

## BUILDING ALTARS

On May 25, 1979, Denis Waitley was waiting to catch a flight from Chicago to Los Angeles for a speaking engagement. He was late. He was running through O'Hare Airport. Wrong airport to have to run through. Big airport, plus Garrett's Popcorn. How do you run past that? So Denis ran through the airport and got to his gate just as they closed the jetway. You might know the feeling. He begged to get on the flight, told them he had a speaking engagement, but they didn't budge. So, in his anger, he went back to the ticket counter to register a complaint. Twenty minutes later, the complaint line hasn't moved, and an announcement comes over the airport intercom that American Airlines flight 191 from Chicago to Los Angeles had crashed upon take-off. There were 258 passengers and 13 crew members who died in that crash. It was the deadliest aviation accident in US history. Denis got out of line. He didn't register a complaint. In fact, he didn't return the ticket. What he did was take that ticket home, and he pinned it on a bulletin board in his office. And every time he would get a little frustrated or upset at things that were happening in his life, all he had to do was glance at that ticket and it was a reminder that life was a gift, a gift not to be taken for granted. That invalidated ticket for Flight 191 is what I would call a life symbol. It is a symbol from the past that gives meaning to the present and faith for the future. Altars are like a reminder of some important life-changing moments.

*“Build for me an altar made of earth, and offer your sacrifices to me—your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and goats, and your cattle. Build my altar wherever I cause my name to be remembered, and I will come to you and bless you.” Exodus 20:24*

Altars mark significant places in our lives. An altar is a way of saying, “The God who got me here will get me to there. The God who did this will also do that.” Altars are a place where we meet with God.

In Exodus 30, it says, “Make an altar.” It is referencing the altar of incense, and priests were to burn incense there every morning and every evening. It was right by the Holy of Holies. It was as close as you could get to the presence of God.

If you want to get closer to God, one way to do that is to build an altar, a place where you seek God.

To live a life of significance every day, you have to make an altar in the morning and at night. People would build an altar and kneel right there and offer themselves to God.

Three words begin Exodus 30, “*Make an altar.*” Exodus 30:1

Every day, kneel before God and see what He does. The altar is where God makes alterations in our lives. Altars are always places where God reveals Himself in new ways.

Altars were built in different seasons of their life.

Significance of Altars:

- Altars were built for future generations – Our kids need to see.
- Altars were built to take territory for a deity – Our altars make spiritual conquest.
- Altars were built in significant moments - So we don't forget.
- Altars were built to sacrifice something on – Wherever there's an altar, there's sacrifice.

Altars are like photos that are time-stamped and dated. Altars in our life remind us of a time, date, place. We can go back and look at it and reflect on it. It is a profound moment. An altar is not like a casual place. Most altars in that day were built out of dirt or stone or wood. This is a serious thing.

An altar is a serious, sacred moment in time. It is a sacred place of transaction. Altars are places of transformation. They are not just about sightseeing. They are not just about, “Why don’t we swing by the altar?” They are about doing business with God.

## **1. Build Altars In Moments Of Transition.**

It acknowledges God’s presence in the transition that God is with you and will help you in the transition. It acknowledges that God is moving you from point to point.

Transitions are moments of new beginnings, where God is altering the script of your life. It might be a new city or a new job or a new relationship or the end of a relationship. Maybe you are coming out of a season of failure or of disappointment and you are ready to turn to a new chapter and make a fresh start. Maybe it is a new situation, a bad report from the doctor or a good report from the doctor. Maybe there is a new child in your household. Maybe it is another deployment. Where is God in those moments? Maybe you’ve made a decision that has prompted a new beginning, or maybe life has just propelled you there. Where is God, and what is He saying in the moment of new beginning?

Noah was used by God to build an ark, and 8 people were saved from his 125 years of preaching. When Noah came out of the ark, he built an ark to acknowledge a new beginning. For 40 days and 40 nights they lived through some of the most tumultuous weather in history. Outside they are hearing the cries of terror and death while inside they are dealing with the cries of animals and dealing with sea-sickness. Outside they are losing everything they have ever known, their family, their friends, their crops, their house. Inside they are clinging to the hope that God has made a place of refuge for them. And a year later, they come out of this experience, of tremendous physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion. God is not just making a new beginning in the life of Noah and his family, but for all of human history that comes after it. Noah made an altar in that place of new beginnings.

*“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.” Genesis 8:20*

When Abraham moved to a new land, he built an altar. He acknowledged that God was with him in his transition. Abraham did not just pitch a tent, but he built an altar,

*“From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.” Genesis 12:8*

When the Israelites moved to a new place.

## **2. Build Altars In Moments Of Truth.**

God causes His presence to mark us. He reveals Himself in a special way.

Jacob was 80 years old when he left his home. He had deceived his father and cheated his brother out of a birthright. He was running away from home, and God followed him and revealed Himself to Jacob. He comes to Bethel at the conclusion of the first-day journey.

*“When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as an altar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel.” Genesis 28:16-19*

The altar is a place where we establish identity. The altar is a place we come back to when we need to find our identity. It is so easy to wander off or get discouraged, but when we come back to that place and say, "This is where God met me," there is a peace. Jacob is going to have a change of name and identity.

### **3. Build Altars In Moments Of Tragedy.**

There are moments that are unexplainable. Moments that break our hearts. Moments where, before the moment, life was defined one way, and after the moment, life is different. Job learned how to worship God in the middle of that tragedy.

*"Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship."* Job 1:20

### **4. Build Altars In Moments Of Trial.**

God shows up in life's testing and trials. It's a reminder of His faithfulness. In these moments you can blame God or lean into Him and trust Him.

Paul and Silas were shackled in the prison in Philippi, but the walls came down and the chains fell off because they praised God in the trial.

*"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose."* Acts 16:25-26

### **5. Build Altars In Moments Of Triumph.**

We often don't give God credit for the miracles He does in our life.

*"After the victory, the Lord instructed Moses, 'Write this down on a scroll as a permanent reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: 'I will erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven.' Moses built an altar there and named it Yahweh-Nissi (which means 'the Lord is my banner.')*" Exodus 17:14-15

How do you build an altar?

In the book of Hebrews, it says that we have an altar, and later in the book, he makes it very clear that he is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is our altar. We don't need a physical altar anymore.

- Tear down idols.
- Build an altar of earth.
- Prepare a sacrifice.