

September 23 — The Truth of the Dare

READ

Malachai 2:10-4:6

Joel 1:1-3:21

Malachi 3:10-12, "*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this, 'says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.'*"

THINK

Do you remember the shame of being dared to do something as a kid, and then chickening out at the last minute? Well, if it still haunts you to this day, keep reading for a chance to redeem your courage in a lot bigger arena!

There's something unique about today's passage. It's the only time in His Word that God *dares* us to test Him! That should make us all pause to consider the magnitude of that! However, as profound as it is, we can't get so hyper-focused on that fact alone that we miss the promise that follows! As the verse continues, God promises that if we're obedient with the tithe — bringing to Him the first 10% of all we earn — He'll "...pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Seems like a great deal, doesn't it? But when it comes to our money, we often get funny. As we pour over our finances and wonder how to make ends meet, tithing can begin to seem one-sided, and it's easy to question God: "Where's my storage units full of blessings? All I have is mountains of bills due and debts to pay!" It's then that we must keep sight of what tithing truly is — obedience to God and trusting Him to not only provide but to fulfill His promise! And most importantly, we can't forget that everything we have is really His. We're simply stewards of what God has given us.

Here's your chance to let that courage shine! Go ahead, test God by either starting to tithe or going beyond in generosity. See if He "will not throw open His floodgates of heaven" and rain down blessing in your life like never before!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for giving me everything I have. Help me to not forget You are the true source of it all. Open my heart to give with joy. I believe in Your promises and choose to walk in obedience to Your commands and the sweet spot off Your blessing. Amen.

September 22 — Leftovers

READ

Nehemiah 12:27-13:31

Malachi 1:1-2:9

Malachi 1:7-8, *“You have shown contempt by offering defiled sacrifices on My altar. Then you ask, ‘How have we defiled the sacrifices? You defile them by saying the altar of the Lord deserves no respect. When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn’t that wrong? And isn’t it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is!’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”*

THINK

You’ve been vying for a chance to get your boss’s ear because you have an idea that you just *know* will help business thrive, and today’s the day! Your boss has accepted a dinner invitation to your house. Everything looks clean and pristine, you’ve selected the perfect low-key playlist, you’ve set the lighting to emit a welcoming vibe, and you look dressed for success. As everyone sits down to eat you say, “Well, I hope you like leftovers! I can either reheat my pizza from lunch or last night’s pot roast... (Insert sound of a record player screeching to a halt!) What?!” The thought of inviting an honored guest over for leftovers – especially the one who you respect and who signs your paycheck – is unfathomable; it’s absurd!

In today’s reading, Malachi is admonishing the very people who work in God’s house, the temple priests, for defiling God’s name by offering sacrifices with animals no one wanted — and it’s something we, too, must consider. In almost a mocking tone, he cuts straight to the heart with a comment and a question that should cut straight to ours as well: “Go ahead and beg God for mercy! But when you bring Him your ‘leftovers’ — that which was merely lying around going to waste — instead of giving Him your best, how can you expect Him to show favor to you?” Malachi sure gives us a lot more to chew on here than even a freshly cooked gourmet meal!

What are you serving up to the Most High? Do you pray for blessings and favor but offer Him table scraps when it comes to obedience, time, talent, and resources? Don’t defile the Lord’s name! Honor Him above all else because He sacrificed His best for you — His one and only Son. Today, glorify God with your best, and you will indeed be blessed!

PRAY

Lord, I praise Your name and give thanks to You for sending Jesus to die for my sins and secure my eternity in heaven. Nudge my heart if I begin to serve You “leftovers” because I want to honor You with my best. Amen!

September 21 — The Supporting Crew

READ

Nehemiah 11:1-12:26

1 Chronicles 9:1-34

Nehemiah 11:1-2, "Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem."

THINK

In the movies, it often seems so bold and adventurous to see pioneers set out into the unknown. But whether journeying west or setting out to sea, even the greatest heroes and heroines would be nothing without their supporting crew — those beloved characters, the glue that make classic films, well, classics!

As Jerusalem was being rebuilt, the "crew" — the nameless lot that were crucial to getting the work done — carried on as a new challenge emerged. The city needed repopulation. Therefore, in addition to those who willingly volunteered to move, lots were cast to compel people to move to Jerusalem with a 1 in 10 chance of being selected. And, as we see in the passage above, a theme emerged: the people responded obediently, regardless of their role. The leaders led. The volunteers let go of comfort and familiarity to rebuild the city. And even those selected by "chance" submitted to God's authority and His chosen chain of command.

If others watched a movie about your life, would they recognize that same level of obedience and willingness to serve? Take a moment to examine your heart. Is there anything you're holding back from God? Would you ever say, "God I'd do anything for You except...? You may not be called to plant a church, but you may be called into new territory. Don't miss out on the role of a lifetime. Whatever you can't give up for God is nothing compared to what you will gain if you do!

PRAY

God, I love and trust You. Are you calling me to lead in any situation today? Let me lead by example! Are you calling me to go somewhere in obedience? I readily volunteer! Or are you just asking me to open my hands to You, holding nothing back? Lord it is not easy, but I lay every dream and comfort before You. You are the King of my heart. Amen

September 20 — Don't Forget!

READ

Nehemiah 8:13-10:39

Nehemiah 9:5b-7, "Then they prayed, May your glorious name be praised! May it be exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone are the Lord. You made the skies and the heavens and all the stars. You made the earth and the seas and everything in them. You preserve them all, and the angels of heaven worship You. You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans and renamed him Abraham."

THINK

Have you ever fallen into the trap of repeating the same mistake twice? We've all done it, whether it was a simple mishap or one with grave consequences. Why is it so easy to forget about the implications of past errors and go down the same old trail again and again? The answer: We're human!

However, in today's reading, we can give the Jews a pat on the back. History proves that, for generations, they made huge recurring mistakes. Now, after being evicted from the Promised Land and living in exile, they were home again with a great new respect for obeying God's commands.

As God's Law was read aloud before all the people, they confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors with heartfelt conviction, praising God for His faithfulness all the way back to the time of Abraham. In doing so, they glorified God's power, goodness, and unfailing love. Unlike before, they didn't go hysterical, they went historical — recognizing the futility of repeated mistakes and taking God lightly. Now, their eyes were open to all God had endured with a heavy heart as His chosen people sinned continuously for hundreds of years.

There's enormous power in praising God for all He's done, what He's rescued you from, and how He has blessed you. A great way to remember such things is to journal your prayers, which also allows you to look back and recognize how He's answered in unexpected ways. So, next time you feel the sway to go astray, don't get hysterical, go historical! In both the good times and the bad, look back and praise God for all He's done. And, most importantly, remember that He's not yet finished!

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for Your faithfulness. When I struggle to see it, help me to go historical. I praise You and firmly believe the best is yet to come! Amen.

September 19 — Life of the Party

READ

Nehemiah 7:4-8:12

Nehemiah 8:10, “...*the joy of the Lord is your strength.*”

THINK

Certain people are “life of the party” people. The mood changes when they walk into a room and their confidence is contagious. They have a zest for life and love encouraging others to do the same. So, what is this “it” factor, that special ingredient that draws others to them? Of course, it may be personality — a great sense of humor and an adventurous spirit. But there's a quality that goes above and beyond any good joke-telling or momentary excitement — a trait that even those who are more reserved can attain. The answer: Jesus! Because they have a personal relationship with Christ, they exude His joy and reflect His nature.

Sadly, though, many people are searching for satisfaction in all the wrong places — including a lot of lively partygoers! Unlike happiness, joy isn't circumstantial; it's the soul-satisfying confidence that comes from knowing God is always with us and always for us. This doesn't mean we'll have trouble-free lives. But it does mean that through it all, we have the ability to trust that God is in control.

You, too, can be the life of the party. If you have accepted Jesus into your heart, His outrageous, contagious joy is on tap 24/7. So, no matter what life brings, nothing can take it from you; it's YOURS! You can't lose it, so use it to make a difference!

PRAY

Dear Lord, I delight in You. The mere mention of Your name makes me smile. Thank You for Your overwhelming goodness and the joy You have produced in my life. Today, may Your light shine through me and Your joy be ever-present within every encounter and conversation I have with others. In Jesus 'name, Amen.

September 18 — Packed with Purpose

READ

Nehemiah 3:1-5:13, 6:1-7:3

Nehemiah 4:14-17, "Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, 'Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes! When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated them, we all returned to our work on the wall. But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The leaders stationed themselves behind the people of Judah who were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon.'"

THINK

It's so exhilarating to know that we're doing something with a bigger purpose than ourselves — especially when that purpose is a direct heart-prompt from God! However, when we're sailing away to accomplish such a God-given mission, the enemy lurks nearby, scheming to thwart our best efforts. He is sly and cunning. He'll stop at nothing to get us off-focus when we're bent on being on-purpose for God!

Nehemiah was tasked by God to lead his fellow Jews in Jerusalem to rebuild the city wall. This was an enormous undertaking! The wall represented great political, social, and religious significance for the people of Judah. But to their neighbors, it meant trouble in the form of a power struggle with people they deemed unworthy. So, Nehemiah was walking around with a huge target on his back. And Satan was chomping at the bits to hit a bull's eye by inflaming the tensions between God's people and their newest adversaries.

Fortunately, Nehemiah was undeterred and wisely helped refocus his people on God to keep them on task. Through his keen leadership, they forged on, encouraged to know that God was their strength amid a continuous onslaught of naysayers seeking to stop them.

It's far too easy to get distracted from a God-given purpose by negative people who might cause us to doubt our ability to accomplish the task. But Satan is just using them to throw us off course. So, when negative voices seem to drown out all else: "Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious...." Stay focused! You are part of something BIG — God's Kingdom — and you are making a difference both here and in Heaven!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the purpose you have put on my heart to further Your kingdom. Help me to ignore any negative attempts and distractions that threaten to get me off course. Keep me focused on the task at hand for Your glory. Amen.

September 17 — First Response

READ

Ezra 9:1-10:44

Nehemiah 1:1-2:20

Nehemiah 1:5-6a, *"Then I said, 'O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of unfailing love with those who love Him and obey His commands, listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel.'"*

THINK

Imagine hearing the news that the home your family grew up in was being torn down and destroyed. What would be your response? That was the situation Nehemiah found himself in. The city of Jerusalem was in danger, and the people who had returned from captivity were in trouble.

There is something to say about Nehemiah and how he responded to this challenging situation. He didn't get angry or rush to Jerusalem to try and fix the problem on his own. Instead, he mourned for the city and — his greatest response — immediately turned to God. Nehemiah knew the vast power of prayer.

When trouble came, Nehemiah didn't just sit on the sidelines and wait for someone else to address the problem. And he didn't immediately jump into action. He stopped and took His grief to God. After prayer, he found the strength to step up and be a leader for the people in Jerusalem. Because of his faith and dependence, God used Nehemiah in mighty ways and answered his prayer by granting him favor with the king, who not only allowed him to go to Jerusalem to fix the wall and rebuild the city but gave him the resources to do so — and it was a massive job!

What are you facing in your life that you need to take to God in prayer? There's power in bringing your requests to God — who doesn't want to be the last resort, but a part of your first action steps each day. Is prayer a priority in your life? Learn from Nehemiah's response and the favor his obedience granted him. Start today, and see God's guiding hand upon your life!

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for being a personal God who listens to my prayers whenever and wherever. Remind me to bring my requests to You. I want You to be my first response to whatever comes my way. Amen.