

Answers To Life's Difficult Questions
Message 4: How Can I Live Above Average
1 Chronicles 4:9-10

How are you today? Now be honest ... How are you really?

If we're honest most of us would have to admit to some dark days. Maybe COVID has taken some lustre out of life or you've recently had your dreams "discouraged" out of you. Maybe some harsh words have been spoken or there's some passed hurts still simmering. Well today I give you permission be released from all that and to dream again. Today, I give you permission to aspire again and regain your sense of optimism. Today, I give you permission to be ambitious and to come before God and ask Him to bless your life and expand your territory. And we're going to do this as we look at the Prayer of Jabez and ask the question "How Can I Live Above Average?"

Ambition is Neither Good nor Bad

Ambition in and of itself is neither good nor bad, it's just a basic drive in life that reflects our need for significance and a sense of mastery. In fact a sense of ambition or achievement is necessary for psychological health. But we need a certain degree of self-worth or confidence to give ourselves permission to be ambitious and give new things a go. But we Aussie don't really like our "tall poppies" do we? The U.S. doesn't suffer from the same culture in that regard. In the U.S. achievement and ambition is king and that's reflected in them having produced the largest number of billionaires on the planet.

God in fact wants to bless us far beyond we could dream or imagine! But first, how is your relationship and your connection with Him going? How worthy do you feel to receive His blessing?

Is there anything stopping you from feeling worthy enough to come before God and ask for His blessing?

Jabez Prayed For God's Blessing

In the book of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 we see this simple prayer -

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.

Jabez didn't have the best of starts. He was someone who was named as a "pain" by his mother, had no father present and perhaps the most positive thing you could say about him is – well at least he's not as dishonourable as his brothers. But none of this prevented Jabez from aspiring for more. So he unashamedly prayed that God would bless him and enlarge his territory.

God honoured his prayer not because of any special formula Jabez used but rather because of Jabez's heart attitude which is reflected in his prayer. Lets examine it -

His prayer is a prayer of 4 parts that can be remembered from the mnemonic B.E.S.T. -

Bless me -	"Oh, that you would bless me!"
Enlarge my territory -	"Enlarge my territory."
Stay with me -	"Let your hand be with me."
Take evil away -	"Keep me from harm..."

The key here is that Jabez didn't just pray to be blessed - he emphatically asked God to go with him - "Let your hand be with me." He didn't just want God to bless his life - he genuinely wanted God to be part of his life. To just seek God's blessing and an enlargement of your territory without God's presence is a focus on just the B & E parts of this prayer.

This heart attitude reminds us of the prodigal son in one of Jesus' parables - who selfishly demanded half of his inheritance and quickly left his earthly father behind as if dead. This was the height of selfish ambition. The Bible warns against selfish ambition in Phil 2:3 even saying "Do nothing out of selfish ambition". So whilst it's true that ambition itself is neither good nor bad - selfish, godless ambition that seeks just to puff us up without regard to a genuine connection to God, won't be blessed by God - because God's not in the business of feeding our fleshly nature (Romans 6:14).

How much do you genuinely want God to be part of your life and prosperity moving forward?

The Alternative to Selfish Ambition - Christlike Ambition

But in contrast to the selfish ambitions of the prodigal son – the prayer of Jabez – reflects a heart attitude that wants to bring God and His presence into the journey. It's not a "give me what's mine I'm out of here" kind of prayer. It's a God "I have these ambitions and want to be successful – but I want you to come with me and protect me" kind of prayer.

In fact - you know what – Jabez in asking "let your hand be with me" is not saying so much "God come along with me" - but rather God I want to come with you as I take your hand and you lead me"

God let your hand be with me – so I can hold it and be led by you.

God save me from evil and therefore save me from pain, save me from me – from my nature as the causer of pain.

He's saying God I want to be a follower of you, I want to do what pleases you and be blessed as a byproduct.

And this type of ambition isn't selfish at all – rather it's an ambition to see God's will and purpose for you unfold, with God right there in the middle, and seeing God's blessings and your territory expanding as you move forward doing God's will and God's work.

This is Christlike ambition. This is living out all four aspects of Jabez' B.E.S.T prayer.

Which Biblical people does this B.E.S.T attitude remind you of?

Paul an Example of Christlike Ambition

The Apostle Paul is a very clear example of someone who earnestly sort God's hand of leading and a desire to avoid evil. God ultimately blessed Paul far beyond his wildest imaginings and enlarged his territory to cover much of the ancient Mediterranean.

If I was ask you the question –

If you were in your car and you had a choice of deciding which seat Jesus would sit in your car?

I guess most of you would say that you'd pick Jesus to sit in the driver's seat. You'd want Jesus to be driving your car. But in fact the best seat for Jesus to occupy wouldn't be the driver's seat at all. I mean it's your car – you'd be the one who would have the responsibility for driving it. So it is with your life too – we all have the responsibility ultimately of how we have lived our lives. We can't delegate that responsibility to another person.

So, in fact the best seat for Jesus to sit in would be the navigators seat.

Imagine a car rally? The whole thing – the safety of the driver, the car's performance and in fact the outcome of the race all hinge on the ability of the navigator to give directions and navigate the track and for the driver to simply respond to his directions.

If it wasn't for the timely instructions of the navigator, the car couldn't perform at all on the track and the driver would be driving blind and dangerous.

That would be a bit like Jabez praying his prayer for blessing without the “God let your hand be with me and keep me from harm” parts.

The truth is that we need Jesus in the car of our life – directing our ambitions and our agendas, guiding us through the obstacles in life – away from the pain that evil can cause and towards the blessings and territory expansion that God has in mind for us.

So start dreaming again.

So how could your life look if you took the steps to not just pray the prayer of Jabez but to step out and live it - taking God's hand of leadership as His blessed plans for you unfold as you seek **His** will and **His** destiny for you?
