

2026-10-14 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide

"Rebuilding the Altar" | 1 Kings 18

Before You Begin

Open your time together with prayer, asking God to give your group honest hearts and a willingness to examine where your personal altar may need attention. Have Bibles available and encourage members to look up passages as they come up in discussion.

Overview

This sermon draws from the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, connecting the physical rebuilding of the altar to the deeply personal call in Romans 12 to present ourselves as living sacrifices. The central question the sermon poses is this: Has your altar fallen into disrepair, and if so, is it because of defilement or simply neglect?

Key Takeaways

An altar can fall into ruin in one of two ways: through defilement, meaning something wrong was placed on it, or through neglect, meaning it simply stopped being used.

Romans 12 describes offering our bodies as living sacrifices as our "spiritual act of worship," meaning worship extends far beyond a Sunday song service.

Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4 that the Father seeks worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth, a standard that challenges routine and surface-level engagement with God.

Elijah's prayer before the fire fell was brief, focused, and entirely God-centered. He was not concerned with his own reputation but with the people coming to know that the Lord is God.

The living water Jesus offered the woman at the well was not a one-time transaction but a spring welling up from within, suggesting that genuine worship and surrender produce an ongoing, internal source of life.

Discussion Questions

Opening the Conversation

The sermon opened with a reflection on not being present enough with people who mattered, like grandparents, because of busyness. Can you think of a time when you were physically present somewhere but mentally and spiritually somewhere else? How does that tendency show up in your relationship with God?

The pastor described how familiarity with a passage can cause us to stop truly engaging with it. Is there a Bible story or verse you have heard so many times that you have stopped really hearing it? What would it look like to approach it fresh?

Digging Into the Text

Read 1 Kings 18:30. The altar of the Lord had fallen into ruin before Elijah arrived. Based on the sermon, what are the two main reasons an altar might need to be rebuilt? Which of those two reasons do you think is more common among Christians today, and why?

Read Romans 12:1-3. The sermon pointed out that Paul uses the word "urge," conveying a sense of strong, almost physical compulsion. What does it tell you about Paul's concern for his readers that he used that kind of language? What does it tell you about how seriously God takes this call?

The sermon made the point that before Christ, worshipers were largely confined to a physical location, but now God desires to dwell within people. How does that shift change the way you think about what worship actually is and when it happens?

Read John 4:13-14 and 4:23-24. Jesus told the woman at the well that true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth. In your own words, what do you think it means to worship in spirit? What does it mean to worship in truth? Can you have one without the other?

The sermon noted that Jesus did not gloss over the woman's sin, but he also did not condemn her. Instead, he drew her in. What does that approach reveal about how God deals with people whose altars have been defiled?

Getting Personal

The pastor described the living sacrifice as something that keeps wanting to crawl off the altar. What are the most common things in your own life that pull you back off the altar? Are those things sinful in themselves, or are they simply competing priorities?

The sermon drew a distinction between focusing on not sinning versus focusing on Christ, comparing it to the principle in recovery that dwelling on the addiction makes it worse. How has that shift in focus, from avoiding sin to pursuing God, shown up or failed to show up in your own walk?

Elijah's prayer before the fire fell was not long or elaborate. It was honest, God-centered, and clear about what he wanted God to accomplish. How would you describe your own prayer life right now? Is it more about what you need, or more about what God deserves?

The sermon ended with a call to examine our own hearts before examining the world around us, referencing the idea that judgment begins with the house of God. What is one area of your personal altar that you sense God is asking you to rebuild or purify right now?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

Daily Sacrifice The sermon referenced the Old Testament pattern of a morning sacrifice and an evening sacrifice. For the next week, set aside a specific moment each morning and each evening to consciously present yourself to God. This does not need to be lengthy. It can be as simple as a brief, honest prayer acknowledging that your day, your decisions, and your desires belong to Him.

Altar Inventory Take time this week to privately ask God the two diagnostic questions the sermon raised. First: Is there anything on my altar that defiles it, something I have placed there that does not belong? Second: Has my altar simply fallen into disrepair because I have not been using it? Write down what He shows you and bring it to Him in confession and recommitment.

Worship Beyond the Song Service Identify one ordinary activity in your week, driving to work, cooking a meal, exercising, doing yard work, and intentionally turn it into an act of worship. Pray during it, meditate on a passage of Scripture, or simply acknowledge God's presence and thank Him for specifics. Practice the idea that worship is a way of living, not only a scheduled event.

Focused Prayer for Someone Far from God Elijah's heart was not only for God's glory but for the people standing at a distance, unable to make up their minds. Identify one person in your life who is in that place. Commit to praying specifically for them each day this week, asking God to make Himself unmistakably real to them the way He did on Mount Carmel.

Revisit Romans 12:1-3 Read these three verses slowly every day this week. Do not rush through them. Ask God each time to show you something you have not seen before, and write down what surfaces.

Closing Reflection

Elijah did not call down fire and then move on. He first rebuilt what had fallen. The fire came after the altar was restored. As your group closes, spend a few minutes in quiet reflection, then invite anyone who is willing to

share one honest sentence about the condition of their altar right now. Close by praying for one another, asking God to do what only He can do: answer by fire.

Scripture references: 1 Kings 18, Romans 12:1-3, John 4:10-24, Hebrews 11:6, Romans 8:28, Psalm 51:17