THE PRAYER OF JABEZ: IS IT FOR ME?
Part 1 of 2: Book Review of
The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life

by Dr. Ron Gleason

There’s a relatively new book out that’s making quite a splash in the modern evangelical world. The title is The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life. The author is Bruce Wilkinson, who is the founder and president of Walk Thru the Bible Ministries. He has previously authored Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs and 30 Days to Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs.

The little book numbers only 93 pages and the font is fairly large, so it’s a quick and easy read. I think that both of these attributes make it a sought-after book in modern Christianity. There are several reasons that I think this book is worth reviewing, not the least of which is that so many Christians are reading it and finding it to be helpful. While there are some insights and applications in the book that can be beneficial, on the whole the book presents some serious problems in biblical interpretation. Therefore, I’ve decided to look at this book and its contents from a Reformed perspective.

One final disclaimer: I’m writing this for the church of Jesus Christ. I have no desire to be polemical or to kick another brother in the Lord in the shins. I do consider Bruce Wilkinson a brother in Christ, but I think he’s just wrong on some of his statements and interpretations. Not all, just some. Where I disagree with him will become increasingly evident in what follows. I hope that it will be helpful for you. The way I’d like to go about this is to begin with a thumbnail sketch of the book, give an explanation of the Hebrew words in the text, go to an examination of what can be known about Jabez and the author of the book of Chronicles (where this prayer is found), and then close with some comments and criticisms of what Rev. Wilkinson has written.

A Thumbnail Sketch of the Book

The table of contents promises the reader seven chapters of relatively short duration preceded by a preface. This is what the author tells us in the Preface.

“Dear Reader, I want to teach you how to pray a daring prayer that God always answers. It is brief — only one sentence with four parts — and tucked away in the Bible, but I believe it contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God. This petition has radically changed what I expect from God and what I experience every day by His power. In fact, thousands of believers who are applying its truths are seeing miracles happen on a regular basis. Will you join me for a personal exploration of Jabez? I hope you will! Bruce H. Wilkinson.”
The chapters that follow bear these titles: 1) Little Prayer, Giant Prize; 2) So Why Not Ask? 3) Living Large for God; 4) The Touch of Greatness; 5) Keeping the Legacy Safe; 6) Welcome to God’s Honor Roll; 7) and Making Jabez Mine.

A “Gimper”

Bruce Wilkinson had a life-changing experience during his senior year at Dallas Theological Seminary — and it wasn’t that he missed the rapture! He heard a message from the seminary chaplain Dr. Richard Seume. Here’s what Seume said that was earthshaking: “Want a bigger vision for your life? Sign up to be a gimper for God.” A gimper, as Seume explained it and Knute Rockne lived it, is someone who always does a little more than what’s required or expected (pp. 9-10). Dr. Seume also used this text from Jabez’ prayer to make his point.

Wilkinson told the Lord that he wanted to be a “gimper” for him. I’m not certain what the Lord responded, but that’s another story. Since that time, he’s prayed this prayer every morning for thirty years! Jabez was a gimper for the Lord, and Wilkinson knows that this prayer will have a significant impact upon our lives. Why? “Because of my experience and the testimony of hundreds of others around the world with whom I’ve shared these principles” (p. 11). But there’s more. Wilkinson asks us a very pointed question: When was the last time you saw miracles happen on a regular basis in your life? (p. 16).

That’s a very interesting question, and I suppose I’d have to answer that I have never seen miracles happen in my life on a regular basis. Should I now feel very guilty, or that I’ve missed a lot in life? I believe Wilkinson would answer yes, but I’d answer no. In fact, I believe I’m in pretty decent company because I don’t think anyone in the Bible saw miracles happen on a regular basis in his life. But I certainly believe that many of the men and women of the Bible saw God’s miracles take place in their lives as well as in the lives of others. That’s an important point. I wonder why Wilkinson didn’t ask about miracles in the lives of others? Some people in the Bible witnessed a number of miracles. Some of the instances were more regular than others, but if we’re talking about expecting a miracle weekly or daily I’m convinced we’re missing the point of the gospel. I also fear that we can take our focus off Christ and put it on the miracles that should — if they’re genuine — point away from themselves and toward God.

Wilkinson is convinced that “God really does have unclaimed blessings waiting for you” (p. 17). If he means that God wants us to be in prayer for both the physical and spiritual things of this life, then I wholeheartedly agree. What does it take to achieve these unclaimed blessings? Nothing more than “a handful of core commitments on your part” (Ibid.) I haven’t been able to locate anywhere in the book where Wilkinson tells what those core commitments might be, except for a six-step program near the end of the book. But he is convinced that if you’ll start praying Jabez’ prayer, God will “sweep you forward into the profoundly important and satisfying life He has waiting” (Ibid).
Let me pause right here for a moment and ask a question. Can we derive from the text of Jabez’ prayer that God gave him a profoundly important and satisfying life? Based on the three times his name appears in Scripture (I think the mention in 1 Chr. 2:55 is to a location), I believe we’d be hard pressed to draw those conclusions.

**Is this “Name It & Claim It?”**

One of Wilkinson’s theses is that “Great men of the faith think differently than the rest of us” (p. 19). This may very well be true. What Wilkinson is leading to, however, is yet another question. “Is it possible that God wants you to be more ‘selfish’ in your prayers?” (Ibid.) He asks this question in light of Jabez’ prayer that the Lord would bless him indeed. He paraphrases this petition this way. “Father, oh, Father! Please bless me! And what I really mean is ... bless me a lot!” (p. 22). In light of this petition, Wilkinson adds, “Let me tell you a guaranteed by-product of sincerely seeking His blessing: Your life will become marked by miracles” (pp. 24-25). At this point we can only ask if this is truly the biblical message. Is it true that if I ask the Lord to bless me richly, my life will be full of miracles?

To make his point, Wilkinson uses the example of a fictitious Mr. Jones dying and going to heaven. Wilkinson prefaces his remarks with yet another question. “What if you found out that God had it in mind to send you twenty-three specific blessings today, but you got only one?” (p. 25). I’m of the persuasion that if God wants me to have anything, He will make certain that I get it. But the author of the book seems to believe otherwise. At any rate, Jones dies and goes to heaven, and St. Peter is giving him the proverbial nickel-tour. In heaven, Jones observes an oddly shaped building and asks his tour guide about it. The building is filled with packages, all neatly gift-wrapped. “Do I have a package in there?” asks Jones. “Yes you do,” replies the poor saint that has done nothing in heaven since his death but give tours and make up jokes. So Jones rushes in, finds the gift box with his name on it, and opens it. Jones lets out a deep sigh like St. Peter has heard so many times before. “Because there in Mr. Jones’s white box are all the blessings that God wanted to give him while he was on earth ... but Mr. Jones never asked” (p. 27).

That’s just awful theology folks! In the first place, the Bible tells us that there will be no more sadness in heaven. But Wilkinson has Jones sighing deeply because of blessings he never received on earth. That’s pretty pitiful. The next thing is even worse. If God is truly sovereign, as the Bible repeatedly says that he is, then his plan will never be thwarted. Wilkinson doesn’t tell us the theological reason why Jones didn’t receive all those blessings, but it seems to boil down to this: God had these blessings somehow reserved for Jones, but Jones was such a bonehead that he never asked for them. Even though God intended to give them to Jones, he never did because Jones didn’t ask. It all sounds terribly Arminian to me.

Should we be asking for God’s spiritual blessing(s)? Absolutely! God is able to do superabundantly more than we can ever think or imagine (Eph. 3:20.) Probably one of
the areas of neglect in the Christian life is failure to ask our Lord to bless us spiritually. The example that Wilkinson uses, however, is theologically horrible.1

A Big Leap

Chapter 3 (“Living Large for God”) makes a quantum leap, but I don’t think it’s forward. Here Wilkinson deals with the petition “Oh, that You would enlarge my territory!” in Jabez’ prayer. Interpreting the Word of God properly (2 Tim. 2:15) is of the utmost importance. Modern Christianity is plagued by sloppy and inept interpretation. All of us should be deeply concerned to interpret God’s Word in light of the entire message and with a view to the immediate context of any given verses.

Here is what Wilkinson says about the petition to enlarge one’s territory: “The next part of the Jabez prayer — a plea for more territory — is where you ask God to enlarge your life so you can make a greater impact for Him” (p. 30). Huh? How do we get there from Jabez’ prayer? How do we rightly, correctly, and justifiably interpret that petition to mean that we are to ask God to enlarge our life so that we can make a greater impact for him?

For Wilkinson, the conclusion is simple: “From both the context and the results of Jabez’s prayer, we can see that there was more to his request than a simple desire for more real estate. He wanted more influence, more responsibility, and more opportunity to make a mark for the God of Israel” (Ibid.) All right, then, let’s think for a moment about what he has said. First, he speaks about the context. What context? Wilkinson has not taken the time to give us any semblance of a context. How can he now appeal to that which is unknown to us? If you go back and look at the abrupt appearance of this prayer, what can you deduce concerning its context?

Second, our attention is drawn to the results of Jabez’ prayer. The text merely says that God granted his request. So, if Jabez asked for more territory and God granted his request, how does that compute into us asking God to “enlarge” our life so that we can make a greater impact for him?

Finally, how does Wilkinson know for certain that Jabez was asking for something more than real estate? Looking at the text itself, how in the world are we to conclude that this obscure prayer that only mentions real estate (territory) means that Jabez really was praying for more influence, more responsibility, and more opportunity to make a mark for the God of Israel? There is not one shred of evidence for this type of conclusion. If ministers of the Word of God play this footloose and fancy-free with the Word of God, what ought we to expect from those who are less trained in interpretation?

In a similar vein when Wilkinson puts the following paraphrase in Jabez’ mouth, it is pure speculation: “When Jabez cried out to God, ‘Enlarge my territory!’ he was

1 Our Reformed doctrine of providence rightly captures the idea: God may choose not to give us certain blessings if we don’t ask for them. But the choice is God’s, not ours. We do not tie his hands by failing to ask.
looking at his present circumstances and concluding, “Surely I was born for more than this” (p. 31). Here we see interpretation going from bad to worse. We have no idea whatsoever of what Jabez was thinking when he prayed this prayer, except that he wanted more territory and knew that God could give it to him. I think there is a very different biblical attitude of humility. King David seemed to manifest this type of humility when he asked why the Lord had exalted him to such a high position (see 1 Sam. 18:18; 2 Sam. 7:18; 1 Chr. 17:16). Even though Wilkinson repeatedly issues disclaimers that his interpretation of Jabez’ prayer has nothing to do with the gospel of health and wealth, the following quote gives you some idea of why his critics have accused him of peddling a version of health and wealth theology: “If Jabez had worked on Wall Street, he might have prayed, ‘Lord, increase the value of my investment portfolios.’ When I talk to presidents of companies, I often talk to them about this particular mind-set. When Christian executives ask me, ‘Is it right for me to ask God for more business?’ my response is, ‘Absolutely!’ If you’re doing your business God’s way, it’s not only right to ask for more, but He is waiting for you to ask” (Ibid.).

More — or less — interpretation of this petition causes Wilkinson to conclude that praying this prayer in the 21st century has to do with “appointments to keep” (p. 42.). This is synonymous with asking God for miracles (p. 43). This gets hokey — or hokier — when he says, “God always intervenes when you put His agenda before yours and go for it! Amazingly, if you have prayed to the Lord to expand a border, you will recognize His divine answer. You’ll have a front-row seat in the life of miracles” (p. 44). I am under the impression that God has an agenda (otherwise known as his determinate counsel), and that even when I don’t put his first, he has a way of overriding my agenda. I’m also less concerned about having a front-row seat in the life of miracle than I am about witnessing God’s grace in the life of sinners and worshipping him.

A Touch of Greatness or the Numbers Game?

Chapter 4 deals with the petition in the prayer where Jabez asks that God’s hand would be with him. There are places where Wilkinson seems to have made a turn for the better. Early in this chapter he directs our attention to the phrase “the hand of God” and states, “The church’s growth bears powerful witness to both the necessity and availability of the hand of God to accomplish the business of God” (p. 54). Even stuffy old Presbyterians can muster up a heartfelt “Amen” to that! In addition, he is to be commended when he says, “When we ask for God’s mighty presence like Jabez and the early church did, we will also see tremendous results that can be explained only as from the hand of God” (p. 55). Where the chapter “derails” is when he gets involved in what I’ll call “the numbers game.” Let me let him explain this…

When he was a youth pastor in New Jersey, he and twelve high school students planned an evangelism effort on nearby Long Island. Their objective was to evangelize the youth in a particular suburban area over a six-week period. They did all the necessary planning and brought in a specialist in children’s ministry to help them prepare and strategize. So far, so good. When the specialist left, Wilkinson said to the twelve kids, “If we don’t have one hundred kids in each club by the end of the week, we
should consider it a failure” (p. 57). Why? They prayed for the Lord’s blessing, as they should have. But to make the statement that unless you achieve a certain number the whole thing is a fiasco verges on the ludicrous. How did he arrive at the number one hundred? Did the Holy Spirit give it to him? Did he somehow derive this from Jabez’ prayer? How? If God had chosen to bless them with five, ten, or none, would God’s Word have returned to him empty (Isa. 55:11)? In addition to this, Wilkinson and his group asked the Lord for thirty decisions for salvation by the end of the first day (p. 58). God blessed their efforts beyond expectation, “but right in line with the scope of our Jabez prayer.”

What kind of message does this send to us lesser lights? Are we “failing” because we don’t pray the Jabez prayer, mantra-like, every morning? Is it because our faith is too small? Is it because we’re not trying hard enough? And what about all the others that have witnessed faithfully and have seen little or no “results”? Are we even supposed to look for results? What is to be said — if anything — for being used of and by God to plant a seed in a person’s life?

Watching Your Flanks or Other Parts of Your Anatomy

Chapter 5 deals with being kept from evil. You think to yourself that this is going to be a meaty chapter because all of us need help in dealing with temptation. What I found here was a series of self-serving anecdotes and success stories. He begins by relating a conversation between Dallas Seminary New Testament professor Howard Hendricks and a fellow student. The student tells Hendricks that he’s reached a level of sanctification at seminary to where he is hardly being tempted at all (p. 64). My assessment is that he was kidding himself or Hendricks, or both — probably both — and that he really needed to work on pride, which, if I’m not mistaken is still a sin. Anyway, Hendricks answers, “That’s about the worst thing I could have heard. That shows me that you’re no longer in the battle! Satan isn’t worried about you anymore” (Ibid.). I wonder. The Bible tells me that Satan is a formidable foe and works on Christians in a methodological fashion (Eph. 6:11). We’re warned that he roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). It would seem that this would include even deluded seminary students.

But Wilkinson does issue a very valid warning about temptation and how, when our resistance is down or we are tired, we can fall prey to things that would normally not tempt us. He cites an example, however, that seems to be especially self-seeking and self-serving. Here’s what he tells us: “Years ago, a cab had picked me up in downtown Chicago and was whisking me down the Kennedy expressway toward the airport. I slumped in the backseat, [sic] exhausted from a week of special meetings at Moody Bible Institute. God had moved in remarkable ways. I had preached every day and counseled scores of students — seventy-six, to be exact (I kept a log). Now heading home, I was physically and spiritually spent. Staring blankly out at the traffic, I reached for the Jabez prayer” (p. 65).
He made it to O'Hare and sat down on the flight in between two men, each of whom was reading a Playboy or Penthouse magazine. Silently, Wilkinson complained to God that he thought they had a “deal.” He told the Lord that he just couldn’t cope with that situation in his current state, and within moments both men swore and put their magazines away. Yet another “success” story. Let me tell you the story of a Christian I know. He was flying back from Mexico and sat down next to a woman who had a small DVD player. She was watching a porn movie on it. My friend was weary too and prayed that God would remove the temptation. God chose to let him sit there the whole flight and turn his head the other direction. Which was more “successful?” It can be argued that my friend had as much success over evil as did Wilkinson or Jabez.

Wilkinson concludes this chapter with these words: “With the fourth plea of Jabez as part of our life, we are now ready to move up to a higher level of honor and exponentially expanding blessings” (p. 75). Now let me see if I’ve got this straight: God’s kingdom is the safest investment and also shows the most remarkable growth (Ibid.) That’s true enough, but a lot depends on how you interpret that last idea. We are to seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and everything else will be given to us as well (Matt. 6:33). It’s also true that this kingdom shows the most remarkable growth, but this growth is a quality and not a quantity. I don’t measure spiritual growth by counting noses or conversions.

Does God Play Favorites?

Chapter 6 returns to the beginning of the account in Chronicles: Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. Without explaining the context in which the Chronicler penned those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Wilkinson believes these words beg the question: Do you think God has favorites? He qualifies this question with these remarks. “Certainly God makes His love available to all, and Jesus came to earth so that ‘whosoever’ might call on His name and be saved. But Jabez, whose prayer earned him a ‘more honorable’ award from God, might have made the case that God does have favorites” (p. 76). What this boils down to, then, is this: “Simply put, God favors those who ask. He holds back nothing from those who want and earnestly long for what He wants” (Ibid.).

Moreover, to say “that you want to be ‘more honorable’ in God’s eyes is not arrogance or self-centeredness” (pp. 76-77). Here Wilkinson is making reference to the beginning of the text containing the prayer of Jabez. Since Wilkinson has not explained or opened the text for us, the reader is only left to guess — or worse, fantasize — about what the words might mean. Let me give you an example of what I mean. We know nothing of Jabez’ brothers. To say that Jabez was more honorable than his brothers might not be a true complement. Since we haven’t looked at the text and its larger context yet, it would be difficult — I would think — to decide a priori what the words “more honorable” actually mean.

Two items seem to motivate Wilkinson in this chapter. The first is Paul’s admonition in Philippians 3:14 that Christians press on toward the goal for the prize.
The other is found in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 where we are told that we will have to give an account to God for what we have done. Wilkinson’s theology comes shining through when he writes, “The sorrowful alternative does not appeal to me. I don’t want to get to heaven and hear God say: ‘Let’s look at your life, Bruce. Let me show you what I wanted for you and tried repeatedly to accomplish through you ... but you wouldn’t let me.’ What a travesty!” (p. 77).

Well, actually this is substantially worse than a travesty. It’s a horrible indictment about God and his sovereignty. In this example, God is portrayed as impotent. He wanted to do all kinds of wonderful things for Bruce, and even tried repeatedly to get his creature to do what he wanted him to do, but to no avail. What kind of image does this paint of our Lord? He certainly doesn’t seem to be the Lord God Almighty. His creature can thwart his desires. God wants to do all kinds of things for us, but just doesn’t seem to have the ability to accomplish what he wants to do.

Wilkinson then shifts gears a little and gives us an example that I find mystifying. Like many of us, he seems to have enjoyed the thrills of meeting deadlines and air travel. He gives the example of being in Atlanta on his way to a speaking engagement in North Carolina. A major accident had blocked all the lanes of traffic and it became clear that he was going to miss his flight. What to do? Wilkinson prayed this prayer. “Lord, please make my flight late so I can catch it” (p. 79). Martin Hedman should have thought of a comparable prayer when we were on our way to the PCA’s General Assembly in Louisville, KY, a couple of years ago. We arrived in Atlanta from LAX and just as we landed a huge thunder and lightning storm began. Down South they call that kind of storm a “red hill washer.” Anyway, we sat in the plane on the tarmac for longer than the flight from LAX to Atlanta! I prayed, but I guess I prayed the wrong kind of prayers.

Wilkinson seems to have a kind of “direct line” to God — all of us pastors are accused of having one of these phones — and low and behold his flight was delayed. He tells us that not only was his flight delayed, but also he began to see that the Lord might be arranging “an appointment for ministry” for him (Ibid.). He encountered a woman who was very flustered and asked, “What can I do for you?” and she punched him in the nose. I’m just kidding – she didn’t really. But I could certainly imagine a scenario where that would happen. Anyway, this turned out to be “an appointment for ministry.” I mean, how much more dramatic can you make it? He was granted the privilege of witnessing to the woman, who was considering divorcing her husband. To make it even more impressive, he told the woman that they would be sitting together on the plane even though they had different seat assignments. God arranged it all. The result? “Let me encourage you, friend, to reach boldly for the miracle” (p. 82). “As you repeat the steps, you will set in motion a cycle of blessing that will keep multiplying what God is able to do in and through you” (p. 83). This is nothing more or less than a mantra or incantation principle. We seem to be guaranteed that as we repeat these steps we shall receive an ever-increasing cycle of blessing from God. Is this what the Lord promises us? Most certainly he promises that he will bless his children. He also points us to example after example of hardship and sorrow in the Christian life. My pastoral fear is that Wilkinson paints a rosy picture of the Christian life that is skewed in the
direction of success, and bereft of some of the true trials and hardships of reality that mug us on a regular basis.

Wilkinson also promises something else: “This is the exponential growth I referred to at the close of the previous chapter. You have asked for and received more blessing, more territory, more power, and more protection. But the growth curve soon starts to spike upwards” (Ibid.). In theology we speak about the believer’s sanctification or his being made holy. The Bible is clear that this is not always a curve that spikes upward. Sanctification is filled with growth and regress, ebb and flow, times of great spiritual elation and times of spiritual dryness. You get the impression from Wilkinson that if you plotted the “sanctification curve” and if you were faithfully praying the Jabez prayer, you’d get a steady upward climb. How good will it get? I’ll let Wilkinson tell you. Before I do, however, I should warn you that it’s going to get very, very good. So good, in fact, that you’ll actually have to ask God to stop blessing you. Don’t believe me? Well, just listen.

“Repeatedly during your life … you will be so overwhelmed with God’s graciousness that tears will stream down your face. I can remember saying to the Lord, ‘It’s too much! Hold some of your blessings back!’ If you’re like many who use the Jabez prayer, including me, you’ll come to times in your life when you feel so blessed that you stop praying for more, at least for a while” (p. 84). I can’t speak for you, but I can never get enough of God’s blessings in my life. If I’m truly praying for spiritual blessings and the Lord grants them I cannot conceive of a situation or time when I’d ask him to stop! But then again, I haven’t prayed the Jabez prayer very much.

**Making Jabez Mine**

Chapter 7 is the application. The first part of the appropriation of this prayer comes in the form of a challenge from Wilkinson: “I challenge you to make the Jabez prayer for blessing part of the daily fabric of your life. To do that, I encourage you to follow unwaveringly the plan outlined here for the next thirty days. By the end of that time, you’ll be noticing significant changes in your life, and the prayer will be on its way to becoming a treasured, lifelong habit” (p. 86).

Let’s break this down and have some fun in the process. Can you imagine Jesus saying something similar to his disciples? “Hey, guys. If you just pray this Lord’s Prayer I’ve taught you for the next thirty days, you’re going to see some great changes in your life!” Where do pastors get off suggesting that God’s people do something God has never suggested? This stuff is starting to get very scary at this point. I know that Wilkinson did not command us to pray the prayer, but given everything he’s said up to this point, his suggestion/encouragement is almost a command. It’s like you’re an idiot if you don’t. Did Jesus ever suggest anything like this to his disciples? No. It’s as if this obscure prayer has now taken on some magical mantra-like powers so that if you follow Wilkinson’s plan things are going to start going a lot better in your life. What is that plan? It should come as no surprise that it’s a six-step plan for significant change in your life.
Here it is:

1. Pray the Jabez prayer every morning, and keep a record of your daily prayer by marking off a calendar or a chart you make especially for the purpose.

2. Write out the prayer and tape it in your Bible, in your day-timer, on your bathroom mirror, or some other place where you'll be reminded of your new vision.

3. Reread this little book once each week during the next month, asking God to show you important insights you may have missed.

4. Tell one other person of your commitment to your new prayer habit, and ask him or her to check up on you.

5. Begin to keep a record of changes in your life, especially the divine appointments and new opportunities you can relate directly to the Jabez prayer.

6. Start praying the Jabez prayer for your family, friends, and local church (pp. 86-87).

Let me comment briefly on each of these steps to success. It would certainly seem that life is more than the Jabez prayer. That is why God gave us such diversity in his book, the Bible. The prayers recorded there for us are anything but monotone. Our prayers are not to be rote, but from our hearts. There is nothing wrong with “journaling” if that's helpful to you, but I'm not convinced that we're required to keep a calendar or chart just for the Jabez prayer, for Pete's sake! Why should I tape the prayer in my Bible unless I'm only reading the New Testament, in which case I'm wrong. The prayer is already in my Bible. I'm not opposed to taping favorite or very helpful texts to your mirror or putting them on the “fridge,” but my new vision is given to me by the whole counsel of God! With step 3 we're headed right in the direction of a blatant Roman Catholic theology. It's a sad truth, but many Christians struggle with reading their Bible on a daily basis. I honestly would have expected Wilkinson to encourage us to read the Word of God daily in lieu of his book. Certainly God's Word will show us a great many more insights to life that we've missed than Wilkinson's book ever will. It's like we've got two authorities in our spiritual walk now: the Bible and Wilkinson's book. This is serious, folks! Maybe it's just a cheap plug for his book, but I believe he could have done a lot better on point number 3.

I think it's important to have people hold you accountable for prayer. Most of us are far too sloppy and negligent in our prayer life. It's one thing to have my fellow Christians hold me accountable to pray on a regular basis. It's quite another thing to have them make sure I'm praying this specific prayer.

“Divine appointments” is another phrase for opportunities to witness for God. Most of us are just too lazy to speak to the people God already brings into our lives. If we were to sit down and think about it, I'll bet we could list a number of people God brings to us on a regular basis already. To make matters worse, if you're like me you keep your mouth shut far too many times. To my distorted mind, “divine appointments”
is a cutesy way to say “providence.” In God’s providential governing of his created order, he brings all kinds of people into my life with a high degree of regularity. What am I doing with those he’s already given to me?

Finally, I’d say we should keep praying for our family, friends, and church. You don’t have to pray specifically the Jabez prayer to be effective. Prayer is effective. Prayer is one of the most sublime gifts of grace our Lord has given us. If you want to include the Jabez prayer in your variety of prayers for family, friends, and your local church, I’d encourage you to do so. I’d also encourage you to pray a variety of prayers for the variety of spiritual needs our family, friends, and church have.

Wilkinson has some concluding remarks that point in the direction of American success: numbers. Like it or not, Americans are numbers oriented and numbers driven. Even though we don’t say it very loudly, we tend to determine truth by counting noses. Numbers matter and they matter a lot to us. Success or failure can be gauged by numbers. Your value as a human being can be closely associated with how much money you earn. One of my fears (there are more) while reading this book is that Wilkinson throws numbers around as an indicator of success. He spoke to 9,000; his church is large; he needs so many warm bodies at a Vacation Bible School before it can be considered successful. The book ends on a similar note: “Over the years at Walk Thru the Bible, our once feeble prayers have grown because He has never stopped answering! I can remember when we had twenty-five or thirty Bible conferences in a year. This year Walk Thru will conduct over twenty-five hundred Bible conferences — fifty each weekend. The ministry now publishes ten magazines each month to help individuals and families grow in God’s Word every day. We recently passed the 100 million mark in total issues published” (p. 88).

We’re told that these figures are not quoted to impress us, but is just evidence of what Jabez praying can do (p. 89). But then we’re on to more numbers: “In January 1998 we began WorldTeach, birthed from the womb of the Jabez prayer. WorldTeach is an exciting fifteen-year vision to establish the largest Bible-teaching faculty in the world — 120,000 — a Bible teacher for every 50,000 people on earth” (Ibid.). In principle, this is a very good idea. One of my first questions is, however, what kind of theology are these 120,000 educators going to teach? I’ve been in seminaries where even small faculties can’t agree. How ungainly is it going to be to try to monitor 120,000? Then again, maybe there’s going to be no attempt whatsoever to monitor them, except, maybe, on their view of the Tribulation and the Rapture.

Wilkinson ends by inviting us to join him for the coming transformation. He ends with a promise: “You will change your legacy and bring supernatural blessings wherever you go. God will release His miraculous power in your life now. And for all eternity, He will lavish on you His honor and delight” (pp. 91-92). What is my legacy if I’m a Christian? Wilkinson seems to suggest that whatever it is, it’ll get substantially better if I pray this prayer enough. This might come as a surprise, but as a Christian, I believe that I receive supernatural blessings from my heavenly Father because of Christ.