



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

July—August 2010

Prayer or Promise?

By Bob Van Domelen

¹⁰ *Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request. (1 Chronicles 4.10)*

At the entrance of a local Christian bookstore was a cart with a large "Clearance Items" sign positioned in such a way as to be easily seen. Usually when I look into that bin I can see things that have probably been on their inside shelves for a period of time. Eventually, space is needed in the store for the new things—hence the clearance bin, a final attempt to sell.

My eye was drawn to a picture frame wedged behind some CDs that were for sale, and when I pulled it out I saw the text centered in the middle of decorative matting was the "Prayer of Jabez." In 2000, it seemed everyone was talking about both the prayer and a companion book of the same title by Bruce Wilkinson.

My spiritual advisor suggested I memorize the prayer, especially in light of the ministry I do. I said the words every day for a month or so and then discontinued. Why? Well, I think I was afraid that God would actually do what I asked, that He would enlarge my territory. What if I couldn't handle that? So I set the prayer aside without telling anyone.

That you would bless me

I can remember speaking publicly years ago about my struggles with same sex attraction and eventually about the behaviors that brought me to prison as a sex offender. Despite my nervousness, every event included sharing how God had blessed me—especially as I found myself being drawn closer and closer to Him despite and maybe because of difficult situations.

More often than not, God's blessings came in ways I would not have expected. Permission granted to go to chapel services while still in the restricted area of intake; a transfer to a treatment program being started for the first time in another institution; and cell mates who allowed me to see more than their tough exterior, who shared stories of the families concerned about them, and who showed a willingness to get to know me despite my crime.

It is always easier at the end of a day to focus on the bad that happened that day. As a matter of fact, those negative things have a way of overpowering us, of blinding us to the good things, the blessings God gives. And whenever I share stories of the blessings, there are always people nodding their heads because they remember their own blessings.

On days when things don't seem to be going well and I find myself churning inside, I am actually getting in the way of the peace that God wants for me to have. My solutions

to problems are often grandiose and me-centered. God's solutions are simple and more often than not, look nothing like what I asked God to do. Sometimes I even say "Well, God, that worked but I think you could have done better." Fortunately, God has a sense of humor when it comes to my self-centeredness. He knows that eventually I will learn.

Enlarge my territory

When I came home from prison in 1988, my goals were pretty basic—finding a job, getting used to living in a space bigger than a prison cell, and slowly re-establishing lost relationships.

Employers are definitely concerned when they see "Yes" to the question "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" Most probably look for ways to find someone more qualified, someone with more of the right experience. In the end, it was a friend of our family who offered me a part time job in his accounting firm. Not a lot of money, but it was a start that eventually opened another part time door that became full time after a few years.

Anyone who has ever spent time in prison and has been released will tell you that the outside world is incredible. I was almost overwhelmed at the simple things—a comfortable chair, watching a program without guys yelling or making obscene comments, a walk early in the morning or late in the evening without having to sign out.

My family had changed while I was away. They had become strong in the face of negative community reaction, frugal in managing what money there was to make ends meet, and definitely more aware of me. My crimes had shocked them, hurt them, and challenged them more than I will ever know. I did learn that my time in prison was something of a comma, a pause in their ability to process everything they felt about me. Coming home was, in some ways, a re-opening of those wounds yet with hope that they would heal.

Even after 25 years, not all relationships have been mended. Some might never be. As the Serenity Prayer reminds us, we can only change our own lives. We cannot force others to like us or even forgive us. And you know something, that's hard to accept some days.

As ministry became a familiar word to me over the years, I certainly had no idea it would lead to what I do now. The territory of this ministry has enlarged; the experiences sufficient to fill a book or several books. But it was God and not Bob who enlarged the territory.

I have been thinking of how this part of the "Prayer of Jabez" works for anyone still in prison, especially for lifers who will never see the outside of prison walls. The answer is that one's territory is not a physical boundary. I believe

that my territory is actually the impact I have on others and their impact on me. The more I seek to serve God as a blessing in the lives of others, the more I receive of the blessings God gives them for me. To stay in a cell even when one can leave that cell is to be isolated. That individual is unable to touch the lives of others any more than they are able to touch that individual.

It does get tricky, though, because prisons tend to hold people who don't care about others. Yet if God is trusted to enlarge our territories, there will be that one person who connects. And that connection will lead to another and another. When these connections are God-centered, there is peace in knowing that the body of Christ's followers can make a difference.

**Let your hand be with me
and keep me from harm so that
I will be free from pain**

At first glance, these words might be difficult to accept, especially for those in prison situations where lives are threatened every day, where molesters are fair game for the physical assaults others feel are deserved, where guards turn away from this abuse because they believe the same thing. After all, if God is with us and if God hears this prayer, shouldn't the abuse stop or never even start?

There are pat answers some people give to the question but I haven't found one yet. I guess I see the issue as the apostle Paul must have done—being a servant of God does not eliminate hardship and sometimes actually encourages it. God reminded Paul that it would be in his weakness that Paul would find God's strength.

Of one thing I am certain. God's hand has been with me just as it is with all who seek Him. And more often than not, it is the changes we have experienced in our daily living that have borne their own witness, changes that *have* kept us from harm and free of pain.

And God granted his request

The only other reference to the name Jabez comes in verse nine where it says "And Jabez was more honorable than his brothers." I think I wanted to find out *how* God granted his request but the specifics are not there. Being honorable implies an attitude of respect for others, certainly obedience to God. Why, then, is the prayer Jabez raised to God so important?

I think it's important *because* there is no listing of specific blessings, no mention of how the territory of Jabez was enlarged, and no evidence of how he was protected from harm and pain. In other words, the prayer is personal. God's response is personal. The way God wants to bless us, enlarge our territory, and protect us is personal. And we can trust that when we say such a prayer, God promises to respond. There is no maybe. □

Bits & Pieces

The following are all from letters I have received in recent months. As always, I hope something you read will bring you encouragement and hope.

You said in your letter that there is nothing you could do about my understandable frustration concerning my appeal except to pray for me. Well, my brother, not only is praying for one another our duty but it is also the best gift you could

give to me. To go before the King of behalf of another is not only a privilege but an awesome responsibility and I really do appreciate and need prayer as we all do.

So many cry out to God year after year and He seems silent to them. I even see it here at this prison. Yet God has placed his hand on me—why not them, too? All I can do is bow my knee and be overwhelmingly thankful for this blessing. I also pray that this doesn't become a source of pride on my part because I don't deserve this blessing any more than they.

Recently I have been more at peace within myself and it feels like that peace is growing. It's a nice blessing to have after many years of anger and hurting others.

It is clear to me that we are social beings and that my old tendency to isolate is absolutely dangerous and counterproductive to both recovery and reconciliation. In saying that, I still feel like an ugly duckling when I try to be real with other men here. And when I do, there is still way too much tendency to put my foot in my mouth. Sometimes I feel as if the men I do trust and work with closely are way too sensitive in their approach to misunderstandings.

Jesus blesses a person mourning out of brokenness. He will not refuse anyone but will bind up and comfort. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter who will bring about a permanent change of heart so that we might walk in love. He who is forgiven much, loves much and the blood of Jesus continually cleanses and makes the vilest sinner clean.

God does not want our failures to take away our confidence in his promises.

I am feeling a bit more peaceful lately. Things are always unpredictable in prison (anywhere, for that matter) but God is in control and I'm in good hands. I will continue to breathe deeply and trust him.

I firmly believe that we as believers are supposed to pray for others. What greater thing can one of us do for another go before the creator of all that there is on behalf of another of his creatures?

No matter what happens, trust that it will not happen unless God lets it happen. Trust in him. Trust in his judgment. Trust in him who knows all. You don't have to know why, don't have to like it, and don't have to not try to change his mind. But I do have to be content in him or all is for nothing!

The thorn in my life is the path I decided to take that brought me to prison. The cycle is getting weaker as I learn how to want to suppress it.

Even though I stumble and fall, I can now get up, smile, and start again. It used to be upon failing I would just throw up my hands and become depressed. Then it would be at times months before I would try again..

Satan always attacks at the critical times in our lives. We are responsible for our actions, though, and I made all the wrong choices that I could. I just praise God that he allowed me to get stopped long before I did anything more than I did. Got truly delivers us--just not the way we usually would like it to happen. The most critical truth I have learned in the last several years is the power of aligning my will with his word. It is in the act of truly trusting and obeying regularly his loving laws as I began to walk the hard and debris strewn stairway back up out of the hole of despair that I willingly spiraled into. When a man takes responsibility for his choices and integrates all of his experiences (good and bad) into his life, then he can be whole and God can bring healing balm to his soul. Even the act of exposure or confession becomes easier as I enter into his will and realize that today I stand righteous in his sight. Although I am far from perfect, he has now captured my heart and laid the groundwork for future success and freedom. The choice is now only in walking in his light regardless of the pain, danger, and fear I might experience in the rejection of others--even in the church.

I can only speak for myself but all those who read your newsletter need to realize that God's blessings come with the stipulation--"Follow my commandments." I know we are not to judge, but we need to learn to wait on God. I was miserable during my time away from God's blessings. He kept me safe until I faced the fact that I couldn't live a perfect daily life. He still loves me when I fall time and time again, but I was always trying to improve my walk to justify his love for me. Silly me. He created me, he loves me, and he sent Jesus to take my place at Calvary. So who am I to try and earn his love? I can never be good enough so I must accept his grace and love.

Yes, surrender is total surrender, but I have to admit I'm not there yet. I recently released to God my life and my subsequent transfer shows how much I've not surrendered. I think of growth and faith as daily (often partial) surrenders. I don't even know what exactly it is, but God has other places to show me where I've not surrendered. I do know, however, that this God patiently desires more and more.

As long as we are seeking God, we have full rights to joy that is inexpressible yet full of glory. When one is living in sin, there is misery.

This newsletter is made possible by the donations of its readers and would cease to exist without that support. Please consider a tax-exempt donation to Broken Yoke Ministries, PO Box 5824, De Pere, WI 54115-5824. And if you cannot contribute, please pray!



Our Prayer Corner

Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and always foremost, for our victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those who pray, that they will believe that God *does* answer their prayers.
- For churches, that they become willing to deal with sex offenders as Jesus would have done.
- For those in despair, that they be blessed by words of encouragement and hope.
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions who have not acted on those attractions, that they are able to find the support and encouragement needed to deal with those attractions.
- For those whose victims are family members, that each day is a reminder to pray for them and ask God to heal the wounds of betrayal.
- For communities, that they seek intelligent rather than emotional answers to issues related to housing.
- For Bob and Cathie, that they continue to live each day with the same trust and faith in God that they've had from the start.
- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter.
- Finally, for those who are still abusing and are reading this newsletter because God made that possible, that they will do whatever it takes to stop the cycle of abuse and harm caused to their victims.

A Prayer Team-- Are you interested? Willing?

I recently received the following suggestion in a letter that I would like you to consider.

"I would encourage you to let God lead you to expand your prayer covering to those involved in spiritual warfare—especially to those who will commit to fasting and prayer during your times of ministry to others. There has to come about a healing between victims and abusers to the point where they stand up together in Christ to bring about the needed change."

My first thought was "How would I go about organizing such an army of prayer warriors?" and that immediately felt *really* wrong. The writer's suggestion is not about organizing, it's about inviting.

Those who correspond with me on a regular basis know that God has opened doors for me to speak on sex offender issues in public settings. I would be less than truthful if I said I have no feelings of unease but I do trust God to protect me and those I love on these occasions.

There won't be a club membership list or ID cards for those who agree, but God *will* hear your voice and your heart's desire. AND you will bless me and the ministry God has called me to do. For that I am exceedingly grateful!

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A Little Humor . . .

It was a really hot day at the office due to a malfunction with the air conditioning system. There were about twenty people in close quarters and everyone was sweating, even with a fan on.

All of a sudden, people started to wrinkle their noses at an odor passing through the air. It was the most hideous smell anyone had ever smelled.

One man, popping his head out of his cubicle said, "Oh, man! Someone's deodorant isn't working." A man in the corner replied, "It can't be me. I'm not wearing any."

