

The Way

BACK TO
THE ALTAR

HOW TO LIVE DAILY AS
A DISCIPLE OF JESUS



The Way Back to the Altar

How to Live Daily As a Disciple of Jesus

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me”
(John 14:6).*

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Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and King James Version (KJV) when included in Spirit of Prophecy quotes.

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Introduction to **The Way Back to the Altar**

*“Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come near to me.’
So all the people came near to him. And he repaired
the altar of the Lord which had been torn down”
(1 Kings 18:30).*

Dear Friends,

Do you long to live every day as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

It is our prayerful heart-cry that the Holy Spirit will inspire and reignite your personal fire and passion to make the worship of Jesus Christ central to your life as you live each moment as His disciple! Jesus is **The Way** back to the altar and throne of God.

We pray that this booklet, with its simple activities and soul challenges, will not only draw you closer to Jesus personally but give you practical tools to lead your family, your congregation, and your friends and neighbors to becoming daily disciples of Jesus who **live at the altar**.

Ellen White wrote the following in the early 1900s; it couldn't be more accurate for the times in which we live:

An intensity such as never before was seen is taking possession of the world. In amusement, in moneymaking, in the contest for power, in the very struggle for existence, there is a terrible force that engrosses body and mind and soul. In the midst of this maddening rush, God is speaking. He bids us come apart and commune with Him. “Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10.

Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ's loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work.

These workers can never attain the highest success until they learn the secret of strength. They must give themselves time to think, to pray, to wait upon God for a renewal of physical, mental, and spiritual power. They need the uplifting influence of His Spirit. Receiving this, they will be quickened by fresh life. The wearied frame and tired brain will be refreshed, the burdened heart will be lightened.

Not a pause for a moment in His presence, but personal contact with Christ, to sit down in companionship with Him — this is our need (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 260).

This is what we will receive as we take unrushed time each day in worship. Jesus is just waiting to meet with you! Are you ready to meet with Him and learn afresh what it means to be His disciple, living daily at the altar?

Join us on this seven-part journey as we follow Jesus, the Way back to the altar.

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Note for Disciple Leaders

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be a revival teaching tool, both for yourself individually and for those God calls you to help lead along *The Way Back to The Altar*.

We will include a few brief thoughts for personal inspiration at the beginning of each section, followed by more in-depth and interactive ways to teach the seven Back to the Altar principles of being a disciple of Jesus. These teaching tools can be used for personal growth and/or for small groups.

Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations...” (Matt. 28:19).

Throughout the book, each principle uses the following format for teaching purposes. When teaching small groups, we encourage you to jump right into the section “Small Group Leader’s Guide,” as titled below. Whether you are leading one small group or working with multiple small groups at once, follow the same format. This way, each group is engaged and active right from the start.

Small Group Leader’s Guide

CARE

- A question is provided to help grow connection and friendship within the small group and to help group members understand each other’s needs.
- An accountability opportunity is given for participants to share how God helped them apply the challenge from the previous lesson.

CONNECT

- A simple interactive activity is given that will help group members engage and prepare their hearts for the written Word of God. This serves as a bridge to the biblical truth that will be taught in the upcoming lesson.
- A quick debrief about what was learned from the activity might also be included.

Before beginning the deeper study, an introduction to the purpose of the Back to the Altar discipleship lesson will be shared.

DISCOVER

- Always start with prayer, worshiping God and asking for the Holy Spirit to teach the Word.
- Then begin the heart of each lesson: an exploration of God's Word to know Jesus Christ and understand what it means to live at the altar in relationship with Him.

PRACTICE

- An opportunity to practically apply and act on what has been learned in God's Word will be offered.
- Time to seek the blessings of God in prayer as the group commits to following the discovered truth.

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE

- Finally, a practical assignment and takeaway challenge, based on the biblical principle learned, will be given for participants to take home. This challenge is designed to help participants foster a relationship with Jesus and challenge them to live daily at the altar in a real-life application.

If you are using this resource to lead multiple small groups, split each group into no more than six members

each. As the leader, you can present to many small groups at a time, as needed. If possible, it's good to have help from other disciples who have already studied the principles in *The Way Back to the Altar* (which you hold in your hands) to facilitate each small group.

As a leader, make a commitment to teach only what you are living by the grace of the Lord Jesus. In other words, if you don't live it, don't teach it. We are all broken, imperfect people — sinners in need of the Savior — so don't wait until you are perfectly living each principle before you teach it. Rather, put these principles into your daily life practice **now** and then teach out of your own ongoing journey to walk, talk, and share Jesus. Stay real in your leadership journey. Don't ever lead as one who has already arrived spiritually; lead as someone who is still growing in your own Back to the Altar journey. Whenever you can, share personal testimonies. Participants will be much more responsive to your humility and vulnerability than to picture-perfect presentations.

If you feel inadequate to lead or teach these principles, that's good, because you are at a perfect place for the Holy Spirit to do a mighty work through you! *(If you need help formulating your personal testimony, refer to Appendix 2.)*

Are you ready? Let's get started!

What Is a Disciple of Jesus?

You may be wondering: What is a disciple of Jesus? The written Word of God answers this question.

Please pray as you look up the following Bible passages to see what other discoveries the Holy Spirit gives you on this topic.

A disciple of Jesus...

Matthew 4:18–20

- Follows Jesus wherever He leads
- Trusts Him to be his/her Master Commander
- Leaves whatever gets in the way of following Him
- Maintains a meaningful relationship with Him
- Longs to be like Him in every way
- Learns from Him to become a fisher of men

John 8:31, 32

- Continues in Jesus' Word
- Knows the Truth
- Finds freedom in the Truth

John 13:35

- Loves others

John 15:7, 8

- Bears much fruit
- Abides in Jesus

Matthew 16:24

- Denies self and puts Jesus above what he/she wants
- Takes up the cross
- Is willing to suffer to be true to Jesus

Matthew 28:19, 20

- Goes to make disciples of all the nations
- Baptizes in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Teaches other disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded

Acts 1:5, 8

- Is baptized by the Holy Spirit
- Is a powerful witness everywhere

The question for us all to ask God is: Am I currently living as a disciple of Jesus?

Leader's Tip

If you are leading a small group, invite each participant to take the following **anonymous survey** before you begin the study. Pass out pens and paper, letting group members know they will only need to answer **yes** or **no** to each question. Read the questions out loud, giving everyone time to write their answers. Afterward, collect the papers, add up the yes/no answers for each question, and share the results with the group.

Discipleship Questions for Anonymous Survey (Answer yes or no)

1. Are you thirsty for something more with Jesus than what you currently have?
2. Do you have peace about your salvation by grace through faith?
3. Do you have daily, meaningful, *unrushed time* alone with God in His written Word?
4. Do you have daily, meaningful, *unrushed time* in prayer?
5. Do you surrender daily to Jesus as Lord of all you are and all you have, including your attitude and electronics?
6. Do you ask for and receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit daily?
7. Do you love your family sacrificially?
8. When you are home, do you have daily family worship with your spouse and/or children?
9. Are you free from anything that would make you a slave (bitterness, addictions, electronics, porn, appetite, etc.)?
10. Are you presently discipling someone outside your church family to trust, follow, and share Jesus?

The results are usually eye-opening and sobering.

After you've shared, ask everyone to take a few moments to pray and ask the Holy Spirit what *He* wants to tell them about the results.

After this prayer, pray that the Holy Spirit will prepare each heart to receive and live the seven Back to the Altar principles of living daily as a disciple of Jesus.

The Lord can do more in one hour than we can do in a whole lifetime, and when He sees that His people are fully consecrated, let me tell you a great work will be done in a short time, and the message of truth is to be carried into the dark places of the earth, where it has never been proclaimed (Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 306.5).

BACK TO THE ALTAR – PRINCIPLE 1

Every Day...

Come to Jesus as You Are

Do you sometimes feel that you need to be in a certain condition before you can come to Jesus? Maybe you think you must be positive, happy, responsible, or all clean physically and mentally. Maybe you think you must be feeling spiritual and have your life in order before He will accept you.

In the words of Inspiration, we read:

If you come to Jesus now, with contrition of soul, He will take you just as you are, sinful and polluted. He will take away your sins, He will give to you His own righteousness. You are to look to Him, and believe in Him as your personal Saviour, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. Come to Jesus in faith, with the simplicity of a child. Make an entire surrender, and you have His words, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” John 6:37. In accepting Christ by genuine faith, you gain all heaven with this precious gift (*Letters and Manuscripts*, Letter 29, 1893, vol. 8, par. 5).

In this lesson we will explore what it truly means to come to Jesus just as we are, without changing anything first.

Pray: *As you begin to read and study (or prepare to teach) this first Back to the Altar principle, ask God to send the Holy Spirit to teach you the Word of God in a fresh and meaningful way! And ask Him to take the message from His Word deep into your heart and soul — so deep that you will no longer be the same.*

Small Group Leader's Guide

CARE

1. Go around the group circle and have members take turns sharing one word that best describes their day so far. Be attentive: celebrate the good things and have compassion for the not-so-good.
2. Say: *At the end of this lesson, we will give you a challenge to do daily. When we meet again, we will share what God helped us do with the challenge from this lesson. Each lesson will have a fresh challenge.*

CONNECT

1. Everyone turn to someone in the group and share two things you do when you know guests or visitors are coming to your house.
2. Ask if 2-3 people would be willing to share with the group what they do to prepare for company. (Allow for open dialogue.)
3. Imagine that Jesus is coming to your home. Do you feel you need to be in a certain condition before you open the door or before you spend time with Him? (Be attentive and validate participation.)
4. Sometimes we think we need to be in a certain condition or frame of mind before we can meet with Jesus or allow Him into our home/heart.

Today we will explore what it means to come to Jesus just as we are, without changing anything first.

DISCOVER

Pray with the group, asking the Holy Spirit to teach the Word.

Keep Coming to Jesus As You Are Every Moment!

Read: Matthew 11:28-30.

Ask: *When do we come to Jesus?* (Answer from the Bible text only.)

Ask for group feedback. Allow dialogue. (He says when we are weary and burdened, that's when we come to Him.)

Read: Luke 5:30-32.

Ask: *According to Jesus, what qualifies us to come to Him?* (If we are sick/if we are sinners!)

Jesus invites you to come to Him at the altar each day, just as you are. When you are sick and wonder why He does not intervene, when you are exhausted and don't feel like caring about anything or anybody, when you have sinned against God or people and feel too ashamed to approach the spotless Son of God — come to Him anyway! Come to Him when you are discouraged and feel alone. Come to Him when darkness presses around you and you feel overwhelmed with depression. Come to Him when you are angry that He did not show up or did not protect you and when your requests seem to be met with silence.

Come to Him in every and all circumstances. He will not turn you away.

Author's Testimony

When I was a teenager, I had an accident while racing on horseback with my friend. We were racing bareback (without saddles) across a plowed field. As my horse lunged forward across a rough stretch of field, I lost my grip and slipped under her pounding hooves! She

trampled my right leg very badly. My friend took me home, where I tried to take care of my leg while my parents were out of town. A day later, my parents returned. My mother looked at my injured leg and noticed that my foot was swollen and had a strange color.

She took me to see the doctor — just as I was. The doctor examined my leg and my foot and asked me seriously, “Son, do you want to keep your foot?” “Yes, sir!” I said. “Then you need to go immediately to the hospital so they can work to save your foot before it has to be amputated.”

I am thankful for my doctor, who saw me just as I was, but I am also thankful he did not leave me that way. I still have my leg and foot and joyfully walk or hike almost every day! Thank God for doctors who take us as we are! Thank God for Jesus who does the same!

Jesus said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

Jesus takes you just as you are. You do not need to try to heal yourself before coming to Him. He alone is the Healer. He offers to heal you inside and out! He is the Doctor who stays with you throughout your healing process and forever. He promises that “...I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

Ellen G. White writes:

If you see your sinfulness, do not wait to make yourself better. How many there are who think they are not good enough to come to Christ. Do you expect to become better through your own efforts? “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Jeremiah 13:23. There is help for us only in God.

We must not wait for stronger persuasions, for better opportunities, or for holier tempers. We can do nothing of ourselves. We must come to Christ just as we are (*Steps to Christ*, p. 31).

You can trust Jesus right now and throughout eternity. He is looking forward to coming to take you to heaven to be with Him. He says, “I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). But you may be wondering: Am I ready to meet Jesus?

Discover How You Can *Be Sure* of Your Salvation!

If Jesus came back tonight, would you go to heaven? Why or why not?

Come to the altar — **come to Jesus just as you are** — and know that you can be sure about your salvation. When you come to Jesus, remember that you are coming also to God the Father who gives you salvation in Jesus!

Leader’s Tip

- Become familiar with these steps so you can use your own words rather than the script. It would be good to read the Bible verse with the group and ask the question before you state the step. In this way, you will lead the group to hear God’s Word first and to think about its meaning before you give the answer and state the conclusion of the step.
- Add Bible promises that are meaningful to you as a leader.

Now we are going to study seven simple steps that show us how we can have the assurance of salvation.

Seven Steps – Being Sure of Your Salvation!

Read: Romans 5:8.

Ask: *How do you know that God loves you?*

Read: Romans 8:38, 39.

Ask: *Can anything separate you from His love?*

STEP #1: You can *be sure* that *nothing* will separate you from God's love.

Read: Romans 3:23.

Ask: *What problem do we all have?*

Read: Romans 6:23 (first part).

Ask: *What is the result of our sin?*

STEP #2: You can *be sure* that, as a sinner, you *need* the Savior.

Read: Romans 6:23 (last part) and Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Ask: *What free gift does God offer you?*

STEP #3: You can *be sure* that salvation is God's *free gift* to you.

Read: John 3:16.

Ask: *How does this gift of eternal life become yours?*

STEP #4: You can *be sure* that Jesus is your Savior when you *believe* in Him.

Read: Revelation 3:20.

Ask: *What is your answer to Jesus' request?*

STEP #5: You can *be sure* that Jesus wants to make His *home* in your heart by faith.

Read: 1 John 1:9.

Share: When you confess your sins and invite Jesus to be your personal Savior, He comes into your heart immediately by faith via the Holy Spirit. He comes in His righteousness, purity, and perfection. You realize like never before how much you need Jesus to clean your heart.

Ask: *What does Jesus do for you when you confess your sins?*

STEP #6: You can *be sure* that Jesus completely *cleans* your heart.

Read: 1 John 5:13.

Ask: *What does this verse tell you that you can know for sure?*

STEP #7: You can *be sure* that Jesus gives you *eternal life*.

God tells us in Revelation 7:9 that there will be a countless multitude of those who are saved. God has planned for you to be one of them!

Coming to Jesus as we are leads us to live in His peace. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).

Coming to Jesus as our Savior leads us to live in His joy! “And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8, 9).

Our Father God is the Giver of all good gifts to you (James 1:17). These endless gifts include salvation, eternal life, a new heart, peace, and joy.

PRACTICE

1. Read Revelation 3:20 again privately and invite Jesus into your heart as your Savior.
2. Are you ready to come to Jesus as you are and entrust your life to your Savior?
3. Pray the following:

Dear Father in Heaven, You are the Giver of the gift of salvation. We are sinners in need of Jesus as our Savior. We thank You for sending Jesus to die so we can have eternal life and be covered by His perfect righteousness. We choose to believe that this gift of salvation and righteousness is ours now. We ask Your Son, Jesus, to come into our hearts by faith and be our Friend, Savior, and Lord. We confess our sins and claim His forgiveness and cleansing from all of our unrighteousness. Thank you that we can be sure about our eternal life with Jesus our Savior. In Jesus' name, amen.

This passage from *Steps to Christ* is so encouraging:

With the rich promises of the Bible before you, can you give place to doubt? Can you believe that when the poor sinner longs to return, longs to forsake his sins, the Lord sternly withholds him from coming to His feet in repentance? Away with such thoughts! Nothing can hurt your own soul more than to entertain such a conception of our heavenly Father. He hates sin, but He loves the sinner, and He gave Himself in the person of Christ, that all who would might be saved and have eternal blessedness in the kingdom of glory. What stronger or more tender language could have been employed than He has chosen in which to

express His love toward us? He declares, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” Isaiah 49:15 (Ellen G. White, p. 54).

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 1

Every moment, practice coming to Jesus as you are: happy, sad, worried, peaceful, defeated, or victorious. Having the assurance of our salvation in Jesus gives us the freedom to run to Him always.

Go home and review the seven steps of assurance of salvation and then share them with someone else.

BACK TO THE ALTAR – PRINCIPLE 2

Every Day...

Honor Jesus as Lord

It's easy to acknowledge Jesus as our Savior! After all, He took us as we are — broken and battered and scarred with sin — and then delivered us, cleansed us with His blood, and set us free. Because of that, we joyfully sing, “What a wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, what a wonderful Savior is He!”

However, it's a very different thing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and to sing with the same gusto “I surrender all.” That's because if Jesus truly is Lord, our life and lifestyle will change, and sometimes we don't like that because we feel out of control.

Reflect on the following:

It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51.2).

Pray: As you begin to study (or prepare to teach) this *Back to the Altar* principle, ask God to send the Holy Spirit to teach you the Word of God in such a fresh and meaningful way that you will love singing “I surrender all” because your Savior's love has truly captured your heart.

Small Group Leader's Guide

CARE

1. Ask the small group: *What is the best thing that happened to you today?* (Take time to listen, celebrate the good things, and have compassion for those having difficult days.)
2. Review the Back to the Altar principle studied so far:
 - **Principle 1 – Come to Jesus as you are!** Every moment, practice coming to Jesus as you are: happy, sad, worried, peaceful, defeated, or victorious. And remember that you can be sure of your salvation.
3. Ask: *Did anyone share the seven steps of salvation with someone else?* (Ask for testimonies.)
4. Instruct: Have the group divide into pairs and ask, *How did God help you live out the challenge from last time?* Give pairs 2–3 minutes to share. Then ask the larger group if anyone would be willing to share what God did in their lives as they came to Jesus as they are.

CONNECT

1. Gather in teams of two. Ask each other: “What person do you respect most and why?” After 2–3 minutes of sharing, ask if anyone would like to share with the larger group.
2. Ask: *What qualities in a person do we respect the most?* (Allow for open dialogue.) *How do these qualities relate to our relationship with Jesus?* (Validate participation.)

Today we will explore what it means to honor Jesus as Lord.

DISCOVER

Pray: *Father in heaven, please send the Holy Spirit to teach us Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.*

What do the following Bible passages tell us about Jesus?

Read: Mark 1:35.

In the early morning, Jesus would get up while it was still dark and go outside to a secluded place to pray.

Read: Isaiah 50:4.

Ask: *Who is testifying in this verse: Isaiah the prophet or someone else?*

Read: Isaiah 50:6 to discover the answer.

This is a Messianic prophecy pointing toward what Jesus would experience every morning on this planet.

Every morning, God would awaken Jesus to disciple/teach Him. God would give Him the tongue of a disciple/teacher so that He could give a word to sustain the weary. This early-morning time was pivotal to Christ's life on earth.

Our Father God loves us enough to awaken us as He did the Messiah! He will bring us to the altar each morning.

It is the love of the Father that moves His heart to wake us up each morning to have unrushed time with Him, His Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Part I – Honor Jesus as Lord

Honor Jesus as Lord by asking God every night to wake you the next morning to have unrushed, undistracted time alone with Him in the Word and in prayer.

Ask: *What does God's Word teach us about Jesus as Lord?*

Read: Matthew 28:18.

Jesus proclaimed that **all** authority had been given to Him in heaven and in earth.

Read: Philippians 2:5–11.

Jesus humbled Himself to be obedient to God the Father to the point of dying on the cross. Jesus died and was resurrected from the grave. God exalted Jesus to His right hand and gave Him a name above all names. At Jesus' name, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess Him as Lord.

We know that everyone in the universe will soon bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. So, why do we not honor Jesus as Lord now? Do we love Jesus as a Friend and Savior but not as our Lord?

Driver's Seat Activity/Illustration

- Arrange four chairs in placement for the seats of an imaginary car (driver's seat, passenger seat, two back seats).
- Have fun describing a fancy new car and ask for a volunteer to drive this new vehicle.
- When a volunteer comes forward, begin the following dialogue.

Set the story stage: You are in the driver's seat of your life. You decide where you want to go, how you want to get there, and how fast you get there. But then you decide that you want Jesus to be Lord of your life. If Jesus is Lord of your life, where should He be sitting in this car? (Give the group time to respond; they will probably put Jesus in the driver's seat. Follow the story outline.)

Ask 1: *If Jesus is now in the driver's seat, where will you be sitting?* (Give the group time to respond. They will usually put themselves in the front passenger seat beside Jesus. Play along with how they respond.)

Ask 2: *So, Jesus is driving the car now. What happens when He goes in a direction you don't want to go? (Allow time for a response and then demonstrate by grabbing the wheel from Jesus.)*

Ask 3: *What happens if Jesus isn't driving fast enough for you? (Give the group time to respond and then show how you can push your leg from the passenger's side over to the gas pedal to speed things up.)*

Ask 4: *Let's ask again: If Jesus is Lord of your life, where should you be sitting? (Allow time for the group to respond. If they suggest the back seat, go with it. If they suggest the trunk, skip to the final thought.)*

Ask 5: *If you are in the back seat and Jesus starts going in a different direction than you want, what do you do? (Give time for a response.) You know what I sometimes do? I start complaining and try to tell Him from the back seat what He's doing wrong.*

Ask 6: *If Jesus is Lord of your life, where should you be sitting? (Allow time for a response. By now participants should put themselves in the trunk.)*

Final Thought: *That's right! You know the best place for us to be as Christians when Jesus is in the driver's seat, when He is Lord of our lives? We should be in the trunk. We can't see where we are going, and we can't tell Him what to do. But we are lying down in simple faith, trusting that our Lord and Master will take us where He knows we should be.*

Pray: *Close the illustration with prayer, asking that we submit to Jesus as the Driver and **LORD** of every area of our lives.*

Back to the Word!

Ask: *How can we stop doing things we know are wrong?*

Read: Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

Jesus is ready to cut out the hard places in our hearts that refuse His Lordship. We must surrender to Jesus as our Master Surgeon so that He can do this surgery for us.

Read: Colossians 1:27, 28.

The secret of victory for the Christian is contained in two three-word phrases in this passage. What is it? ("**Christ in you**" and "**perfect in Christ**")

Jesus lives in us by His Holy Spirit, and He empowers our surrender! While our righteousness is nothing more than filthy rags (see Isa. 64:6), we are perfect in Christ.

Jesus lived an abiding life of surrender to His Father in heaven every moment of every day. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34). Jesus' passion was to do the will of God the Father.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was overwhelmed from carrying the weight of every sin committed by every child, youth, and adult who has ever lived. He wanted a way out from His Father — but notice what He prayed as He fell on His face: "...My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; **yet not as I will**, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39, emphasis supplied). Three times He wrestled with what He wanted personally and chose to give up His will to His Father.

This same Jesus, who daily gave up His will to His Father, lives in you through His Holy Spirit. This same Jesus, who wanted to live and not die, gave up His will to His Father, stretched out His hands, and submitted to die on the

cross in your place! This glorious truth leads us to be willing to surrender all to Him every day!

What can we do each morning to tune out distractions and honor the Lordship of Jesus?

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Part II – Honor Jesus as Lord

Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.

This same Jesus, who has all power and authority, lives **in** you; He gives you strength and power to submit your will to Him. Jesus will help you! He will not fail you!

What does God’s Word teach about the Source of our power to live for Christ?

Read: Ephesians 2:22 and Philippians 2:13.

The Father and Son dwell with us (live in us) via the Holy Spirit. And it is the grace of God Himself that empowers us to surrender. He gives us both the ability **to will** and the ability **to do** His will.

Read: John 14:17, 18, 23 and Ephesians 3:14–19.

We are not on our own to wrestle, worry, and strive to try to honor Jesus throughout the day. We are **not** spiritual orphans! Jesus promised, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” And when He comes to us, we will experience His fullness.

Ocean/Cup Gospel Illustration

- Supplies needed: a pan of water, an eye-dropper, and a cup
- Place the pan of water on a table.
- Explain that the pan of water is the ocean, and the ocean represents Jesus and His fullness.
- Explain that the cup represents you.
- Using the eye dropper, put a few drops of water in the cup.
- Ask: *Is the ocean in the cup?* (No, there is only a small drop in the cup!)
- You want Jesus to dwell **in** you in all fullness through His Spirit, so what do you do? You plunge into the ocean. And you stay there.
- Immerse the cup of water in the pan of water. This is what it means to abide in Jesus. The more you are **in** Jesus, the more of Him will be in you, and the more like Him you will become.
- For the sake of gospel emphasis, ask again: *Is the ocean in the cup or is the cup in the ocean?* (While a little ocean may be in the cup, the cup is still in the ocean!)

Just as Jesus lives in us by faith (the cup full of water) and empowers us to yield good fruit, we also keep abiding in Him, and His life flows through our own.

God desires to manifest through you the holiness, the benevolence, the compassion, of His own character. Yet the Saviour does not bid the disciples labor to bear fruit. **He tells them to abide in Him.** “If ye abide in Me,” He says, “and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” It is through the word that Christ abides in His followers. This is the same vital union that is represented by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The words of Christ are spirit and life. Receiving them, you receive

the life of the Vine. You live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4. The life of Christ **in you** produces the same fruits as **in Him**. Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 677, emphasis added).

Our greatest work is not to bear fruit but to abide!

Read: Philippians 4:13.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Christ is our strength to live each moment in honor to Him. When we are in Him, and He is in us, we will want to live for His honor and glory. (See 1 Cor. 10:31.)

Read: Philippians 4:8.

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

Part III – Honor Jesus as Lord

Every moment, practice honoring Jesus with your choices.

Yes, you can start today!

PRACTICE

We often know Jesus as Savior and Friend, but do we know Him as Lord?

1. Draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper.

2. On the left side of the line, draw a crown at the top. Underneath the crown, write “What **is** surrendered to Jesus.” In that column, list the things you know you have given to the Lordship of Jesus (what you have surrendered to Him).
3. On the right side of the line, write “What **is not** surrendered to Jesus.” In that column, write down those things you are struggling to surrender. After you write a few things down, pray and ask the Holy Spirit if there is anything you have forgotten.



What **is** surrendered
to Jesus

What **is not** surrendered
to Jesus

Whatever is not surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus holds us captive.

Put this chart by your bed, and every day this next week, surrender what is not yet surrendered to Jesus. If you are struggling to surrender, pray, “Lord make me willing to be willing to be willing to surrender!” You can add as many “willings” as you need to that prayer.

Leader’s Appeal

Who needs Jesus to do what He promised in Ezekiel 36:26, 27: to give you a new heart and to take out your heart of stone?

If God is calling you to have this heart surgery, please join me on your knees before the Lord. I invite you to have a private prayer to ask Jesus to cut out whatever is in your heart that should not be there: bitterness, hatred, lust, or love for anything or anyone that replaces Jesus as Lord.

Pray: *Dear Father in heaven, thank You for loving us so much! Thank You for Jesus, our Master Surgeon. We ask for Jesus to come, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and cut out the hard places in our hearts. Please cut out our bitterness, our hurt, and our love for anything or anybody that has replaced Jesus as Lord. Give us new hearts! Amen.*

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 2

This coming week, as you seek to honor Jesus as Lord, strive for the following:

- Part I: Ask God to awaken you each morning to have unrushed time alone with Him.
- Part II: Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.
- Part III: By the power of Jesus who lives within you by faith, follow His lead in all your choices through the day.

Always remember...

Jesus says, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness — all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly — by abiding in Him — that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Psalm 16:8 (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 69).

BACK TO THE ALTAR – PRINCIPLE 3

Every Day...

Discover Jesus in His Word and in Prayer

God's written Word is His personal love letter to our hearts. In it, we discover who God is, who we are, and what He longs to do in and through us as His children. His Word is holy, trustworthy, and timely. His Word is the highest authority and a never-failing light shining in the darkness.

While God's written Word is the anchor for our faith and our relationship with Him, prayer is the breath of our soul! Prayer without the Word becomes guided by emotion and is like a sailboat without a rudder. The Word without personal prayer is lifeless and stale, like a loaf of old bread forgotten at the back of the cupboard.

Prayer is how we talk to God, and, in response, He speaks to our minds via the Holy Spirit as we read and reflect on the written Word. Just as human relationships do not thrive without communication, neither can our relationship with God survive, let alone thrive, without daily communication.

God loves when we talk with Him in prayer. No fancy words are needed. He just wants to hear our heart.

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. When Jesus was upon the earth, He taught His disciples how to pray. He directed them to present their daily needs before God, and to

cast all their care upon Him. And the assurance He gave them that their petitions should be heard, is assurance also to us (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93).

God delights to communicate with us, and He longs for us to lift up our heads and delight in Him each and every day!

“My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct it to You, and will look up” (Ps. 5:3).

“How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Ps. 119:103).

Pray: *As you begin to study (or prepare to teach) this Back to the Altar lesson, ask God to send the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart in such a compelling way that you will find yourself hungering for more time in God’s Word and in prayer.*

Small Group Leader’s Guide

CARE

1. Have group members ask each other: “Where have you seen God at work in your life this past week?”
2. Ask: *What are the Back to the Altar principles we’ve learned so far?*
 - **Principle 1: Come to Jesus as you are!**
 - **Principle 2: Honor Jesus as Lord.**
 - Part I: Ask God to awaken you each morning to have unrushed time alone with Him.
 - Part II: Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.

- Part III: By the power of Jesus who lives within you by faith, follow His lead in all your choices through the day.
3. Team up in pairs. Ask: *How did God help you live out the challenge from last time?* The challenge was allowing God to wake you up, having unrushed time with Him, beholding Him, and surrendering to Him as Lord. Give pairs 2–3 minutes to share. Ask the larger group if anyone would be willing to share what God did in their lives as they accepted the challenge.

CONNECT

1. Have everyone stand in a circle. Invite participants to think of something they have done that has required intense, concentrated focus. Invite each one to act out the focused activity while the group guesses what it is.
2. What kinds of things in life take great focus? What kind of focus should we have when reading God's Word?

Today we will explore how to read God's Word and pray with a clear focus.

DISCOVER

As we prepare to open God's Word, consider the following:

The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God's Word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, p. 393).

Pray: *Dear Father in heaven, we ask that You send the Holy Spirit to teach us what our focus should be in Your Word and in prayer. We also ask that You give us a fresh*

awe and love of You and Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

How May We Have Meaningful Time with God in His Word?

When you open the Bible each day, do you ask your teacher to help you understand it more clearly?

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:12–14 and John 16:13.

Ask: *Who can help us understand truth?* (Ask God for the Holy Spirit to guide you into all **truth!**)

Jesus **is** the **truth** (John 14:6) in His written Word.

Jesus is not Lord of our life unless He's also Lord of our time. Time with Jesus should come before we get distracted using our phones or electronic devices, before we check our emails or social media accounts, and before we engage in work or business. We can discern the leading of the Holy Spirit better while we study the Word when His voice is not competing with technology that we have already opened before the Word! Our goal should always be to meet with Jesus before starting our day or meeting with others.

(Struggling with always being distracted with those digital devices or smartphones? See tips in Appendix 5 for healthier digital habits.)

Read: John 5:39.

What did Jesus say was the focus of all God's Word? (All Scripture points to and testifies of Jesus.)

Practice: Divide into groups of two and spend 5–7 minutes studying these verses:

1. Compare Proverbs 12:3 and Psalm 16:8. (Who is the root of the righteous?)

2. Compare Proverbs 12:12 and John 15:1–5. (How do you see a fresh picture of Jesus in these passages?)

Read: Jeremiah 29:13

Who should we be seeking as we study God's Word? (Jesus! If we seek Him with all our hearts, we will find Him!)

Treasure-Seeking Activity

- Before meeting, hide a few coins (or small change) in the room where your small group meets. Hide it well!
- Ask for a volunteer who loves treasure hunts.
- Ask the volunteer to look for the coins.
- If the person doesn't find them, ask how long he or she would be willing to look until the coins were found? If the money is found, you can still ask this question as if it were not found. (Most will say that they wouldn't look long because it's not that valuable!)
- Now, hold up a \$10 dollar bill (or some large money amount in local currency) and ask how long they would look until they found it. (If you feel generous, you can hide this and give it to whoever finds it!)
- Now hold up a fake \$10,000 bill (or large amount of money) and ask how long they would look until they found it. (We all would keep looking until we found it!)

As the miner discovers veins of precious metal concealed beneath the surface of the earth, so will he who perseveringly searches the Word of God as for hid treasure find truths of the greatest value, which are concealed from the view of the careless seeker (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 90).

Pray: *Are you willing to pray and ask God to help you search His Word as for valuable buried treasure? Let's pray again!*

Read: Matthew 7:24 and John 14:23.

What should our priority be after finding Jesus in God's Word? (The Word of God must be practiced, not merely heard. How we honor God's Word is actually a reflection of how we love the God of the Word. Think on that for a moment!)

God the Father loves to give us the Holy Spirit, so we can see Jesus Christ in every part of the written Word! And as we look for Jesus, our love for His Word will grow.

How Can We Have Meaningful Time with God in Prayer?

Read: Psalm 100:4.

How should we begin our time in prayer? (Come into God's presence with thanksgiving and praise.)

What is the difference between thanksgiving and praise?

- Thanksgiving is more focused on what God has done for you and me: His provision, protection, etc.
- Praise declares **who** God is: His names, His strength, His character, etc. Praise and adoration are completely God-focused.

Read: Isaiah 6:5 and 1 John 1:9.

When we praise God for who He is and gain a deeper sense of His awesome holiness, we will realize our own sinfulness afresh. What should we do with our sense of sin? (Confess your sins and find your forgiveness and cleansing in Jesus.)

Read: Matthew 7:7, 8.

What does Jesus invite us to do? What does He promise? (Jesus invites us not just to ask but also to seek and to knock. This shows our growing intensity, activity, and earnestness in prayer. When we pray with perseverance, asking in His name and according to His will, He promises to answer. See John 14:14 and 1 John 5:14.)

Read: John 6:37.

Will Jesus ever turn us away when we come to Him? (Never! If you are hungering and thirsting for more of Him, no matter your condition or circumstances, He will welcome you with open arms. He just says, “Come!”)

There is no danger that the Lord will neglect the prayers of His people. The danger is that in temptation and trial they will become discouraged, and fail to persevere in prayer (Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 175.1).

Every day, look for a fresh picture of Jesus in the written Word of God. Pray and apply what you have discovered to the way you live and how you worship Him. Take the promises of God, personalize them, and pray over them, applying them to your daily needs. God’s Word is not just meant to be read through; it is also meant to be prayed through.

To learn how to get started praying the Word, scan this QR code with your phone camera or visit: <https://bit.ly/PrayingThePromises>.



SILENT ACTIVITY

1. Set a timer for one minute and sit still, waiting for it to ring without looking at the clock.
2. Afterward, ask yourself how long that minute felt. Did it seem like an eternity? Was it awkward to sit still for that long?
3. We humans don’t deal well with silence. We feel a need to “fill” empty space with music, busyness, scrolling through our messages or social media, and other activities and noise. But God is calling us out of all those distractions, in the early morning while all is quiet, to be still and to wait on Him. (See Ps. 46:10 and Ps. 25:4, 5.)

4. As we wait on Him through time in His Word and prayer, we will see clearer and clearer pictures of who Jesus is, and our hearts will long for more and more and more of Him.

PRACTICE

1. Give everyone seven minutes to:
 - a. Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal a fresh picture of Jesus in God's Word.
 - b. Read Matthew 14:13–21 and look for a fresh picture of Jesus.
2. Give everyone seven minutes to pray and read the passage again, asking God how He wants them to apply this passage to their lives right now.
3. Give everyone seven minutes to share their discoveries and convictions in twos.

Invite all who are convicted to have a deeper walk with God in His Word and in prayer to kneel.

Pray: *Dear Father God, forgive us for the times we have lost the true focus of searching for Your Son in Your Word. Help us to find Jesus in Your Word daily and to apply what we read to our lives. Deepen our prayer life so that it becomes the most life-giving, meaningful conversation in our day! In Jesus' name, amen.*

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 3

Every day, with a prayerful heart, search for a fresh picture of Jesus in God's Word. Ask God to impress you with how you should apply it to your life for that day. Live accordingly!

For a richer study, review the life of Joseph in Genesis 37–47. Ask yourself, "How does the story of Joseph give us new pictures of Jesus?" There are dozens of parallels. (Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 239, to find some illustrations.)

Another rich study is reading through the entire book of Revelation with one purpose: to find fresh pictures of Jesus. You will be amazed at what you discover!

Looking for fresh and meaningful ways on how to read and study God's Word? Read Appendix 7, "Keys to Experiencing God's Word."

BACK TO THE ALTAR - PRINCIPLE 4

Every Day... Receive a Fresh Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Are you longing for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit daily? Are you specifically asking for it? You can have it!

Plead for the Holy Spirit. God stands back of every promise He has made. With your Bible in your hands say, I have done as Thou hast said. I present Thy promise, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 147).

There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out his Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation (Ellen G. White, *Review & Herald*, March 22, 1887, par. 7).

Pray: As you begin to study (or prepare to teach) this Back to the Altar lesson, ask God to search your heart (Ps. 139:23, 24; Isa. 59:1, 2) and remove any roadblocks so that He can send the Holy Spirit to baptize you afresh each day. Pray that He would give you a hunger for that baptism today and daily.

Small Group Leader’s Guide

CARE

1. In your small group, ask: *What is your favorite thing that has happened to you this week?*

2. Let's review the Back to the Altar Principles:
 - **Principle 1: Come to Jesus as you are!**
 - **Principle 2: Honor Jesus as Lord.**
 - Part I: Ask God to awaken you each morning to have unrushed time alone with Him.
 - Part II: Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.
 - Part III: By the power of Jesus who lives within you by faith, follow His lead in all your choices through the day.
 - **Principle 3: Discover Jesus in His Word and in prayer.**
3. How did you do on Principle 3? (The challenge: Every day prayerfully search for a fresh picture of Jesus in God's Word. You were to ask God to impress you with how you should apply it to your life for that day and to live accordingly.)
4. Partner with someone. Ask each other: "How did God help you live the challenge from last time?" Give pairs 2–3 minutes to share. Afterward, ask if anyone would be willing to share what God did in their lives as they accepted the challenge.

CONNECT

1. Gather in teams of two. Each team has five minutes to use whatever objects are at their disposal to demonstrate what it means to be "completely immersed." Encourage them to share their demonstration with another team of two.
2. What does this experience have to do with the Holy Spirit? As believers today, would you say we are fully immersed in the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

Today we will explore what it means to ask for and receive the daily baptism of the Holy Spirit.

DISCOVER

Pray: *Dear Father in heaven, bring us a thirst for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Please send the Holy Spirit to teach us about this Gift. In Jesus' name, amen.*

How Can We Be Baptized by the Holy Spirit?

Leaders: Have everyone work in their groups. Have each group look up the following four passages and answer this question: What are the five steps to being daily baptized by the Holy Spirit?

John 7:37–39

Step 1: Come to Jesus with thirst and believe in Him.

Acts 2:38

Step 2: Repent.

Step 3: Be baptized with water.

Acts 5:32

Step 4: Obey God.

Obedience is the test of discipleship. It is the keeping of the commandments that proves the sincerity of our professions of love. When the doctrine we accept kills sin in the heart, purifies the soul from defilement, bears fruit unto holiness, we may know that it is the truth of God (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, p. 146).

Luke 11:13

Step 5: Ask God the Father for this Gift.

In *Christ's Object Lessons*, we have the following description of Jesus while He was on earth:

Not for Himself, but for others, He lived and thought and prayed. From hours spent with God He came forth

morning by morning, to bring the light of heaven to men. *Daily* He received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit (Ellen G. White, p. 139, emphasis added).

Oh, how our hearts should be moved to know that Jesus Himself received a daily baptism of the Holy Spirit! Since He needed this Gift, how much more do we need this Gift every moment of our lives!

There are two major results from receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

- We receive the **fruit** of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).
- We have the power to **be** a witness for Christ (Acts 1:8).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit transforms us on the inside to give us the character of Christ and transforms us on the outside so that we are a witness for Christ in all we say and do. God the Father is the Giver of all good gifts, and He takes great joy in giving us the Gift of the Holy Spirit every day.

ACTIVITY

Here we will demonstrate the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Materials Needed: large bowl/basin, large sponge, large rock, 2-3 large pitchers of water, and a small plastic cup or drinking glass.

Soft-Heart Illustration

- Pour water over the rock. Say: *If we have a hard heart — one of stone — we can't absorb the water of the Holy Spirit. Things like pride, bitterness, and anger make our hearts hard.*
- Read Ezekiel 36:26, 27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in

My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

- Pour water over the sponge and say: *God will give us a new heart and a new Spirit, and our soft heart will be like a sponge that can soak up the Spirit who will transform our ways. And He can flow (be squeezed) from us, so we are like Jesus in our interactions with others.*
- Demonstrate how easily the Holy Spirit can be “squeezed out” to others when we have a “soft” heart of flesh.

Filled-to-Overflowing Illustration

- To continue the previous illustration, hold the cup over the large bowl/basin. Say: *This cup is us. It looks nice, but what use is it without something inside?*
- Have someone fill the cup halfway with water. Ask: *Is this how much of the Holy Spirit we want?* (No!) Fill it up 3/4 of the way and ask the same question. (No!)
- Ask: *How much of our heart do we want filled with the Holy Spirit?* (All of it!)
- Have the person continue slowly pouring the water, letting it fill the glass and overflow abundantly into the bowl/basin. Say: *When we are filled to overflowing with the Spirit, He can't help but overflow into other people's lives in our sphere of influence.*
- Stop pouring and ask: *But are we content to just overflow once?*
- Keep pouring the water again, using all the water in the first pitcher. Say: *No, we want to continue asking for MORE.*
- Start pouring from second pitcher. Ask: *Is there ever a time we should stop asking for this daily overflowing baptism?* (No!)

- Keep pouring. Say: *Don't forget to ask daily for the baptism of the Holy Spirit so you can be effective witnesses for Him, always overflowing with much to give for God's glory!*

Leader: Share a short (5-10 minute) personal testimony about how God changed your hard heart to a soft one. (*If you aren't sure what to share in a testimony, see Appendix 2.*)

PRACTICE

Give everyone five minutes to pray through the five steps to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. Come to Jesus with thirst and believe in Him.
2. Repent.
3. Be baptized with water.
4. Obey God.
5. Ask God the Father for this Gift.

Ask: *Is there anything you need to do that you haven't yet done so you can receive the fullness of this gift?*

Will we wrestle with God in prayer? Will we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? This is what we need and may have at this time.... If we will walk humbly with God, God will walk with us (Ellen G. White, *Prayer*, p. 87).

Pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us for not longing after the Gift You promised. Help us to ask for and receive the baptism of Your Holy Spirit every day. Transform our hearts to have the loving character of Jesus. Make us a fearless witness for Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.*

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 4

Every day ask for and receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. Practice receiving this Gift by faith, not by feeling. Follow His lead. **And keep asking for more!**

All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind.... Through co-operation with Christ, they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 827).

BACK TO THE ALTAR – PRINCIPLE 5

Every Day...

Love Your Family Sacrificially

Of John the Baptist it is written: “And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him (Christ) in the spirit and power of Elijah, **to turn the hearts of fathers back to their children**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17, emphasis added).

Author’s Testimony

In 1999, on a cold winter night in Michigan, I heard Elijah’s call to turn my heart back to my children. I did not hear this call through the preaching of a sermon from the pulpit or from a chapter in a book. I heard Elijah’s call through the cries of my children.

I was gathering my papers and briefcase so I could run out the door to an important meeting to plan the building of a larger church. I was in a rush. My children, Jason and Julie, were 6 and 3 years old. They heard me getting ready to leave. They ran up to me, asking, “Where are you going, Daddy?”

“I am going to a meeting,” I replied factually.

“Daddy, stay home tonight!” they pleaded. “You are always gone! Daddy, you never play with us anymore!”

I leaned over to give my son and daughter quick hugs and kisses. Their little arms wrapped around me tightly. When I tried to stand up, they would not let me go! They clung to me with desperation. They were trying to keep their over-committed daddy home.

I had to gently pry their arms off my neck so I could go. They started crying. “Daddy, just tonight! Please stay home!”

I backed out of the house and closed the door. As I walked out into the snow, the picture of my children crying and reaching out to me lingered heavily on my heart. As I trudged through the snow to my church meeting, God spoke to my heart. He called me by name. I stopped in my tracks. On that night, as the snow silently fell around me, God called me back to my children. He had first spoken through the cries and the love of my children: “Daddy, stay home!”

That was a very difficult call for me. I was often out seven nights a week, helping others while neglecting my own children. It was a painful call but a call of mercy that led to healing between me, Jason, and Julie.

From that day forward, I began to say no to many requests so I could say yes to my family. It was not easy! God helped me to begin safeguarding time with each child, just as my wife, April, and I had prioritized our time together.

At first, my children were not interested in spending time with me. I had said no to their requests to play too many times. Often, I felt like a failure. But the call of Elijah comes with the healing power of the Lord. The Lord helped my children to forgive me. He literally turned my heart to them and their little hearts back to me. Praise God!

John, with the same Holy Spirit power of Elijah, prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah. Like Elijah, John called for revival. He preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2).

John, like Elijah, called the hearts of the fathers back to their children. Today, we are commissioned to do likewise.

John prepared the people of the first century to receive Jesus as the Messiah. Today, we are called to prepare people to receive Jesus as the King of kings who will come in the clouds!

The healing of the family is a pivotal part of revival, and it is a pivotal part of coming back to the altar. Revival must be the daily heartbeat of our homes. Worship at the altar as a family must be the heartbeat of our homes. As our families experience a daily revival with Jesus through worship, time in His written Word, and prayer, the Spirit of God is preparing us to meet Jesus soon! Now is the time to live the message of Elijah for these last days!

Pray: *As you begin to study (or prepare to teach) this Back to the Altar principle, ask God to give you fresh eyes to see the needs of your family members. Pray that He will show you how to love and serve each member of your family intentionally and sacrificially and how to call them, with you, back to the altar of daily worship.*

Small Group Leader's Guide

CARE

1. Ask: *What song best describes your week?* Have group members share the title of their song and the reason they chose it.
2. Ask: *What are the Back to the Altar principles up to this point?*
 - **Principle 1: Come to Jesus as you are!**
 - **Principle 2: Honor Jesus as Lord.**
 - Part I: Ask God to awaken you each morning to have unrushed time alone with Him.

- **Part II:** Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.
 - **Part III:** By the power of Jesus who lives within you by faith, follow His lead in all your choices through the day.
 - **Principle 3: Discover Jesus in His Word and in prayer.**
 - **Principle 4: Ask for and receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.**
3. Team up in groups of two. Ask one another, “How did God help you live the challenge from last time, asking for and receiving a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit?” Give pairs 2–3 minutes to share. Ask the larger group if anyone would be willing to share what God did in their lives as they accepted the challenge.

CONNECT

1. Have everyone team up in twos and ask each other: “What is your favorite family memory and why?”
2. After one minute, ask: *What ingredients make up a good family memory? What would God love to do with our families before Jesus returns to take us all home?*

Today we will explore how to love our family sacrificially.

DISCOVER

Pray: *Dear Father God, thank You for our families. We find both the greatest love and the greatest hate within families. Thank You for being the Healer of every hurt. Open our hearts to receive what the Holy Spirit teaches us through Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

How to Love Your Family Sacrificially

Read: Romans 13:8.

Ask: *What kind of debt does God ask you to keep?* (Owe nothing except to love each other.)

Read: Ephesians 4:29–32.

Ask: *What filter should we use for all our conversations?* (Speak only what builds up.)

Ask: *What should we do with resentment and bitterness?* (Put away all bitterness.)

Ask: *To what level should we forgive each other?* (Forgive each other as Christ forgave you.)

Read: Matthew 5:23, 24.

Ask: *How should we apply this passage to our time of personal or family worship?* (If possible, seek reconciliation before you worship. If you've spoken harshly to your spouse or children or if you've done something that has wounded the hearts of your family members won't be with you in worship. However, if you have apologized and sought to right any wrongs before starting worship, they will likely be much more receptive to your leading.)

Read: Ephesians 6:12.

Ask: *Who are we really fighting against when we have conflict in our home and family?* (We are warring against spiritual powers and wickedness in high places. If we recognize who our true enemy is — Satan, not each other — and remember that we and our family members are on the winning side, what a difference it will make in helping us forgive and work through conflict.)

Ask: *What do you do when you feel like you cannot forgive someone in your family?*

Read: Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

Ask: *Who performs this heart surgery — you or someone else? How many promises does God give you in this passage?* (God does this surgery. He is the only one who can do it! He makes 6–9 promises in this passage, depending on what Bible translation you are reading.)

Ask God to do heart surgery on you to remove your bitterness toward that specific person. Ask God to completely free you from resentment. Ask God to give you a new heart of love and forgiveness and to flood your heart with the Holy Spirit.

Read: Ephesians 5:21–33.

Ask: *How is verse 21 the key to a Christlike marriage?* (Submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. This counsel gives context for the rest of the counsel. If followed, all desire for supremacy over one another would be surrendered to Christ!)

Ask: *In verses 22-24, what counsel does God give to wives? How does verse 33 provide the summary?* (Love your husband with respect.)

Ask: *In verses 25-29, what counsel does God give to husbands? How does verse 25 summarize the role of the husband?* (Love your wife sacrificially, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.)

Read: Malachi 4:5, 6.

Ask: *What two promises does God give parents and children in the last days?* (God will turn the hearts of parents back to their children and the hearts of children back to their parents. Part of God's plan for the last days is for family relationships to be restored.)

Humbling ourselves before God so that He can restore our hearts with our children and parents needs to happen

before we can be a part of the Deuteronomy model of discipling new generations for Christ.

Teach and Talk About God's Word!

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4–6.

Ask: *How do verses 4–6 call us to a revival with God?* (God calls us to love the Lord our God with **all** our hearts.)

When God does this revival in our hearts, we are ready for His counsel in verse 7.

Read: Deuteronomy 6:7–9.

Ask: *Who is to teach our children?* (Parents, teach God's Word to "your sons" — your children.)

Ask: *In what way are parents to teach/disciple their children?*

"When you sit in your house"

Ask: *When do parents and children sit together?* (Commuting to school, at church, eating a meal, watching a video, playing a game, working on a craft or project, etc.)

"When you walk by the way"

Ask: *When do parents and children walk together?* (Getting groceries, walking from the car or to the bus stop, going on a hike, working in the garden or yard, cleaning the house)

"When you lie down"

Ask: *What conversations for Christ could you have with your children before they sleep?* (Maybe ask them about their day. What was their favorite part of the day? What was the worst part of the day? Ask them how you can pray for them.)

“When you rise up”

Ask: *What conversations for Christ could you have when your children start their day? How could you make family worship more engaging and interactive? (See Appendix 3 for creating family worships.)*

Look for ways to model to your children how to:

- Come to Jesus as they are.
- Worship Him in adoration.
- Surrender to Jesus as Lord first thing in the morning.
- Find Jesus in God’s Word and in prayer.
- Apply God’s Word to their lives.
- Ask for and receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Don’t forget to pray a blessing over your children each day.

Bind God’s Word to Your Actions and Thoughts

Continuing with Deuteronomy 6:7–9:

“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand.”

Ask: *What do you think it means to bind God’s Word to our hands? (Our actions should be true to God’s Word.)*

“And they shall be frontals on your forehead.”

Ask: *What do you think it means to have God’s Word on your forehead? (Our thoughts and attitudes should be true to God’s Word.)*

Make God’s Word the Welcome and Witness of Your Front Door

“You shall write them on the door posts of your house.”

Ask: *How can you make God’s Word into a “welcome and witness” to all who come into your home?* (Possible example: Place a Bible promise above an inside door. Prayerfully place Bible promises in different rooms of your home, matching texts with activities that might take place in those rooms — eating, sleeping, studying, etc. Using wet-erase markers, write a Bible verse on the mirror of a bathroom.)

Make God’s Word the Welcome and Witness of the Entry to Your Property

“You shall write them...on your gates.”

Ask: *What can you do to make God’s Word the welcome and witness of your property?* (Invite your guests to join you on a Bible prayer walk on your property. If you don’t have much property or don’t live where you can do Bible prayer walks in nature, walk your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors — and let them know you are praying for them. Ask, when possible, how you can pray for them.)

For ideas for Bible prayer walks, see the book Meet Jesus Outside: Bible Prayer Walks, downloadable for free at indisicpleship.org.

Is it sometimes difficult to love your family? God always has enough love to pour out **through** us to family members who are tough to love or forgive. God **is** our **forgiveness** to the unforgivable people in our lives. God **is** our **healing** to restore in our marriages and family relationships what we alone could never have the power to restore!

PRACTICE

1. Pray and ask God:
 - a. What specific thing does each person in my immediate family need from me to know that I love him or her?
 - b. Who in my family needs to be forgiven or needs my apology?
 - c. What is my next step?
2. Hear and believe what God promises you:

“Ah Lord God! Behold, You Yourself have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You” (Jer. 32:17).

“And my God will supply **all** your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

Consider this...

One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached. Such a family gives evidence that the parents have been successful in following God's directions, and that their children will serve Him in the church. Their influence grows; for as they impart, they receive to impart again. The father and mother find helpers in their children, who give to others the instruction received in the home. The neighborhood in which they live is helped, for in it they have become enriched for time and for eternity. The whole family is engaged in the service of the Master; and by their godly example, others are inspired to be faithful and true to God in dealing with His flock, His beautiful flock.

The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-

disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 32).

Pray: *Dear Father God, when You think of our families, You remind us that nothing is too difficult for You! You tell us in Your Word that You will supply all our needs according to Your riches, not ours. We surrender our fears and worries as well as our deepest wounds to you — trusting ourselves and our families to Your healing love. Give us Your love so that we may love each member of our family as You love them. Thank You for hearing this prayer. In Jesus' name, amen.*

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 5

Take your next step this week, trusting God to help you do what He has convicted you to do to love your family sacrificially.

BACK TO THE ALTAR – PRINCIPLE 6

Every Day...

Disciple Others to Jesus

“Do you love me?” That’s the question Jesus asked Peter when giving him his commission as a disciple-maker for the heavenly Kingdom.

The question that Christ had put to Peter was significant. He mentioned only one condition of discipleship and service. “Lovest thou Me?” He said. This is the essential qualification. Though Peter might possess every other, yet without the love of Christ he could not be a faithful shepherd over the Lord’s flock. Knowledge, benevolence, eloquence, gratitude, and zeal are all aids in the good work; but without the love of Jesus in the heart, the work of the Christian minister is a failure (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 815.2).

The Bible tells us, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37–40).

The foundation of being a true disciple-maker for Jesus is love! We love because He first loved us.

Pray: As you begin to study (or prepare to teach) this Back to the Altar principle, ask God to give you the love and humility you need to sacrificially serve and disciple others to Jesus. Remember, Jesus would have given up everything and come to die on the cross for just one to be in the Kingdom.

Small Group Leader's Guide

CARE

1. Have group members ask each other: "If you could have anything you needed right now, what would you ask for?"
2. Let's review the Back to the Altar principles:
 - **Principle 1: Come to Jesus as you are!**
 - **Principle 2: Honor Jesus as Lord.**
 - Part I: Ask God to awaken you each morning to have unrushed time alone with Him.
 - Part II: Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.
 - Part III: By the power of Jesus who lives within you by faith, follow His lead in all your choices through the day.
 - **Principle 3: Discover Jesus in His Word and in prayer.**
 - **Principle 4: Ask for and receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.**
 - **Principle 5: Love your family sacrificially.**
3. Have members team up in groups of two and ask each other: "How did God help you live the challenge from last time?" (The challenge was: Take your next step, trusting God to help you do what He has convicted you to do next to love your family sacrificially.)
4. Give pairs 2–3 minutes to share. Ask the larger group if anyone would be willing to share what God did in their lives as they accepted the challenge.

CONNECT

1. Invite everyone to team up in groups of two. Give each team a small object that has a known purpose (examples: a tool, fruit, baby bib, comb, etc.). Give

each team four minutes to demonstrate the value of the object, how to care for it, and how to use it in a meaningful way and teach someone else to do the same.

2. What did someone do that you found effective in helping you to become interested in the item, want to use that item, and desire to share it with others? What can we learn from this activity that we can apply to making disciples for Christ?

Today we will explore what it means to disciple others to Jesus.

DISCOVER

Pray: *Eternal Father, Your Son Jesus called us to make disciples all around the world. Please send the Holy Spirit to help us to be faithful to our calling. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Why should we accept the call to become disciple-makers?

We Are Commanded to Make Disciple-Makers!

Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18–20)! He commands us to make disciples.

Disciples = Disciple-Makers. The two must be **one**.

However, if we are to be disciple-makers, we must follow the ways of Jesus, the Master Disciple-Maker.

Jesus' Disciple-Making Method

1. **Read:** Luke 6:12–16.
Spend a night of prayer before choosing “the twelve.” In other words, take a night for intentional prayer to ask God who He wants you to disciple and

mentor. (*Wondering how to spend a night of prayer?*
See Appendix 1.)

2. **Read:** Matthew 4:18–20.
 - a. Go and visit potential disciples where they live/work.
 - b. Invite them to follow you as you follow Jesus, to work with you as you work for Jesus, and to engage with you in ministry as you serve Jesus.
 - c. Train your mentees to become fishers of men.
3. **Read:** Mark 3:13, 14 and Matthew 4:23.
 - a. Invite your disciples to be with you. Give time and opportunities through all different types of daily life and ministry activities, interacting with them so they can observe how you follow Jesus, how you pray, how you act when you are tired, how you react when you are stressed, and how you study God’s Word.

It was by personal contact and association that Jesus trained His disciples. Sometimes He taught them, sitting among them on the mountainside; sometimes beside the sea, or walking with them by the way, He revealed the mysteries of the kingdom of God. He did not sermonize as men do today. Wherever hearts were open to receive the divine message, He unfolded the truths of the way of salvation. He did not command His disciples to do this or that, but said, “Follow Me.” On His journeys through country and cities He took them with Him, that they might see how He taught the people. He linked their interest with His, and they united with Him in the work (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 152).

- b. Send them out to preach and teach, believing that the One who called you will call and empower them.
4. **Read:** Luke 9:1, 2.
- a. Call them to ask God to receive power through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Instruct them that, through the name of Jesus, they have authority over all evil spirits and powers of darkness.
 - c. Teach them to pray for the sick. Show them how to add their prayers to healthy lifestyle education and natural treatments for the healing of disease. *(For practical tips on healthy living, see Appendix 6.)*
 - d. Send them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and bring healing to sin-sick hearts and souls through the power of God's Word.

Our Father God disciplined Jesus morning by morning while He was on earth (see Isa. 50:4). Our Father God and the Holy Spirit are just as interested and invested in discipling us to be disciple-makers as Jesus is Himself.

PRACTICE

“Disciple Me” Game

1. Ask group members to take blank pieces of paper and write down one simple spiritual principle or habit they have added to their daily routine to foster their relationship with Jesus. Clarify that this principle or habit should be:
 - Meaningful to building a relationship with Jesus
 - Short and simple
 - Easily adopted by anyone
2. Have participants form two lines facing each other, roughly 10 feet (3 meters) apart. Both lines should have an equal number of people.

3. Explain to both lines that the person directly across from them will be their disciple in the game.
4. Describe the scene: *There is a gulf 1,000 feet (300 meters) deep that separates you from each other. God has appointed you to disciple each other across this deep chasm.*
5. Have participants crumple their papers and, on the count of 10, throw them to their respective disciple. (It is important that these papers do not fall in the gulf that separates them. If they do, the teams on both sides must work together to pick these up without anyone going into the chasm.)
6. Now transition to active, intentional discipling between the two disciple partners.
7. Highlight the following steps for those that must remain on both sides of the line:
 - Read your disciple-maker's note that was just thrown to you.
 - Have each disciple-maker explain what he or she wrote.
 - If questions arise, answer each other's questions.
 - Have each disciple-maker challenge the other to practice what is written down and then say, "See you next week!"
8. Have disciple partners turn away from each other as if to be apart for the week and pray for their respective disciple, asking that each would practice what was shared with him or her.
9. Say: *One week has passed. Face your disciple again.*
10. Engage in dialogue and ask both lines: *What could this great divide, chasm, or gulf represent in our lives? What kinds of things can separate us from someone we are trying to disciple?* (Possible answers: age, race, language, socioeconomics, level of education, etc.)

11. Optional exercise to show the necessity of the baptism of the Holy Spirit:
 - Give participants a small piece of a sponge and tell them that this represents us and our witness. On the count of 3, have everyone throw the sponge pieces to their respective partners. (They won't go very far!)
 - Then, provide a pitcher of water and let members soak the sponge pieces in it. On the count of 3, repeat the exercise. (The sponges will probably reach the partners! Partners may have gotten a little wet when they caught the sponge.)
 - The water is the power of the Holy Spirit (make reference to the Holy Spirit demonstration). The power of the Holy Spirit makes our disciple-making process effective.
12. Say: *Although there are obstacles that create this divide, the Holy Spirit is eager to build a bridge from us to anyone He has called us to disciple. Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill in the gaps and make your witness effective!* [Pause for silent prayer.]
13. Say: *Take your imaginary shovel and fill in the gap between the lines.* Afterward, say, *When we ask for His help, He will fill in the gaps that separate us.*
14. Now that the chasm has been filled, invite the disciples to meet together side by side. Have disciple partners use their imaginations to ask and answer this question: How did the challenge go for you last week?
15. Have partners tell each other a testimony about what they had written down and how it has impacted their relationship with Jesus.
16. Have them challenge their disciple partner again to practice this principle and, this time, pray with their disciple.

17. Have disciple partners turn away from each other to represent time apart. Then, have them face each other again.
18. Say to the group: *We will assume that you have been seeing each other over several weeks and that you know your disciple understands, makes personal, and practices what you have shared with him or her. Now challenge your disciple, in turn, to share what he or she has learned from you with someone else in the room. Note that how you disciple them will be how they disciple others. Therefore, be intentional!*
19. Allow a few minutes for disciple-makers to spread out and find another disciple partner to teach what was just taught to them. This goes two ways. Then have them pray for one another.
20. Invite each disciple to find their original disciple-making partner. Have them ask each other: "How did it go as you shared what I gave you with someone else?"
21. Explain that, over time, you want to see the discipleship principles that you teach go:
 - from head (understanding)
 - to heart (desire)
 - to hand (practice)
 - to feet (moving to go tell others)
22. Share a short, personal testimony, if possible.
23. Invite members to kneel in humility before their Lord Jesus.
24. Make a call: *Who wants to be more intentional in discipling others? Who is willing to do a night or day of prayer to ask God who He wants you to disciple? If you want to take this challenge, kneel with me in humility before our Lord Jesus as we pray for strength to do what He is calling us to do.*

Pray: *Dear Father in heaven, we have little time left to follow our Savior's command to go and make disciples*

around the world. We have given others information about Jesus yet made few disciples of Jesus. Forgive us for not being willing to pay the price that disciple-making costs. To make a disciple costs our time when we have too much to do. It costs our comfort when we are weary. It costs our reputation when the Holy Spirit sends us to someone we do not want to see. It cost Jesus His life to make the way back to the altar to disciple us. Send us the Holy Spirit to empower us to make disciples of Jesus who walk with Him, talk with Him, and share Him with heart-pounding power. In Jesus' name, amen.

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 6

Be intentional about discipling someone to Jesus. Do a “night” or special time of prayer to ask God **who** He wants you to disciple and **how**. Spread it out before the Lord. Pray, and go share it with that person.

Remember...

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.” There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

BACK TO THE ALTAR – PRINCIPLE 7

Every Day...

Live Your God-Given Mission

When we were children, we had dreams of what we wanted to be when we grew up. Stop and think a moment about those childhood dreams. Did any of those dreams come true in your life?

Just as God gave you precious dreams as a child, He has precious dreams for your life today. No matter where you've been or what you've done, no matter your age, your gender, your education or lack thereof, where you live, or your qualifications, if you are willing, God will use you.

To His servants Christ commits “His goods” — something to be put to use for Him. He gives “to every man his work.” Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in cooperation with Christ for the salvation of souls. Not more surely is the place prepared for us in heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 326).

Yes, Jesus has a special **mission** just for you. As David Livingstone, the famous missionary to Africa, once said, “If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, why is a commission by the Heavenly King considered a sacrifice?”

Pray: *As you begin to study (or prepare to teach) the last Back to the Altar principle, ask God to give you courage to step out of your comfort zone in whatever ways He's calling you to serve. While we each have certain gifts and*

strengths, remember, it's not about being qualified; it's about being called. He qualifies everyone He calls who will humbly lean on Him.

Small Group Leader's Guide

CARE

1. Ask small groups: *Which principle of living as a disciple is most meaningful to you? Why?*
2. Let's review the Back to the Altar principles:
 - **Principle 1: Come to Jesus as you are!**
 - **Principle 2: Honor Jesus as Lord.**
 - Part I: Ask God to awaken you each morning to have unrushed time alone with Him.
 - Part II: Every morning, make it your first priority to focus on who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Then surrender all that you are, all that you have, and even your attitude and electronics to Jesus as Lord.
 - Part III: By the power of Jesus who lives within you by faith, follow His lead in all your choices through the day.
 - **Principle 3: Discover Jesus in His Word and in prayer.**
 - **Principle 4: Ask for and receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.**
 - **Principle 5: Love your family sacrificially.**
 - **Principle 6: Disciple others to Jesus.**
3. What was last meeting's challenge? (Take the idea you received in the "Disciple Me" game and spread it out before the Lord. Pray on it. Practice it. Ask God who He wants you to share it with. Pray, and go share it with that person.)
4. Team up in twos and ask one another: "How did God help you live the challenge from last week?" Give pairs 2–3 minutes to share. Ask the larger group if anyone would be willing to share what God did in their lives as they accepted the challenge.

CONNECT

1. Team everyone up in groups of two. Say: *Imagine that a billionaire tells you he will build you the house of your dreams and pay for it, along with land up to ten acres, anywhere in the world. What would you say?*
2. After the groups of two have shared with each other for two minutes, ask if anyone would like to share with the larger group.
3. It can be fun to dream about the house we would love to live in! What dreams do you think God has for you? (Take responses.)
4. We know God has something special planned for us in heaven, but do we take time to discover what God has dreamed up for us to do for Him **now** — before He comes to take us home to heaven?

Today we will explore our unique and special calling. God has a mission for your life and mine. There is a reason why He chose us to live and serve Him **now**.

DISCOVER

Pray: *Dear Creator God, You created the heavens and the earth with limitless beauty. You created us as Your children, each one unique and special. Awaken us to the dreams and plans You have for our lives. Please, Father, do not let us miss the holy purpose for which You brought us into this world. Show us how to live and serve You now — today! Show us how our lives can be used for Your Kingdom and give You glory and honor. In Jesus' name, amen.*

What does God know about you?

Read: Psalm 139:1–6, 13–15.
List what God knows about **you**.

Read: Psalm 139:16 and Ephesians 2:10.

What does God have down in writing? What has He planned for you beforehand? (He has all the days of your life written down; He has had good works planned for you since before you were born. He has a mission for **you!**)

Let's explore who God created us to be and learn how we may serve Him in our own unique way now.

Discover Your God-Given Mission!

ACTIVITY: Exploring Questions to Learn Where to Serve God

Humbly pray before you begin exploring. Surrender your life to Jesus Christ. Ask God to send His Holy Spirit to guide you in this process.

1. What are my spiritual gifts?

List all that you think you have. Circle your top 3–5 spiritual gifts.

- 1 Corinthians 12:4–11
- Romans 12:6–8, 13
- Ephesians 4:11, 12
- 1 Peter 4:9–11
- Exodus 31:1–5

2. When did I feel the most:

- Free — to be who God made me to be?
- Flow — to serve people I love to help and tackle issues I care about in a way that utilizes my natural gifts?
- Joy?
- Used of God?
- Positive feedback from people who responded to my service by moving toward God?

Briefly share three times in your life when those five things were present for you.

3. **Who do I like to help?**

List all the types/categories of people you have a heart to help. Circle the top 3–5.

4. **What issues do I care about?**

List issues that are being neglected in your world that make you angry. Or list issues you have a passion to address.

5. **What do others see in me?**

Send your answers to the last four questions to five people who have the following criteria:

- They know you well.
- They care about you.
- They walk with God.
- They have discernment.
- They will spend three days praying and reflecting on your answers and will respond to this question: In what specific ways do you think I could best serve God with my gifts, with a focus on people and on issues I care about?

Pray about the feedback these five people give you. Seek God's wisdom from James 1:5–8. Take steps of faith to serve God in the way He is calling you!

Live the Lord of the Harvest Prayer

Reflect on Matthew 9:35–38:

- Verse 35 – Jesus taught, proclaimed the gospel, and healed. These three went together!
- Verse 36 – Jesus saw the people and felt compassion for the crowd.

- Verse 37 – Jesus saw the harvest as plentiful but the workers as few.
- Verse 38 – Jesus tells His disciples to beg the Lord of the harvest to *ekballo* — that is, to hurl out workers into His harvest.

Matthew 10:16 – Jesus doesn’t just call us to pray that He will send out others into the harvest; He tells **us** to go ourselves! The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give us **all** good gifts and send us **all** out to be fearless and faithful in His mission!

Hurling into the Harvest – Closing Activity

- **Share:** We learned that Jesus wants to hurl us out into His harvest. He wants to throw you and me into the mission He has dreamed for us.
- **Instructions:** Have everyone take a piece of paper and write down an out-of-their-comfort zone mission that God might be nudging them to take. It could be witnessing to a neighbor down the street, making friends with the bully at school, or something much more daring like quitting a job and going to a faraway place to make disciples.
- After everyone has written something down, invite them to come together, forming a big circle with each person **facing outward**. Have them take the sheet of paper that they just wrote on and wad it up into a tight ball. Invite everyone to then hurl or throw the paper ball as far away from the circle as they can.
- **Ask:** *Would anyone like to share the out-of-your-comfort-zone mission that you just wrote and hurled into the harvest?*
- After a few responses, ask everyone who is willing to step out of their comfort zone to go to where their piece of paper fell and take five minutes to surrender to Jesus privately, asking Him to throw

them out into the mission He dreamed and planned for them before they were born!

- After five minutes, sing a short chorus to draw the group back together. Kneel and pray together.

Pray: *Dear Father in heaven, thank You for calling us to follow Your Son as His disciples! We surrender to Jesus as our Lord and ask that He will hurl us out into His harvest anywhere He wants to send us. Give us courage to obey immediately when He calls us on His gospel missions. In Jesus' name, amen.*

BACK TO THE ALTAR CHALLENGE – Principle 7

Complete the “Where to Serve God?” questions, ask for feedback from friends and family, pray over the results for God’s direction, and serve where He leads you!

In closing, remember this:

There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, by putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God. If men will endure the necessary discipline, without complaining or fainting by the way, God will teach them hour by hour, and day by day. He longs to reveal His grace. If His people will remove the obstructions, He will pour forth the waters of salvation in abundant streams through the human channels. If men in humble life were encouraged to do all the good they could do, if restraining hands were not laid upon them to repress their zeal, there would be a hundred workers for Christ where now there is one (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 250).

And whatever you do, keep things simple! Less preaching, more teaching, and more time in the Word.

There should be less preaching, and more teaching.... As we approach the end, I have seen that in these meetings there will be less preaching, and more Bible study. There will be little groups all over the grounds, with their Bibles in their hands, and different ones leading out in a free, conversational study of the Scriptures. This was the method that Christ taught His disciples (Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 407).

*Not by might, nor by power, **but by your Spirit,**
says the Lord of Hosts
(Zech. 4:6)*

The Next Step...

What If You Lived As a Disciple of Jesus?

Ask the group:

- *If you lived as a disciple of Jesus every day, what would be the result? (Wait for responses.)*
- *What would God like to do with us next as a group?*

Pray together in groups of two and then pray one prayer all together, asking God what He would like to do with the group. After praying, ask people to share. Make plans according to what God has revealed to the group.

God wants us to disciple:

- **Noahs**, who build what has never been built before.
- **Abrahams**, who leave their country to go to the land which God will show them.
- **Josephs**, who refuse to compromise and to whom God will entrust dreams to lead nations.
- **Moseses**, whom God will re-tool in their later years to lead His people where they should go.
- **Bezalels**, who will design and build what man cannot imagine.
- **Joshuas**, who dare to pray sun-stand-still prayers.
- **Deborahs**, who will lead God's people with wisdom from on high.
- **Samuels**, who in their childhood will hear God's voice, know Him, and call His people to faithfulness.
- **Ruths**, who refuse to let loss define them, will love whom God provides, and will leave a legacy of faith.
- **Jobs**, who are able businessmen, who will be faithful to God both in abundance and in tragic catastrophes, and who will provide for widows and orphans.

- **Elijahs**, who will confront wickedness in high places, call nations to revival, call fire from heaven, raise up Elishas, and cross Jordan Rivers.
- **Elishas**, who will pick up the mantle in their youth, strike the Jordan, cross over, and lead the mighty to know God.
- **Davids**, who will confront and slay giants and lead mighty men.
- **Issachars**, who know the times and what Israel should do.
- **Jonahs**, who stop running from God to be sent to call entire godless cities to repent and turn to Him.
- **Jeremiahs**, who prophesy truth even when people do not want to hear it.
- **Daniels**, who will not be bought or sold, who are true to God at any cost, who stand for Him against the crowd, who will lead nations and counsel heads of state and disciple the wicked in high places to walk with Him.
- **Esthers**, who will stand before the great men of the earth and risk their lives to help save God's people.
- **Marys**, who in their teens brave ridicule to say, "Behold, the bond slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to Your Word."
- **Mary Magdalenes**, who are transformed from women of the night to daughters of the Light, who stand by God's power alone and are healed by His resurrected presence.
- **Andrews**, who quietly and consistently bring seekers to Jesus.
- **Peters**, who leave their boats to join Jesus in walking on water.
- **Widows**, who give all they have to Jesus.
- **Lydias**, who will be entrepreneurs with a heart to serve and a home for hospitality.
- **Barnabases**, who are sons of encouragement and who mentor champions for Christ.

- **Lukes**, who will be missionary physicians, blending the gospel with medicine.
- **Josephs of Arimethea**, men of wealth who risk all for Christ and use their influence for His Kingdom.
- **Susannas**, who are walking testimonies of healing and redemption, who follow Jesus wherever He goes and support the ministry out of their own funds.
- **Pauls**, who will suffer and sacrifice comfort and security to take the Gospel to those who have never heard of Jesus, who will risk all to be apostles in inhospitable places, who write what must be written and proclaim freedom at the cost of their own lives to those crying out in the dark.

Appendix 1

Night of Prayer

Jesus' Example

“Now it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer with God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor” (Luke 6:12–16).

“The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

Challenge

Jesus took a night of prayer before He chose His twelve disciples. Take a night of prayer to worship God and ask and receive direction on two questions:

1. God, who do You want me to disciple to Christ at this time?
2. God, how do You want me to operate my life/ministry at this time?

Tips for Your Night of Prayer

- Come into God's presence with **thanksgiving**. Enjoy reviewing all the ways God has been working in your life and thank Him for these blessings (Ps. 100:4).
- **Praise** God for who He is! How has God revealed Himself to you? Give Him glory for His character, His power, and His kingdom (Ps. 100:4).
- **Surrender fully** (Matt. 28:18 and Phil. 2:5–11) to Jesus as Lord over:

- All you are as a person — your identity, successes, and failures
- All you have — your time, talent, wealth, and influence
- Your whole attitude
- **Confess** your sins and **claim** God’s forgiveness (Ps. 51:10–12 and 1 John 1:9).
- Invite God to search out any sins or sinful patterns that you keep confessing but do not turn away from (Acts 2:38, 39). **Repent** from these sins. If you don’t feel like repenting, **pray** Ezekiel 36:25–27, claiming these promises as yours.
- **Ask** God to give you:
 - The baptism of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:11–13 and Acts 1:4, 5).
 - Wisdom to know who God is calling you to disciple **now** (Isa. 30:21). Pray: “God, who do YOU want me to disciple for Your mission in this end time?” (James 1:5–8).
 - Direction on how God wants you to operate your life/ministry **now** (Prov. 3:5, 6).
- **Wait** with expectation (Jer. 33:3; Ps. 25:4, 5; Ps. 46:10).
- **Test** your conclusions with God’s Word (Isa. 8:20). Ask: “Lord, is there anything in Your Word that challenges my conclusions or confirms my conclusions?”
- **Give thanks** to God for spending the night of prayer with you (1 Thess. 5:18).

Pointers

Ask friends and/or family to pray for you during this time.

Jesus spent a night of prayer. We don’t know how many hours that was, just that it was “a night.” Don’t stress about how long or short your “night” is. Just give God the time and let the Holy Spirit guide you when to conclude it. God knows your personal limits better than you do. This outline is simply a tool. Submit this tool to the leading of the Holy Spirit to change it up as He wishes.

Appendix 2

How to Share Your Testimony

Explore the testimony of the apostle Paul by reading Acts 21:39–22:21, Philippians 4:10-13, and 1 Peter 3:15–17.

A simple way to think of your personal testimony (the story of you and Jesus Christ) is to prepare it in three parts:

1. **Before Christ:** Describe briefly what your life was like before you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Tell what was missing in your life. Do not make your sinful life look glamorous.
2. **How you met Christ:** Share how Jesus Christ intervened in your life. How did He get your attention? How did He call you to Him? Include a Bible verse or passage if possible.
3. **How Jesus is changing you:** Tell what difference Jesus Christ has made in your life. Why do you love and serve Him? What has He done for you? Your audience needs to see something fresh in your spiritual journey; share the difference He is making in your daily experience now! What do you have in your walk with Jesus that others need to have? This should be the sweetest part of your testimony.

Write out your testimony. Make sure to include at least 1-2 Scriptures. You might prepare three different versions:

- The 1-minute elevator version — in other words, a testimony you can give in one minute on an elevator.
- The 5-minute nutshell version — giving the gold nuggets and a few special highlights.
- The 10- to 15-minute version, with more details and testimonies of God's intervention and leading.

After you've written out your testimony, get comfortable sharing it with others. If you've never shared before, practice on a friend, mentor, or family member.

Remember, be genuine and real and joyful. You are on a journey with Jesus. Your life is no longer about yourself or seeking your own glory. It's all about bringing Him glory. (See Ps. 115:1.)

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

“So you are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and I am God” (Isa. 43:12).

Appendix 3

Ideas for Creating Family Worship

- Keep the worship time short. The younger the child, the shorter the worship time should be. Three to five minutes that connect a child with God is better than 15–20 minutes that leave a child bored and unengaged. The length of worship can grow with the age of the child.
- Focus your time together on God. Do not use the time to correct family members; rather, celebrate who God is and what He longs to do in and through your family!
- Make the time together interactive rather than only reading or lecturing.
- Consider the following ways to make the worship of God interactive:
 - Share what God did during the day and thank Him.
 - Praise God for what you love about Him.
 - If your family likes to sing or play instruments, praise God through song.
 - Ask God to send the Holy Spirit to bless what you read in the Bible.
 - Create a simple, fun activity that connects your family members' minds and hearts with the theme you will explore in the Bible.
 - Explore a Bible story with the focus on discovering Jesus. Ask:
 - *What does this story show us about who Jesus is?*
 - *What is God calling us to do today with the lesson of this story?*
- Pray together for God to help you live the truth about Jesus.

Questions to Ask Yourself As You Prepare a Family Worship

1. “What has Jesus been doing in my own heart?” Share from your current living experience with Jesus.
2. “How is God’s Word currently moving my own heart?” Share something new and fresh that you’ve discovered in God’s Word.
3. “What are the current needs of my family members? What are they going through in their lives?”
4. “What Scripture passage speaks most effectively to the present heart needs of my family?” This is not a time to preach, but an opportunity to share healing and hope.
5. “What fun activity would connect each family member with the Scripture that I’m going to share for worship?” (See creative examples on the following pages.)
6. “What questions should I ask that would help my family explore the Word and discover Jesus?”
7. “How can I encourage my family to apply what they’ve learned to their daily life?”

Example of an Interactive Family Worship Flow

1. Connect Activity
 - Debrief
 - Prayer
2. Explore the Word
3. Apply the Word
 - Songs may be added that are true to the theme chosen.
 - Closing Prayer

Creative Worship Examples

The following worship ideas are just to get you started. Adapt ideas for your family’s age group. Ask for the Holy

Spirit, and He will guide your time and show you how to connect heart to heart with your spouse and children.

With the Lord's blessing, daily family worships can be a time everyone in the family looks forward to.

Building Trust

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Theme: Trust

Connect Activity: Trust Fall

Have a family member stand with arms at their sides.

Place two family members behind them with arms locked together, ready to catch them. Invite the person to fall backward without bending their knees.

Discussion: Discuss what it means to trust each other and what it means to trust God.

Pray: Pray for God to help you discover Jesus in a fresh way in the Bible story.

Explore: Read Matthew 14:22–33 and Proverbs 3:5, 6.

- What does this story show us about Jesus?
- What do we need to trust in Jesus completely today?

Pray: Pray together for God to help you totally trust in Jesus today.

Following the Word

Scripture: Psalm 119:105.

Theme: God's Word

Connect Activity: Follow the Light

Appoint one person to hold a flashlight. Line up behind that person. Turn off all the lights in the house. Turn on the flashlight and follow the leader who holds the light.

Discussion: Discuss how God's Word is like a light in the darkness.

Pray: Pray for God to help you discover Jesus in a fresh way in the Bible story.

Explore: Read Psalm 119:105 and Acts 8:25–40.

- What does this story show us about Jesus?
- How will we practice following the Word of God today as a light for our path?

Pray: Pray together for God to help you follow His Word like a light in the darkness.

Seeing Jesus

Scripture: John 15:5

Theme: Abiding Life

Connect Activity 1: Seeing Jesus in Daily Life

Take turns sharing how you saw Jesus at work in your day — through both good and tough things that happened.

Connect Activity 2: Seeing Jesus in Each Other

Take time to fill in the blank, “I saw Jesus in ____ (**name of family member**) today and/or this week as he/she ____ (**fill in the blank**).”

Discussion: Describe how you have seen Jesus in each other through daily life activities. This allows for family members to affirm and be affirmed in the reality of Christ living in them and through them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pray: Pray that you can discover Jesus in a fresh way in His Word.

Explore: Read John 15:5 again and Galatians 5:22, 23.

- What do these scriptures teach us about Jesus living in us?
- If Jesus is living in us, what kind of fruit (attitudes and actions) will be seen in our lives?

Pray: Pray together for Jesus to live in you and make His home with you. Pray that His fruit will be seen in your life.

The Answered-Prayer Jar

Prepare: Get two glass jars. Label one Prayer Requests and the other Answered Prayers. Get 3x5 colored cards or colored paper.

Write: As a family, write out your prayer requests on different-colored 3x5 cards. Ask your children for their

requests. Find a Bible verse you can write on the back of each card. Teach your children why we claim God's Word for our requests (see Isa. 55:11). Put all the prayer requests in the Prayer Request jar.

Pray: During each worship, pull out the Prayer Request jar and put it in the center of your family circle as you pray. If you have time, pull out several requests to pray over. Pray short prayers, conversation-style, with family members taking turns and contributing to one family-sized prayer.

Celebrate: Whenever a prayer is answered, have a child experience the joy of moving that request to the Answered Prayer jar. Then celebrate with praise to God. Children of all ages love watching the Answered Prayer jar fill up, and it builds their faith.

The Best Gifts!*

Prepare: Identify at least two spiritual gifts you think God has given to each of your children. Find something to symbolize these gifts and wrap each individually with beautiful gift wrap and ribbon.

Read: Read 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 and give your children their gifts, affirming evidence you have seen that shows God has bestowed these gifts upon them. Give your children a chance to think about how they will enjoy these gifts and use them to share the Good News about Jesus and in service to others.

Pray: Dedicate your children and their gifts to God afresh.

On A Mission*

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, 20

How do you see yourselves fitting into this picture? Write a mission statement for your family.

Pray: Pray together over your family mission statement.

Plan: Make a plan for how you as a family can start living your mission statement in practical ways.

Conquer the Mountains*

Scripture: Isaiah 40:28–31

What is the secret to renewed strength? What does it mean to wait on the Lord?

Discuss: What makes you feel great, like you could conquer Mt. Everest? Tell your family about a time when God renewed your strength. Have family members take turns sharing practical ways they could be the “wind beneath each other’s wings” this week.

Pray: Pray this Bible passage over your lives as a family.

Get Comfortable*

Ask: Ask each family member to bring to family worship something that comforts them when they are tired, sick, or worried. Perhaps it’s a favorite blanket, a hot drink, a soft toy, an aromatic lotion, etc.

Read: Isaiah 40:1, 2.

Discuss: Talk together about the comfort that comes from knowing that God has reconciled the whole world to Himself in Jesus Christ and that you are part of that world brought back into the family of God. Celebrate your decision to accept this gift from God by standing in a circle and holding out your tightly closed fists, then unclasping them to receive the salvation that is yours in Jesus.

ABCs of Praise and Worship*

Connect: Share why you gave your children the names you did and explain why their names are special.

Read: Philippians 2:9–11.

Search: Think of all the names for Christ you can find in the Bible. See if you can find at least one name for every letter in the alphabet.

Discuss: Talk about the different names you have found and how they are meaningful in your life.

Praise: Take time going through the ABCs of praise, praising God for each name you have found. In addition, see how many things you can think of to praise God for

using each letter of the alphabet. Don't move on to the next letter until someone can't think of any more ideas to thank God for.

**We thank Adventist Family Ministries for these worship ideas. Links for additional family, youth, and children's resources are included at the end of this booklet.*

Back to the Altar Tips for Couples

Your home and marriage can be a little heaven on earth!

- Make a fresh commitment to seek God individually and together in worship each day.
- Make it a priority to pray together daily, asking the Holy Spirit to keep your hearts in unity and to work through your marriage.
- Stay humble! When offenses come, apologize quickly. We are told, "If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties" (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 119).
- Keep your couple worship time brief but meaningful and practical.
- Choose a single text or short passage to focus on in Scripture. Look for Jesus, praise Him for who He is, and look for practical applications to daily life. Pray and apply!
- When time allows, do more in-depth Bible study together, studying a Bible character, a book of the Bible, or a specific topic. Search the Word together and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you. (See *Appendix 7 for Keys to Experiencing God's Word.*)

The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a

superhuman effort to overcome difficulties — though there will be much of this to do — but union with Christ.... The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179).

“The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides” (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 15).

Appendix 4

Finding Your God-Given Mission

(and how to know God's will for your life)

Five Questions to Ask

Nehemiah 1 and 2

1. **Read Nehemiah 1:1–4.** Nehemiah grieved over the broken-down walls of Jerusalem. God-given missions address something that God allows us to see that is broken in our world. What is broken in the world around you that grieves your heart? Pray and ask God to help you identify the broken things in the world that He has given you eyes to see. Be as specific as possible. Narrow your responses to the one issue that God has given you the most passion to address. Describe this issue, this broken thing, in one sentence.
2. **Read Nehemiah 1:4–10.** Nehemiah set aside days to fast and pray about the broken-down walls. Have you done the following in response to what God has shown you is broken:
 - Praised God for who He is?
 - Confessed your sins?
 - Repented from these sins? (Turn away from these sins with the power of Jesus Christ.)
 - Fasted? (Why fast? To humble yourself before God and to clear your mind so you can discern God's leading.)
 - Claimed God's promises? (Identify God's promises in His Word that are relevant to God's dream for you. Choose to believe in these promises. Ask God by faith to fulfill these promises for His glory.)
3. **Read Nehemiah 1:11.** Nehemiah asked for favor with the king. He was ready for a divine appointment. When the king asked him a question, Nehemiah had a

choice: to respond with faith or with fear. Divine appointments are initiated by the Holy Spirit through us or the other person. The Holy Spirit can tell you to make the first move or tell the other person to initiate the conversation. Have you asked God for a divine appointment with a pivotal person of His choosing who holds the key to your God-given dream?

Prayerfully identify who that person would be. Seek God for an appointment with this person in the way that would give Him the most glory.

4. **Read Nehemiah 2:1–8.** When the king asked Nehemiah what he needed to rebuild the broken-down walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah was not caught off-guard. He had a God-given plan. Have you written out the mission God has put in your heart with what you need to do it, plus the time you will do it in? Write out the dream or mission God has placed on your heart on one side of one page. Address the following: What is the need? What is the mission to address the need? How and when will you accomplish the mission? What are the intended benefits of the mission? What do you need to accomplish the mission? What accountability do you have in place for accomplishing this mission?
5. **Re-read Nehemiah 2:1–8.** Nehemiah did not stop with praying for a divine appointment with the king. He shared the dream and mission as soon as God impressed him to share it! Have you shared this vision with the key individuals God brings to your mind? Share the dream and mission with those God impresses on your heart.

Steps to Knowing God's Will for Your Life

1. **Read:** Matthew 28:18 and Ephesians 1:20–22; 6:10–12, 18. Pray in the authoritative name of Jesus to prevent Satan from confusing you or distracting you from discovering God's will.

2. **Read:** Matthew 28:18 and Philippians 2:9–11. Surrender your dreams, circumstances, and life fully to the authority of Jesus Christ. Repent of anything compromising your faithfulness to Christ. Seek what would give Him the highest glory!
3. **Read:** James 1:5-8. Ask God for wisdom. Believe He has given it to you. Do not doubt.
4. **Read:** Psalm 25:5; 46:10 and Jeremiah 33:3. Wait in God's Presence for Him to reveal His wisdom to you. Wait with expectation that God will reveal His will to you.
5. **Read:** Isaiah 8:20. Test your conclusions with the written Word of God. Ask God: Is there anything in Your Word that affirms or challenges my conclusion?

We need to follow more closely God's plan of life. To do our best in the work that lies nearest, to commit our ways to God, and to watch for the indications of His providence — these are the rules that ensure safe guidance in the choice of an occupation (or ministry). He who came from heaven to be our example spent nearly thirty years of His life in common, mechanical labor; but during this time He was studying the Word and works of God, and helping, teaching, all whom His influence could reach. When His public ministry began, He went about healing the sick, comforting the sorrowful, and preaching the gospel to the poor. This is the work of all His followers (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 267).

Appendix 5

Tips for Healthier Digital Habits

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16).

- Adopt the motto: **Word before world!**
- Surrender your phone to Jesus each and every morning!
- Remember, your phone is for your convenience, not for the convenience of everyone else.
- Make a conscious choice to **look up** and keep looking up!
 - Look up to Jesus each morning (Ps. 5:3).
 - Look at people’s eyes when they are talking.
 - Look around you at nature and the beauty God has given.
 - Look at how you can bless someone in need.
- Put your phone on silent more often.
- Turn off all nonessential push notifications on your phone.
- Delete expired, nonessential, and time-wasting applications.
- At night, store your phone out of your room.
- If you must use an alarm, use an actual alarm clock, not your phone alarm.
- Guard your morning devotions and evening sleeping patterns by using phone settings to mute all notifications.
- Before going to bed, have worship with your family or a friend, read a book, or enjoy nature instead of scrolling.
- In the morning, after you’ve had your time with God, prayerfully plan your agenda for the day *before* you look at the messages on your phone or get distracted.

- Answer non-urgent emails from your computer rather than responding immediately from your phone.
- While on the job, work for an hour or two at a time with your phone turned off. You will be much more productive.
- Delete social media accounts from your phone so you aren't tempted to waste time scrolling when you are bored.
- If needed, use self-restricting apps, which will help limit time spent mindlessly browsing or scrolling.
- When eating or spending quality time with family or friends, leave your phone out of sight and on silent mode so you're not distracted.
- Invite your family members and close friends to give you feedback on your digital habits, to help you be aware of excessive phone absorption.
- While at church, leave your phone in the car or turn it off completely.
- Consider taking strategic times in your life to digitally detox and recalibrate your priorities. That might mean stepping away from your phone for days at a time or taking a digital fast each Sabbath. It might also mean going on a phone fast for an entire week or switching to an old flip phone without internet and social media distractions.
- If in doubt regarding anything you read, watch, or listen to, consider Philippians 4:8 as a safe rule of guidance.
- Above all, don't let your phone become your master. Remember who your true Master is!

The above list, with a few additions, is taken from the book *Daring to Live by Every Word: Loving God with Heart, Body, Mind and Soul*, by Melody Mason, pp. 161–163.

Appendix 6

Tips for Growing Healthy Disciples

“Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

To help take the principles from *The Way Back to the Altar* even deeper, we’ve included some tips for growing a healthy body.

The relation that exists between mind and body is very intimate: when one is affected, the other is always more or less in sympathy. It is impossible for men, while under the power of sinful, health-destroying habits, to appreciate sacred truths. When the intellect is clouded, the moral powers are enfeebled, and sin does not look sinful. The most ennobling, grand, and glorious themes of God’s Word seem but idle tales. Satan can then easily snatch away the good seed that has been sown in the heart; for the soul is in no condition to comprehend or understand its true value. It is thus that selfish, health-destroying indulgences are counteracting the influence of the message which is to prepare a people for the great day of God (Ellen G. White, *Review & Herald*, November 12, 1901, par. 7).

The simple healthy-lifestyle tips that follow connect with the spiritual principles we’ve shared. You can add them to the take-home challenges. Just the basic health principles are shared here. Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom on how to share these principles in creative, engaging ways that will even grab the interest of children.

Principle 1: Come to Jesus as you are.

Healthy Tip 1: Get your rest.

- Get eight hours of sleep at night if possible.

- The sleep you get before midnight is most beneficial.
- Take time throughout the day to pause, rest, and relax.
- Rest in Jesus, no matter your circumstances.

“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength...”
(Isa. 40:31).

“The heart that rests most fully upon Christ will be the most earnest and active in labor for Him” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 71).

Principle 2: Honor Jesus as Lord.

Healthy Tip 2: Be temperate.

- Surrender your lifestyle and health habits to Jesus.
- Exercise moderation and temperance in all good things and denial of all harmful things.
- Surrender any addictions to Jesus.
- Surrender bitterness and unforgiveness to Jesus.

Principle 3: Discover Jesus in the Word and in prayer.

Healthy Tip 3: Get good nutrition and fresh air.

- Eat a variety of nutritious, whole, plant-based foods (fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, and whole grains).
- Great rule to follow: Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, supper like a pauper (if you eat supper at all).
- Avoid overeating and snacking.
- Avoid eating right before bedtime.
- Breathe deeply and get lots of pure, fresh air.
- Whenever possible, open the windows in your home for fresh air.
- The Word is our spiritual bread, and prayer is the breath of the soul — don’t neglect eating and breathing!

As our first parents lost Eden through the indulgence of appetite, our only hope of regaining

Eden is through the firm denial of appetite and passion.... The controlling power of appetite will prove the ruin of thousands, when, if they had conquered on this point, then they would have had the moral power to gain the victory over every other temptation of Satan (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 491).

Principle 4: Receive a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit daily.

Healthy Tip 4: Drink adequate water daily.

- Drink 8–10 cups of water a day. (In general, the average adult should try to drink at least half an ounce for each pound he or she weighs. For example, if you weigh 150 pounds, you would drink about 75 ounces of water per day. There are 8 ounces in a cup, so that would be 9 cups of water per day, or 2.2 liters.)
- Carry a water bottle with you to remind you to drink.
- Avoid sodas and soft drinks, which dehydrate.
- Drink before you feel thirsty.
- Bathe daily and practice cleanliness.
- Use simple hydrotherapy treatments as needed to boost your immune system (hot/cold showers, etc.).
- Drink what cleanses the body and ask for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to reveal what needs to be cleansed from the soul.

Principle 5: Love your family sacrificially.

Healthy Tip 5: Enjoy the sunshine.

- Wake up with the sunshine.
- Spend at least 10–20 minutes in the sunshine, morning and evening.
- Avoid getting sunburned.
- Be sunshine to your family and loved ones, reflecting the love of Jesus everywhere you go.

Principle 6: Disciple others to Jesus.

Healthy Tip 6: Stay active physically.

- Aim for 30–60 minutes of exercise each day.
- Keep active throughout the day.
- Take the stairs rather than the elevator.
- Actively live the Word in daily life.
- Stay active in sharing your faith and discipling others.

Principle 7: Follow your God-given mission.

Healthy Tip 7: Trust in God!

- Trust your life with God — completely!
- Trust even your unanswered life questions to God.
- Give Him your heart and will each day.
- Abide in Him and ask Him to abide in you.
- Live for His glory!

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Appendix 7

Keys to Experiencing God's Word

Wondering how to journal and go deeper in God's Word?
We hope the following pointers will be helpful.

- Prayerfully open God's Word with a teachable heart.
- Read a Bible passage several times, allowing Scripture to interpret itself.
- Circle and highlight key words, themes, or phrases.
- Highlight promises and words of encouragement.
- Meditate on the passage and individual verses that speak to you.
- Ask questions like:
 - What is the message of this passage?
 - What is the context surrounding the passage?
 - What is God saying to me in this passage?
 - What commands, instructions, and life principles are found here?
 - What changes should I ask God to make in my life to align with this Scripture?
 - What do I learn about God's character in this passage?
 - How does this passage show me a fresh picture of Jesus?
 - How do I see the great controversy played out?
- Pray the Bible passage verse by verse, personalizing it for your own life.
- As you pray, listen to what the Holy Spirit tells you.
- Journal (or audio record) the special insights God gives you.
- Journal a prayer of worship, including praise, confession, thanksgiving, and surrender to God in response.

- Write out your specific prayer requests, along with Bible promises to claim for those requests. Record any answers to prayer you receive.
- Journal a summary thought from your time with God that you could share with someone today.

Additional Ideas for Deepening Your Bible Study

- Ask “Who, What, When, Where, Why, How” questions.
- Read the Bible passage in different Bible translations.
- Look up cross-references and parallel passages.
- Look up key words in Greek or Hebrew or use a study Bible that explains key words.
- Read Ellen G. White’s comments on the passage.
- Consult other trustworthy Bible commentaries.

Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart (Jer. 15:16).

Live at the altar. Strengthen your purposes by the promises of God (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 1, p. 169).

Back to the Altar

Discipling Resources

The Back to the Altar initiative is about helping God's people discover a daily place for God in every heart and home. For more information visit:
www.backtothealtar.org

Looking for additional resources like this booklet?

Go to indiscipleship.org for the following free downloadable books and resources by Don MacLafferty. All of these resources may be used for personal growth and/or small groups.

- ***Inside Out*** – Calling busy families to invest in God and to disciple their children.
- ***Come Home*** – Small-group studies to call individuals and couples back to the altar, to live God's vision for the home in preparation for Christ's soon return.
- ***Meet Jesus Outside: Bible Prayer Walks*** – Twenty outdoor adventures for children, youth, and adults to experience the Creator in His Word, His book of nature, prayer, and action.
- ***Jesus' Last Love Letter: A Revival for Children, Youth, and Adults*** – Teacher's notes to seven interactive, intergenerational meetings to call all to Jesus as Friend, Savior, and Lord.
- ***Follow*** – Step-by-step Bible studies to use in discipling someone to Jesus Christ. May be used one on one or in small groups.
- ***Discipling the New Generations*** – Small-group studies for parents/mentors/students to grow disciples of Jesus who know and live these life-transforming truths by the Holy Spirit's power.
- ***Live Like Elijah*** – Life-changing stories from the life of Elijah and from the MacLafferty family's personal

journey of learning to live by faith, trusting in the providence of God.

- **God Still Lives** – Sixteen timely God stories to encourage you to trust, follow, and share Jesus with Holy Spirit power!

Additional Worship Resources and Tools

From GC Family Ministries

- Rebuilding the Family Altar – <https://family.adventist.org/resources/rtfa/>
- Fun and Easy Family Worship Memories – <https://family.adventist.org/resources/fun-easy-family-worship-memories/>

From GC Youth Ministries

- Developing an Authentic Devotional Life – <https://bit.ly/GCYouthministries1>
- Morning Watch: In the Word for Youth – <https://www.gc youthministries.org/resources/morning-watch/>

From GC Children's Ministries

- Bible Studies for Young Readers – <https://www.faithfinders.com/bible-studies>
- Back to the Altar: 10 Days of Prayer for Children – <https://www.faithfinders.com/ten-days-of-prayer-2023.pdf>

Visit revivalandreformation.org for hundreds of additional free tools and resources to grow your walk with Jesus through Bible study, prayer, worship, and witness.

Looking for prayer support? Join your worldwide church family anytime, day or night, on our 24/7 prayer Zoom call at 247unitedprayer.org. Unite with others praying for the Latter Rain.

A BACK TO THE ALTAR RESOURCE
FROM THE GENERAL CONFERENCE