

How God Answers Your Prayers by Changing You

Editor's Note: Bo Stern's husband is fighting a rare disease called ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Years ago, the book *Prayer of Jabez* took the world by storm. It was built on an obscure scripture from 1 Chronicles—a beautiful prayer spoken to the heavens by a man with a strange name and a difficult life. The book got people praying again and one line from that small bit of biblical text quickly took center stage in the Christian lexicon: *enlarge my territory*.

I was thinking about that line this morning, as I've run to my Bible and my coffee for refuge after a string of long, hard ALS nights. (One thing I'll say for living at extreme levels of exhaustion: it pretty much eliminates pretense. There's no posing in my prayer life anymore. I don't have the time or energy for it.) I mostly mumbled gibberish through my murky mental fog until one line rose to the surface and became something of an inhale/exhale:

“Strengthen my resolve, increase my reserves, fill my storehouse.”

I breathed that prayer in and out, in and out, in and out, and it reminded me of a therapy Steve does called breath-stacking. Because the muscles in his chest are beginning to atrophy, he uses a weird device to force air into his lungs, causing them to expand and fill. So in spite of his muscles' inability to do that work on their own, his lungs are still being enlarged and maintaining more of their functional capacity.

Here's how I think all this comes together: External pressure exhausts internal capacity. I could ask God to lessen the external pressure, or I can ask Him to step in and sovereignly

fill my lungs with life. Maybe this is what “expand my territory” is all (or partially) about. Maybe it’s not so much that God is here to give me new and exciting adventures or increased authority or notoriety or whatever it is we think of when we think “expansion.” Instead, I think it might mean that He is here to grow my *internal ability* to draw the strength I need from Him, to endure hardship with hope, to run a long race without losing joy, to care for Steve well, to do tasks I’ve never imagined I could do before (medical stuff freaks me out a little—but I’m learning). Maybe the territory that He is longing to enlarge for me is actually the ground *inside of me*—where the threat of atrophy is always lurking. Because it seems that any long-term external expansion will hinge on our internal capacity to maintain it.

So today, this is my prayer over myself and the ALS wives that are so dear to me and over everyone who feels at the end of their rope and last of their resources:

Strengthen our resolve (to do Your will when it’s hard), increase our reserves (to endure this “expansion” with joy) and fill our storehouses (with all the resources we need to become the bigger, stronger people You have designed us to be.) Amen.

With hope for strength, increase and abundance.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of Beautiful Battlefields (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband’s terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Oregon.