

OPEN BIBLE CHURCH

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SERMON TITLE

Return to the Altar

SERIES

DATE

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KEY SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1

SYNOPSIS

The altar is not just a religious symbol, it's a place of deep encounter, total surrender, and consuming fire.

HIGHLIGHTS

Closing with soft music and prayer time.





☞ RETURN TO THE ALTAR

Last week we talked about lingering with God. That's when we can really connect with God and know personally that he is real. One aspect of lingering with God is coming to the altar to seek him and listen for his voice. I believe God is wooing us to draw near and to return to the altar. Not just the physical altar at the front of a sanctuary, but the spiritual altar of the heart. The altar is not just a religious symbol, it's a place of deep encounter, total surrender, and consuming fire.

In the Old Testament, the altar was the centerpiece of worship. It's where sacrifices were offered, where covenants were renewed, and where God revealed Himself. Abraham, Isaac & Jacob; Moses, Elijah, & more, all had significant altar experiences.

Now, under the New Covenant, we are the living sacrifice. And while we may not bring animals to a temple, God still calls us to the altar to meet with Him, to surrender, and to be set on fire for His purpose.

☞ Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

God is calling His people back to the altar. Not for ritual, but for relationship. Not for religion, but for revival.

☞ The Altar Is a Place of Encounter

Genesis 12:7

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

The first thing Abraham did when God appeared to him was build an altar. This wasn't just a religious obligation, it was a response to divine presence.

Have you ever taken a road trip to visit a place you'd only seen in photos? But when you got there, it was different? ...it was real, alive, and unforgettable? You can look at pictures all day, but nothing compares with being there in person. That's what the altar is; it's not a picture of God, it's an encounter with God Himself.

From the beginning, the altar was a meeting place between God and man. It was where eternity interrupted time. Where heaven intersected with earth. We all need that place. That sacred space where we meet with God... where we cry, worship, and listen. With all the noise and distractions ☞ around us, **the altar is a place of stillness and intimacy.**



It's kind of like a married couple who's been together for years. Life gets busy with kids, jobs, bills; and they realize they've been living in the same house but haven't really connected. Then they take a weekend getaway... no phones, no schedules, just time to talk, laugh, and be together again. That's what the altar is; it's your spiritual getaway with God. It's where the relationship gets rekindled, where the distractions fade, and His voice becomes clear again. We all need that. And unlike a weekend trip, you don't need to book it months in advance, you can build that altar in your living room, in your car, or on a walk around the block.

Have you noticed how easy it is to drift? To grow lukewarm in the faith? Like that hypothetical couple, you don't intend to, but your passion cools over time. You were never meant to drift away, or to live off of old memories. God wants to meet with you personally, daily.

☞ **Don't let the altar grow cold. Build it again.** Even if it's with something as simple as a whisper, a song, or a single bible verse... start there. God always responds to hunger. He will meet you at the altar. It's a place of encounter.

☞ **The Altar Is a Place of Surrender**

Genesis 22:9

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there... He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar...

One of the hardest stories in Scripture is when God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac was not just his son, he was the promise God had fulfilled. He represented decades of waiting and hoping. And now God was asking Abraham to lay him on the altar. Why would God do that? Because even ☞ **good things can become idols.**

Sometimes the promise can take the place of the Promiser. The altar is not just where we worship. ☞ **It's where we surrender. Where we say, 'Not my will, but Yours be done.' God doesn't want part of you, He wants all of you.**

Imagine a little boy clutching his favorite toy truck. His dad kneels down holding something behind his back—an even better, shinier remote-control truck—but the boy refuses to let go of the old one. The only way he can get the better gift is to release what's in his hands. That's surrender. Sometimes we think if we give something to God, we'll lose it forever. But often, God is just asking us to trade our limited version for something far better. Abraham laid Isaac on the altar and walked away with both Isaac and a greater revelation of God's character.

What is God asking you to place on the altar today? Is it your pride? Is it control? Is it your plan for the future?



Don't fear the altar. What we lay down in obedience, God often resurrects in power. Abraham placed Isaac on the altar, but he walked down the mountain with his son and a deeper revelation of God as Provider. The altar is a place of surrender.

☞ The Altar Is a Place of Fire

Leviticus 6:12–13

The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out...

In Leviticus 9:24, God sent fire to consume the offering. That fire was not man-made, it came from heaven. But once it fell, the priests were commanded to keep it burning. The same is true today.

☞ God ignites the fire in our hearts, but we are responsible for feeding it through daily prayer, worship, and the Word; these are the logs on the fire.

Campers know that starting a fire can be exciting, but keeping it going takes work. You can't just light it once and walk away—you have to feed it, stoke it, and guard it from going out. Many Christians have had a "campfire moment" at a conference or revival service where the fire fell, but by Monday, the flames died because they didn't tend to it. The altar is where we come again and again to add fuel so that what God starts in a moment, burns for a lifetime.

Many Christians are living on ashes... memories of past revivals, past encounters. But ashes don't burn. If your heart has grown cold, don't fake the fire... return to the altar and invite God to breathe on the embers again. God's fire in us doesn't die because He stops loving us; it dies when we stop feeding and stoking it.

Where there is sacrifice, there will be fire. And, where there is hunger, God will come. You don't have to work it up... just offer yourself again. The fire will fall.

☞ The Altar Is Now in You

Romans 12:1

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... your true and proper worship

☞ In the Old Testament, people traveled to a place to meet God, but under the New Covenant, we are the temple. The altar is no longer made of stone, it's made of surrender.

Worship is more than a song; it's a life laid down. It's obedience when no one's watching. It's saying yes to God when it's costly. Every day we have the choice: will I crawl off the altar, or will I stay surrendered? Will I live for comfort, or will I live for His glory? This kind of living may not get applause, but it gets fire. It attracts the presence of God.



A full-time firefighter doesn't just sleep at home until the fire alarm sounds, he lives ready. In the same way, we don't just come to God's altar during a crisis; we live at the altar, ready for Him to use us at any moment.

☞ Today, you are the altar. Don't wait for Sunday; **live ready for God's presence every day**. God isn't looking for perfect people, He's looking for available ones... for people who say, 'Lord, here I am. Use me. Burn in me.'

Return to the Altar

Many want the benefits of the altar... the encounter, the fire, the breakthrough... but few are willing to lay something down. Revival doesn't start in arenas, it starts on altars. It begins when one heart says, 'I will return. I will rebuild. I will be the sacrifice.'

An old house with a fireplace may have had a warm, roaring fire years ago. But if no one's been there for decades, that fireplace is cold, dusty, and unused. Yet, with a little cleaning, some kindling, and a fresh spark, it can blaze again. The fireplace doesn't need to be replaced, it just needs a fresh fire in it. That's your heart. Maybe it's been a while since the fire burned bright. But God's invitation is the same: return to the altar, and He will breathe on the embers again. Inside, your heart may feel cold, but it can burn again if you return to the altar.

The altar was a place for a dead animal to be sacrificed, but today the altar is not a place of death, ☞ it's a place of transformation. **When we surrender, God resurrects.**

What is God calling you to put on the altar today? Your timeline? Your plans? Your comfort? Your opinions? Your "pet" sin?

☞ Whatever it is, lay it down. **Don't withhold what God wants to consume. Because what He consumes, He purifies. And, what He purifies, He empowers.**

God is calling us to return. Not with ritual, but with kindling. Return to the altar and watch what He will do. He's calling you to come back... not to religion; not to routine; but to the altar.

☞ **(start music)** Kneel again, weep again, worship again, surrender again, and say: "God, I'm Yours. I lay myself on the altar. Set me on fire again." The altar is open. The fire is ready. The only thing missing... is you.