. What is keeping you from breaking through to a blessed life here in prison? (Circumstances, others or myself.)
2. Can God bless you even when He appears to be saying no to a specific request? Can He bless you here?

Ideas for the speaker to consider when preparing talk:

Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 17:3-4

Ask and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8

TALK # 4 – THAT YOU WOULD ENLARGE MY TERRITORY

When Jabez asked God to expand or enlarge his territory, he wasn't asking for more land. We can conclude that he wasn't asking for growth for growth's sake, or more space at the expense of someone else, or the promise of easy money. Why? Because the Bible calls him "more honorable." To qualify for such praise, the request and motives of Jabez would have to be in harmony with God's purposes. Jabez understood that to increase his servant-hood, he needed more opportunity. Can you imagine a mother or dad being irritated with a child who asks, "What can I do to help you, Mommy?" In the same way, when you ask for greater opportunity for God, He responds with delight and favor.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus was unusually attracted to people who had emptiness in their lives? Losers and loners, the sick and the lame, the weak and the hungry – these were the ones He came for and whose needs He met. God loves nobodies! Jabez shouldn't have made it into the record books. He began life as one of Israel's certified nobodies. No fortune. No social standing. No special talents. No promising future. But his life ends up with significance, fulfillment and honor.

Like Jabez, we have territory. This territory includes all those whose lives we touch, wherever we are. When you think about God expanding your territories, think about ways you can serve Him – in the place you're in right now.

God has plans to help you reach out and touch lives for Him. He will place people and opportunities in your path. Call them Jabez Appointments. They occur when you respond to what seems to be a divinely arranged encounter...and you invite God to act. You can trust that God will **never** send someone to you that you cannot help by the power of His will and your willingness to respond.

If you have ever prayed for God to enlarge your territory, tell what happened as a result of that prayer... if it hasn't happened yet, tell what and why you are praying for something to happen.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean when we ask God to expand our territories here?

2. When was the last time you asked God for more ministry? What happened?

Ideas for the speaker to consider when preparing talk:

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. “ 2 Timothy 1:7

What reasons do you have for not asking God to enlarge your territories?

SHY – “I’m afraid of new people and new situation. Can I take territory for God from the safety of my couch?

Proverbs 29:25

UNGIFTED – “I’m so ordinary that I’m practically invisible. And I don’t have special gifts. How can God make me an influence for Him?

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

AFRAID TO FAIL - “I’m afraid God will ask me outside my comfort zone, then I’ll get in too deep and blow it. And I hate to fail!”

Nahum 1:7, Matthew 10:18-20

RELUCTANT TO SURRENDER CONTROL – “If I let go of control, I worry about what God will do to me – send me to the worst place on earth? Make me give away my prized possessions? Ask me to talk to my step mom?”

Romans 12:1, Proverbs 3:506

OVEREXTENDED - “I don’t have the time or resources. In fact, I’m already too busy.”

Matthew 11:28=30

TALK # 5 – THAT YOUR HAND WOULD BE WITH ME

How many of you here have taken on a huge job only to discover too late that you're in way over your head? Well, when you ask God for more blessings and more territory, you'll have that experience. When you step out to live on a larger scale for God, you will realize that overwhelming new obstacles are popping up right along with your grand new opportunities... only you are as small and weak as ever. You'll feel like you set out to dog-paddle across your favorite pool only to end up in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

It's natural to feel overwhelmed afraid, or even a little angry when we see the outrageous predicament that our bold praying has gotten us into. We may even feel the weight of the limits of our powers and the certainty of our failure. We as Christians know about our need for God's power in our life. Yet God asks us to challenge the odds – He wants to grow the size of our faith to match the size of His destiny for us. It's the beginning of the kind of living that changes lives and impacts the world for God. And that's exactly what He has in mind for you.

Jabez understood this

- He received the blessing
- He took on greater territories
- He became aware that everything was done with power from God.
- He prayed for more power

Testify about what scares you about praying for big things to happen... bearing in mind God is in control and won't give us something He hasn't prepared for us to do.

Discussion Questions

1. Name a time in your life when you either felt or witnessed God's hand powerfully moving? What happened? How did you handle it?
2. What is keeping you from experiencing God's hand upon you?

Ideas for the speaker to consider when preparing talk:

People today place a high value on being self-sufficient. Way too high! Do you sense that this attitude affects how you live out your faith?

Consider:

- What does it mean to have God's hand upon you
- Why feeling "in over your head" is normal – and what you should do about it.
- What the Bible says about being filled with God's Spirit
- What might be keeping you from asking for God's hand upon you
- How you can experience God's power in your life today

TALK # 6 – He asked, “and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!” THAT YOU WOULD KEEP ME FROM EVIL

After three huge requests of God, the last request in the Jabez prayer reaches for safety, protection, and long-term security. This request makes a lot of sense. When you're hugely blessed by God, you have a lot to lose. Beside, when you're taking territory for God by His power, you are taking it from someone else. And Satan doesn't like it. With God's hand using you in mighty ways for Him, you will become a larger target for the enemy. And how does the enemy attack his targets? Through temptation.

Think for a minute about how you pray when you face temptations. Do you mostly ask just for strength to not give in? There's nothing wrong with that prayer, but it's not the way Jabez prayed. He didn't pray "Keep me through evil" but "Keep me from evil." Jabez didn't ask God to help him overcome temptation. Instead, he asked God to keep him away from temptation.

Peter warns Christians that "*your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). Jabez understood that our most important strategy for defeating the roaring lion is to RUN.

In the book, Bruce Wilkinson reminds us that Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be our indwelling, personal source of comfort. This is a wonderful, supernatural provision to help us with our struggle with sin. What would happen if we specifically asked for this divine comfort in a time of temptation? I believe the Holy Spirit will provide whatever we need.

Testify about personally praying for power and strength to overcome sin and what happened once you relied on God and the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there a time that you feel God protected you from evil?
2. Have you asked God to keep you from evil?

Ideas for the speaker to consider when preparing talks:

“Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Matthew 6:13

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41

“Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desire and enticed.” James 1:14

“AUTO” INSURED – “I think that if I’m a Christian and live right, I’ll automatically be covered against evil attacks.” Matthew 26:41

UNDERPOWERED & OVERWHELMED – You don’t know how intense my temptations are! I just can’t handle them, they overpower me.”
Hebrews 12:3-4, Hebrews 4:15-16

TEMPTATION JUNKIE – Why flee my temptations? I can survive, and I like the thrill of standing on the edge. 1 Corinthians 10:13

CHOOSE TO LOSE – Why start over when you know you’ll fail again? I think some sins are just meant to be part of us, like a mole or a scar.
Romans 6:11-13, 15

HOME ALONE – I’m not sure I trust God to be there when I need Him. Anyway, when I’m being tempted I don’t feel worthy of God’s help.”
James 1:13-14

TALK # 7 – THAT I MAY NOT CAUSE PAIN

Linked to Jabez's last request are the words "that I may not cause pain." Many translations render the clause "so that I will be free from pain" or something similar. The Hebrew simply says "pain not," so you can see why both renderings can be correct – and completely true.

Sin causes pain, period! The Bible says, "*The wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). Satan wants you to sin because he wants to cut you off not only from God's blessings but also from your relationship with Him. Why? Because when you are connected to Christ and are active in your relationship with Him, Satan can't touch you.

We need to follow Peter's advice to be "sober and vigilant." For us not to cause pain to other through our sin, we must clothe ourselves with the full armor of God. Ephesians E6:14-17 (NIV) says— "*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*"

Think of a time when you have caused pain to others through your actions. Who was hurt in the process? Don't you find that most of the time when we cause pain to others, not only are our targets hurt, but the hurt comes back to us in some way?

So, here Jabez is asking to be kept away from sin so he will not cause pain. That's a worthy prayer. Talk about how your sin has hurt others and what would have happened if you had been praying this same prayer.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when someone else's sin caused you pain.
2. When have you had a time in your life when you were the one who caused pain?
3. Do you think God feels pain when you sin?

Ideas for the speaker to consider when preparing talk:

“The wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23

Sin causes pain.

When a person commits a sin, it greatly affects others in its wake. 2 Samuel 12:9-12

Some people in the Bible whose denial of God’s will (sin) caused havoc:
David, Samson, Jonah

Leader's Closing remarks – It ends, “So God granted what he requested.”

I think it's easier to understand that God loves us, than to understand that He also likes us. Jabez understood that God is good – and that God liked him. That same God is still good – and He likes you! He wants to answer your big, world-changing prayers, and He longs to meet your most intimate, personal desires too.

So – let's get back to our friend, Jabez. He prayed this mighty prayer and his life was changed. Not only was his life changed, but the power of the name given him was thrown out of the picture. He didn't let a hurtful past or an unpromising present keep him from asking God for a huge blessing.

Did you begin your life with a disadvantage? Have you faced shame and rejection? Do you feel like a nobody? Negative life experiences can profoundly influence how we see ourselves and how we understand and relate to God. They can change the way we pray, cutting us off from His abundant best.

Take a few moments and ask yourself what name you have put on your life. Have you stamped your heritage or your record thus far with some severely limiting labels like “Disappointment,” “Not Very Smart,” “Unwanted,” “Unlovable,” or “Failure?” Do you feel that God can't use you because of whatever barrier you have identified?

I believe that God weeps for you when you have these feelings. God's love is so big, and His desires for you are so huge that none of us can fathom them. He wants the best for you and is so happy when He sees you realize how much you can accomplish with Him. And, I can promise you that if you truly pray for Him to bless you and use you for His purposes; if you glorify Him and look for ways to serve Him; if you trust Him -- you're in for an adventure that would rival any you've seen on TV.

Your living is determined not by what life brings to you but by the attitude you bring to life; not by what happens to you but by the way your mind looks at what happens. Circumstances and situations do color life, but God has given you the mind to choose what the color will be.

I would like to leave you with this thought – If you think that you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito.

Talk 1 Discussion Questions

1. What are the main reasons you hesitate to ask God for His blessings?
2. Is there a “skeleton” in your prayer life – someone or some experience that affected your prayer life negatively? Were you able to overcome it?

Talk 2 Discussion Questions

1. Name a time when your name or the name used to identify you had a negative effect on you?
2. What labels or attitudes have you placed upon yourself that might be limiting what you see as God’s purpose for life?

Talk 3 Discussion Questions

1. What is keeping you from breaking through to a blessed life here in prison? (Circumstances, others or myself.)
2. Can God bless you even when He appears to be saying no to a specific request? Can He bless you here?

Talk 4 Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean when we ask God to expand our territories here?
2. When was the last time you asked God for more ministry? What happened?

Talk 5 Discussion Questions

1. Name a time in your life when you either felt or witnessed God’s hand powerfully moving? What happened? How did you handle it?
2. What is keeping you from experiencing God’s hand upon you?

Talk 6 Discussion Questions

1. Is there a time that you feel God protected you from evil?
2. Have you asked God to keep you from evil?

Talk 7 Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when someone else’s sin caused you pain.
2. When have you had a time in your life when you were the one who caused pain?
3. Do you think God feels pain when you sin?