

Small Group Discussion Guide

Altars - Week 3: The Altar of the Church

Based on 1 Peter 2:1-12

Overview

This week we moved from the individual to the communal, from "me" to "we." The altar of the church is not a piece of furniture at the front of a room. It is a surrendered people. When hearts and homes that are already yielded to Christ come together as the body of Christ, God builds something that no individual could become on their own -- a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a chosen people called to declare his glory to the world around them.

Key Takeaways

- Before God builds something among us, he often deals with what is operating within us. The soil must be prepared before a foundation can be laid.
- Jesus is the cornerstone. Everything the church does must align with who he is and what he has accomplished.
- God does not save individuals so that they remain isolated. He saves us into a people. We were not saved just to sit by other saved people -- we were saved to become a people.
- The church is both a house and a priesthood. As the house, we are the dwelling place of God. As a priesthood, we bring spiritual sacrifices -- our surrendered lives.
- Our identity as believers is not determined by our culture, our circumstances, or the opinions of others. It is determined by God. We are chosen, royal, holy, and his.
- God is doing something in us so that he might accomplish his work among us and declare his glory through us to the world.

Opening Question

Take a few minutes to get the conversation started before diving into the deeper material.

- Think about a time when you experienced genuine, meaningful community -- inside or outside the church. What made it feel different from simply being around a group of people?

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Laying Aside What Destroys Community

Refer to 1 Peter 2:1

In the sermon, the image used was that of preparing soil before laying a foundation. Before God builds something, he first removes what would undermine the integrity of what he is building.

1. Peter lists five things to lay aside: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Which of these do you think is most common in church communities today? Why do you think that is?
2. The sermon made a distinction between conviction and condemnation. Conviction draws us toward God; condemnation drives us away in shame. Have you experienced that difference in your own life? How does understanding conviction as a gift change the way you respond when God exposes something in your heart?
3. The sermon pointed out that we often hold on to things like fear, insecurity, resentment, or the need to be right because we believe they are serving or protecting us -- when in reality they are preventing us from experiencing something better. Is there something you have been holding on to that might be doing that in your life or in your relationships within the church?

Section 2: Coming to Christ, the Cornerstone

Refer to 1 Peter 2:4-6 and Isaiah 28:16

4. A cornerstone determines the direction and alignment of everything that is built after it. What are some practical ways a church can make sure that Jesus, and not its own preferences, traditions, or personality, is functioning as the true cornerstone?
5. The sermon stated that the church will never stop preaching the gospel because everything rises and falls on that truth. Why is it important for people who already know Christ to be regularly reminded of the gospel? What happens when that reminder fades from the center of a church's life?

Section 3: Living Stones Built Together

Refer to 1 Peter 2:5

6. Peter says we are being built together as living stones into a spiritual house. He does not say we are individual stones scattered in different places. What is the difference between attending a church and being built into one? What does the second one actually require of us?
7. The sermon described the tension in our culture between content and community -- that content is now everywhere and readily available, but genuine community is increasingly

rare. Do you feel that tension in your own life? How has it affected the way you engage with the church?

8. The sermon mentioned that we can become consumers of content while community quietly disappears. What is one honest way that tendency shows up in your own life, and what would it look like to push back against it?

Section 4: Identity and Purpose

Refer to 1 Peter 2:9-12

9. Peter writes to a church that is scattered, persecuted, and living as strangers and exiles. Into that situation, he declares who they actually are: chosen, royal, holy, belonging to God. How does remembering your identity in Christ change the way you respond to seasons of difficulty, rejection, or isolation?
10. The sermon closed with a series of contrasts -- not just a church that has worship, but a worshiping people; not just a church that has small groups, but a people who actually share their lives together; not just a church that sends money to the mission field, but a sent people. Which of those contrasts lands most heavily on you personally? What would it take to move from one side of that contrast to the other in your own life?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to discuss as a group or take home as a personal challenge this week.

- **Examine the soil.** Set aside time this week to honestly ask God whether any of the five things Peter lists -- malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander -- have taken root in your heart, particularly toward someone in your church community. If God surfaces something, bring it to him and, where appropriate, take a step toward reconciliation.
- **Show up as a living stone, not a spectator.** Identify one specific way you can contribute to the life of this church beyond attending a weekend service. This might mean joining a community group, volunteering to serve, or simply committing to be more present and engaged with the people around you.
- **Push back against isolation.** Choose one person in your church community you do not know well and take a concrete step toward building a real relationship with them this week. A text, a coffee, a conversation after a service -- start somewhere.
- **Pray the prayer together.** The sermon ended with a call to move from "God, have my heart" and "God, have my home" to "God, have us." As a group, take a few minutes to pray that prayer together -- not just for yourselves as individuals, but for your church as a whole. Ask God to do in your community what no individual could accomplish alone.

Closing Reflection

Close your time together by reading 1 Peter 2:9 aloud as a group, then sit quietly for a moment before praying.

Remind one another: your identity is not determined by your circumstances, your culture, or anyone else's opinion of you. You are chosen. You are royal. You are holy. You belong to God. And you have been called out of darkness and into his marvelous light -- not just for your own sake, but so that you might proclaim his praises to everyone around you.

Looking Ahead

Next week we move to the final message in the Altars series: the altar of the region. If the heart becomes an altar, and the home becomes an altar, and the church becomes an altar, then the altar moves outward -- into the city, the region, and beyond. Come ready to ask what it means to be a sent people.