

“ALTAR CALLS”

Gen 12:7

A unique aspect of our church is altar calls: 1. For salvation (appealing to sinners) 2. For believers (to respond to the sermon). We need to understand the altar call – and think about how to make them effective if we become Pastors.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE ALTAR

A. The Bible is filled with the idea of the altar (Place of sacrifice)

1. Very widespread: 433 x mentions of altars
 - a. Noah/Abraham/Isaac/Jacob/Prophets/Kings
 - b. Tabernacle/Temple – center of worship
 - c. NT refers to: *We have an altar...*
2. Spiritual health is connected to altars
 - a. People doing well: Built altars
 - b. Saul: Weak spiritually – built 1; *Only after a lot of time went by*

B. We need to understand the purpose of the altar

1. **The altar always had a physical location:** *Not just “I talked to God in the woods...”*
 2. **The altar was where people responded to what God has revealed to us**
 - a. *Genesis 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. I see it – I agree with what you said*
 3. **The altar was where you met with God:** Especially seen in the Temple – you came to meet with God
 4. **The altar was a place of sacrifice:** Something died at the altar (OT animals – one time Isaac)
- #### C. For us – typically the altar is the space at the front of the church
1. We encourage people to come to the altar after the sermon
 - a. Respond
 - b. Meet with God
 - c. Take care of business - repentance

II. CONTENDING FOR THE ALTAR

A. Practical thought #1: In new churches – you must instruct people about the altar

1. New converts don’t have reference points: They don’t know what this is for
 - a. You preach/teach about the altar
 - b. Even personally tell people what to do

B. Practical thought #2: In all churches – you must contend for a supernatural dimension at the altar

1. Preaching should aim people to meet with God at the altar
 - a. *God can do more in a few minutes of a supernatural encounter than a thousand sermons*
2. This is giving people the understanding of the personal responsibility to meet with God
 - a. *Not genuflection: Supernatural encounter! b. Will cut down the counseling load (healthy people)*

C. Practical thought #3: In older churches – you must refresh people’s understanding of the altar

1. People get into routines: *The altar thing...I pop down for a few seconds and I’m off*
 - a. *No real searching of heart/crying out to God for a miracle/repenting/making vows to God*
2. So you preach/teach periodically – gently remind people that it is not genuflection

III. PRACTICAL THOUGHTS FOR MAKING THE ALTAR EFFECTIVE

A. Some practicals

1. **Don’t re-preach your whole sermon:** *If you have to say it again – you failed the first time!*
2. **Help people to seal things at the altar:** *Sometimes lead them in a prayer of agreement*
3. **Make the altar a supernatural place of deliverance and encounter**
 - a. Pray for deliverance
 - b. Pray for healing
 - c. Pray for breakthroughs
 - d. Pray for habits
 - e. Pray for \$
 1. *Sharon Walter: I prayed for healing of broken hearts; God absolutely met with her!*
4. **Have some variety at the altar:** Not spiritual - just practical; People tune out things that remain the same
 - a. 1 time just let people pray by themselves
 - b. 1 time pray for everyone mass prayer
 - c. Pray for specific needs that were mentioned in the sermon
 - d. Pray for other things not mentioned
 1. *In SA: Keith Sullivan – very effective revival; Prayed personally for different needs each night*
 - e. Mix it up between mass prayer and personally praying for people (this will depend on numbers)
 - f. Sometimes give them a challenge of what they should do after they leave...
5. **Never underestimate the power of a personal touch:** People need a personal touch
 - a. They appreciate it
 - b. It helps their faith
 - c. You can impart a spiritual dimension as headship
 - d. In times of rebellion: I counsel Pastors to make up reasons to lay hands on people
 1. *I Pastored a church in a long season of rebellion/church splits. People would come with a cloud on them; I would have them come to the altar and I would lay hands on them; Something would lift off of them, their minds would come clear so they could make their own decisions about right & wrong.*