

The logo consists of two overlapping speech bubbles. The left bubble is blue and contains the word "Small" in white. The right bubble is red and contains the word "Groups" in white. Below the bubbles, the words "DISCUSSION GUIDE" are written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Small Groups

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Repair the Altar
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Main Idea – Many of us have unknowingly become attached to false gods that have sidetracked us from a meaningful relationship with Jesus. One way you can renew your relationship with Him is by giving up things that have diluted, or distracted you from, His rightful place in your life.

When we think of altars

- What do you think of when you think of an altar?
- Do you think of a place where one stands when getting married?
- Is an altar a place to pray or worship or experience the Holy Spirit?
- Of all the different ways we use an altar, it is a place to communicate with God free from distractions.

The building of an original altar

- Many Old Testament individuals built altars in places where God had done things of significance. Aside from being places of sacrifice, these altars served as reminders of God's legacy in their individual lives.
 - Noah - **Genesis 8:20 – Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.** (This is the first mention of an altar in the Bible.)
 - Abram - **Genesis 12:7 – Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.** (ESV)
 - Isaac - **Genesis 26: 24-25 – And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.” So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.** (ESV)
 - Jacob - **Genesis 35:3 – Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.”** (ESV)
 - Moses - **Exodus 17:15-16 – And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner, saying, “A hand upon the throne of**

- the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (ESV)**
- Gideon - **Judges 6:24 – Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites. (ESV)**
 - David - **1 Chronicles 21:26 – And David built there an altar to the Lord and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering. (ESV)**

Altars must be maintained

- As with anything else, altars must be maintained or they will decay and fall apart.
- **1 Kings** and **2 Kings** mainly tell stories of Israelite kings who rejected God’s primary place in their lives. For political, social, and economic reasons they incorporated false gods into their daily lives.
- When Elijah confronted the prophets of these false gods, he was careful not to sacrifice on their altars. Rather, he repaired a legitimate altar that had previously been constructed but had been neglected and had fallen into disrepair.
1 Kings 18: 29-30 (ESV) – And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered, no one paid attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down.”

False American idols

- An idol is anything one believes can bring more happiness and fulfillment than can God.
- Typical American idols are things such as marriage, sex, money, career, fame, or recognition. These things can bring temporary pleasure, but are poor gods.
- If any of those idols occupy a significant place in your life, they will always disappoint you.
- All of our associations and relationships offer the potential of introducing us to false gods.

The true God responded to Elijah

- After Elijah repaired the original altar of God, God responded.
1 Kings 18: 36-38 (ESV) – And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer

me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

- In order for God to favorably respond, Elijah had to return to the original ways that had been abandoned.

Rebuild your altar with surrender and sacrifice

- *Surrender* and *sacrifice* are key components of a rebuilt altar.
- God has much to share with you, but your choices are key to making that communication happen.
- You will not return to your original relationship with God by holding onto distracting or damaging activities and interactions.
- Like the old Israelite kings, society and secular culture may have brought things into your life that have caused you to forget how to communicate with God.

Go back to your “original place”

- After Abraham had become distracted by his own initiatives, he returned to the place where God had originally communed with him.
Genesis 13:3-4 (ESV) – And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.
- If any repairs need to be made in your life, make them. Go back to doing things the same way as when your relationship with God was a good one.
- Identify activities and relationships that have distracted you from the right way to have a life with God.
- The things you repair will automatically benefit other areas in your life.

Reflective Questions for Rebuild the Altar

1. The 1 Kings 18 account of the confrontation between Elijah and the false prophets is a famous Bible story. Had you noticed before that Elijah did not sacrifice from the same altar as the false prophets? What might be a current day application of that? In other words, what might be today’s “altars of worship” to false gods?
2. Mr. Leak identified several potential false American idols. Can you add any to that list?
3. Why is surrender and sacrifice essential to rebuilding an altar?

4. What questions can you ask yourself in order to identify things that have distracted you from your best relationship with God?