

My Faith Story..... Dave Kirchner 12/16/01

Several weeks ago, Joel Goff was in our office and asked that one of the Kirchner boys do the Faith Story. Dan had told his several months ago, so it was between Jim and myself. I have just one thing to say to Jim, “thanks a lot”!

Briefly explain how I got here....

When I went away to college, my parents did a very brave thing. They made a decision to leave a church who's denomination had been served by my Grandfather (as a minister) for nearly 50 years. After a short church shopping spree, my parents landed at Minnetonka Baptist Church. They choose to come here because they knew that the Reycrafts attended here and also that Austin Evans was a member. My parents had heard Austin share his faith while in his house for an Orono soccer parents meeting. They wanted to be a part of a church that would encourage that type of outreach.

Later on that school year, I came home to see my parents get baptized. I thought they were crazy! I wanted nothing to do with a Baptist Church! Little did I know then, that I would accept Christ that summer and be baptized along with my two brothers in late August. That was over 20 years ago and now I know that my parents were indeed crazy!

Part of a rich HISTORY

Who am I? The display behind me has my name, but you need to know that: I am the son of Doug, who was the son of Ernst G, who was the son of Ernst A, -- and so on and so on. (Aren't family trees great?) If the book of life looks anything like 1 Chronicles, I could be one in a long list of names OR I could be a modern day Jabez. I've been learning about this Jabez character over the past 9 months, and I am amazed at how God honors the honest prayer of this simple man. His prayer is recorded in 1 Chronicles and reads as follows: “Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me indeed 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.

My favorite part of that prayer is the last: “And God granted his request”. That means quite simply that Jabez's desire was in alignment with God's will. In the few minutes that I have today I wanted to touch on the first two parts of this prayer. The 1st is Jabez's request that God bless him indeed. It was very hard for me to even think about asking God to bless me. You see I believed that He was busy helping people with more significant needs than my own. If my own son asked me to bless him, would I hold back? After the tears of joy dried, I would bless him with everything I have. I believe that God desires to do the same with me AND you. Perhaps we have not, because we ask not... Let me be clear on this point, these blessing are not of the material nature, but rather the eternal nature. Why would the God of heaven and earth, bless me with a few dollars or a thing that rusts, when He can bless me with something of eternal value. Consider for a moment what a unique blessing we've received from Him to be a part of His ministry on this planet.

The 2nd part of Jabez's prayer is his request for God to enlarge his territory. I've been praying for enlarged territory for about 3 months. I believe that like Jabez, you will experience God almighty working through you when you pray this. God has opened my eyes to what he is doing around me in a new and exciting way. It is almost scary to ask this. After 60 days of praying this I was asked to consider a position on the Board of Stewards. I'm very humbled by this opportunity and VERY scared. This is THE last ministry position that I would want, but I believe that God has asked me to be obedient to His calling and His timing.

Last Saturday morning, I was again asking God for more territory. That night we were at the M & M's Christmas dinner, when my cell phone rang. It was the baby sitter saying that my Grandmother's nursing home had called. Her leg was cut and she needed to be transported to the hospital for stitches. It had been a while since I had visited Grandma, so I was initially feeling rather guilty. My next selfish thought was "why can't the nursing home take care of this"? My brother Dan was there that night as well, and we decided that we should both go and help her. I was sad to see my Grandmother in pain, but was glad to be there in that moment to assist her and hold her hand as the doctor put 7 stitches in her paper-thin skin. As we knelt by her bed that night and prayed her to sleep, I wondered how many times this sweet lady had prayed at my bedside? I realized that I am truly blessed indeed. When God enlarges your territory, it will not always be at a convenient time.

What is my territory?

Perhaps you are wondering "where IS my territory" and why would I want more? When I pray Jabez's prayer, I am trusting God to show me what territory He wants for me AND then to provide the tools to accomplish His bidding.

Last winter, when I first heard about this form of prayer, I thought my territory was my workplace and my neighborhood. God had a different idea. His thought was that my territory would be every where I would go that day. My new territory included: the gym, my vendors, people that I ran into at Target, Burger King and even the Christmas tree guy at the lot in Elk River. Each ReachUp event gave me an opportunity to invite new people to come and hear the gospel. As I talked about these events, more questions arose: Who do you think God is? Does He really care about me? Does God answer prayer? Is God in control? It seemed as though a simple invitation lead to more questions. If the events of September 11th didn't provoke conversations about God in your territory, you need to get another cup of coffee.

ReachUp has provided an awesome opportunity for you to bring your neighbors, co-workers – yes even your hairstylist! I may not be able to sit down with someone that I'm newly aquatinted and share the gospel, but I can INVITE them to an event that is in a "neutral setting".

This summer the boy's competed in an INT wakeboard tournament held in Alexandria, Minnesota. As we drove to this tournament, we prayed that our territory would expand. During lunch time an announcement was made that free food was being offered by Fellowship of Christian Athletes. It turns out that FCA has worship services the mornings before each tournament. We joined their prayer team and are now pleased to learn that they will be offering huddles that are aimed at our oldest son's age group. I told Ben, that if he wanted to par-

ticipate, I would pay for him and a friend to attend the weekly clinics which include wakeboarding classes. The one condition: the friend had to be unchurched. Now how long do you think it will take an 11-year-old to find a friend that wants to wakeboard? Inviting is easy!

In the same way it should be easy to invite people to our church. What barriers exist to ReachUp or summer wakeboard camp OR worship service at INT tournaments? We know that once inside our building, people are sold on the solid teaching and friendly people. I really don't think it matters what the label says on the outside of our "product", whether that be Ridgewood or something else. What does matter is that we choose to participate in expanding God's territory for His ultimate glory!

I was asked recently what my vision for our church was. I explained that I believe that we are to grow. To grow, from new believers--not from discontented church shoppers-- but from the unchurched. I pray that the carpet and the door hinges wear out every other year from people seeking the good news that will save them for all eternity.

When the lineage of our church is examined, will we be like Jabez, who was found more honorable or will we be just another name separated by a coma? Will our children one day look back on us and find us faithful to God's specific calling to reach lost people? I believe that we have an unprecedented opportunity to share Christ. We must examine all barriers that prevent us from fulfilling the great commission.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, change is not easy, but the Christian life as outlined in the new testament, was not a life of ease, but rather a life of sacrifice modeled after our savior Jesus Christ. I believe that early Christians were not afraid to be martyred, because they had seen Jesus raised from the dead. They knew life was lived beyond those years spent on this world! May we never be found to be like the church of Laodicea that was neither hot nor cold and was therefore rendered useless! Our community needs salt NOW. Lord please motivate us to be HOT for the lost!

The Jabez prayer makes me realize that life truly is an adventure. Peter the ROCK and cornerstone of the church was the only one that stepped out of the boat and onto the water. He denied Christ three times, but was the only disciple close enough to see Jesus' face. The rest of the disciples were scattered – hiding in fear. As God seeks to expand the territory of our church will YOU be willing to join me as we step out of the boat with our eyes on JESUS!

May God bless us indeed!

