

# DISCIPLESHIP AT THE ALTAR

Sat, April 22nd - 10:10AM [Opening Slide #1]

## WELCOME & INTRO

Welcome...my name is Caren Petfield. I am the Discipleship Pastor for REACH CHURCH; an Assemblies of God Fellowship in White Plains, NY. I'm delighted to talk to you today about **DISCIPLESHIP AT THE ALTAR**.

## AVENUES OF DISCIPLESHIP [Slide #2]

Oftentimes, when we think about Discipleship, we think about small groups, mentoring, Bible classes. We think about volunteering and building relationships with other believers. And those are ALL important avenues for discipleship. However, there's another important avenue for Transformational Discipleship...and that's at the altar.

## [Slide #3]

At the altar, there can be deliberate discipleship that brings a life-changing encounter with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, if deliberate discipleship isn't happening at the altar, important opportunities are missed; opportunities that we may not get back.

I'm talking about opportunities for salvation that involve deep and specific repentance and renouncement of sin. I'm talking about the ministry of deliverance at the altar, baptisms with the Holy Spirit at the altar, as well as miraculous healings and other gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation at the altar. I'm talking about "Truth-Encounters" that lead to "Power Encounters" when discipleship takes place at the altar. Amen?

Sometimes the default of altar ministry is to rush into praying and encouraging and pushing back against the enemy. However, slowing down and giving room for "first things first" has proven very powerful for us at the altar. *"Has this person, I'm about to pray for, accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior BY repenting of sin?" "Has this person inadvertently given any license to the enemy to bring chaos, disorder, bondage or oppression?"*

Sometimes the default of altar ministry is that at the end of a message, a person will be given an opportunity to repeat a 30-second prayer from their seat and then see an altar minister after the service for a "What's Next" kit, a congratulations & a prayer of blessing.

To be honest, at times we, at REACH, even defaulted to that. But we sensed there was a deeper work that was being missed. We recognized that if we weren't seizing opportunities to deliberately disciple at the altar, we were risking missing the deeper work AND fruit of true repentance in the miracle of salvation and deliverance.

## ABOUT SALVATION [Slide #4]

For us, a change started because we began to get concerned about the message of salvation that's being presented. We were concerned that some, who profess to be Christians, may not have a true understanding of salvation and, as a result, might not be truly saved. We were concerned because we could see them embracing lifestyles that did not reflect the fruit of repentance. We got concerned because there is a false understanding of salvation that is being promoted in our culture, it's even being promoted in some churches.

[Slide #5] A false understanding of salvation says a person can be saved without being changed; without changing course; without repentance.

- That's what repentance is, right? A change of heart & mind and a change of direction.
- That was the message of **John the Baptist** in Matt 3:2 and **Jesus** in Matt 4:17.

In fact, these were the first words of Jesus' public ministry.

- They both said, "**REPENT**, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

[Slide #6] A false understanding of salvation says that all we have to do to receive eternal life is to repeat a special prayer, but our attitudes and actions can remain just like the attitudes and actions of the world.

- [Slide #7] In other words, we can say YES to Jesus and keep saying YES to the world. We can keep saying YES to sin.

[Slide #8] A false understanding of salvation is that God is so loving, He's so gracious, He's so kind, that my sin doesn't really matter; His Holiness doesn't matter. Some might even say that sin doesn't really exist, it's just a social constraint - You live your truth and I'll live my truth and that is acceptable to God because God loves us. Perhaps you've heard of this. It's definitely true of "Progressive Christianity" and other representations of Christianity.

[Slide #9] A false understanding of salvation is that I can REGARD Jesus as a Savior, but I don't have to ENTHRONE Him as Lord; I don't have to actually LIVE under His authority. If you're following any of the news outlets or are on social media at all, is this not the false understanding of salvation that is being spread?

But, as pastors and ministry leaders and ministry volunteers, we know better than that, don't we? We know that Jesus didn't just go to the cross to offer us forgiveness and a place in heaven. Jesus went to the cross so that we could have the opportunity to repent of sin and thus be forgiven. He went to the cross to claim His position as Lord.

We know that a salvation that does not include true repentance **AND** accepting His Lordship is not Biblical; it's not really salvation.

So, what did this mean for us? It meant that we needed to have a conversation at the altar.

We have become utterly convinced that the urgency of the Holy Spirit is to bring transformative life-changing salvation and freedom into people's lives...right at the altar...AND beyond the altar. Being convinced of this meant that our altar ministers had to be trained and equipped to intentionally prioritize this urgency at the altar.

So, what we've done is that before someone can join the altar ministry team, we have training and refresher training which become on-ramps to enlarge the team, but they also become important reminders to strengthen the intentionality of discipleship at the altar.

#### [Slide #10]

In these trainings, we define the EXPECTATIONS, the PROCESS, the PROTOCOLS, and the FOLLOW-UP at the altar. However, since we've only got ½ an hour for this workshop, I'd like to focus on the 2 areas that you may find most helpful; the process and the follow-up.

#### WHAT IS THE PROCESS? [Slide #11]

At Reach, when someone comes to the altar for prayer, no matter what the prayer request or how long the person has been attending the church, our altar ministers have committed themselves to asking **TWO KEY QUESTIONS**. These questions initiate a conversation at the altar that invites the Holy Spirit to lead the ministry experience.

We've discovered that in altar ministry, it's imperative that we slow down and wait on the Holy Spirit by inviting Him to do what He does best; convince of the love of Christ, convict of sin and put His spotlight on what He wants to do in that moment. We can do that by pausing and asking a few questions before we get to praying.

At the altar, we have to ask ourselves, *"Am I leaving room for the Holy Spirit to FIRST give His marching orders or am I just marching ahead?"*

Discipleship at the altar happens when we intentionally make room for the Holy Spirit to give direction and minister with His still small voice. And He doesn't just want to talk to and through the altar minister. He wants to talk to the person who came up for prayer.

So, we've asked our altar ministers to lay down their familiar ministry at the altar. We've asked them to step out of the comfort zone of their default ministry at the altar and embrace a new approach. We've asked them to initiate deliberate discipleship at the altar. As a result, AMAZING things are happening at the altar!

People are coming to the altar and deeply repenting and getting radically saved. Prodigals, who didn't realize they were prodigals, are running back to Jesus. People are getting set free at the altar. AND we are seeing healings at the altar - I'm talking about stage 4 cancer types of healings where they go and get scans and bloodwork and they are clear of cancer. At this point, we're just waiting to start seeing limbs grow back. Amen?

In John 14:12, Jesus said, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.**" The Holy Spirit is moving across the land. It's not just happening at Reach Church. This is becoming the regular Christian experience... and isn't that what's supposed to be happening? \*The miracles of salvation and deliverance are the greatest miracles of all!

So, our PROCESS at the altar begins with **TWO KEY QUESTIONS**:

**[Slide #12] THE FIRST KEY QUESTION IS: Why have you come to the altar today?**

This may seem like an obvious first question, but sometimes assumptions are made or a rush to move right into prayer happens and the individual who came up for prayer is not invited into the process. Asking this question, accomplishes a few things:

- 1) Number one. It gets a conversation started.
- 2) Number two. It may help an altar minister get a sense of where this person is in his/her walk with Christ.
- 3) Thirdly, it causes the person who came up for prayer to think through what they're asking of the Lord.
- 4) Lastly, it helps bring clarity to the need in a person's life so that prayer can be specific and targeted. This FIRST question helps lead into the next, MOST IMPORTANT, question.

**[Slide #13] THE SECOND KEY QUESTION IS: Before we pray for \_\_\_\_\_, have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior by repenting of your sins?**

\*If you notice, WE DO NOT ASK: "Have you accepted Jesus into your heart." We don't ask that question because accepting Jesus into our heart is not the Biblical pattern for salvation. Accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior by repenting of sin is the Biblical pattern for salvation. If there's been no repentance, there's been no salvation. And if Jesus hasn't become Lord, then He hasn't become Savior. So, we've asked our altar ministers to eliminate that phrase. We don't ask Jesus into our hearts. We don't accept Jesus into our hearts. We accept Jesus as Lord and Savior by repenting (turning away) from our sin.

Now, there could be a few ways that question might be answered but typically it's a YES or NO reply.

[Slide #14] If the answer is NO - Then we ask: *"What is preventing you from accepting Jesus Christ today?"*

[Depending on the response, we may share the Gospel Message with three easy points.]

**POINT ONE:** God has done everything that's needed to be done to forgive men of sin by sending Jesus to die on the cross as the sacrifice for our sin and now it is up to us to repent. God has already MOVED and now it is our MOVE.

**POINT TWO:** All of us have SINNED and all of us need to be FORGIVEN.

**POINT THREE:** Being born-again starts with REPENTANCE (turning away from sin) and RENOUNCING (cutting off permissions created by sin).

Acts 3:19 speaks of repentance saying, *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

### **WE SHARE BASIC TRUTHS ABOUT REPENTANCE**

1. Repentance is not shallow. It is deep.
2. Repentance is not general. It is specific.
3. Repentance requires action and produces fruit.
4. Repentance solves the problem of our past and present sin condition.
5. Repentance requires that we agree to the definition of sin as applied in God's Word.
6. Repentance is not a suggestion for salvation. It is a requirement for salvation.

**THERE'S A QUOTE WE LIKE REPEAT: WHEN GOD COMES IN, OUR LIFE IS DISRUPTED. IF OUR LIFE HASN'T BEEN DISRUPTED, WE HAVE TO ASK IF GOD CAME IN.**

**WE ASK: WOULD YOU LIKE TO ACCEPT JESUS TODAY?**

### **THEN WE WALK SOMEONE THROUGH REPENTANCE**

1. Repentance is personal, so they say the words. They don't simply repeat after us.
2. Repentance is specific.
3. Repentance includes renouncing sinful activity by stating we no longer want that activity as a part of our life.

GOING BACK TO THE QUESTION: If the answer is YES, they HAVE accepted Jesus - Then we confirm by saying, *“Great! So that means you have repented of your sin (you’ve turned away from your sin) and you are living a lifestyle consistent with the Word of God. Correct?”*

- If that is not correct - we ask: *“Would you like to make a fresh commitment to Jesus Christ right now?”*
- If the answer is correct - we say: *“That’s great. Before we pray, let’s invite the Holy Spirit to search us and ask Him if there’s anything He sees. Ask the Holy Spirit - ‘Search Me, Holy Spirit. Is there is anything in my life...my thoughts, my words, my actions, my attitude or my motives...that offend God?’”*
  - *And then we wait - And almost everytime, the Holy Spirit puts His finger on something.*

If He does, we ask, *“Would you like to repent of that? Are you willing to turn away from that?”* Sometimes the answer is YES. And then we lead them into prayers of repentance. These types of prayers are deep and specific...and they remove the license of the enemy.

Another area of discipleship at the altar is in the area of forgiveness. Matthew 18 tells the “Parable of the Unforgiving Servant” saying that the unforgiving servant was handed over to the tormentors. Verse 35 then says, **“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”** Dealing with unforgiveness at the altar opens the door for freedom in the name of Jesus.

## TESTIMONIES

This just happened a couple of weeks ago. A young woman I’ve known since she was a kid came to the altar. I hadn’t seen her at church since she was a kid. She was a single mom now. I asked the KEY QUESTIONS and those questions opened the door to discipleship right there at the altar. The Holy Spirit helped her see where she had turned from God. And with tears in her eyes, she recommitted her life to Christ. She took an active role in prayers of repentance...she forgave many who had hurt her in her life...and then she experienced freedom. She was freed from unforgiveness, resentment, bitterness, anger, rejection, shame, grief, and abandonment, to name a few. She fell to her knees at that altar, sobbing as she was set free. And she broke out in tongues - overflowing with the Holy Spirit. Afterwards, I asked her what she was experiencing and how she felt. She said, “I feel so light. I have peace. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

That same day (different service) - a man named Nicholas came sprinting to the altar. He was all tatted up, visiting from another part of the state. He was clearly being touched by the Holy Spirit as he made his way to the altar. When he got to me, I pulled one of our male altar ministers to join me. I asked Nicholas why he came to the altar? "Do you want to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior." He said, "Yes, I do." I asked if he'd ever done that before, he said, "Yes, I have, but I'm not living right." I said, "Okay, before we pray, can you ask the Holy Spirit to search you and show you any area where you are offending God?" And he did. He talked to the Holy Spirit while we supported him in prayer. And he recognized many areas and repented. Then I asked him if there was anyone who had hurt him that he needed to forgive, and he said, "Yes." I asked, "Can you forgive them?" He said, "Yes, I can." And with the help of the Holy Spirit, he forgave each one by name and forgave the offenses specifically. And then he recommitted his life to Christ and we prayed prayers of freedom and he was saved, delivered and set free right at the altar.

Deliberate Discipleship can happen at the altar - and when it does, AMAZING things happen!

### **FOLLOW-UP [Slide #15]**

After ministry at the altar, we have a follow-up process. We ask that an Altar Ministry Form be completed for instances of salvation, recommitment to Christ, a request for further prayer or a request to meet with a pastor.

#### **For Salvation or Recommitment to Christ**

- A person will receive an invitation and registration link to our 3 Baptisms course, which I'll tell you about in a moment.

#### **For a Request for Further Prayer**

- A person will receive a link to our PRAYER FORM and will meet with our Deliverance Team

#### **And For a Request to Meet with a Pastor**

- Arrangements will be made for phone call or meeting

### **THE THREE BAPTISMS [Slide #16]**

About our 3 Baptisms Class - This is a two-session course that our lead pastor and I co-teach. We offer it every other month. In the course, we cover THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, we explain REPENTANCE in depth, and we teach about DELIVERANCE - What is it? Who is it for? And How do I walk in freedom? We teach about WATER BAPTISM and set up a time for people to be water baptized. We also teach on the HOLY SPIRIT. Who is He? What are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? And what is the Baptism with the Holy Spirit?

In the course, we take time to pray prayers of repentance and prayers for deliverance. We also take time to seek Jesus for the Baptism with the Holy Spirit and people receive!

We encourage everyone at REACH to take this course, whether they're newer Christians or seasoned Christians; whether they have been baptized or not. It's our favorite class to teach and has been producing so much fruit in the lives of people.

We have taught this class to all our Altar Ministers OR we have asked them to take this class before getting trained. We can't take others into deeper waters unless we're there ourselves. I'm so thankful for this amazing team. They are a precious group of people who love Jesus and love others. Some of them are in this workshop now. And I just want to say thank you for your precious ministry!

These are some of the ways we are bringing discipleship to the altar. We're still learning and growing, but we're encountering the power and presence of the Holy Spirit like never before...and we're seeing people enter a deep, transformative relationship with Jesus, developing as healthy followers of Christ who are becoming disciples that MAKE disciples.

**[Slide #17]** A quick word about TRUTH & FREEDOM - Discipleship at the Altar is speaking truth with grace and seeing the Holy Spirit do what only He can do. We must speak the truth to culture because it's the truth that sets souls free. **If you'd like to learn more about that, I encourage you to attend Pastor Jason Murphy's workshop during Session #6 at 2:50 this afternoon. He'll be in the multi-purpose room. He's going share how to lead by grace without compromising truth.**

If we had more time, there's so much more I could have covered. I hope I was able to give you something new to consider in the area of discipleship at the altar.

**[Slide #18]** If you ever want to discuss this area of discipleship, I'm available. You are also welcome to attend our THREE BAPTISMS course. It takes place in four weeks. The dates are Thursday, May 18th & Thursday, May 25th. You can use the QR code on the REACH CARDS that were left on your seats to register.

Thank you for joining me today! Let's close in prayer...