Introduction: This is our sixth session in this spring semester on our journey together in becoming better followers of Jesus and it’s our third session on working around the altar. Thank you SO MUCH for making a commitment to this experience of very practical training in “Following Jesus.” This week we conclude our look at the subject of How To Work Around The Altar and what disciples of Jesus do as they work with other people who are seeking the Lord.

Exercise #1:
Convene in the Sanctuary with your table group near the front and in the middle three sections. As you arrive, share with your table group the (1) **learning** (insights, knowledge gained, whispers from Jesus) and (2) **application** (how you have begun to apply what you have learned) during this series of lessons on How to Work Around the Altar.

Key Memory Verse:
3 John 1:2 “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy **good health** and that all may go well with you. . .”

This Coming Week’s Reading: Matthew 19-21; Proverbs 4-10

Objective: The purpose of this lesson is to provide additional practical guidance for how to work with people seeking the Lord around our altars.

Key Definitions or Concepts:
1. Serving as an altar “counselor” can be an exciting and rewarding spiritual experience: At various times in our services, we want to provide an opportunity for people to respond to God by coming forward to the altar. There are three main types of altar calls. 1) Sal**vation** – a call for those who need to repent of their sins and be born again, 2) Ent**ire Sanctification** –
a call for those who want to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit (we will provide this training after the Encounter Weekend), 3) **Recommitment** – a general call for those who want to recommit their lives, desire a deeper walk with Jesus, etc. and 4) **Healing** - a call for those who need physical, mental or emotional healing.

2. After an appeal has been made, workers are needed to pray individually with those who respond to the call. This is the role of the altar counselor, simply to “draw alongside of” someone who has responded to the altar call and minister to them. The purpose of this training is to prepare you to be an effective altar counselor and work cooperatively with your pastoral staff.

3. **General Guidelines:**

   a. When the altar call is made, start moving forward immediately. Always expect that people will respond. If you move forward, others may follow.
   
   b. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the person He wants you to minister to.
   
   c. Men should counsel men and women counsel women. Exceptions would be in cases where the person responding is a relative (for example, you are a woman and your brother responds to the salvation call) or when a husband and wife are ministering together to an individual of either sex.
   
   d. If a person is crying or responding emotionally to an appeal, do not interrupt this process unless it becomes "out of order" (extremely loud, disruptive, attention getting). Just draw alongside and begin to pray for them quietly. We are emotional beings, and God often deals with us first at the emotional level.
   
   e. When the emotion subsides, then you can talk with the seeker. It is especially important to follow up with altar ministry even when strong emotions have been evident. For example, crying because one is sorry for sin is not enough. The seeker must understand the plan of salvation and make the proper response of repentance and faith.
   
   f. Serious or difficult problems should be referred to your pastoral staff. For example – if the seeker is suicidal, a young lady is planning an abortion, the seeker’s home is about to break up…these kinds of serious situations should be referred to your pastoral staff.
   
   g. If you encounter a problem at the altar and you do not know what to do, simply ask for assistance from a member of your pastoral staff.
   
   h. Be careful about personal hygiene. Carry a supply of breath spray or mints and use them as you move forward.

**SEEKERS RESPONDING FOR SALVATION**

4. **Seekers Who Respond For Salvation:** The Bible teaches that salvation (being born again) is necessary for a person to receive eternal life, forgiveness of sins and become a child of God. Salvation is by God's grace through faith and includes repentance. The following are the Four Spiritual Laws, a very easy way to share the gospel.
Four Spiritual Laws

Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so are there spiritual laws which govern your relationship with God.

**Spiritual Law #1.** God LOVES you and offers a wonderful PLAN for your life.

- **God's Love**
  
  "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" John 3:16 (NIV).

- **God's Plan**
  
  [Christ speaking] "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" [that it might be full and meaningful]. John 10:10

Why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life? *Because...*

**Spiritual Law #2.** Man is SINFUL and SEPARATED from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.

- **Man Is Sinful**
  
  "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

  Man was created to have fellowship with God; but, because of his stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way, and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

- **Man Is Separated**
  
  "The wages of sin is death" [spiritual separation from God]. Romans 6:23

This diagram illustrates that God is holy and man is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that a man is continually trying to reach God and the abundant life through his own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion - but he inevitably fails. The third law explains the only way to bridge this gulf...
**Spiritual Law #3.** Jesus Christ is God's **ONLY** provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.

**He Died in Our Place**
"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

**He Rose From the Dead**
"Christ died for our sins...He was buried...He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures...He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred..." 1 Corinthians 15:3-6

**He Is the Only Way to God**
"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me'" John 14:6

This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf which separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. It is not enough just to know these three laws...

**Spiritual Law #4.** We must individually **RECEIVE** Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

**We Must Receive Christ**
"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" John 1:12

**We Receive Christ Through Faith**
"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" Ephesians 2:8,9

**When We Receive Christ, We Experience a New Birth**  (Read John 3:1-8)

**We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation** Revelation 3: 20
[Christ speaking] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him"

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to
agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for your sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. You receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives:

![Diagram of two circles]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Directed Life</th>
<th>Christ-Directed Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S - Self is on the throne</td>
<td>† - Christ is in the life and on the throne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>† - Christ is outside the life</td>
<td>S - Self is yielding to Christ, resulting in harmony with God's plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● - Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration</td>
<td>● - Interests are directed by Christ, resulting in harmony with God's plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which circle best describes your life? Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

_The following explains how you can receive Christ:_

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer (prayer is talking to God):

God knows your heart and is not as concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, I invite you to pray this prayer right now and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

As we pray with people, it is important we use the Bible to explain that they need salvation because _everyone has sinned_. We also use the Bible to share God’s salutation for sin, _salvation by grace through faith_.

We bring the seeker to a point of positive decision that he/she wants to be saved.
We encourage you to pray out loud together. Have the seeker confess their sins and receive Christ as Savior. If they need help in praying, ask them to follow you in a prayer such as: "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

5. **Provide Follow-Up**: We should fill out a “Decision Card” on each seeker who accepts Christ, to secure their name and address for follow-up. These cards should be kept somewhere in the altar area. Completed cards should be returned to the church office for contact by your pastoral staff and referral to a discipleship group.

**Exercise #2 – Salvation Response Review and Role Play**

**Preparation:**
Decide which person in your pair will first be the seeker praying at the altar and which one will be the altar worker.

For this Exercise we will practice the Salvation Response (see pages 2-6 of this handout or the 4 Spiritual Laws booklet). Follow the scenarios below when the pastor gives the invitation for people to come forward to pray:

**Seeker Praying at the Altar:** You are responding to the Pastor’s invitation to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You are nervous; you don’t know what to expect but your heart is pounding and you know deep inside you are being called forward and you need to go.

**Altar Worker:** Your pastor has shared with you in advance that he/she will be having an altar call with a focus on people who desire to commit their lives to Jesus. While you are excited to have the opportunity to work with someone around the altar, you are also apprehensive. Remember, you are prepared and Jesus will help you!

**Exercise #3 – Salvation Response Role Play:**

**Role Play #1:** The altar call is made from the pulpit. The person you have decided will be the seeker praying at the altar gets up from their seat and heads to the altar. The altar worker waits a moment then follows them. Now practice what you have learned in Paragraph #4 on pages 2-6 of this handout – the Four Spiritual Laws – and lead your seeker into a committed relationship with Jesus.

**Role Play #2:** Reverse the role play when the altar call is again made from the pulpit. The seeker now becomes the altar worker and the altar worker now becomes the seeker.

**SEEKERS RESPONDING FOR RECOMMITMENT**

6. **Seekers Who Respond For Recommitment**: Altar calls for recommitment are general calls made for people who want to recommit their lives to Jesus or desire a deeper walk with the Lord. The call may include a focus on full-time Christian service, responding to a mission appeal, rededicating your marriage or your family to the Lord, etc. Here are some basic guidelines for ministering to a seeker who is responding for a recommitment of themselves:
a. Determine the reason they have come to the altar. Ask them, "What can I pray with you about today?" This will help you determine the reason they have responded to the call.

b. Pray specifically about their need. It may be a deeper walk with the Lord, guidance for full-time Christian service, recommitting their life, recommitting to serve the Lord, etc. Always find out their first name and pray for them by name.

c. A couple of key verses you can use: Jesus said to His disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

d. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2).

Exercise #4 – Recommitment Response Review and Role Play

**Preparation:**

Decide which person in your pair will first be the person praying at the altar and which one will be the altar worker. For the altar worker, remember to practice good oral hygiene -- take a breath mint from the altar table and let it dissolve in your mouth.

Follow the scenarios below when the pastor gives the invitation for people to come forward to pray (see #6 on page 6-7 of this handout):

- **Person Praying at the Altar:** You are responding to the Pastor’s invitation to recommit your life to Jesus. You were raised in a Christian home with parents who were Godly examples but in recent years you have fallen away from the church and left Jesus out of your life. You are remorseful, are seeking forgiveness and want to ask Jesus to again be the leader of your life.

- **Altar Worker:** Your pastor has shared with you in advance that he/she will be having an altar call with a focus on people who need to recommit their lives to Jesus. You are prepared and excited to put your training into action!

Exercise #5 – Salvation Response Review Role Play:

**Role Play #1:** The altar call is made from the pulpit. The person praying at the altar gets up from their seat and heads to the altar. The altar worker waits a moment then follows them. Now practice what you have learned in Paragraph #6 on Pages 6-7 of this handout.

**Role Play #2:** Reverse the role play when the altar call is again made from the pulpit. Be sure each person has the opportunity to be someone praying at the altar and to practice being an altar worker.
6. Seekers Who Respond For Healing: Usually the pastor will invite people who are in need of physical, mental, or emotional healing to respond in some way. The Bible promises physical healing, but we should never focus on physical healing apart from the more important matter of spiritual healing. Both go together. We believe the Bible teaches that divine healing is available through the atonement of Jesus and that God heals physically, mentally, and emotionally as well as spiritually. Here are some guidelines for ministering to those in need of healing:

   a. Listen for instructions when we have a healing service. Your pastor may ask people to lift their hands if they need healing and ask altar workers to go to them where they are and pray.
   b. Sometimes we may ask those who need healing to simply step into the aisles and ask our altar workers to go and minister to them there.
   c. Sometimes we may ask those in need of healing to come forward and line up or kneel at the altar. At the same time, altar workers would be asked to come and pray individually with them.
   d. Listen and pay attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our healing services.
   e. Before you pray for their healing, lead them to a point of decision, just as you do regarding salvation. Be sure the person is a born-again Christian. Their "spiritual healing" and is the most important type of healing. (James 5:15)
   f. Determine people’s specific condition you will be praying for. Jesus asked people what they wanted, inquired concerning their faith, and dealt with negative forces of unbelief before He ministered to them. Ask the person, "What are you asking for Jesus to do for you today?" Verbalizing the request for prayer is a very important part of God’s healing process.
   g. Ask for a specific statement of what they want God to do. If a request is too general, you will not know what to pray for and the affected person may not recognize healing when it comes. You need only brief facts: For example: "I have cancer of the stomach." You do not need a complete medical history.
   h. Do not try to analyze the information you are given. Your function is to pray, not provide advice. Some unique cases may require privacy and more time for the altar counseling before you pray. If it is very complex or difficult, refer these individuals to the pastoral staff.
   i. When you pray a prayer for healing, pray specifically for the condition. Remember that you do not have to persuade God to heal by the length or loudness of your prayer. Just as salvation is available to us, healing is available to us as well. God wants to heal, just like He wants to save. Help the seeker to see that God may have more than one way to bring about healing.
   j. God can choose to heal by a supernatural touch. He can also use nutrition, medical science, surgery, prescription drugs and a variety of other ways. We must stay open to what God wants to continue teaching us as we pray for healing.

7. Some Questions About Healing:
   a. WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SICKNESS IN THE WORLD? God never intended for man to be sick or to die, but He gave man a will of his own to choose evil or good. When Adam exercised that will in the Garden of Eden and chose to be disobedient to God, sin entered the world and as a result, so did sickness and death.
b. WHAT IS DIVINE HEALING? God's direct intervention to heal sick and afflicted bodies. He can use a variety of ways to do this.

c. IS IT WRONG TO GO TO DOCTORS OR TAKE MEDICINE? No. There are many fine medical doctors whose talent and ability aid the healing process. Many medicines come from natural, healthful, God-created elements. We believe God uses medical science to also bring about the healing our bodies.

d. IS HEALING FOR TODAY? Yes. God does not change. Jesus healed people while on earth and He is still alive today. His commission to His followers was not only to preach the Gospel, but also to pray for healing and expect the sick to be healed by Him.

e. IS MY SICKNESS PUNISHMENT FOR MY SINS? No. Some people are afflicted as a result of sin (Deuteronomy 28:22,27,28,35). But in John 9:2-3, Jesus healed a blind man about whom His disciples asked, "Who did sin...this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that they glory of God might be displayed in his life." 

f. WHAT OTHER VERSES IN THE BIBLE TALK ABOUT HEALING? (Psalm 103:3; 3 John 2; Exodus 15:26; 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 8:17; 1 Corinthians 12:9; Matthew 10:7-8).

**Exercise #6 – Healing Response Preparation:**
Decide which person in your pair will first be the seeker praying at the altar and which one will be the altar worker.

For this Exercise we will practice the Healing Response (see pages 8-9 of this handout). Follow the scenarios below when the pastor gives the invitation for people to come forward to pray:

**Seeker Praying at the Altar:** You are responding to the Pastor’s invitation to receive healing. You really want to be healed from your physical or emotional hurt. (This may be a very real scenario to you or you may choose to make something up.) You are fighting doubt in your mind that healing is really possible for you. You decide to go forward and be open to having Jesus heal you.

**Altar Worker:** Your pastor has shared with you in advance that he/she will be having an altar call with a focus on people who need healing from Jesus. You are prepared to participate as an altar worker in this call for healing!
Exercise #7 – Healing Response Role Play:

Role Play #1: The altar call is made from the pulpit. The person you have decided will be the seeker praying at the altar gets up from their seat and heads to the altar. The altar worker waits a moment then follows them. Now practice what you have learned in Paragraphs 6-7 on pages 8-9 of this handout and, in the name of Jesus, pray for healing for your seeker.

Role Play #2: Reverse the role play when the altar call is again made from the pulpit. The seeker now becomes the altar worker and the altar worker now becomes the seeker.

Prayer and Dismissal:
Gather together as a table group. Pray for one another to become the altar worker God would have you be, to give each one wisdom and confidence and the ability to recollect Bible verses as they are needed. Pray for individual needs. When you conclude you are dismissed.