

Expand My Borders – Vision Dream #1
1 Chronicles 4: 9-10
Don Lincoln

I'm in my 39th year of ministry and I've never preached from 1st Chronicles, but I suspect many of you have at least HEARD about the text I just read if not having heard or read it yourself.

In 2000, Bruce Wilkinson wrote a book entitled *The Prayer of Jabez*. The book suggested you post this prayer everywhere in your house – on your mirror, desk – and pray it daily, seeking God's blessing in your life as Jabez did. Within a few years this 93-page book sold over 10 million copies and was at the top of the New York Times best-seller list. In its wake, a virtual "Prayer of Jabez" subculture emerged, complete with journals, backpacks, jewelry, scented candles, and a host of marketing paraphernalia.¹ A First Chronicles subculture – who would've thought...

Dream #1 "Expand Our Witness," reminded me of Jabez' prayer: "enlarge my borders," so I began to look for the book. I checked the church library, which is LOADED with fabulous books – no luck. I looked on Sue Spotts' bookshelf, no Prayer of Jabez. I asked Pastor Jennie. Nope. I asked Pastor Ann, she looked at me – a little sheepishly – and said, "It's at home."

I said "REALLY?" You actually have it?

She said, "The Bible study I was in for years used it as their study in 2001, and I prayed that prayer every day for quite some time." And after a pause – she said: "And that's how I ended up in seminary!"

Despite the book's perhaps simplistic approach, seemingly more aligned with the Prosperity Gospel than we might like, Pastor Ann obviously found the truth of "You better watch what you pray for," but even more, found the rich blessing of what happens when you and I align ourselves with God, and ask God to expand our horizons.

Ann brought in her copy of the book, so listen to a couple lines from Wilkinson's book. "Ask God to enlarge your life so you can make a greater impact for Him. When you pray for more ministry, amazing things do occur. Attempt something large enough that failure is guaranteed – unless God steps in."

That's the heart of this God-Sized Dream #1: Expand our Witness. Asking God to equip, compel, challenge, inspire, surprise, and use us to increase our impact in inviting others to join us on a journey with Jesus Christ.

Jabez was praying for more land. Perhaps appropriate in his day – that Israel would have a larger footprint in the region so God's word would be known among the tribes dwelling in that area. It seems very appropriate for Jabez to be praying for that. We're not praying for more land, we're praying for a deepening expansion of ministry. For

creative energizing of who we are and what we do that might enhance the life of this congregation for the witness of Jesus Christ in the world.

It may seem funny to say nametags is one of the pieces of that, but that's the for instance for today. That's the easy takeaway. I hear over and over, lots of times, from people who visit here that they find Westminster warm and friendly – but I also hear from those who don't experience us that way. This is a large Presbyterian Church. Might it improve our fellowship if we knew more names of the friends Christ has given us. You cannot imagine how much help a name tag is to a pastor. We love it when we're doing Communion by intinction. But there's a bigger ministry. A recent study by Cigna found loneliness has reached epidemic proportions in this nation. Loneliness. Is there a ministry in knowing one another's names?

We had a satellite campus at Dilworthtown from 2006-2009. We used nametags EVERY Sunday. For that small, new church, it made a huge difference because everybody got to know everybody quickly. But we have struggled for years with the idea here – how to locate 2,500 nametags where people could actually get to them and put them back. It would probably take all week to put them all in order again. We have not been able to figure that out.

Then, we started doing a check-in station in our children's ministry in the childcare area. A digital sign-in on a little iPad or tablet – which lets us know you're in the building and gives you and your child a printed nametag. Once you've registered yourself, you can even use a bar code from your phone or from one of those grocery store plastic bar code favored patron thingy's – you know what I mean!! Run it under the scanner – voila – you get a printed nametag and we know you're in the building!!

There's a sample kiosk in Spellman. Try it! So what would happen if we had 6 or 8 of those around the building and every Sunday the pastors could see your name again. Imagine if we could call one another friends. Is it possible nametags could grow this large congregation SMALLER??

That's the kind of thing this big dream #1 is talking about!

We also know not everyone in this congregation can worship every Sunday morning. Some work on Sunday morning, people travel, sports impacts many. From September of 2004 to June of 2007 we had a Sunday evening service. Might we consider that again – have a service NOT on Sunday morning – expand our borders, enlarging our witness, a bit to provide additional opportunities for worship?



Or could we assist other retirement communities, by replicating what we're doing with Maris Grove at places like White Horse, or Freedom Village, or Willow Valley, or Jenner's Pond – streaming worship in house for those who have difficulty getting out to a local congregation, bringing Christian Community to them so that believers in a place might share with one another? What would it mean for us to expand our borders in that kind of way – to pray for God to use us.

This is the broadest of the four dreams – encompassing an attitude about ALL our ministry. The other three are more focused – in fact dreams 3 and 4 are really laser-focused in very specific directions – affordable housing and young adults. THIS Dream #1 is where just about any and every thing in our ministry can find its place. What does God want us to do? aspect of who God is calling us to be could be found.

In this dream we're asking God to expand our witness, as the Prayer of Jabez was to "enlarge my border." That may or may not have anything to do with size or numbers. Expansion might actually mean going deeper. Expanding and enlarging might actually mean doing less in some areas so we could be more richly focused in others. But it is asking God to open our hearts, stimulate our minds, fully energize and engage our spirits in thinking creatively about how this great congregation can continue to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

What if each of us began praying this Prayer of Jabez every day – that God would expand – enlarge your border - your own, individual ministry opportunities? Can you imagine what might happen? Just ask Pastor Ann... And what if the entire congregation was praying, watching, listening for how to expand Westminster's witness? Who knows what God might do with us?

I love that we're launching this on World Communion Sunday – when we remember our common call with Christians everywhere, not just to gather at this Table, but to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the saving promise of God's love and grace shown in our Lord and Savior. And OUR job is to do that as creatively, as effectively, as we can in OUR little corner of the world.

May it be so. Amen.

1. Steven Lawson, Ligonier ministries "Tabletalk;" Feb 1, 2006.