

*Proverbs 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*

# Effective Altar Work



**Faye Green**

Leading souls to Jesus is the most rewarding work of the kingdom, yet we are apt to abuse or misuse this gift which is divinely bestowed upon us. First of all, to be effective we ourselves must be partakers of God's true holiness: saved, dedicated, consecrated, filled with the Holy Spirit, walking in all the commandments, and blameless.

Ephesians 4:1 states, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." In 2 Timothy 2:21 the Apostle Paul said, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." In order to tell others how to be saved, we must first have experienced the new birth ourselves; we must have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit to be able to instruct others in the presentation of their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, for the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, as instructed in Romans 12:1.

Secondly, we must have a genuine concern for all the lost. We must and will have a compassion for the poor, lost soul. Without a vision, we perish (Proverbs 29:18). We are of no value to ourselves or others without a burden for lost souls. To be effective, we will look on souls as Jesus looked on them, with the same compassion, and we will value them as Jesus values them: "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). We will look beyond the tattered clothing or the life that is degraded and reproached by sin, loving the sinner but hating the sin. Some misunderstand that when rebuking the devil, we have to be harsh, and they fail to realize that we are not fighting the sinner, but fighting sin and the devil.

## **Holy Ghost Discernment**

When praying with and instructing souls, lest Satan steal a march and the individual take up a mere profession and leave the altar deceived and in worse condition than when he came, we need

the gift of discernment. We cannot look into the hearts of men, but Jesus, who knows all things, can reveal to us the need, as He helped Peter discern Simon the sorcerer in Acts, Chapter 8.

Philip had gone down to Samaria and conducted a great revival. Simon had fooled Philip into baptizing him, but when Peter came down, he had Simon's number and said, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:21-23).

Simon wanted to buy the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked him and said, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). Discernment is not something we know or have heard, but something the Holy Spirit reveals.

I recall my first experience with devil possession as a young Gospel worker. A young woman came to the altar professing to be saved. I was instructing her as best I knew, not realizing that she was devil-possessed!

The evangelist with whom we were then traveling was a great man of discernment with years of experience. He was watching the case closely and had discerned her need. He soon realized it was a case of demon possession. I was frightened, it being my first experience, and my knees began to knock together.

The man of God had her seated in a chair, and he began naming the devils in her just as if he were reading a newspaper. When he had named the last one, she made a lunge for the altar and beat her fists against it as though she wanted to batter it to pieces. She began praying in inhuman tones (it was the devil speaking through her). She

finally admitted her need and humbled her heart, willing for the devils to be cast out. It was embarrassing the things she had stooped to, all the time professing to be in the Church of God. God gloriously delivered her, and she looked like an angel.

As young Gospel workers, my husband and I began to seek God for the gift of discernment. We greatly needed God's help in dealing with immortal souls, and God helped us with many hard cases. Years ago, a woman teaching a Bible class was in good standing with her pastor, but she had hatred in her heart. It was revealed by the Holy Spirit that she needed help. She went home after the young people's service, not staying for the next service. However, the Lord said to me, "You must be true to that woman's soul before you leave town." After the service was over, we went to her home and knocked on her door. Although we knew she was in bed, her soul was at stake.

Brother Green told her that he was uneasy about her soul and would like to talk to her before we left town. She invited us in, but since she had a roommate, we felt it was not the appropriate time. She promised to meet us the next morning in the parsonage. At 8:00 we started praying and dealing with her. We prayed until noon. God revealed that she had hatred and covetousness. She would admit her need, then the devil would hide it from her and she would deny it.

Finally, after four hours of hard praying and rebuking the devil, she admitted she hated God because He had taken her husband. She admitted she was covetous. She said that when she saw an elderly couple walking down the street, she coveted that woman's husband. She had good standing in the eyes of the people; no one knew she had those feelings but God. Thank God, she humbled her heart and was delivered and gloriously saved.

### **Many Are Bound and Cannot Pray**

We cannot always go on the outward appearance. People may look saintly and be dressed modestly in every way, but underneath is a spirit of hatred, jealousy, envy, lust, or many other spirits. Many are bound and cannot pray. I am always uneasy when the seeker can *weep* but cannot *pray*. In most cases, there is a binding spirit that needs to be rebuked before that soul can have liberty to pray. It is always good to let the one who is seeking help pray. There may be rare exceptions when the seeker is ignorant and does not know how to pray and repent.

### **Many and Varied Experiences**

When altar workers ask the seeker, "What do you need?" we receive many different replies. One said, "I'm about half backslid." Others have said, "I just want to draw closer to Jesus" or "I need to reconsecrate." The devil does not want them to be honest and admit their needs. One girl said that she did not hate, but kind of "disliked" or "detested" her mother. Finally she said, "I guess it is hate." She was asked to remove the "guess," and we would pray.

We cannot help a soul pray through to victory until he comes clean and completely honest before God. Some will say, "My wife, she . . ." or "My husband, he . . ." They are just trying to shift the blame. In our ministry, we have found piano players devil-possessed, jealous of other players. We have found preachers' wives filled with hatred and wrong attitudes.

Many are possessed with doubts, fears, and confusion. One Sunday school superintendent had been possessed with doubts for twenty-five years. Many hold grudges and resentment. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:14-15: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Also, in Matthew 5:23-24 we read: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." God will not accept us if we hold something in our hearts against one another.

I have witnessed souls who were possessed with hatred, being instructed to "just believe." Sometimes altar workers try to sing these people in, so to speak. This kind cannot believe or be sung into the kingdom, but God's ministry will have to lay on hands and cast out the devil. God has given his ministry this power. Mark 16:17 says, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils." Matthew 18:18 tells us, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

## **Shallow Altar Work**

The need of the hour is a more thorough work at the altar. The blame cannot be placed on the ministry or on the altar workers altogether. In many cases, there is a lack of depth on the seeker's part. Some are moved with emotion only and come because someone else moved. Some are light-hearted and indifferent about their needs, chewing their gum with no conviction. On the other hand, some may be broken up and cry. Yet, do not mistake a good cry for salvation!

Jesus, in His parable of the sower, illustrated the different kinds of hearts that hear the Word (Matthew, Chapter 13). Some fell on stony ground, which had no depth; some fell among thorns and was choked out; some, however, fell on fertile ground and brought forth—some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, and some thirty fold.

Some leave the altar without help because they are not willing to pay the price. They are bound by smoking, drinking, worldly pleasures, stepping out on their companions, or an unwillingness to make restitution. Some are bound by false religion and are not willing to denounce it. It does not take a soul long to pray through, if he is willing to meet the condition of God's Word. God is always ready.

## **The Need to Hold On With Patience**

Often this is where we fall short. We have gone all out to invite souls to the service; they have heard the singing; God has blessed the message, and conviction is heavy. This is the time when the church needs to hold on in prayer. We do not *all* need to be singing in the invitation service, but we need to hold on for souls to be brought to God.

This is the most serious time of the service. Souls are in the valley of the decision, making a decision either for Heaven or for hell. Zion needs to travail in prayer for sons and daughters to be born again.

The altar workers need patience to hold on with those who are seeking help. Oh, that it could be said that a soul has never left the altar without receiving the help he needed! Sometimes a poor, lonely sinner goes down to the altar, and when no one goes to pray with him, he gets up and leaves the altar.

A sister ought to go kneel by a sister, and a brother ought to go kneel by a man seeking help. It can be a lonely place at the altar all alone. The Sunday school teacher should be prompt to kneel by her pupil. If you feel you cannot instruct, you can be kneeling in prayer until the minister or a qualified altar worker gets there.

It is always in order for the pastor of an individual to kneel with those seeking help, especially while they are visiting another congregation such as in camp meetings or revivals. The pastor understands his own people, and he is considered their pastor.

## **Not All Are Qualified**

When Paul listed the various gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, one of the most important was the gift of wisdom (verse 8). No one is qualified to work at the altar who has not this gift. Even as all saved saints do not possess the gift of prophecy or healing, so all do not possess the gift of wisdom so necessary for effective altar work.

Young converts, especially, are not qualified to work at the altar. Paul told Timothy that a pastor must be "not a novice" (1 Timothy 3:6). The same is true of an altar worker. A novice (someone recently converted) is not capable of giving the counsel that comes by experience, deep knowledge of the Word, and a close, consistent walk with God.

Neither should strangers in the midst be permitted to work at the altar. Paul wrote the Thessalonian church, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you . . ." (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

If a stranger takes the liberty of working at the altar, one of the elders should quietly exercise his authority by quietly but directly requesting the offender to return to his place in the assembly. Special caution is needed when a stranger wants to work at the altar only with the opposite sex. Pentecostal free-love spirits may well be at work.

It is safe to say that if your pastor has not personally requested you to work at the altar, you should not try to be an altar worker! As the watchman on the wall, he will be given discernment of God to know who should labor in what capacity in the local assembly. If you are not a recognized altar worker in your local congregation, you certainly are not qualified to work at an altar in a convention, fellowship meeting, camp meeting, or revival.

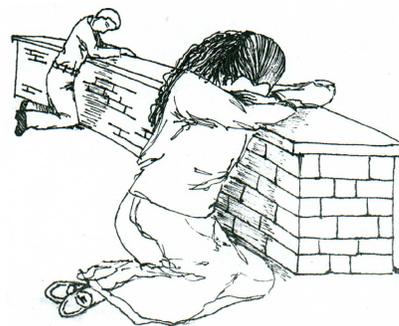
## Why the Public Altar?

Some may ask, "Why have a public altar?" The answer is because it is God's plan. More people are saved at the public altar. It is a convenient place to pray. At one time we heard of more people praying through in their homes, out in the corn field, or under the old oak tree. There they made an altar and found God sweet and precious to their souls. Today, though, more get saved in revival services where a sermon is brought under the anointing of God and where conviction draws the soul to God through the preaching of the Word of God.

Not many people can pray through alone because many are bound and others need instruction at the altar on how to be saved. Those who are already saved need counsel and advice. Thank God for the public altar! There is no salvation in the altar bench, but Jesus is our true altar. I thank Him for the night He saved me at an old-fashioned altar. There I repented and surrendered my life to Him.

*At the altar I settled the question;  
At the altar the battle was won.  
At the altar my sins were all covered;  
And a new life in Christ was begun.*

*At the altar my shackles were broken;  
At the altar my soul was set free.  
At the altar I met my Redeemer;  
He revealed His sweet presence to me.*



**Printed by:**

**Church of God, God's Acres  
675 N. Cedar Street  
Newark, OH 43055 USA**

[www.GodsAcres.org](http://www.GodsAcres.org)

Copyright © 2004 All rights reserved.