

## Daily Readings

**Please note:** Each of these passages challenge us to think about the manner in which we live our lives for God and for others. Do we live for God or self? The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

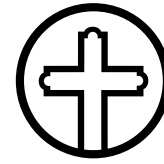
**Monday, October 27** – Read *Isaiah 58*. Here the prophet reminds us that God’s followers should spend themselves on behalf of the poor. How does your life serve the poor? What have you in the last 12 months for those less fortunate than yourself.

**Tuesday, October 28** – Read *Matthew 25:34-40*. Whatever people do for the **“least of these”** – forgotten and overlooked people in society – they do for Jesus. Who are the least of these in our community? Who are the least of these in your life and work? How do you relate to these persons?

**Wednesday, October 29** – Read *Philippians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:6; 1 John 3:16-19*. Our lives are to be **“poured out”** and spent to serve God’s purposes. Where and for what is your life being poured out? Rank the top four priorities in your life. Where are God and God’s people on this list?

**Thursday, October 30** – Read *Micah 6:8*. We should be known for living humbly, pursuing justice and offering mercy. Can you identify humility, justice or mercy in your life? How often can you use these words to describe your life?

**Friday, October 31** – Read *1 Corinthians 13*. Paul describes the qualities of love. How would you describe the love of others in your life? Carefully read this chapter again, inserting your name for the word “love” in the passage. Does it ring true? What do you need to do to make this possible in your life?



TRIETSCH

**October 26, 2008**  
**Study Guide & Daily Readings**

## Fields of Gold Week 3 of 3 Abundance

### **Malachi 3:10**

**“Bring to the storehouse a full tenth of what you earn so there will be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD All-Powerful. “I will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out all the blessings you need.”**

The Word from the Bible New Century Version

### **Will Anyone Rob God?**

Malachi 3:8-10

**Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me — the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.**

The promise by God to **open the windows of heaven** begins with one of the strongest accusations in the entire Bible — **will anyone rob God?** This passage assumes that everything we have belongs to God. The call to give 10 percent is what God asks in return. The tithe belongs to God, Malachi declares. To withhold it is to rob God. Give God what is due, and the nation’s prosperity will be a worldwide testimony.

In verse 8 and 9 the word **“nation”** is the term ordinarily applied to foreigners. Therefore, it implies that by robbing God, the Jews are forfeiting their privilege as the chosen people. The tithes and offerings brought into the temple storehouse seem to reflect the laws of Priestly Code, by which all of the tithes provide support for the priests and Levites (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-32).

In verses 10-12, God asks the people to test the divine promises that their obedience will be rewarded. God will **open the windows of heaven** — send abundant rainfall — and rebuke the devourers — prevent the coming of locusts. Surplus crops will result. The prosperity of the Jewish community will be a witness to all nations of the blessings that come with obedience to Yahweh. The promises will benefit everyone — even those who still withhold their contribution. (Matthew 5:45)

While Malachi 3 specifically addresses withholding the tithe as a cause for the divine-human breach, the entire book of Malachi address the larger issue of total human commitment to God. When we examine Malachi's prophecy in light of the words of Jesus, (Matthew 19:16-22) who requires total sacrifice from his disciples, we see that true obedience is found in a life lived fully for God.

Verse 10 includes the invitation to test God. This is the only place the scripture invites us to test God. Malachi reminds the reader that God wants to bless us beyond our wildest dreams. Often our selfish desires and need to control our situation stands in the way of God's wish to pour out his lavish love on us.

### ***Application – The Windows of Heaven***

Malachi delivered his message during a period of spiritual stagnancy, when the people of Israel where infected by indifference toward God. **"I have loved you,"** said the Lord, but the people doubted God's love and failed to respond to it. The primary indicator of Israel's apathy was their halfhearted giving. God had expressly commanded that the people bring sacrifices, tithes and offerings in the law, but the priests and the people had neglected their sacrificial duties, and by doing so had "robbed God" (3:8). Malachi prophesied about a day when God would visit his people and purify their defiled offerings (3:1-4). By offering himself to God, Jesus would refine the gifts of his people and make them pleasing and acceptable to God (Hebrews 13:15-16).

The language and imagery that Malachi uses here are important because they capture a reality that we often forget: God's riches are innumerable. We should note that in our day, many "health-and-wealth" proponents misapply this passage by arguing that God wants all his people to be materially wealthy. But this misses the point. Great wealth can be a dangerous distraction from true faith (Mark 10:17-27). Rather than teaching that God wants everyone to be rich, this passage shows us that God desires devotion. God knows we cannot be happy if we live outside God's presence. Only in submission, can God bless us. Here, the essence of God's promise is that we will never be disappointed by obedience. We cannot out-give God.

In our control-oriented society, this passage comes as a reminder of the importance of trust and devotion. We can not live a full life on our own.

### ***Application – How do we rob God?***

How do we rob God today? Certainly, we rob him in the same ways that Israelites did — **"in tithes and offerings"** (Malachi 3:8). Most American Christians don't even come close to giving 10 percent of their incomes to local churches, even though the New Testament amplifies the requirement, calling us to give sacrificially. As Christians who have been given God's Holy Spirit, it is trivial to appeal to the Old Testament law as the ultimate standard for giving because today our ultimate standard is the generosity of Christ (2 Corinthians 8:9). The giving levels commanded in the New Testament are much more radical than the Old Testament tithe. John the Baptist raised

the bar to 50 percent (Luke 3:11), and the Lord Jesus raised it to 100 percent (Luke 21:1-4). Further, the apostle Paul called Christians "to offer your bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1). Because New Testament believers have been given a more complete revelation of God's generosity in the person of Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:9; Hebrews 1:1-2) and a greater share in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) than Old Testament believers, God reasonably requires more of us. Still, this does not mean that the Law and the Prophets are irrelevant. Old Testament standards are a very useful place to begin, but we must not forget that they are only a starting place.

Are there other ways that we rob God today? Do we cheat God out of our time? "Time is money," and in our hypersonic culture, our prayers and devotions tend to be on-the-go-when-we-have-time. When we fail to offer a choice portion of our time as representative of the whole, we rob God. We rob him of our efforts as well. How often are our energies absorbed by God's purposes "on earth as it is in heaven"?

Already exhausted by the things we really care about, do we offer up the dregs of our existence? Like the sacrifices of the Israelites (Malachi 1:7-14), are the efforts we give to God lame and blind? We promise the best but give the worst. Then when we need God, we are shocked when God seems distant and far off.

But this is what God who sent his only begotten Son says: **"I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed ... Return to me, and I will return to you"** (Malachi 3:6-7). "Returning" means giving back to God the things that belong to him, and for Christians who live in light of Christ's new day (Malachi 4:2), this means nothing less than submitting the totality of our lives and livelihoods to God. For we are not our own, but were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).