

WHAT IS ON YOUR ALTAR?

THE LAW OF THE ALTAR

"What Is Built Determines What Is Released"

Kingdom Identity Series · Ladies' Ministry

Key Text: Exodus 20:22–26 NKJV

Theme: Every life is built around an altar. The question is not whether we have one, but what is being offered on it, and what that altar is releasing over us.

Setting the Scene

One of the first things God speaks to Israel after giving the Ten Commandments is not about how to fight their enemies. It is about how to worship. Before He teaches them to conquer nations, He teaches them to build an altar.

That should tell us something. In God's Kingdom the altar always comes before the assignment. Victory flows from worship. Authority flows from worship. Blessing, peace and life all flow from worship. Get the altar right, and everything else begins to line up behind it.

We are not asking, "Do I have an altar?" because every one of us does. We are asking a braver question: "What is on mine? What am I giving my first affection, my energy, my worship to, and what is that altar producing in my life?"

What Is an Altar?

In Hebrew the word for altar is *mizbeach* (מִזְבֵּחַ). It comes from the root *zabach*, meaning to slaughter, to sacrifice, to offer.

So an altar is not merely a pile of stones. It is a place where heaven and earth meet through sacrifice. Right through Scripture, altars become places of covenant, worship, exchange, encounter, remembrance and consecration. Before an altar is ever about sacrifice, it is about relationship.

The Principle of Exchange

Here is the heartbeat of every altar: exchange. We give something, and God releases something.

- Abraham gave worship. God released covenant.
- Elijah offered sacrifice. God released fire.
- Solomon offered sacrifice. God released wisdom.
- At the Cross, Jesus offered Himself. God released redemption.

An altar is always a place of exchange. Whatever you lay down there, something is released in return. That is why what sits on your altar matters so much.

Every Altar Is an Exchange

Exodus 20:24 NKJV *An altar of earth you shall make for Me... In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.*

Notice what God ties to the altar: His name, His coming, and His blessing. Where His name is recorded, He shows up. Where He shows up, blessing follows. The altar is the meeting place, and God is not distant from it. He promises to come.

This is good news for every tired woman in the room. You do not have to climb up to God. You build the altar, you give Him your worship, and He comes down to you.

Why God Gave Rules for the Altar

In Exodus 20:22–26 God gives simple instructions: no idols, an altar of earth, uncut stones, no human tools, and no steps. Every detail preaches a message.

Earth

The altar was made of the ground, a reminder that we came from dust. It speaks of humility. We come to God as we are, not as we pretend to be.

Uncut stones

No chisel, no human craftsmanship, nothing added. God wanted authenticity, not performance. He does not ask us to manufacture our own holiness or strive to impress Him. He simply wants us, real and undecorated.

No steps

No climbing, no self-exaltation, no showing off, no hierarchy. Nobody approaches God through self-promotion. We all come on level ground.

Beautiful thread: Genesis begins in a garden. Exodus begins with an altar. The New Testament begins with a cross. From the very start, God has always wanted relationship rather than religion.

Altars All Through the Bible

Noah (Genesis 8)

The first recorded altar after the flood. Before Noah rebuilt his life, he worshipped. Worship came before rebuilding, and God responded with covenant.

Abraham (Genesis 12, 13, 22)

Abraham built altars at every major encounter: Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, Mount Moriah. Notice the order: Abraham built altars before he built houses. His identity in God came before his possessions.

Isaac (Genesis 26)

Isaac re-dug his father's wells and rebuilt his father's altars. Sometimes our assignment is simply to restore what a previous generation abandoned.

Jacob at Bethel

At Bethel, “the house of God,” the place of encounter became the place of worship. Where God meets you becomes a place worth building an altar.

Moses and Elijah: Victory and Repair

Moses built an altar after the battle with Amalek and called it Jehovah Nissi, “The Lord is my Banner.” Victory was remembered through worship.

| **1 Kings 18:30 NKJV** *...And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.*

Before the fire could fall on Mount Carmel, Elijah first repaired the broken-down altar. Perhaps revival in our homes begins the same way, with repaired altars. Before we ask for fire, we mend what has been neglected.

Altars That Pull Us the Wrong Way

Scripture is honest that not every altar is holy. The Bible speaks plainly about altars built to Baal, Asherah and Molech, and about the “high places,” all of them representing false worship and misplaced allegiance.

Here is the key principle: **an altar represents allegiance**. Who receives your worship? Who receives your trust? Who receives your obedience? That is what reveals the true altar of your life.

Scripture is clearest when it shows that idolatry, unfaithfulness and persistent sin carry consequences that can touch a whole family line, while also affirming that each of us is responsible for our own response to God.

| **Exodus 20:5–6 NKJV** *...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

| **Ezekiel 18:20 NKJV** *The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father...*

Hold both truths together: patterns can run in families, but no daughter of God is trapped by her past. In Christ, the line can be broken and a new altar built.

The Altar of the Heart

The New Testament shifts the altar from stone to the heart. Now you are the sacrifice.

| **Romans 12:1 NKJV** *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

| **1 Peter 2:5 NKJV** *...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Under the new covenant, every believer becomes three things at once: the priest who offers, the altar where it happens, and the sacrifice that is laid down. You do not travel to a temple to meet God. You carry the altar within you.

| **Hebrews 13:15 NKJV** *Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*

Jesus, the Final Sacrifice

Hebrews 10:12 NKJV *But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.*

This is where the whole teaching finds its rest. Jesus fulfilled the entire sacrificial system once and for all. There is no longer any need for a repeated sacrifice. The Cross became the place of the ultimate exchange. He gave Himself, and God released our redemption.

So our response is not to strive for another sacrifice or to earn our place at the altar. Our response is to live from His finished work. Everything we offer now, we offer from a place of “already accepted,” not “trying to be accepted.”

The Altar of Your Body

We read Romans 12:1 a moment ago and most of us heard it spiritually. Read it again slowly, because Paul does not say present your thoughts. He does not say present your good intentions. He says present your bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 NKJV *Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

There is an old saying about this verse: the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. We laugh, because it is true. But there is something else here that women in particular need to hear.

Most of us bring plenty to the altar. We bring our prayers. We bring our service. We bring our children, our finances, our worries and our ministry. The one thing many of us never bring is the body we are carrying it all in. We do not bring our sleep. We do not bring our eating. We do not bring our rest, our limits or our health.

Look at how God dealt with Elijah. He had just called down fire on Mount Carmel, and days later he was under a tree asking to die.

1 Kings 19:5–7 NKJV *...suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ... And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.”*

Before God gave Elijah a word, God gave him food and sleep. Twice. Then He spoke. God dealt with the body first, and He did not scold him for needing it.

Hear this plainly: **exhaustion is not devotion**. A woman running on four hours of sleep and skipped meals is not more spiritual. She is more depleted, and a depleted altar has very little to offer.

So what does it mean to lay the body down as an altar? It means these ordinary things become worship:

- Sleeping, instead of treating tiredness as a badge of honour.
- Eating properly, and not last, and not on your feet.
- Keeping a Sabbath, because God built rest into the week before sin ever entered the world.
- Saying no, so that your yes still means something.
- Going to the doctor, taking the medication, doing the check-up.
- Moving your body, not to change how it looks, but because it is the temple you were given.

The Way God Built Us

God did not only give us a spirit. He gave us a body and a mind, and He built them to work in a particular way. When we understand a little of that, some of these instructions stop sounding religious and start sounding practical.

What we repeat, we strengthen

Paul does not say be transformed by an event. He says be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and renewing is a slow, repeated word. The things we rehearse become the things that come easily. Worry rehearsed becomes a well-worn path. So does praise. This is why the same verse spoken every morning for a month does more than a powerful moment once a year.

Place tells the body what to do

We are creatures of place. The body learns what happens in a particular chair, at a particular time. This is exactly why the corner or the chair matters. It is not superstition. It is the reason God kept telling Israel to build in a specific place and come back to it. Return to the same spot often enough and your body begins to settle the moment you sit down.

Singing settles us

When we sing, our breathing changes. The out-breath lengthens and the body comes down out of alarm. So when we say praise is a weapon, we are not only speaking spiritually. A woman singing in her kitchen is genuinely calmer than the woman who was standing there five minutes before. Jehoshaphat sent the singers out first, and the battlefield was not the only thing that changed.

We settle one another

A calm mother settles an anxious child without saying a word. A tense person walks into a room and everyone feels it. This is why we talk about the atmosphere of a home, and it is not merely poetic. Your peace is contagious in your house, and so is your panic. This is one of the most practical reasons to build an altar: what you receive there, your family catches from you.

If my body carries an atmosphere, and my family catches what I carry, then my altar is never only mine. It spills.

The Altars We Are Building Now

Every generation gets to choose. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob kept building altars to the Lord. Later generations sometimes rebuilt those altars, and sometimes tore them down and raised up altars to false gods.

So the question is not only, "What altar did my ancestors build?" It is also, **"What altar am I building right now?"**

Every one of us has the same opportunity today:

- To continue a legacy of worship handed down to us.
- To repent of idolatry and misplaced allegiance.
- To establish fresh covenant faithfulness in our own home.

In Christ we are not stuck with what was handed to us. We are invited into a new covenant and a new way of living, and what we build now becomes tomorrow's inheritance for our children.

Building an Altar in Your Own Home

So what does this actually look like in real life, in a real house, with washing to do and children to feed? An altar in your home is not a shrine and it is not decoration. It is simply a place you have set aside where you meet with God on purpose, and where everyone under your roof learns that His presence is welcome here.

Jacob fell asleep in an ordinary place with a stone under his head. He woke up and realised God had been there all along. So he marked the spot.

Genesis 28:16-17 NKJV *Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

- **Choose your place.** A chair by the window, a corner of your bedroom, the kitchen table before the house wakes up. It does not need to be beautiful. It needs to be yours, and you need to keep coming back to it.
- **Keep it simple.** Remember the uncut stones. Your Bible, a notebook, perhaps a candle or a worship song playing softly. God is not impressed by how it looks. He is drawn by a heart that shows up.
- **Put the Word in the middle of the house.** Read it out loud. Stick a verse on the fridge or the bathroom mirror. Let Scripture be something your family hears in the ordinary hours, not only on a Sunday.
- **Worship out loud.** Sing while you cook. Play worship while you clean. Praise is a sacrifice, and where praise is offered, His presence settles.
- **Pray through your rooms.** Walk your home and hand each room back to God. The children's bedrooms, the front door, the room where the arguments usually happen.
- **Watch what you set before your eyes.** What we welcome in through screens, conversations and habits either strengthens the altar or quietly competes with it.
- **Keep a record of the answers.** Write down what you asked God for and what He did. Israel built stone memorials so that one day the children would ask what they meant. Your notebook becomes that memorial.
- **Invite your family in.** Five minutes at supper: one verse, one prayer, one thank You. Small and faithful builds far more than big and occasional.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 NKJV *And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

The power is not in the corner, the candle or the chair. The power is in the Presence of the One you are inviting. The altar is simply the place where you keep saying yes to God, until your whole home carries the atmosphere of that yes.

The Altar and the People Around You

Here is where this teaching stops being comfortable. Jesus said something about the altar that we do not quote nearly often enough.

Matthew 5:23-24 NKJV *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Read that again and notice what Jesus does. He interrupts worship. The woman is in the right place, holding the right offering, doing the right thing, and He says: stop. Leave it there. Go and sort it out. Then come back.

He does not say finish the offering first. He does not say pray about it. He says leave the gift on the altar and go and deal with the person.

This should not surprise us. The very first altar in Scripture had a brother problem attached to it. Cain brought his offering, his brother brought his, and what happened at that altar ended in the field with blood in the ground. From the beginning, our worship and our treatment of people have been tied together.

God says the same thing through Isaiah, to people who were fasting and praying and could not understand why heaven felt closed.

Isaiah 58:6-7 NKJV *Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out...?*

Micah 6:6-8 NKJV *With what shall I come before the Lord...? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*

And in Hebrews, right where we are told to offer the sacrifice of praise, there is a second sacrifice sitting in the very next sentence.

Hebrews 13:15-16 NKJV *Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God... But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

Two sacrifices. One breath. Praise and kindness are not two departments. They are one offering.

So how we treat people is not separate from our worship. It is part of it. Which means these questions belong on the altar too:

- Who do I avoid? Whose name makes my stomach tighten when I hear it?
- Who have I quietly written off as not worth the effort anymore?
- Where am I offering God worship on Sunday and withholding kindness on Monday?
- Is there a conversation I have been calling forgiveness that is actually just avoidance?

Hear this clearly. Forgiveness is always required of us. Access is not. Reconciliation does not mean returning to a person who is not safe. You can forgive somebody fully, release every debt, and still keep a door closed. God is not sending you back into harm.

Two Things Every Altar Needs

One: the fire must not go out

Leviticus 6:12-13 NKJV *And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning... A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.*

Look at what the priest actually did. Every single morning he got up and put wood on the fire. That is it. Not spectacular. Not emotional. Just wood, every morning, for a lifetime.

This is the answer for the woman who thinks she has failed because she missed three days. The fire is not kept by intensity. It is kept by returning. You do not need a better start. You need a next morning.

Two: it must cost something

2 Samuel 24:24 NKJV ...nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.

David was offered the threshing floor for free, and he refused it. He understood that an offering that costs nothing is not really an offering at all.

God says something similar and far sharper through Malachi, to people who were bringing Him the blind, lame and sick animals from the flock while keeping the good ones back. He asks them to try offering that to their governor and see how it goes.

So the honest question for every one of us is this: am I giving God my first, or my leftover? My leftover hour, my leftover energy, my leftover attention, whatever is still standing at the end of the day when everything else has taken its share?

These two truths hold each other in balance. The fire says keep coming back and do not despair. The cost says bring something real when you come. Hold them together, or the first becomes lazy and the second becomes heavy.

What Is Really On Your Altar?

Sit with these questions and answer them honestly in your own heart.

Matthew 6:21 NKJV For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- What receives my first affection? That reveals my altar.
- What do I keep sacrificing my peace for? That reveals my altar.
- What consumes most of my thoughts? That reveals my altar.
- What am I building into my children? That becomes tomorrow's altar.

This teaching follows on from 'Women Who Bring Forth Life.' You cannot sustain life without first building an altar. Life flows from worship. Purpose flows from presence. Fruit grows where worship remains. The altar always comes before the inheritance.

Verses to Carry

Joshua 24:15 NKJV ...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Romans 12:2 NKJV And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Genesis 13:17 NKJV Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.

Hebrews 13:15 NKJV ...let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God...

Leviticus 6:13 NKJV A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.

Matthew 5:24 NKJV ...First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NKJV ...your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you... therefore glorify God in your body...

Prayer Activation

Come to the Altar

Lord, before I bring anything else, I bring myself. I come to Your altar not to perform, but to worship. Thank You that the way is already open through Jesus. I do not have to climb; You have already come down. Holy Spirit, meet me here.

Examine the Altar

Take a minute of quiet before you pray this.

Holy Spirit, show me honestly what has been sitting on my altar. Where have I given my first affection to something that is not You? Where have I built an altar of worry, of striving, of approval, of fear? Lord, I repent for every altar I have raised that competes with You, and for any pattern handed down my family line that I have quietly accepted as normal. I renounce it now, and I ask You to tear it down in the name of Jesus.

Rebuild and Release

Today I rebuild my altar to the Lord alone. I present myself as a living sacrifice: my heart, my home, my children, my future. Lord, let Your name be recorded here, and where Your name is, come and bless. I declare that as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Fill every place that has been cleared with Your presence, Your peace and Your light. What I build now, let it become an inheritance of worship for the generations after me. In the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Make Peace

Lord, You said that if I am at the altar and I remember that someone has something against me, I must go and make it right. So I bring one name to You now. I forgive them, fully and freely, the way You have forgiven me. I release every debt I have been holding, and I let go of my right to see them pay. Where I need to go and speak, give me the words and the courage. Where the door must stay closed for my safety, give me peace without bitterness. Let my worship and the way I treat people be one offering, not two. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Your altar is not random. What you build determines what is released.

Now go and build well.

"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." — Joshua 24:15 NKJV