

Pray First: Building Altars

WELCOME: Fort Myers, East, Worshipping with us Online. Welcome.

INTRO: I'm Charles, Pastor on staff for the last 4 years.

HONOR: Pastors Matt and Sarah for who you are, for how you serve our God, how you love.

21 Days of Prayer: We did it! This is the final day. Look at what God has done!

Photo with Hair: As an answer to the prayers of many of our Staff members, I've brought this to show. <**PICTURE 1 me with HAIR**>

Pray First: Here at the threshold of a new decade, a new year, a new season, we are being invited to Pray First.

Question: Have you ever had your back against the wall?

- **Retire** - Have you ever looked at your retirement account and wondered if you've got enough money to make it?
- **Health** - Have you ever gotten a report from a physician where they've pointed out something that came back on a test that has made you uncertain?
- **Parents**, have you ever worried about your child's choices?
- **Students** have you ever looked at your course load for a semester and wondered how?
- **Have you ever been in a place where you needed help desperately?**
- **Some people worry, some overwork, some lose sleep, some try to numb**
- **My submission friends is that we can invite God into each of these situations.**

Genesis 12 gives an account of a man named Abram who was called a great in the faith.

2 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. (Abram leaves with a Tent & a Word from God only)

- God then offers Abram a 7-fold promise to grow his family into a great nation.
- Abram leaves everything he knows to find the place that God is going to give him. He ran into some challenges along the way.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring[c] I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

<**PRAY**>

- As we consider learning some prayer lessons from this great man of Faith I immediately noticed a disparity. ABRAM BUILT AN ALTAR THERE TO THE LORD. "HE BUILT AN ALTAR" but PITCHED A TENT FOR HIMSELF.**
- PICTURE 2: ALTAR** to the Lord: Huge Rock symbolizing a permanent place. Designed to be unmovable, unshakable. A place to build on & remember what God said. "God I'm placing a rock on your word." "What you say is unmovable!"

- C. **PICTURE 3 TENT** for Himself. Tent's are Temporary. Designed to be moved. God had Abram moving and Abram followed. He had to walk based on what God revealed.
- D. **TENSION:** Many of us Build a Tent for God and an Altar for ourselves. We create unmovable permanence around the things that we want but we place God in a tent and move Him whenever it is convenient for us. **I believe what God is looking for are some Believers this year Build Solid Altars of Prayer to Him and pitch a tent to move where He desires us to move to receive our blessing!**
- E. **Pastor Matt Taught us that** Prayer is Moving Heaven's Reality into Earth's Reality. If that is true then **an Altar is a place (not just physical) to engage in that Exchange.**
- F. **When I speak of the Altar of Prayer, I'm not talking about just physical place but a place in Time. (Home, School, Work, Driving, Anywhere)**
 - 1. An Altar is a place to Meet with God.
 - 2. An Altar is a place to show Submission to God.
 - 3. An Altar is a place to Worship God.
 - 4. An Altar is a place to offer Sacrifice for sin. (bulls, sheep, goats, blood)
 - 5. **A PLACE in life where we engage in a divine exchange of Heaven's Reality for Earth's.** An EXCHANGE, WORDS, OFFERING UP, BLESSINGS DOWN.
- G. **TS: Abram's life wasn't easy either. I'd like to use some events from Abraham's life and my life to demonstrate some of the Prayer Altars we can Build to God.**
- H. **Genesis 12:6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**
- I. Abram has left the only home he knew (father's) and is wandering in faith with a tent and a promise. And the first thing he sees are the Canaanites! A great group of people who proved to be malicious, formidable group, a group anti his God are living in the place God promised him.
- J. **TS: Question: Have you ever had something standing in the way of you and your Dreams?** Health problem, Financial problem, a relationship problem, a thought life, standing in the way? Abram had something standing in his way. This is where he built his first Altar...

4 Life Places to Build Altars of Prayer

1. When in a place DISTRESS.

- A. Distress comes when there is something significant between us and the Promise God has for us. Something between us and our dreams. ***Defined: Distress is Trouble. It is Affliction or Adversity that leaves us in Anguish and Pain.***
- B. **We should build an Altar of Prayer when in a place of Distress.**
- C. **ILL: I grew up in Miami but we've always had a special connection to SWFL. My Mom used to Dream about moving to SWFL one day. She wanted a home, maybe on the water, see her kids enjoying their lives. She inspired me to dream. That dream was coming alive.**

1. In 2010 more like a nightmare. January 18th – Urology, 19th Emergency Surgery, 3 months later – Mom’s diagnoses. The dream faded away.
 2. **WE WERE IN DISTRESS!**
- D. God wants us to **BUILD** an Altar when we are in Distress. When we try to handle Distress on our own we are Engulfed by it. We sink into Misery.
1. I hadn’t prayed consistently in years. I Built an Altar in my Chemo infusion chair was an Altar for me. It was a place that I prayed.
 2. My Mom’s bedside was an altar for me. I cried out to God in distress.
 3. My Mom cried out to God from her bed.
- E. My Mom was a believer always told me to read Psalms when I was in trouble. I found my way through Psalms praying the prayers of King David.
- F. David was one of the greatest kings, leaders, warriors of God. He worshipped and prayed! His prayers in song form are in the book of Psalms.
1. **Psalm 4:1 Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.**
 2. **Psalm 18: 6 In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.**
- G. What can I Believe God for in times of Distress?
1. **ANSWER: We can believe God for the Comfort of His Presence.** It may take a while for your circumstance to change, but we get the Comfort of His presence in the midst of the pain!
 2. David’s circumstances didn’t change overnight but he gained comfort..
 3. Abram’s circumstances of the Canaanites didn’t change overnight but he gained comfort from the Lord’s presence...Let’s throw vs. 7 up again.
- H. **Genesis 12:7-8 ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring^[e] I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.**
- I. **ILL:** When my Mom and I cried out to the Lord in 2010, we gained comfort from God’s presence. For me His comfort joined me as I healed. For my Mom, His comfort guided her into His arms in Heaven. People ask, how did you get through a time with so much pain, physically, emotionally, mentally? I built an Altar of Prayer and my Heavenly Father, the God of Comfort came near to me!
- J. **MIP:** Some of us are here in Distress and you’ve been trying to handle it on your own. We need to seek God in Prayer. We need to get in a room, turn on some worship music, read some Psalms and let God visit you! Your heavenly Father wants to bring you Comfort today by His presence.

2. When in a place of DECISION.

- A. **Q: Have you ever been at a place of significant Decision that was critical?**
- B. Our faith hero Abram comes back from some time in Egypt and he has his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. By now he and his nephew Lot had acquired wealth, herds of livestock, and servants. Time has passed and we pick back up.
- C. **Genesis 13:3 From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4 and where he had first built an ALTAR. There Abram called on the name of the Lord.**
- D. **PROBLEM AROSE/A DECISION NEEDED:** Herds were too big and were conflicting. (joke here?) **They had to make a decision to part ways. They had to make a decision, Where** are they each would live?
- E. **12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.**
(EXPLAIN – ABRAM HAS A CHOICE TO MAKE/LOT CHOOSES LUST)
 - 1. Lot looked over at Sodom (Wild sinning, parties, God not present) and he said, I'd like to live over there. (Some of us picked our college that way).
 - 2. Abram made a different decision.
 - 3. **Do you find yourself at a place of Decision?**
- F. **ILL: After years of a successful career we had the Decision to come into Ministry. We laughed. Then we built an Altar in the place of Decision.**
- G. Decisions are long lasting and life changing. If we don't involve God, decisions Can drive us further from His will.
- H. **We all make decisions a lot of ways. We can either make a Decision with or without God. LOT made it without God and he paid for it critically!!!**
- I. **WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE GOD FOR? When we bring a Decision to the Altar in Prayer We can believe God for Direction.** God can speak to us on the front end or He can affirm us as we step out in faith on the back end.
- J. **BUT GOD CAN DIRECT US...Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.**
- K. **ILL: We took our decision to God. We said God if you're in this, I've got this family to care for, and I've got this house. (Hadrn't sold in a year and a half.) He sold that house without the pictures even being online in 2 days for full price. We made \$27K. God encouraged our decision on the front and back end.**
- L. **God Affirmed Abram's Decision: ¹⁴The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring^[a] forever. ¹⁸So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.**
- M. **MIP: What about us? What decisions? Which voices are you listening to at the place of Decision? Job decisions, Relationship decisions?**
- N. Are we making them using **Lust like Lot, Fear, Anger?**

- O. I want to encourage us to Build and Altar at a place of Decision. **“God I need direction.” Then we have to LISTEN TO HIS VOICE! He will Direct us.**

Abraham’s story continues as God begins to fulfill His promise, he changes his name, he promises Abraham and his wife a child and Abraham continues to seek God. **BUT Abraham and his Sarah found themselves in a place of despair at times.**

3. When in a place of DESPERATION.

- A. You’re Desperate for a Change, Desperate for a Dream, Desperate for Change for a Move. (Child, Financial change, Job, Spouse, Friendships, Healing)
- B. **When we try to deal with Despair on our Own we end up Tired, Bitter and Defeated.**
- C. **5 Chapters later Abraham found himself in despair** again over his nephew whose life was in danger because God’s judgement was going to come over the place Lot was living, Sodom & Gomorrah. God was sending 2 angels to destroy it. (Genesis 18:22, 23-31)

Genesis 18:22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham **remained standing before the LORD.**^[d] ²³ **Then Abraham approached him** and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”

The Lord says I won’t destroy it for 50 people. Abraham keeps approaching God in prayer until he works the Lord down from 50 to 10! 45, 30, 20, 10

- D. **ABRAHAM REMAINED STANDING BEFORE THE LORD!** What do you when you’re in despair? I would submit that most of us try to handle the situation on our own. I love that He remained. He didn’t try to rescue Lot himself.
- E. **Abraham Approached Him! Abraham Spoke Up! Abraham’s prayer was Bold but his posture was humble. He didn’t give up!**
- F. ²⁷ **Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes,**
- G. **BOLD to Ask, HUMBLE to Accept that HE IS GOD AND WE ARE NOT!**
- H. **ILL: In Ministry, financial picture was different, and we still don’t have a child. For us the idea of fertility procedure was scary because of our ability to pay. Pastor Matt, Lisa Quintero, Pastor Chris.**
 - 1. **We approached God many times, We humbled ourselves. God was speaking to us and Our Miracle came.**
 - 2. **<PICTURE 4 – FAMILY PICTURE>**
- I. **Resolution for Abraham:** For Abraham...God sent those Angels to Lot and they rescued Lot and his daughters from the complete destruction of the wicked city He brought judgement on.
- J. **What can I believe God for when in Despair? When we bring our Despair to the Altar in Prayer, We can believe God for a Miracle!**
 - 1. **It may not be the exact way you wanted or dreamed it up. But God will work supernaturally on our behalf.**

4. When in a place of DELIGHT. Praise!

- A. When we Keep the Delight to Ourselves, we can end up Proudful and Arrogant. Pride goes before Destruction.
- B. When we are in a place of Delight, we bring can build an Altar of Praise to God.
- C. We can Thank Him for who He is and When we Thank Him for what He has done for us: We
 - 1. Give Honor where honor is due.
 - 2. We are pushing back Self-Sufficiency.
- D. Many of us are in a place of delight and that is a great place to bring praise to God. But I've got some good news for the rest of us. We serve a God that can bring me to a place of delight in spite of my current circumstance!
- E. We serve a God who can bring me to a place of delight in even the worse circumstance! And I access this delight through my Praise!
- F. You see My favorite description for our Lord and savior is this. My REDEEMER. My GRANDMOTHER wrote "I Know My Redeemer lives" to me on her death bed.
- G. I had to look it up and this is what I found REDEEMER means the Great Exchanger! JESUS CHRIST IS THE REDEEMER! God's son who came for us, died for our sins and then rose from the dead is an exchanger!
- H. God exchanged Abraham's infertility for fertility. He had a son and named him Isaac. Isaac had a son who's name was Jacob. Changed it to Israel. He had a son who's name Was Judah. Out of the tribe (family tree) of Judah came a savior named Jesus! The name Judah means praise!!! Jesus means God is salvation.
- I. Which means that OUT of PRAISE, GOD BIRTHED SALVATION!
- J. Revelation 5:5 says that Jesus is the Lion of Judah! He is the lion of praise!!!
- K. LOST: I don't know about you, but I serve a Savior who took me when I was lost & he exchanged my lost state and now I'm found.
- L. BOUND: I was bound in sin & he took me broke the chains & made me free.
- M. POWERLESS: He saw me powerless and he took me and exchanged my powerless soul and exchanged it with the Power of His Holy Spirit! He took my fear and exchanged it for his Perfect love.
- N. MY IDENTITY was tied to my last accomplishment and he took that and gave me an unchanging Identity as a chosen child of God who can hold my head up high in any situation!
- O. YOUR MARRIAGE that's on the rocks can be exchanged for a strong one!
- P. DEATH: Church death isn't permanent anymore. Death is an exchange! My grandmother exchanged an old and frail earthy body for a heavenly one. My mom's body was filled with cancer and pain. She couldn't talk or walk when she finished her time on earth. God exchanged her earthly body for one in heaven where she is dancing and singing pain free. He exchanges mortality for immortality! Because of JESUS Even death can't stop us!!!!
- Q. Distress for the comfort of His presence.
- R. Despair for a miraculous touch from the Lord

- S. **Stress of Decision** for divine direction.
- T. **HE GIVES US Beauty** for ashes.
- U. **HE TURNS OUR Mourning** into joy.
- V. Spirit of heaviness and turn it to praise!
- W. Shame for Hope

In any situation and in every situation My Redeemer lives. My Exchanger lives and I will build an altar to the lord when I feel like and I will build an altar to the lord when I don't. And I will build an altar to the Lord when I think I'm worthy and I'll build one when I'm not.

I don't know what you're going through. But I know our Lord came to earth in the form of a son Jesus. He came to make an exchange. He saw his children dying in sin. So he lived a perfect sin free life to show us the way. And then when he knew that we couldn't make the exchange ourselves for our sin. He knew that it would mean permanent death and punishment. He didn't just say I'll make the exchange for them....HE SAID ILL BE THE EXCHANGE FOR THEM. I'll make it with my own body. And he got up on a different kind of altar of sacrifice. He got up on a cross and he allowed he body to be broken and his blood to spill. And then he tricked death 3 days later to execute the exchange! And all we have to do is accept this perfect act of love and we exchange death and punishment. For life and heaven. Are you interested in making an exchange?

Every head bowed and every eye closed.

It's time to make an exchange at the altar.
Heavens reality for earths