

## Jabez: The Man Who Stood Out In A Crowd

Franklin Church of Christ  
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### Introduction:

Have you ever read the first ten chapters of **I Chronicles**? I have. However, after the first few verses, my eyes glaze over and I begin to simply skim the page, pleading for the list of names to end. In the middle of this section, two verses (**I Chronicles 4:9-10**) stand out with such profound impact it seems as though God wanted to slap us out of our stupor and say, "Wake up, this is important!"

For some reason, God wants us to know about Jabez. Jabez was not just another name on the page. He was not just another face in the crowd. When the inspired writer of **I Chronicles** got to Jabez, he stopped listing the names on the tombstones and boldly said, "You need to know about this guy!" Of the hundreds mentioned in the surrounding chapters, this man stood out in the crowd, forcing us to ask, "What about us?" Do we stand out in the crowd gathered on this earth? Are we any different from the droning list of names in the roll call of humanity? In these two verses, Jabez and his prayer give us a model of excellent living for God. If we follow it, we will stand out.

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 (**I Chronicles 4:9-10, NKJV**).

### Discussion:

If you want to stand out in the crowd ...

- I. ... don't let the crowd determine where you will stand.
  - A. Jabez went through what we all go through. His life was "prophesied" for him by his mother. Jabez caused his mother a lot of pain when he was born and evidently she didn't want him to forget it. She reminded him of it every time she said his name, which meant "causes pain." Jabez' mother was doing more than reminding him of the past, she was establishing his future. She had, in a very real sense, set Jabez up to be a cause of pain for all who knew him. She was determining where he would stand.
  - B. Consider what it must be like to hear that you are nothing but a pain every day of your life. Simply by calling your name everyone tells you that you cause sorrow. For many people, the constant reinforcement of this message would have taken control. In the manner of self-fulfilling prophecy, they would have become a great cause of pain in people's lives.
  - C. Every day parents, siblings, peers and teachers "prophecy" children's lives. Many times it is positive. Too often it is negative. Every day some children are told they are going to be doctors, lawyers or presidents. Every day some children are told they are going to be criminals, hoods or druggies. Some are told they are awkward, some graceful. Some are told they are intelligent, some stupid. Some are momma's boys and others are daddy's girls. Some are class leaders, others class clowns. Some are told they are cool, others geeks. What have you been told?
  - D. Jabez understood one of the key factors of standing out in a crowd. The prophecies of our parents, peers or professors do not matter. We are not bound by what they expect. We are bound simply by the extent of God's grace and blessing that we are willing to receive. We can step out of the molds everyone else has set for us and decide to be what God wants us to be. No matter what anyone else has done to us or said about us we can be different. Jabez refused to be a cause of sorrow. He planned to be blessed and if blessed, he would surely be a blessing to others. If you want to stand out in a crowd, don't let the crowd determine where you stand.
- II. ... stop standing still, start going somewhere.
  - A. Jabez knew he wanted something. He wanted his territory increased. I believe there is more to this than simply rubbing a lamp and asking a wish. In the context of his mother's "prophecy", the mere fact that he makes this request demonstrates a mindset in Jabez. It demonstrates he wasn't willing to stand still, he was heading somewhere. He had goals for an enlarged territory.
  - B. When God organized His people in this world, He did not set up communes or monasteries that would keep His people separate from the world. He did not ask us to go out of the world and

have no part in the dealings of the world (**I Corinthians 5:10**). Consequently, He did not ask us to be ambitionless blobs who allow the world to pass us by without any desires or goals. In fact, in places, God has encouraged us to follow our hearts' desires (**Ecclesiastes 11:9**) and in whatever we determine to do we should excel (**Ecclesiastes 9:10**). In the midst of this, pray that God will bless you in these endeavors. Because we live in a society that treats God like a vending machine, we are sometimes afraid to ask God for His blessings on our life's goals. Jabez was not afraid to have goals and ask for God's blessing. We should follow his example. If you want to stand out in a crowd, stop standing still and start going somewhere.

- C. Having said this, I must modify the point with a few governing biblical principles.
  1. While we follow our heart's impulses, we must remember that we will stand before God in judgment (**Ecclesiastes 11:9**). Therefore, keep your desires and impulses within the boundaries of God's word.
  2. We must make sure our goals are means to the end of serving God and not our own personal pleasures (**James 4:3**). If your goals are selfish, don't expect God's blessing.
  3. Remember God is not obligated to bless us and has not promised to grant every blessing we request. At times, God says, "No." We must remember our prayers are dependent upon the Lord's will and we must be willing to accept His answers (**James 4:13-15**).

III. ... stop standing and start kneeling.

- A. When God wanted us to know Jabez, He didn't tell us about his property, his family, his intelligence or his military prowess. He told us about his prayer. We must not miss the forest for the trees, getting so caught up in the particular requests that we miss the most important fact, "Jabez called on the God of Israel."
- B. We cannot extricate these verses about Jabez from their context in the Chronicles and in the history of the Jews. From the time of the Exodus, the Jews were told it was up to God to extend their borders (**Deuteronomy 12:20; 19:8**). The books of First and Second Chronicles tell the stories of men who either recognized this or didn't. These books tell us of Saul, Rehoboam, Jeroboam and others who did not lean on God. They also tell us of David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and others who prayed to God for their borders. All of the men in the Chronicles can be judged by how they compare to the prayer of Jabez. Did they pray to the living God? Or did they pray to idols in high places [**II Chronicles 11:15**]? Did they make their supplications and requests to the God of Israel or did they pray to foreign gods [**II Chronicles 25:14**]? Did they pray at all? At the very beginning of the book stands a man who sets the stage for the following stories. Those who followed his example were likewise blessed. Those who didn't, weren't.
- C. How does your prayer life compare? Your prayers do not have to be long and wordy. (Jabez' was only 32 words long.) They simply have to be there. Do you pray other than in the assembly? How often do you pray by yourself? How often do you pray with your family? How often do you pray with your brethren (outside of the worship service)? If God were to write your epitaph, as He did Jabez', would your prayer life be memorable? If you want to stand out in the crowd, you have to stop standing and start kneeling.

IV. ... recognize you are not standing on your own legs, but on legs God has given you.

- A. While Jabez evidently had his own goals, he understood that all blessings come from above (**James 1:17**). He did not expect to be able to expand his borders on his own. Jabez understood his dependence upon God. He knew he needed God's hand with him if he would be successful. The scriptures are replete with references to God's hand being a part of His people's success (**Ezra 7:9; 8:18, 22; Nehemiah 2:8, 18; Acts 11:21**). Without God, no one has success.
- B. Far too many people settle for mediocrity, because they try to accomplish only what they, "by themselves", can accomplish. They don't ever cast their cares on the Lord [**Philippians 4:6; I Peter 5:7**], stepping out on a limb to do God's will. Typically, we spend our time like Moses at the burning bush, making excuses for ourselves [**Exodus 3-4**]. "I can't do this!" "What if they ask me a question I don't know how to answer?" "What if they won't listen?" "I can't speak very well." On and on we make excuses. Remember God's response to Moses in **Exodus 3:12**, "Certainly I will be with you." When we spend less time thinking about ourselves and more time thinking about God's power and strength, we will remember that it is true, "By myself, I can't accomplish

anything. But I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (**Philippians 4:13**). When we spend less time trying to stand on our own legs and more time realizing these are legs God has given us, we slowly begin to realize that even the things we thought we could do by ourselves, we cannot. Living, moving, existing all seem like things we do by ourselves, but that is not so. It is only by God’s grace we do even these things (**Acts 17:28**).

C. Have you ever felt overwhelmed? You looked at a responsibility, perhaps at school, on the job, with your family, within the congregation and realized, “I can’t do this.” You know what I am talking about, that gut wrenching, embarrassed feeling that you have bitten off more than you can chew. This feeling comes when your boss has placed you over a new department, your teacher has determined you need to be challenged more, you just found out your wife is pregnant or someone has asked you to teach a Bible class. Suddenly, you realize you are not the one for the job. Our natural reaction is to quit, but we must not. Rather, learn that those are the moments when we are coming face to face with our weakness, with our need for God. In that moment, if we realize what Jabez realized, that we are not standing on our own legs, but on legs God has given us, we will be able to stand out in the crowd. Not because of ourselves, but because of God. As Paul learned from his “thorn in the flesh”, it is only when we realize how truly weak we are that God’s power will be used in us. When we are weak, we will be strong (**II Corinthians 12:9-10**). Finally, when the goal has been accomplished and we, like Jabez, have stood out in the crowd, we must remember that we are only servants who have acted as God gave us blessing and opportunity (**I Corinthians 3:5-7**). We are nothing. God is everything.

V. ... don’t let Satan cut off your legs.

A. Jabez understood that sin was the antithesis of all he desired. He did not want to cause pain. Committing evil would do exactly that. Too many people pointlessly ask for God’s blessing while living however they want, committing any sin they choose. Jabez understood it was pointless to expect God’s blessing if he lived in sin. Recognizing his need for God’s strength in this area of life as well, he prayed that God keep him from evil. Make that a part of your prayer life and commit yourself to live what you have prayed.

B. If we will stand out in a crowd, we must recognize that sin, while possibly letting us share some of the world’s limelight, will make us nothing more than mediocre copies of others. It cuts our legs out from underneath us. Ultimately, sin brings death (**Romans 5:12; 6:23; James 1:14-16**). As James said, “Do not be deceived.” Yet it is so easy to be deceived by sin. Satan is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (**I Peter 5:8**), but he never appears in that form to us (**II Corinthians 11:14**). He works diligently to deceive us, even as he quite deceived Eve in the garden (**Genesis 3:4-6; I Timothy 2:14**). The fruit he places before us often seems harmless. In fact, at times it appears helpful. There is the drink that will make us appear cool. The lie that will keep us from trouble. The revenge that will give us satisfaction. Sin is so inviting, but its end is always death. There is no standing out in a crowd when you are dead. Regrettably though, sometimes even though we intellectually know the end of sin, it is still appealing. We see the seeming “fun” others are having in sin. We envision the pleasure it would bring us and we envy those who are allowed to partake. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever said to yourself, “I wish I wasn’t a Christian, then I could ...”? Conquer that feeling. Memorize and recite daily **Proverbs 23:17**. “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the Lord always.”

C. Jabez stood out in the crowd because he didn’t try to straddle the fence. He didn’t ask for God’s blessing but then try to live however he pleased. He, like Paul in **Philippians 3:7-11**, counted the things that would be considered gain in this world as loss for the sake of having God’s blessing. If you would stand out in the crowd, you must not let Satan cut off your legs.

### Conclusion:

You can be more than mediocre. You can excel in life and God’s service. You can stand out in the crowd. But to do so, you must be willing to do some difficult things. You have to break away from the world’s pull. You have to break away from Satan’s pull. You have to break away from your own pull. You have to throw yourself in God’s hands, submitting to Him in all things no matter how frightening or overwhelming it may seem. You have to be like Jabez. You, because you are not alone but have God’s hand with you, can do it.