

## September 9 — Worship First

### READ

Ezra 2:1-4:5  
1 Chronicles 3:19-24

Ezra 3: 11, *“With praise and great thanks, they sang this song to the Lord: ‘He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever! Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the Lord because the foundation of the Lord’s Temple had been laid.’”*

### THINK

Have you ever had a day where your emotions were all over the place? One minute you’re laughing, one minute you’re crying, one minute your stomach is spasming with fear, and one minute you feel a sense of relief and joy. Or have you ever been in a crowd where the emotional response to what was happening ran the gamut? That’s the kind of day the Israelites had as they returned to their holy city of Jerusalem.

For the older Jews who remembered the beauty of Solomon’s temple, they wept. Nothing could replace its splendor and beauty — yet it was bittersweet. They were finally home, thank God, but would it ever truly be the same? For the younger generation, who’d never had the ability to worship at a temple in exile, they felt utter joy. Yet, they all felt a sense of fear knowing the city’s new inhabitants would definitely oppose their presence as they worshiped their God. Nonetheless, they all gathered and sacrificed at the altar set up on the temple mount. They realized that even before the temple’s foundations were to be laid, that worship must come first. Despite the raw mix of emotions, God would be praised.

Does worship come first in your life? Despite emotions, do you seek to praise God first? Regardless of what we’re going through, the feelings involved, He deserves our devotion and thanks. He is always there for us, always has our best interest in mind — on the best days and the worst. Our great God is for us, with us, and always guiding us with His righteous right hand. So, no matter how what emotions you’re dealing with, remember to worship first. Devote yourself to live in reverence of God, for He is worthy of your praise!

### PRAY

Dear God, I may not always see it, but I pray that I praise You and appreciate You through each season I encounter. I want others to see You through me no matter what I am facing. Amen.

## September 8 — The Minority Rules

### READ

Daniel 6:1-28, 9:1-27  
2 Chronicles 36:22-23  
Ezra 1:1-11  
1 Chronicles 3:17-19

Daniel 6:6-7, *“So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘O King Darius, live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O King, shall be thrown into the lion’s den.’”*

### THINK

A group of meddlesome government officials was jealous of King Darius' respect for Daniel. So, they got together and devised a plan for Daniel's demise by appealing to the king's ego, and he played right into their hands. He could have said, "Let me think it over and run it by some of my trusted advisors," but he didn't. He went along with the crowd and inadvertently signed Daniel's death warrant. But even in the face of persecution and death, there was no way that Daniel would go thirty days without talking to his God.

The Bible reassures us that if God is for us, nothing can stand against us. God was for Daniel because Daniel was for God! This is a very encouraging and powerful fact. But the reality is, when the crowd is pressuring us to conform, it's often easier to cave in than stand with conviction. But here's another fact — the majority is often wrong!

To stand for God often means swimming against the current of today's social climate. But if we are willing to stand firm in our faith, we will experience immeasurable growth and be useful to God in ways we never thought possible. Today, decide to do what's right even in the face of opposition, go with the goodness of God, and be positioned for greatness!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. Please help me to remain rooted in Your absolute truth amid today's relativistic culture. Give me strength in the face of opposition to do what's right and allow me the opportunity to be Your witness as I share the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## September 7 — Oblivious to the Obvious

### READ

Daniel 7:1-8:27, 5:1-31

Daniel 5:3-5, 8, *“So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem... As they drank wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall near the golden lampstand in the royal palace. ... Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.”*

### THINK

How good are you at seeing “the writing on the wall?” Are you ever oblivious to the obvious? Often, we ignore history and fail to learn from the difficult consequences endured by those who’ve come before us — even within our own family. So was the case with the Babylonian king, Belshazzar.

The grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar was fully aware that his grandpa was driven into the wilderness to live an insane, animalistic existence for seven years until he humbled himself before God. So why did he so badly miss the obvious: don’t mess around with the God of the universe?

He used goblets taken from the Jerusalem temple to toast and praise false idols. And as everyone indulged in the festivities, God sent a sign that He was not to be mocked or taken lightly. The fingers of a man’s hand wrote on the wall and the king’s face changed completely as his knees knocked with fear. Daniel was summoned to decipher what was written. After giving the king a brief reminder of his family history, Daniel told him something we should heed today: “You knew all of this, yet you have not humbled yourself!” Belshazzar’s actions had been weighed on God’s scales of justice, and he was found lacking — his fate had been sealed, and he was destined for destruction.

Don’t be oblivious to the obvious — learn from the past. God holds us accountable for our actions, especially when we know something is wrong and do it anyway. The king’s fate doesn’t have to be your destiny. Seek God’s righteousness and will in your choices, and you will remain in the sweet spot of God’s blessing and favor!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for providing me with Your Word to learn important life lessons. Help me to apply what I’ve read. Guide my decisions and humble my heart as I seek to live out Your best. Amen.

## September 6 — River of Life

### READ

Ezekiel 47:1-48:35, 29:17-30:19

2 Kings 25:27-30

Jeremiah 52:31-34

*Ezekiel 47:8-9, "He said to me, 'This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish because this water flows there and makes the saltwater fresh; so, where the river flows everything will live.'"*

### THINK

Picture a vast desert. Imagine yourself standing under the heat of the blazing sun. Your tongue is parched as you take in the silence and notice hardly any signs of life — it's scary to think about getting stranded there. Suddenly, you're whisked away to a riverbank where birds are chirping and squirrels are at play. Shaded trees stand tall at the edge of the water and a light breeze cools your skin. Comparing these two scenes, one is a picture of death while the other teems with life.

In Ezekiel's vision, he is shown a river flowing from the temple. The water starts out ankle-deep and eventually grows so deep that it's impossible to cross. The river flows east through the desert and into the Dead Sea, where the high salt content makes it impossible for nature's survival — except for the infiltration of the Living Water, the Holy Spirit. Everything that God's Spirit touches bursts forth with growth and new life.

If we have received Christ, our bodies are temples. The Living Water dwells in us and pours out to a lost and dying world. United as the church, the water deepens and brings death to life through God's power — that which couldn't survive except by His grace and the belief in our Sovereign Savior can flourish both here and in eternity.

Your soul is a well for God's Spirit that can bring healing to the lost and hurting. How much water are you producing? Is it pouring forth, or are you trying to contain it? Let God's love flow through you to others — may the River's raging rapids bring the dead to life through Christ!

### PRAY

Lord, today I look to You for guidance. I see the impossible situation of \_\_\_\_\_ and I don't have the answer. Bring life, miraculously, to this area where I see only a desert. Be glorified through me as I wait on and trust in You. Amen.

## September 5 — In One, Out the Other

### READ

Ezekiel 44:1-46:24

*Ezekiel 46:9, "But when the people come in through the north gateway to worship the Lord during the religious festivals, they must leave by the south gateway. And those who entered through the south gateway must leave by the north gateway. They must never leave by the same gateway they came in, but must always use the opposite gateway."*

### THINK

Have you ever heard someone describe a poor listener by saying, "It just goes in one ear and out the other"? This isn't something we want to have happen as we hear a teaching on God's Word. Why? Because Scripture is God-breathed and transformative. It's not merely to be heard or read but also applied. It's meant to orchestrate change within our hearts.

God gave Ezekiel numerous instructions to relay to His people for worship in the new temple. After suddenly being overcome by God's presence, he was told to "look and listen" to God's specifications for various worship procedures — one of which was for when hundreds of people gathered for feasts and festivals. The worshipers were to never leave the temple by the same door they entered; they had to exit in the opposite direction — they had to go "in one door and out the other."

Why did this matter? Think of it like this: When we gather for worship, we should be present and actively engaged so that we gain from the experience. This set of instructions paints a picture for us. God doesn't want us to leave the same way we came. He wants us to exit a different way — with renewed hearts, a refreshed spirit of obedience, and a willingness to share His love with others throughout the week. How great is that!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your constant presence and provision. I praise You for transforming my heart and renewing my spirit so that I may leave in a new direction, better than before. Amen.

## September 4 — Attention!

### READ

Ezekiel 40:38-43:27

Ezekiel 43:1-2, 10-11, *“After this, the man brought me back around to the east gateway. Suddenly, the glory of the God of Israel appeared from the east. The sound of His coming was like the roar of rushing waters, and the whole landscape shone with his glory. ... “Son of man, describe to the people of Israel the Temple I have shown you, so they will be ashamed of all their sins. Let them study its plan, and they will be ashamed of what they have done. Describe to them all the specifications of the Temple — including its entrances and exits — and everything else about it... so they will be sure to remember and follow them.”*

### THINK

Can you imagine following someone around for several hours, watching them take measurements of a building without getting a little distracted and bored? Then, all of a sudden, the CEO walks in and wants you to remember all those details to share with the architects, contractors, and construction crew precisely as you were shown. Forget about a notebook and pen to write it all down — you must relay the information from memory! Yikes!

Distractions are everywhere. And how easy is it to get lost in so many extraneous diversions that we miss the most important thing right in front of us. Ezekiel was led from room to room, being shown precise measurements for the new temple in Jerusalem, when he and “the man” in his vision turned a corner and, BOOM!, came face to face with the radiance of God’s glory filling the temple. But, notice, Ezekiel says, “I looked and saw...” He wasn’t distracted or overwhelmed by all he’d seen — he immediately recognized God’s glory and fell in worship. Then, God stood him up and said, “See and listen to all these details in order to share this information with Israel.”

Does God have your full attention? In a time when you literally hold a source of distractions in the palm of your hand, are you seeing and hearing what He wants you to take in and share with others? Our world needs to hear that Jesus died and rose again for their salvation. So, listen up and look around — don’t get too distracted by life to forget that God has something important for you to know and share!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, You have my attention. Help me to not get distracted when it comes to telling others about what Jesus has done in my life. Fill my heart with Your Truth to share with a world that needs hope. Amen.

## September 3 — Forever Changed

### READ

1 Chronicles 8:29-9:1

Daniel 4:1-37

Ezekiel 40:1-37

Daniel 4:34, *“At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; His kingdom endures from generation to generation.”*

### THINK

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Hindsight is 20/20?” It means we can see today what we should have or have not done yesterday. Unfortunately, for many of us, the hard way is the only way we learn!

King Nebuchadnezzar seemingly had everything — fame, fortune, and power. But he had one glaring problem. He was sitting on the throne of his life rather than allowing God to take His rightful seat. And although God’s man, Daniel, tried to warn him, Nebuchadnezzar just didn’t listen. He continued to test God’s patience and was eventually driven to an isolated, animalistic existence where he went completely insane. Talk about consequences! Nebuchadnezzar paid the price for his pride. And like so many of us, he definitely had to learn the hard way!

The good news is that God gave him a second chance. After seven years, he finally acknowledged God as God, his sanity was restored, and he returned to his position as king.

When we decide to give up control of our lives to Jesus, we undergo a spiritual metamorphosis. Everything changes! As we break away from the sinful desires and selfish pursuits of the past, our priorities shift and we find our sanity! It all comes down to the question: Who is sitting on the throne of your life?

Remember, if Jesus isn’t Lord OF all, He isn’t Lord AT all. Allow Him to sit on the throne of your life, and begin to live a fulfilled life as a new creation!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Today, make me aware of any area in which I’m prideful or still trying to control. I praise You, Most High, for restoring my sanity and changing me from the inside out. In Jesus ’name, Amen.