

Weakness

by David Ravenhill

David Ravenhill's sermon 'Weakness' explores how God honors those who seek Him, despite their weaknesses and challenges.

Duration: 1:12:30

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-2, 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, Hebrews 11:34

Topics: "Spiritual Strength", "Overcoming Adversity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jabez from the Bible, who was a man honored above his brethren. The preacher emphasizes the importance of meditating on the Word of God and finding hidden treasures within it. He encourages listeners who may feel rejected or written off to find hope and encouragement in God's ability to transform weakness into strength. The preacher also highlights the before and after picture of Jabez's life, showing how God lifted him out of affliction and set him on a solid rock.

Transcript

It's been to be here again, especially to share with Doug and with Jackie. Doug and I, as he has mentioned, started, at least I started my ministry life back in 1964, yeah, in New York City. And he was just commenting that back in those days I was shy and nervous, never did any public speaking, totally bound up in myself.

And God has done a wonderful work of grace and changed all that. Last thing I ever want to do is go into the ministry. It's good to be with Jackie again, being over there several times to visit, even went into the Wall City, even went into her bedroom, living room, apartment, you may not remember I think you'd been away on a trip and they had redone it, I think, in her favorite color.

That entire room was pink. I mean, the pinkest, the pinkest carpet you have ever seen. Not just, you know, not just a pink tint, but downright pink.

You know, the walls were pink, isn't that right? Everything about it. I've taken showers in the camp that she was talking about where all the men, you know, would get their songs and so on. It never worked for me, but at least I got clean.

And one thing I really do appreciate about Jackie, and most of you don't know, she has a huge ministry over there of multiple buildings and so on and so forth. And she has not evolved up to the CEO level where she's got this fancy office and a swivel chair and she sort of directs operations. She still stays at the very grassroots of that whole ministry.

They have rooms where the kids will come in, addicts will come in, sign in a book. I forget how many days it is, but anyway, they've got to attend so many of those meetings before they're admitted to the program. And it's right at the very door of that ministry, right at the grassroots.

And some of those rooms you'd hardly put your car in. And yet those men will come in there and she's hands-on right at level one. And I don't know who sits in the swivel chair, even if there is one, but I've always appreciated more the fact that, again, she comes without any demands.

One of my pet peeves in the ministry, and I'd better stop in a moment, otherwise I'll get going, is this whole idea of entitlement. Men that write books about how to know God, and they've got an endless list of demands if you want them to come to your church. Endless list.

I require X amount of dollars. I require this sort of accommodation. I require this type of food.

I require, I was in a big church about a year ago in New Jersey, huge church where a particular ministry had wanted to use the facilities. And they turned them down a couple of times, well-known men. And the PR men said, listen, you're turning down the greatest preacher since the Apostle Paul.

You guys don't know what you're doing, you know, and refusing the offer to have this man come. But one of his demands was a certain brand of water that he had to have in his motel room. You know, not just ordinary bottled water.

That wasn't good enough for this man. Can you imagine Paul in prison or Jesus demanding his Perrier, you know? I don't know if it was Perrier. I'm not here to advertise brands of water.

But, you know, I mean, it's unbelievable what goes on in the body of Christ today. It really is. And it's so wonderful to know that there are people like this that will go and just believe God.

And anyway, better get off that. Bless you. I've got so many messages going around in my head.

I said to my wife, I don't know what to preach on. It's a dilemma, isn't it? I know some of you came and this has been a shock for some of you, this conference, especially last night. You know, you didn't have any sort of framework for what went on and maybe some of you are confused.

I hope not. Just get into the Word of God and let God bring the revelation, understanding man has messed up things. My father used to quote, I think it was Spurgeon, that says that the Bible has suffered more from its exponents than its opponents.

And we have been taught a whole bunch of baloney, you know, that God doesn't do these things anymore and so on and so forth. And that whole dispensational teaching began right in the very beginning by the devil himself. Has God really meant what he said? No, he hasn't.

Don't worry about it. I mean, it was that's the very roots of dispensationalism. Demonic word, doubting God's ability to do what he said he would do.

And then it was perfected by 10 Israelites, years later, when God told them to go in and possess the land and they could subdue it and take over and all the giants. And they came back and said, no, he can't. We'll get butchered if we go in there.

And it cost them 40 years. God penalized them one year for every day of disobedience and disbelief. Forty years that generation wandered because 10 men chose to dispensationalize God.

And we've been doing it ever since. You know, God's impotent. You know, this is his season of impotency.

He's getting old. You know, can't function the way he used to. Poor old God.

You know, his hands are being tied. His mouth is being taped. He can't speak.

He can't act. He can't, you know, what a tragedy. One of the most terrible words in the Old Testament, they limited the Holy One of Israel.

They limited the Holy One of Israel. And some of you guys know what a limiter is on a car. You can have a, whatever, a Corvette capable of 160, 80 miles an hour, I guess.

I've never had one if somebody wants to know. But you can put a limiter on that thing and it won't go more than 25 miles an hour. Even though it's got the capacity and the capability with all those horsepower of doing that incredible speed.

You can limit it. And we have limited the Holy One of Israel. Just because man can't figure out God.

And so, in order to figure out God, we've sort of put him in a box and a dispensation. And anyway, that's not my message. One of the things I have always enjoyed about the Word of God are the characters in it.

Brother Jim was saying he's got a friend who's got a yacht, a boat of some sort, and occasionally likes to go up there to Vancouver, one of my wife's favorite places, or Victoria on Vancouver Island, and pull into the harbor there and just people, you know, look at people, observe people. And I like to do that with the Word of God. Observe people.

You know, God has got an amazing variety, doesn't he, of people that are used. I smelly old fishermen, you know, shepherds, all types of individuals. I mean, it's amazing.

And, you know, some of these individuals, we have chapter after chapter after chapter about their lives. Entire books, the book of Ruth about Ruth, you know, Samuel, largely about the prophet Samuel. We've got stories about Moses from the moment he was born, as a little baby there, you know, he was a godly little guy and good looking and so on.

Right to 120 years later, you can trace his life to when he climbed up on Mount whatever it was, Nebo or something, you know, drop dead. You can look at the life of David, all the little cameos about David's life. And you can look at the life of Paul and see him, you know, persecuting the church and then the great apostle and all the things about his life.

And then there are other times when God will just take somebody's life and reduce it down to a few verses. And I want to look at this and I shouldn't have to apologize, but I guess I will, because I haven't ministered on this for a long time. But if you turn with me to 1 Chronicles chapter 4, and the reason is because now it's become a famous bestseller, The Prayer of Jabez.

And I purposely have not read that book, lest somebody accuse me of, you know, saying, I know where you got that from. Well, I got this from the original. The original really is better anyway.

And if you buy it, you get a whole bunch of extra stuff with it. But the Bible says in Romans chapter 15, that all these things that were written a fore time were written for our instruction, that through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. I guess you could say hope is another word for mercy in one sense, that we might have hope.

Take away the hopelessness and give us hope. Imagine what the Word of God would be like if every single chapter was nothing but perfect. I have a friend, Winky Prattney, and he has a saying.

He's written numerous books. He's a brilliant man. And he says, the Bible is full of mistakes.

And people look like, how did this guy get invited to this conference? You know, we're evangelicals. We believe in, you know, inerrant Word of God. And here's a man, you know, how did he let him in? You know, bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness.

But he says, I believe the Word of God is full of mistakes. It began with Eve's mistake, followed by Adam's mistake, followed by Noah's mistake. You know, he got drunk and uncovered himself, followed, you know.

And the Bible is full of mistakes. Because through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. Imagine if you started your devotional life reading Genesis at the beginning of the year, and every single page, perfect, perfect, faultless, blameless.

Every single individual, not a flaw, never sinned, never got discouraged, never felt like taking their life, never committed adultery, never put their foot in their mouth, never disobeyed. You know, wouldn't that be encouraging? You'd come away so encouraged, wouldn't you? I mean, your devotions would just go to a whole new level. I finally found somebody just like me.

Through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. And this book really is a before and after book. It's full of before and after stories.

That's what I love about it. Of how God reaches down, as the psalmist said, he lifted me also out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and he set my feet also on a solid rock. And he's put a new song in my mouth as well.

And all the way through, again, God's Word, you've got this before and after picture. Now, this man's life, and it's the only time he's ever mentioned in the Word of God that I know of, is condensed to two verses, 1 Chronicles 4, 9 and 10. And we have to do what I think it was Larry Christiansen used to teach.

He says, when you read the Word of God, he says, you have to, first of all, read it. And then he says, you inch your way through the Word of God. And after you inch your way through the Word of God, you half inch your way through the Word of God.

And after you half inch your way through the Word of God, you quarter inch your way through the Word of God. What he meant was this, that you can sit down and, you know, gulp down vast quantities of the Word of God. You can read through the Book of Romans before you leave for work and say, I had my devotions, I read the Book of Romans, you know, in order to achieve your goal of getting through the Bible in one year.

So, when the evangelist said, how many have you ever read through, you know, you can put your hand up and make everybody else around you feel embarrassed, you know. But you haven't really read the Bible through until you inch your way through. And what the Bible calls meditation.

Meditation is the, somebody said, is like a cow chewing its cud. It will be out there in the pasture gulping down vast quantities of grass. And then after a while it sits down and however it all works, but out of one of its four stomachs, you know, it regurgitates that and then it masticates what it's already eaten.

And it chews on it, chews on it, chews on it, chews on it. Chewing the cud is meditation. And getting out of it everything you can.

I have here in my Bible, a little cold, if I can find it quickly, that Martin Luther, here it is. Martin Luther, it says, used to teach his children to read the Bible in the following way. First, he says, you read it through one book.

First, you read through one book carefully. Then you study it chapter by chapter. Then verse by verse.

And lastly, word by word, he said. It's like a person shaking a fruit tree. First shaking the tree, gathering up the fruit which falls to the ground.

And then shaking each branch and afterwards each twig of the branch. And last of all, carefully looking under each leaf to see that no fruit remains. In this way, in no other, he says, shall we find the hidden treasures that are in the Bible.

So, because we've only got two verses, we can quarter inch our way through or eighth inch our way through. And there's nine things we want to look at here in the life of Jabez. The first thing, he was a man that was honored above his brethren.

He was a man that was honored above his brethren. This is the after picture. We will go to the before in a moment.

Here is a man who, when he came into a room, heads turned. Imagine if Billy Graham snuck in the back door right now and somebody caught him, there would be a ripple effect that would go through, you know, people not. Look, he just had to begin to turn.

Somebody else would hear. I mean, this is the sort of individual that Jabez was. He was more honorable than all his brethren.

In fact, his brethren are never mentioned. He stood head and shoulders above his peers. And yet he was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, if we can use that expression.

He's not the son of a famous priest. He's not the son of a famous king. He hasn't done any mighty exploits or anything else.

And yet here he is, a man that was a spiritual giant, standing again, respected, admired. People looked at him and said, you know, I'd love to be like that man. There's something about Jabez that there's everything about him.

That's what I want to be. You know, we don't have too many honorable men anymore, do we? Or women. You know, the great heroes of faith were the John Wesleys, were the David Livingstones, were the men

that are honorable men that we look up to, we admire, we esteem.

We say, boy, if I could only know God the way that man knows God. This is the sort of individual that Jabez was. Now, listen, this is not an opinion poll.

There wasn't a survey that was done in the local town where he lived and said, you know, who would you say is one of the greatest guys in town? This is God's opinion. This is the Word of God. This is God saying something about Jabez.

He was more honorable than his brethren. And all we can do again is look at the Word of God and say, what was it about Jabez that made him the man of God that he was? First of all, in 1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 30, the Bible says, he that honors me, I will honor. See, the Bible really explains itself.

If you get into it a little bit, he that honors me, I will honor. And so, there was something about Jabez that the reason he was the man that he was is because God was first foremost in his life. He honored God.

He recognized God. Proverbs 15 verse 33, humility comes before honor. So, we know something else about Jabez.

He wasn't going around and sort of strutting and saying, you know, I'm better than you are now. It was a dignity about this man. There was just a, there was a caliber about his life.

He was a man of honor. In fact, that word honor really is the word Kabbalah. It's the word we get glory from.

And it's that idea of this man is a man of substance. He's a man of weight. That's the word glory.

It's got that concept of weight to it. You know, you go into a supermarket or go into a store somewhere and there's a clearance table and all sorts of little knickknacks. And, you know, you look at one and it's marked down from, you know, \$75 to \$15 or something.

And you pick it up and you say, how do you feel this? And it's the fact that, boy, this really is, I mean, this is incredible. You know, it's not styrofoam, but, you know, it's, and it's the weight. It's the, it's the fact that the substance to it that says, boy, this is incredible value, \$15, feel that thing.

This is sort of individual again that this man was. 1 Samuel 2, sorry, 1 Chronicles 29, riches and honor come from the Lord. You see, it was God that placed his weight, his substance, his glory, his honor upon this man.

Jabez was more honorable than his brethren. He stood out in the crowd. Again, he was the one that people wanted to be like.

It caused heads to turn again. The second thing, he was a man that was afflicted from birth. This is the other side of the story now.

His mother, the Bible says, named him Jabez because I bore him with pain. Can you imagine any mother in her right mind giving birth as that baby came out of the womb? Maybe that baby by the midwives or whatever handed that little priceless jewel, that little boy, and she put it to the breast, and what are you going to call him? Pain. One translation, at least one root meaning is a shovel of mire, a shovel of dirt, dung.

What a way to begin life, to have a mother that brands you as a shovel of mire, dirt. You are a pain. What would possess a woman to do that? Oh, all we can do is surmise that maybe she already had a whole little tribe of her own, eight or nine, ten children, not uncommon in those days.

She finds that she's pregnant again. Maybe a couple of weeks after finding out she's pregnant, her husband dies, maybe some sort of accident. Here she is now all alone with all these little mouths to feed and nobody to talk to, no moral support, nobody to, at the end of the day, share with, nobody to bear her burden.

And the last thing in the world that she wants is another mouth to feed, another area of responsibility. And all the way through the rest of that pregnancy, she is sort of cursing, if you like, inside. And when that baby's born, she takes out all that venom, and all that bitterness, and all that anger, and all that pent-up emotion, and she says, you're a pain.

Not a very good beginning, especially if we look at that in the context of the culture of the Old Testament, where names were so significant. You see, names in the Old Testament, or the Bible for that matter, were more not like nicknames. You see, a nickname really tells you a lot more about the person than his name.

You know, if I had a friend, his name is John, and I say, listen, I'd like you to meet my friend John this afternoon. He wouldn't say anything. If I say, listen, my friend Big Red is going to be here this afternoon.

You know, imagine, you think of, you know, some great big Irish guy with flaming red hair, or something, you know, whatever. Oh, Shorty, my friend Shorty is going to be here this afternoon. You know, I mean, nicknames.

My nickname in Bible school was Bones. You know, I put on about, hate to tell you, I put on at least 50 pounds since I was married. I wrestled in high school, 128 pounds, and I'm sure I've shrunk an inch since then.

So, I was skinny, really skinny. You know, I just about rattled when I walked. The Bones was a, you know, it really described me a lot better than David.

And that, you know, and so here, they would, they would look at a child many times, and prophetically, or you know, try and study the nature, or put a, you know, their desire into that name. And here he is, branded. Sticks and stones will break your bones, but names, they don't hurt you.

Oh yeah. You know, some of us have got stigmas, and I'm sure all of us here have carried things all our life, where we've been branded in one way or the other. And there's a stigma that this man had to carry, every time his brothers called him, Payne, get in here, you know.

If they played baseball in those days, you know, I'll take Jim, I'll take John, you know, Mary, you know, Payne. I mean, he couldn't get away from it, all day long, every day of his life, Payne, Payne, Payne, Payne, Payne, Payne, Payne, Payne. Can you imagine what that does? I share that, because some of you have got stigmas.

Oh, those things, the skeletons in the closet that the enemy loves to, sort of, you know, bring into the present, and dangle there. What about that divorce? What about that abortion? What about that criminal record? What about this? What about that? And we can't seem to get past that thing. And the enemy's so good at doing that, isn't he? Branding us, and keeping us, sort of, bound in our own prison house of

insecurity, or fear, or rejection, or whatever it is.

And there we are, and we just can't seem to break out of it. And we look at ourselves, everybody else is up here, but I'm way down here. That's the sort of individual.

What an amazing transformation, from a Payne to, he was more honorable than all these brethren. That's the grace of God. That's the mercy of God.

That's hope. And, you know, as I read through the Word of God, and study these lives, and I love character studies, God does take the foolish things, and the weak things, and the base things, and the despised things, and the things that are not, to confound the mighty. That no flesh will glory in his presence.

Isn't that right? He specializes. In fact, as Doug was saying, the only reason, you know, he doesn't take genius, as well as that statement, is he can't use them. You made some statement the other day.

But God takes the foolish things. And some of you, I know, are here this morning, and you're thinking, you know, I could never do this, or I could never do that. I could never be a Jackie Ponger.

I could never be a Doug Bedert. I could never be a David Rainhill. I could never run a ministry.

I could never, you know, whatever it is. And I want you to know, you are a prime candidate for God to get ahold of. Nancy and I met in Bible school, a very small Bible school.

We only had 35 in our class, and every month, at least, teams were selected from the Bible school to go out, and to sing, and to preach, and to give testimony, and so on. And I understood why they never asked me to sing. I told you before, you know, I'm a prison singer.

Behind a few bars, I'm missing the key. But you know, in three years of Bible college, and only 35 students, I was never once asked to go on the team. Never once.

Now, I know I can sing, so I could excuse it. But never share a never do anything. We had some bright kids in our class.

And yet, most of those students, very few of them, are in sort of full-time active ministry, at least a lot of them. God takes the foolish things. You see, I brought home F's on my report card in school.

It's true. I had two brothers that were brilliant, earned PhD. My younger brother, world-renowned in his field.

Older brother, equally as bright. I was one that brought home the F's on more than one occasion. But you know, God specializes, doesn't He, in taking the weak things, that He might bring confusion and confound the mighty.

One of my all-time favorite portions of Scripture is here in Hebrews. Let me read it to you. What more shall I say? The time would fail me if I were to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight.

What a great list. After all, Hebrews 11, the list of all these super saints, these heroes of faith. And you know, I've read that so many times when I was first born again.

And I put these guys on a pedestal. I mean, these were the sort of, you know, God's seal, so to speak. These were the, you know, the elite of the elite.

These were the ones that had all the special training, like our special forces over there in Iraq, you know, going ahead of everybody else. And they've got all the gear and all the equipment. Well, these were the spiritual seals, if you like.

After all, they were subduing kingdoms, obtaining promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenching the power of fire, became mighty in war, put entire foreign armies to flight. And you know, we read that and we put them all up on a pedestal and we think, you know, well, you know, I could never even dream of even getting close to anything that these men did. But you know, I left out one little phrase that changes everything.

Let me read it again now and put the phrase in. What more shall I say? And he lists the names, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, listened from weakness, were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. They all had one common denominator.

They were just like you and me, from weakness. God chooses the weak things. Gideon, God calms the Midianites who have totally destroyed the land.

Here he is, maybe like the widow with a few little bits of grain left, going to bake his last loaf of bread before he dies. I don't know. And he's in the wine press and all of a sudden the captain of the host, or the angel of the Lord rather, comes to him and, Gideon, you're a mighty man of valor.

Oh, now you can imagine if the whole conversation were there, you know, it would say, come on, don't play jokes. Are you the Lord? Come on, you know, don't play jokes with me. Don't you know there are 12 tribes in Israel and some of those tribes are real prominent tribes like Judah and so on and so forth.

You know, I am from the least tribe and then out of all the families that make up that tribe, my particular, you know, family name is that the least in the whole tribe and then I'm the least in my father's house. In other words, God, you know, don't make fun of me. You know, you've gone right to the very bottom of the barrel and you're trying to tell me I'm going to be a great man.

And God says, go and this is your strength. When I am weak, then I'm strong. When I honestly begin to embrace my weakness, that's the first stage of beginning to embrace God's ability.

He was sufficient for these things, but our adequacy is from God. Then you've got Barak. Barak was the commander-in-chief of the Israeli army.

He was a Schwarzkopf of his day or Schwarzenegger, whatever, you know. And the Bible says the glory of a woman or a woman's glory is her hair. We won't go there.

But the Bible says a man's glory is his strength. The glory of a young man is his strength. And here is a man, military man, the head of the entire Israeli army that will not go out to battle without a woman going with him.

I thank God for you ladies, but when it comes to fighting, you don't drag your sister into the playground and says, this guy's picking up on me, you know. And that lady was Deborah. Samson, oh, this has to be the misfit, you know.

If you've got a children's Bible like I did when I grew up, you know, here is this guy like a Dallas Cowboy linebacker or something, you know, six foot six, you ripple, you know, huge muscles and a, you know, 60-inch chest or whatever. And you see Delilah's dilemma was, I don't get it. How come you're so strong? Imagine here she is sprawled out, you know, cradled in the, you know, a 32-inch bicep or something, you know.

And her hair locks there and this huge chest and she's just sprawled out, you know, admiring Samson and saying, you know, I don't get it. How come you're so strong? Well, it's a stupid question. But she said, I don't get it.

And he says, cut my hair and I will become weak like other men. Just a little runt of a guy that God put his grace upon. Jephthah, possibly the most rejected man in the Bible outside of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was a bastard. Imagine being a bastard in the Old Testament. Talk about rejection, that was the ultimate rejection, ban to whatever it was, how many generations and so on and so forth.

Rejected by all the elders of Gilead, rejected by his own brethren, the Bible says, and so on. And God takes a bastard, puts his anointing upon him, makes him one of the judges of Israel. Talk about mercy.

Wow, from weakness. David, oh, there are Orthodox Jews to this day that believe that David was illegitimate and sinned. And my mother conceived me.

And when the prophet comes to town to anoint a successor to Saul, and mother's been working all day and father's there getting the table set and so on, because the great prophet Samuel is coming to town. All the kids have been notified, all seven of them, minus one. And they sit down to the meal and they're enjoying.

Here's the prophet, the ears of everybody tingle with, you know, and he opens his mouth and after dinner he says, you know, one of you guys is the next king. It's got to be this guy, and tall, dark, handsome, you know, regalness about him. God says, no.

Man looks on the outward appearance, I look at the heart. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Jesse, something's wrong.

Is this your whole family? Well, yeah, they're still the youngest. And that word in the Hebrew means the least in every sense of the word, in quality as well as quantity. Not worth bringing in.

Can you imagine the, how you would feel, again, let's take Billy Graham, wonderful man of God, if he were to come here to town and you, all your siblings are notified and you're not. And you live right in the immediate area. Your parents have never told you Billy Graham's coming to your house.

And your brothers and sisters are all there. They've been told in advance so they can get babysitters and plan the evening and so on. And you're not even told about it.

Talk about rejection from weakness, made strong. Samuel, little boy, the voice of God was silent in those days. God couldn't find a listening ear amongst all the clergy, Hopni and Phineas and Eli.

And so God whispers something to a little, maybe 12-year-old boy, and everybody's abuzz the next morning. God's speaking again from weakness, but made strong. I share that because some of you need some hope, some encouragement.

Some of you, the enemy has taken again and sort of written you off. And you believe that lie and said, not me. So here he was, he was afflicted from birth.

And some of you again can say, well, you know, I've got stigmas again, lack of education, lack of this, lack of that and so on. The next thing about Eli, uh, Jabez was, he was a man who faced a choice. Now it doesn't say it in so many words, but obviously there was a decision.

There was a turning point in his life. He could either succumb to his circumstances or he could overcome. He could say, I'm not going to wallow in self-pity and all of this the rest of my life.

He could allow again his circumstances to sort of dictate the way he was going to be for the next 20 years or he could overcome. He could look back or he could look ahead. And there are times, aren't there, when we have to make a decision like Paul, forgetting those things which are behind, I press on.

Can you imagine if the enemy had wanted to have a heyday, what he could have done with Paul? You are responsible for persecuting the church. You closed down X number of home groups. You shut so many people in prison and you are responsible for the death of Stephen because he was the one that ultimately gave permission for the first martyr.

They put their coats at the foot of Saul. He had authority from the religious leaders to do what he was doing. He was the one that says, go ahead, cast the stone.

And can you imagine God saying, listen, I want to use you, Paul. Oh, not me. Lord, I'm too bad a sinner.

You know, Lord, I killed Stephen, a man full of faith in the Holy Ghost. Lord, I persecuted the church. I did that, you know, forgetting all those things which are behind.

I press on. And there comes times when we've got to make decisions. Moses came to a time when he had to make a decision.

Either I'm going to be the next Pharaoh or I'm going to suffer affliction with the people of God. He made a decision. Decisions are important, aren't they? And some of us live under constant condemnation.

God wants to change that. I'll never forget. I think it was Jack Hayford's brother.

I can't remember his name to give him credit, but I believe that's who it was who talked about the difference between condemnation and conviction. He said, condemnation is when the devil reaches into your past and he takes something from your past and he brings it into the present. And he sort of just constantly dangles it there to stifle any hope for the future.

You know, how could God use you? You've killed a person. You've raped a woman. You've done this.

You've done that, you know. And he just dangles it there constantly. And you don't feel that I could never be a man of God.

I could never be a missionary or academic, you know. And he says conviction is when the Spirit of God reaches into the past and he brings something from the past into the present because it's never been dealt with in order to free you so you have a future. And he says, listen, I want this thing under the blood.

I want this thing dealt with because I want to give you hope. And the enemy wants to just stifle us moving on and advancing in the things of God. God wants us to enter into all that he has for us regardless of our background because as we've heard so beautifully this morning we're all products of his mercy and his grace and his forgiveness, his cleansing.

There's not one that is innocent before God. The Bible says he's made us all guilty before God. We've all been on death row.

Every single one of us because the wages of sin is death. Every single person. I don't care how spiritual I was raised in church all my life, son of a wonderful man of God, but I was on death row.

You know the kingdom of God is so different than the worldly kingdom because if you admit you have done something wrong, that's the worst possible thing. They'll throw the book at you. Yeah, I did it.

I killed a person, officer. I'm responsible. Well, you've got rights.

Yeah, I know I'm going to waive my rights. I killed a person. Boy, that's the end of you.

But you know the way you get out of death row is admit that you were wrong. Isn't God's kingdom funny? Yes, Lord, I did sin. I did do that.

Okay, you're free. I didn't do that, Lord. I'm not a sinner.

Okay, stay in prison. What a weird set of rules, isn't it? The kingdom of God. It's sort of different.

So he was a man that faced a choice, and yet having made that choice, he was powerless to do anything about it. Have you ever decided, boy, if only I could, you know, and yet I can't. I want to, but I can't.

Jabez knew something. God changes things, and it brings us the next thing. Number four, he was a man of prayer, and Jabez called on the God of Israel.

Prayer not only changes things, not only changes circumstances, prayer changes people. Jabez begins to pray, and I love his prayer here. Jabez called on the God of Israel.

Why does it say, why doesn't it just say, Jabez called on God? That would have been sufficient, wouldn't it? Jabez called on God. Well, maybe the writer was trying to differentiate between this God, and the God of the Canaanite, and the God of the Amorite, and the God, so he called on the God of Israel. Maybe.

I don't think so. I think Jabez was doing what the Bible says. Through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope, and I think he looked through the Word of God to find somebody like himself, and he found somebody by the name of Jacob.

He says, you know, Jacob's like me, sort of streetwise, street smart, had to live by his own cunning and conniving, and you know, always trying to get an angle, and an edge on things, and you know, and I've had to do that in order to make it, with my sort of background, my rejection, and so on. I've had to, you know, sort of outgun, and out come everybody else, and you know, and, and then he read one day that

this cunning, scheming, deceitful Jacob had an encounter with God, and God says, no longer are you going to be called Jacob, but Israel, and he said, God, if you can do that for this man, you can do that. God, if you can change the heart of that conniving, cunning, scheming, lying, scheming man, you can do that for me.

God of Jacob, Israel. That's what we need to do. Some of you need to call on the God of David, because of your adultery.

See what I mean? We need to find somebody, and say, God, you did it for this man, and you know respect your persons, and you're the same yesterday, today, and forever, and you did it for this woman. You can do it for me. I've disobeyed you.

Lord, you gave Jonah a second chance. What about me? Lord, I denied you many times. You gave Peter a second chance.

What about me? Oh, maybe it wasn't that way. Maybe it was Jabez Kol, and the God of Israel, meaning the nation of Israel, because you see, Israel was a nation in bondage, in slavery, and talk about pain. Israel knew pain.

Every single day, they were beaten by the taskmasters. In fact, the Psalmist said, it says, I've relieved your shoulder of the burden, and in the margin, it says literally, I've relieved your shoulder of the brick load. You see, that entire generation, from the moment they could carry bricks, they were carrying bricks.

I think Jackie talked about a little boy that was, you know, carrying bricks. You had a nation of brick carriers, and they were stooped. He's my glory and the lifter of my head.

He lifts the heavy burden. I relieved your shoulder of the brick load, and they knew the taskmaster's whip, hour after hour after hour. They suffered incredibly.

In fact, when God said to Moses, I've seen your affliction, I've seen your suffering, what was the other word? Anyway, those three words, if you look at them in the Hebrew, one seems to be oppression, one seems to be spiritual, one seems to be emotional, and one seems to be physical. I've seen your oppression. There was a heaviness.

There was a darkness. There was a bondage. You could, you could walk into Egypt and feel the tangible presence of evil.

They were operating in one of the most demonic realms. Why? Because when Moses came and threw his rod down, Pharaoh says, that's nothing. Hey, you guys, show him we can do that.

I mean, you know, they weren't, it wasn't sly at hand. They were tapping into the demonic realm. In fact, the Passover, God said, and this night I will show my supremacy over all the lords of Egypt.

And that was fulfilled in Calvary when he stripped principalities and powers and made an open show of them. Every type was fulfilled. I will show my supremacy, high and lifted up, far above all principalities and powers and every name that is named.

And so he says, I've seen your oppression. He said, I've seen your affliction. I forget which one it is now.

But one is sort of an emotional type thing. Can you imagine the pain that Egypt felt, the women, the men as well, as a command was given to take little babies, go into any home, anytime you hear a whimper or a cry, take that little one and throw it into the Nile? Can you imagine what a mother must have felt to have that baby, you know, screaming there as it bobbed two or three times and then went? Can you imagine what that must have been like? The torment on the mind, the emotional must have been greater than the physical. Can you imagine taskmaster coming along one day and seeing your daughter who's beginning to develop now into a young woman? And he says, honey, you're coming home with me.

And that mother tormented night after night, knowing that that girl has been used sexually just to satisfy the needs of that taskmaster and tormented maybe more than the girl herself. Can you imagine the pain that Israel went through? That's why the Bible calls it the iron furnace of affliction. God of Israel, if you can take a nation out of their pain, you can take me out.

You can deliver me back. If you can set an entire nation free and be their glory and the lifter of the head, you can do it for me. Call unto me and I will answer you.

Jabez calls on the God of Israel. Number five, he was a man who coveted God's blessing. How much you long for the blessing of God? Oh, sometimes the sort of reticent, we don't feel worthy.

You know, it was God that took the initiative. He said to Moses, hey Moses, I want you to do something for me. I want you to, you know, blow the trumpet, shofar, whatever, get the people.

He said, I want you to lift up your hand. I want you to bless them. Lord, bless them and keep them.

Lord, make his face to smile upon them. That was God doing that. That wasn't Moses sort of, God, you know, could we get a little blessing once in a while, twisting his arm, you know.

God, come on, please. Well, this is God. This is the nature of God to bless, isn't it? It's his nature.

EI Shaddai, the breast. That's that word. Shad is a woman's breast.

God is the breasted one, the place of blessing, of bounty, of nourishment, of security. And he wants to hold us to his breast. He wants to bless us.

That word bless means to endure with power for success. Oh, not just physical or financial prosperity. I think that's in the bottom of God's list in one sense.

I wish you to prosper even as your soul prospers. You know, if we prospered the way our soul prospered, most of us wouldn't have to declare bankruptcy. But God wants to bless us.

He's a God of blessing. He's always going way beyond what is necessary, isn't he? You know, five thousand there that are hungry. They've been with him for a few days and he says to his disciples, hey, give them something to eat.

They said, Lord, we don't have the money and town's a long way off and you know all the excuses. And the little boy says, I've got a few loaves of fish. I said, what's that among so many? A crazy kid.

He just said, bring it here. And he began to break it. And he fed five thousand men aside from women and children, twenty thousand, thirty thousand.

And it says they all ate. And it took the edge off of that. They all ate and were satisfied.

They hadn't eaten for a few days. They were starving. God is always lavish, isn't he? He's lavish.

The thing that brought the prodigal back to the father's house. Bread enough and a spare. Dad's always got extra.

Aren't you glad you can never drain the resources of God's grace and mercy? There's always extra. There's always mercy and a spare. There's always grace and a spare.

There's always hope and a spare. There's always forgiveness and a spare. Oh, I like that about God, don't you? He's coveting God's blessings.

Some of you need to covet the blessing of God. You're almost afraid. You know, we get this mentality, well, Lord, like the prodigal, Lord, I'll pay you back.

I'll earn my way. You know, I know I've been a bad boy, but Lord, I'll prove to you that, you know, I'll get up every morning at five o'clock and I'll have my devotions and I'll prove to you I'm worthy to be called your son and hopefully one of these days, you know, you will actually see my effort and you'll say, well done. And before he did a single thing, the father's killing the fatty calf, putting the best robe on him and everything that was anti-a slave, shoes on his feet, a ring, restored authority.

You see, the ring in those days had an insignia on it, Jim Scotland, with his family crest. I mean, it literally was there and you pushed it in that wax and it was the same as having a credit card. Today it would say, hey son, here's my visa.

The guy still stinks of the pig pen. He hasn't even had a shower yet and the father's giving him a credit card. It's crazy.

The band comes in, the music, the dancing, God wants to bless you. And it's not wrong to say, Lord, bless me. He took every curse and he's blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus in heavenly places.

Every spiritual blessing is available and we don't ask him, do we? All right, the next thing, number six, he was a man who desired enlargement. He wasn't satisfied with what he had. Oh, that would bless me.

Notice, bless me indeed. Not just a blessing and enlarge my border. Some of you need to ask God, enlarge me, enlarge my spiritual capacity.

The sons of the prophets came to Elisha, wasn't it? And they said, listen, the place we're dwelling is too small for us. It's too confining. Go with us so that we can build a bigger place.

Some of you spiritually need to launch out. You've been confined. You've been living on just a small portion, if you like, of what God has for you.

They say, Lord, enlarge my capacity, enlarge my faith. I want to go from faith to faith, from victory to victory. I want an enlargement, Lord.

I want an enlargement in the whole faith realm so that I can operate in the gifts of the Spirit, as Jackie was talking about last night. Not for my namesake, Lord, not so I can put out a magazine with my picture on it,

but for the body of Christ, for the suffering and the broken, where I can have a word of knowledge and a word of wisdom and healing and word of encouragement. No wonder the devil invented dispensationalism to deprive the body of Christ from the blessing of God.

It's not for today. You can't be healed. God doesn't have a word of knowledge for you, word of wisdom for you, word of encouragement for you.

Oh, I can't think of any greater thing the devil could have concocted. Desire enlargement. Some of you, your faith is too small.

Your prayer life is too small. Your sense of expectation is too small. Remember Caleb, old man, 80 years of age, but he tasted something when he was 40 years of age.

And when the doors opened, when the wall came down, so to speak, and they were able to go into the promised land. Here is this old man. He says, give me that mountain.

You know, if I had been 80 years of age, I'd say, give me that valley. Put me on the first floor. I don't like climbing upstairs.

Caleb, give me that mountain. I've dreamed of that mountain for 40 years. Talk about enlargement.

Lord, enlarge my border, enlarge my boundaries. His daughter comes along and says, give me some land too. I mean, she's just like the old man.

God wants to enlarge us. Solomon, there began to enlarge. The Bible says Solomon brought to God a thousand burnt offerings.

Only one was required. And the Bible says the very next verse, and that night God came to Solomon and said, ask whatever you will and I'll give it to you. One upmanship.

You see, you could never out give God. You can give him a thousand burnt offerings. He comes along with a total blank check and says, okay, whatever you want.

Let me digress for a moment while I'm on that. One of my favorite stories is Mike Bickle in Kansas City was reading that one day and in his devotions, and he said, Lord, wouldn't it be wonderful? He said, I don't know what I would do if you came to me in the middle of the night like you did to Solomon. I said, Lord, Mike, whatever you want, I'll give you.

And then God took him into the New Testament. Whatever you ask in my name, you can have. You have not because you ask not.

And he said to Mike, he said, you know, Mike, he said, I left that promise in the word of God for every generation as a revealer of the hearts of men. And he said, this generation came along and they asked for prosperity. Think about it.

This generation came along and they asked for prosperity because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. He said they didn't ask for revival. They didn't ask for the nations of their inheritance.

Make me rich, Lord. You promised whatever I asked. What an indictment against our generation.

We need to cry out for spiritual enlargement. Lord, enlarge my borders. I'm not satisfied.

Lord, I've tasted and I've seen that the Lord is good, but I want more. You know, you go to Baskin Robbins and, you know, 36 varieties and you've never seen one of them and say, well, what's that taste like? And, you know, they take that little spoon that, you know, yeah. Boy, that's good.

I'll have one of those. You know, I think God's like that. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

But some of us are still nibbling at the little spoon. And we say, Lord, I want to, I want to, you know, a double comb or triple. A triple comb.

He desired enlargement. Number seven, he was a man who longed for God's presence. Lord, not only bless me and enlarge my border, but that your hand might be with me.

Oh, this is beautiful. Lord, I want a consciousness day by day that you're there. Lord, wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, the hand of God, the blessing of God, the presence of God is there.

I want to wake up in the morning, Lord, knowing your hand is there. You see, this isn't about prosperity. This isn't just, you know, some, no.

We'll understand at the end of this. This is a man that wants God. And he wants all that God has for him.

He wants God's blessing, God's enlargement, God's honor. He wants, he wants God, this man. And the biggest thing, God, I want your presence.

I want to know. I want to feel your hand day by day. Don't ever leave me, Lord.

Like David said, Lord, take not your Holy Spirit away from me. My father used to say the reason David said that was because he used to go into a presence of Saul when he was going crazy. And it was a tormenting spirit.

And he used to just go wild and berserk. And David knew that the brunt, if you like, of that spear, at least he dodged it a few times as the king got so mad. And he pulled that thing back and flung it at David.

And David ducked and the thing stuck in the wall behind him. But he also knew a time when he prophesied along with the prophets, where the mantle and the Spirit of God rested upon Saul. And so God gave him every single advantage a man could have.

And then he saw him when the Spirit of God was off him, going deranged in his mind, angry. And David, after his sin with Bathsheba, God, whatever you do, whatever you do, God, don't take your Holy Spirit. Lord, I want your presence.

I want to feel that closeness. I want to be your friend. I want us to walk together.

I want to be led by your Spirit. Lord, I want that consciousness that you're there. Number eight.

He was a man who desired holiness. Put your hand on me, Lord, and keep me from evil. Jesus said, when you pray, pray deliver us from evil.

Here's a man that longs again for the holiness of God, the fear of God. See, the fear of God is to hate evil. You know, when you hate something, you don't touch it.

The temptation disappears. You know, if I hate chocolate ice cream, my wife loves chocolate ice cream, and I'm not a big fan of it. I'd rather have almost anything else.

But she likes the real deep, you know, fudgy, you know, super saturated chocolate ice cream. And you know, it's never a temptation to me when I open the refrigerator, because I don't like it. And the fear of the Lord is to hate evil.

When you hate something, hey, it doesn't bother me. And if there's one thing needed in the house of God, it's the fear of God. I will never forget my wife and I in 1966 set sail from Teen Challenge in a freighter from New York City.

We sailed all the way down the east coast of America through the Panama Canal and all the way to New Zealand, 30 days from New York to New Zealand, 21 days without ever stopping and seeing land. A little freighter, nine passengers. We had a baby three months old, our daughter Lisa.

When we got to New Zealand, we lived on an island called the Great Barrier Island off the coast of New Zealand, about 30, sorry, about 30 miles off the coast, about seven miles long. And I forget how, seven miles wide, maybe, and 30 miles long, something like that. And there's no electricity, no modern conveniences and so on.

But a man who was now going to be with the Lord ran that. And it was sort of like a Teen Challenge. Basically, it was helping alcoholics.

And they used to come out. Obviously, they couldn't swim back, so they were sort of stuck. It was sort of a spiritual alcatraz.

Anyway, we based ourselves there in the early days of Youth with a Mission. And the very first camp meeting we had, because people used to come over and they'd pitch a big marquee and New Zealanders loved to rough it. And they had all these camps and, I mean, all these tents around.

And the very first message I heard was an entire message on the fear of God by a man by the name of Milton Smith. And I honestly can say to you, I haven't heard a message on the fear of God before that or since, an entire message. And at the end of that message, I made my way forward to a group of people there.

Lauren Cunningham from Youth with a Mission was there. Joy Dawson. John Dawson was running around with a fishing rod.

He was a little boy in those days. And a couple of other men that you wouldn't recognize their names. And I asked them if they would come into a little room that this man had as an office.

It was, it wasn't more than six feet by seven feet. Just down there, just almost on the water's edge. Rough old, you know, like a tool shed.

And I said, listen, I don't know if this is right or wrong, but I want you to pray for me. And I want you to pray that the fear of God will come into my life. Because I said, I know sin is wrong, but I don't hate it.

And I knelt down that day. And those individuals gathered around, Joy Dawson and Lauren and others, put their hands on my head and prayed. And over the years, I've renewed that cry.

It will keep me from evil. Just like Joseph away from home, away from his family, the elders, the church, the board, and everything else. And there's a beautiful girl making herself available.

She's taking the initiative, pressing him every single day. Come on, lie with me. Come on, we could have a good time.

How can I sin against God and do that thing? Before I was saved, I didn't get saved till I was 18. I was in high school. We moved from England when I was 14.

My parents immigrated. We lived in Minnesota. My father settled on a Bible school campus, but we went to the local high school.

And I was, you know, a red-blooded Englishman, just like a red-blooded American, tempted just like everybody else. In those days, there weren't too many hard drugs, but marijuana. And sexual opportunities, and drinking, and smoking, and all of those things.

And, you know, I was tempted, like I said, just like everybody else. But the one thing that kept me was a fear of my dad. And it wasn't a fear of my dad that he could beat me up.

He'd had a serious accident. I could outrun him. I could, you know.

But it was such a reverence and respect for what my dad represented. His whole message was revival, holiness. And I remember thinking, you know, if my dad knew I was smoking, if my dad saw me drinking, if my dad saw me in some sort of immoral situation, it would literally break his heart.

And I love my dad so much that during the years prior to my conversion, the thing that kept me from sin was a fear of my dad. Now that I'm saved, I've got another dad. And I want to honor what he represents and not break his heart.

And so here is a man to keep me, Lord, from evil. The Bible says, with a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Without holiness, no man will see the Lord.

And Jabez somehow embodies all of this in this one little prayer. One more. Here's a man who desired wholeness.

You see, there's two ways of translating this last little bit. That thou wouldst keep me from evil or you would deliver me from harm, that it may not pain me. Here he was broken.

Lord, I've been hurt so much. I've been rejected so much. Lord, keep me from that.

Keep me from this harm that it doesn't hurt me anymore, Lord. I can't. In other words, he understood God is the one that binds up the brokenhearted.

God is the one that gives the oil of joy for gladness. God is the one that says, listen, I offer an exchange life. I know what you've been through.

I know what you've suffered. I know the abuse. I know that uncle that got you involved in homosexuality.

I know that, you know, whatever it is, I know what you've been through. I know the pain. Your wife's left me or left you now because of your sin and, you know, and all the guilt and the pain of that thing.

And say, God, take away the pain. Just make me whole, Lord. I want to be normal like everybody else.

This is Jacob. Give me the oil of joy. Give me beauty for ashes.

Lord, come and bind up Humpty Dumpty, that he's all smashed and all the king's horses can't put him back together. But Lord, you bind up the brokenhearted. And so he's praying here, God, make me whole.

You see, the gospel is not just cleansing from sin. Jesus said, no, the spirit of the Lord is upon me, not only to preach the gospel, but to open prison doors, to bind lives of being shattered and ruined and bring them back into wholeness. It's a total package, if you like.

Some of you need to experience that. Say, Lord, your grace, your mercy is sufficient to take this wounded warrior, bring healing, bring restoration, where I can look somebody in the eye without having to drop my head, so to speak. Where I'm on a level equal with everybody else, because the cross is level ground.

Where you're not a second-rate sort of citizen, but you're a child of the king. You're not a distant cousin. God doesn't have distant cousins.

He's only got sons and daughters. And then the last thing, as we close, God granted him what he requested. Now, you see, the last little phrase tells me as much about God as any little phrase in the whole Bible, doesn't it? I mean, that's the cameo of God.

Right there is the cameo of God. God wants to bless you. God wants to enlarge you.

God wants to answer your prayer. God wants to put his hand on you. God wants to keep you from evil.

God wants to make you whole, because God said, listen, I don't answer prayer when the motives are wrong. You have not because, you know, you're double-minded, your motives are wrong, and so on and so forth. See, if this was not a prayer in accordance with the will of God, God would have never answered it.

And so we know that it is, because God answered it. And through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have that. God wants you to walk knowing his presence.

He wants to deliver you totally, completely, absolutely from evil. He wants to make you whole. He wants to enlarge your borders.

He wants to bless you. He wants to make you an honorable man or woman. Wow.

Well, Lord, the last bit, you know, I mean, I'll take the blessing, but me being somebody that people would turn and look up to, me, with my background, are you kidding? God answered his request. And I love this little prayer. And again, through the encouragement of the scriptures, God's here to give you hope.

I don't know you, but you know yourself. God knows you. But I do know God a little bit.

And he's the God that longs to answer prayer. He's the God that longs to lift the beggar from the dunghill and make him a prince with God. He loves to take the Jabez, bring them up there, and bestow his honor, his weight, substance, make them men and women of substance, caliber of men and women, men of integrity, women of integrity, men and women of honor.

God specializes in doing that. Let's bow and pray. Father, we're so grateful that you're the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Lord, with you, there's no variableness. There's no shadow of turning. But Lord, your ability to change lives has not diminished one single iota.

I am the Lord, and I change not. Lord, you're still in the business of answering prayer. It's still in the business, Lord, of rescuing the perishing, transforming, changing lives.

Father, touch lives. Lord, we've heard about your grace. We've heard about your mercy.

Father, even now, just put your hand into that broken heart and begin to reconstruct it, Lord. Not just the washing of regeneration, but the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Lord, that renewing process.

You're the great physician. You're the healer. You're the restorer.

You're the encourager. You're the one that has come to bring hope to the hopeless. Father, I pray that you would, Lord, bind again the work of the enemy.

That Lord would bring that condemnation. Lord, reach into the past and dangle that thing and say, not you, but Lord, we do ask for conviction. That, Father, we can bring that situation that has never been dealt with to the blood.

And get out of death row and say, Lord, thank you for freedom. Thank you for liberty. Thank you, Lord, for changing my life.

So, Lord, bless this congregation. Enlarge this congregation. Put your hand upon this congregation.

In Jesus' name.

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