

5-Day Devotional: The Altar Stays Open

Day 1: The Altar of Not Knowing

Reading: Acts 17:22-28

Devotional: The Athenians built an altar "to an unknown God," acknowledging the limits of their understanding. This honest confession—that we don't have all the answers—is profoundly spiritual. Today, consider what questions you've been afraid to ask God. What doubts have you kept hidden, fearing they reveal weak faith? The truth is, our not-knowing can be sacred ground. The altar stays open precisely because God is larger than our comprehension. Paul didn't condemn the Athenians' uncertainty; he met them there. Your questions, your confusion, your inability to name what you're experiencing—these aren't obstacles to faith. They're invitations to encounter the God "in whom we live and move and have our being," closer than you imagine.

Reflection: What question have you been afraid to bring to God?

Day 2: Tested Like Silver

Reading: Psalm 66:8-12

Devotional: "You have tested us as silver is tested." The psalmist doesn't sanitize the experience of suffering. There was fire, burdens, people riding over their heads. Yet this isn't a psalm of complaint—it's a psalm of testimony. The crucial detail: God didn't prevent the fire; God walked through it with them. We often mistake God's faithfulness for the absence of hardship, believing that if we pray correctly, the trials won't come. But mature faith recognizes that God's presence isn't measured by our comfort. The refining fire is real. The burden is heavy. And God is present in it, not despite it. The deliverance comes not as extraction from difficulty, but as accompaniment through it.

Reflection: Where have you experienced God's presence in difficulty rather than God removing the difficulty?

Day 3: The Pattern of Resurrection

Reading: John 12:20-26

Devotional: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain." Jesus reveals resurrection as a pattern, not merely a one-time miracle. Throughout creation, life emerges from death. Seeds must break open. Caterpillars dissolve in the chrysalis. Winter precedes spring. This is the signature move of God—bringing life from places we've declared dead. You may be standing in a place that feels like an ending: a relationship, a dream, a version of yourself you once knew. Resurrection doesn't mean everything returns to how it was. It means something new rises from what has fallen. The God you're reaching toward specializes in making life spring from tombs. Your ending may be the soil for something you cannot yet imagine.

Reflection: What "death" in your life might be preparing ground for new life?

Day 4: God Listened

Reading: Psalm 66:16-20

Devotional: "Truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer." Notice what the psalmist doesn't say. He doesn't claim that God answered exactly as requested, or that circumstances changed immediately. The testimony is simpler and somehow deeper: God listened. In seasons of unanswered prayer, we can mistake silence for absence. But listening is itself a form of presence. When you pour out your heart—even in anger, confusion, or doubt—you are heard. The God who knows every hair on your head receives every word you speak, every groan too deep for words. Before you see any change in your circumstances, this is already true: you are heard. Your prayers land somewhere. They land in the heart of the God who is closer than your breath.

Reflection: Can you trust that being heard is enough, even before you see answers?

Day 5: A Spacious Place

Reading: Psalm 66:10-12; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Devotional: "We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place." The spacious place doesn't erase the fire. The psalmist doesn't pretend the journey wasn't brutal. But on the far side of testing, there's expansion—a wider view, deeper trust, greater capacity to hold both suffering and hope. Paul echoes this in 2 Corinthians: "afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair." The fire refines without destroying. You may not be in the spacious place yet. You may still be in the net, under the burden, in the flames. But the testimony of those who've walked before you is this: the fire has an exit. God is walking with you toward it. And the spacious place is real.

Reflection: What spacious place might God be preparing for you beyond your current trial?