

Altar Work

By Pastor Jack Cunningham

DEFINITION: Altar work is instructing, assisting, and/or leading the seeker to an experience with God.

OBJECTIVE: To pray with, instruct, encourage, and to assess needs of the seeker as you help them pray through to the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

WHERE: Anywhere

THE BASICS:

- Often a familiar voice is helpful. It is good for family members and friends to pray with people they know. The person who invited the guest should pray with the seeker.
- Women praying for women, and men praying for men are preferable. The exception to this rule is pastors and licensed ministers.
- Often, when there are several seekers present, the ministry must determine who is most ready to receive the Holy Ghost first. You do this by watching their body language (note intensity) - if they are kneeling, crying, quiet, excited, shaking, smiling, calm, tight, scared. Praying the “easy” ones through first will build faith in both seekers and altar workers.
- Don't be afraid to have a conversation with the seeker, prior to praying, and there may be times you have to ask them to stop praying:
 - What is your name?
 - Are you praying for the Holy Ghost?
 - Is this your first time to pray for the Holy Ghost?
 - Do you know how to receive the Holy Ghost?
 - As you talk to the seeker, use their name.

- If there are many people assisting the seeker it is important that only one person speak in the seeker's ear – giving directions – at a time. Teamwork is important (unified effort), but only one person giving instructions.
- Always be sensitive to the needs, feelings, frustrations and fears of the seeker. Many times a seeker does not understand what they are supposed to be doing and how they are to do it. Help them by giving clearly spoken and easy-to-understand instructions.

COMMON PROBLEMS

- It is common in our services today to have many people who have never prayed before. They don't know how to pray for the Holy Ghost. They don't know who to pray to. Take the time to tell the seeker how to pray. Tell them that Jesus hears their prayers. Tell them that He wants to answer their prayers.
- Many people, especially chronic seekers, do not receive the Holy Ghost because they have preconceived ideas as to how the Holy Ghost will come.
 - Discuss their preconceived ideas.
 - Let them know that rarely does anyone receive the Holy Ghost the way they think they will.
 - Chronic seekers often get into a rut of saying the same things over and over again, like a "stuck needle" on a phonograph. Get them to say and do something else.
- Quiet people. Encourage them to speak out, to lift up their voice, etc.
- Seekers who struggle to break through to the Holy Ghost.
 - Perhaps they've not repented.
 - Perhaps they have doubt.
 - Perhaps they doubt God's willingness and ability to forgive them of their sins.
 - Whatever the case, these are major hurdles that must be dealt with through prayer (repentance) and faith before the seeker will be able to receive the Holy Ghost.

THE DO'S & DON'TS OF ALTAR WORK

- Don't pound or slap a seeker on the back, arms, shoulders, or anywhere else.
- Don't shake the seeker.
- Don't be overcome with emotions while you are working with a seeker. Stay focused. You are not there to get a blessing yourself (and in doing so forget about helping the seeker).

- Don't work the altars with bad breath or body odor.
- Don't spit in their face when you are praying with the seeker.
- Don't yell in their ears. Altar services can get very loud. Get close to the seeker's ear and ask in a low voice "Can you hear me?" If they are having trouble hearing you, you can turn up the volume a little at a time until they do hear your instructions clearly.
- Don't mess up their hair or clothing. Though many try, we cannot shake the Holy Ghost into a person.
- Don't put words in their mouth to get them to speak in tongues. Never tell a seeker to repeat after you, or to say something (i.e. "la-la-la", etc...).
- Don't get in their face (people today are very conscious of infectious diseases).
- It is very important that you keep your attention on assisting the seeker.
- Get consent from the seeker before you lay hands on them.
- Be sensitive, inoffensive, empathic (feel what they feel)
- Be perceptive. Observe what they are saying and what they are doing. Look for both positive and negative signs.
- Men can lay hands on the head, shoulder, back or arms of another man.
- Men should lay hands ONLY on the head of a woman seeker.
- Women can hands on the head, shoulder, back or arms of another woman.
- Woman should lay hands ONLY on the head of a man seeker.
- The "laying on of hands" is for the purpose of transmitting faith.
- Be positive in all your comments. Tell the seeker often that they are doing good. They are usually in unfamiliar territory and your positive comments will often set their mind at ease.
- Encourage them to press on. Many times a seeker will get the Holy Ghost on the second or third attempt.
- Answer any questions they might have. Give you're your opinion as to what is hindering them from breaking through to the Holy Ghost. Then, encourage the seeker to pray again.
- Pray out loud with them. When the seeker hears you pray, and even speak in tongues, it helps them to know how to worship, as well as how to yield to the Holy Ghost.

TO RECEIVE THE HOLY GHOST THE SEEKER MUST:

REPENT

- It is impossible to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost without first repenting.

- In order to come to Jesus, the Bible says you must first repent.
- To define repentance ... It is asking the Lord to forgive you of your sins, being sorry for your sins, making a 180 degree turn and going in the other direction, death to self, saying not MY will but THINE be done, walking toward Jesus.
- Have them to understand that they must confess and forsake their sins (Proverbs 8:13).
- Repent with them. (A kneeling position is good but not absolutely mandatory.)
- Encourage Godly sorrow (It *worketh repentance* II Cor. 7:10).
- Make sure the seeker understands that God loves them and that He will forgive them. God is faithful. He will cast their sins into the bottom of the sea. He will throw their sins as far as the east is from the west and remember them no more. It's His promise.

HAVE FAITH

- The seeker must believe that God will give them the Holy Ghost just as He promised He would do.
- The scripture teaches, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." --Hebrews 11:6
- You should be continually speaking faith into the heart of the seeker.
- The reason you lay your hand on the seeker is to transmit your faith to them. If you do NOT have faith for the seeker to receive the Holy Ghost you should NOT be praying with them. Your unbelief is transmitted the same as your faith is.

PRAISE THE LORD

- Once the seeker has repented, instruct them to lift their hands, and lift their voice, and start praising God. Just as it is impossible to receive the Holy Ghost without repenting, it is impossible to receive the Holy Ghost while the seeker is repenting. He/she must move past repentance and begin to worship God.
- Praise is like a magnet that draws the Holy Ghost. *He inhabits the praises of His people* (Psalm 22:3).
- Praise is acknowledging God for His greatness, excellence, goodness, mercy, perfection, all that He is, etc.
- Encourage the seeker to worship the Lord out loud. Get them to say...
 - Hallelujah. The highest praise we can give God. It means, "Praise ye Jehovah, frequently rendered "Praise ye the Lord," stands at the beginning of ten of the psalms (Ps. 106, 111-113, 135, 146—150), hence called "hallelujah psalms." From its frequent occurrence it grew into a formula of praise. The Greek form of the word (*alleluia*) is found in Rev. 19:1, 3, 4, 6. —Easton's Bible Dictionary
 - I praise you Lord
 - I magnify you, Lord

- I exalt you, Lord
- Thank you Jesus for the Holy Ghost
- Some people, especially those who have been exposed to Pentecost of some sort, will want to shout, clap, dance, jump, etc. Discourage this outward emotional experience until AFTER they have received the Holy Ghost. Many times people will get caught up in the emotion and not receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost.
- I personally like to pray with people standing up. I think this is more of a worship and praise posture than kneeling (more of a repentance posture). Besides, it is easier to pray with a seeker who is standing. I have seen people receive the Holy Ghost sitting, standing, kneeling and laying on their back.

KEEP THEIR MIND ON THE MIRACLE

- Put everything on the altar.
- Get your mind on Jesus.
- Ask earnestly for the Holy Ghost because it is a gift from God.
- Die out to yourself.
- Close your eyes, focus on Jesus

TRANSITION FROM KNOWN TO UNKNOWN TONGUES

- The Bible says that on the day of Pentecost ... “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” –Acts 2:4
- It is important that you have your eyes and ears open when you are instructing and assisting the seeker. When you see that that they are close to the Holy Ghost (i.e. stammering lips, trembling, excited, etc.), you should tell them:
 - Let your voice out loud, let your tongue and mouth go, and allow God to form the words. Don't be afraid to speak out what God gives you to say.
- The greatest miracle God has ever performed, or ever will perform, is to fill a seeker with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. You should continually encourage them to believe in the miracle that God is working in their life right now.
- If you are feeling the Holy Ghost it is alright, even beneficial to the seeker, for you to allow the Holy Ghost to speak through you.

WHEN THE SEEKER RECEIVES THE HOLY GHOST

- There is a hurdle we need to get over in the church. Many have taught that you never recognize that a person has received the Holy Ghost until they declare themselves that they have received it. That teaching is okay if you are working only with chronic seekers. But, if you are working with a brand new seeker, one

- who doesn't hardly know what is happening to them, how can they be expected to tell us in King James English exactly what has happened to them?
- Do not tell the seeker they have the Holy Ghost if they are not clearly speaking in other tongues. But, if they are speaking in an unknown tongue, you can say to them:
 - That's the Holy Ghost. That is God speaking through you in a heavenly language. Allow God to speak through you all He wants to.
 - After it is obvious that the seeker has clearly received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, encourage them:
 - Enjoy their new experience with God.
 - Rejoice with them.
 - Dance and shout with them before the Lord for the wonderful work He has done in their life.

AFTER THE SEEKER RECEIVES THE HOLY GHOST

- If the seeker has NOT been baptized in water, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, talk to them about the necessity of water baptism while they are still at the altar and still feeling the power of God.
- Talk to them about the benefits they will enjoy by joining the New Convert's Class.
- If possible, ALWAYS introduce a new seeker to the pastor, pastor's wife, ministers, elders, leaders and as many other members as possible. When you introduce the seeker to the pastor it is important that you express your love for, appreciation of, and trust in, the man of God.

ALTAR WORKERS RESPONSIBILITIES

- Either go forward, to the altar area, with a seeker or to meet a seeker without being publicly asked to do so. Altar workers need to always be ready. It is embarrassing to the seeker and to the church if the pastor has to plead with people to come to the altar to help a seeker receive the Holy Ghost.
- At beginning of altar service as incentive for others to go. **DON'T LET SEEKERS GO ALONE!** Someone step out in aisle and go with them.
- Record keepers should be assigned to every altar service. Larger altar services should have several record keepers. Record keepers are NOT people who are also praying with seekers. Their full attention should be on getting proper and complete records.

- Altar Cards (available through the Home Missions Division) are essential to an effective altar service. Make sure an Altar Card is filled out on every seeker, whether they receive the Holy Ghost or not.
- If possible, give every seeker a copy of The New Birth Experience (a one-hour personal Bible study available through Home Missions).
- A Chief Record Keeper should be appointed in larger churches. All records should be turned into the Chief Record Keeper before the Record Keeper leaves the church.

FOLLOW-UP

- Every seeker should receive at least three follow-up contacts within three (3) days of receiving the Holy Ghost:
 - Telephone call the person who invited the seeker to church. It is important that an invitation to come back to church is issued with sincerity and excitement. Ask if you can give them a home Bible study.
 - Telephone call from the pastor (or a minister). Congratulations on your new experience. Our church has many services, ministries and programs to offer you and your family. Invite them to attend the New Convert's Class.
 - Telephone call from the New Convert's Care Coordinator or New Convert's Class teacher. Congratulations on your new experience. Invite them to attend the New Convert's Class.