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**NORMAN R. OKE**

# **We Have An Altar**

**A Manual on Altar Work**



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# WE HAVE AN ALTAR

*A Manual on Altar Work*

*by*

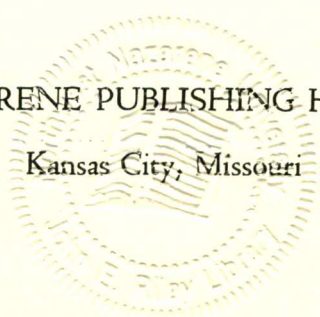
*Norman R. Oke*

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In collaboration with  
Dr. John L. Knight  
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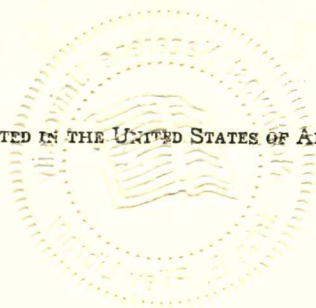
NAZARENE PUBLISHING HOUSE

Kansas City, Missouri



FOURTH PRINTING, 1964

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



## Introduction

This is not just another book sponsored by those at our international headquarters. It comes as an answer to a persistently recurring question, "What of the altar?" From our beginnings the old-fashioned mourners' bench—the altar—has been one of the most important pieces of furniture in any of our religious services, whether it be a split rail in a brush arbor or a polished piece of mahogany in one of our beautiful sanctuaries. It is not the kind of wood or its decorativeness that is important. To those of us who have come this far in the Church of the Nazarene the altar has been made sacred because it was at some altar that so many of us let go the burden of sin and allowed Jesus to come into our hearts. And what of the times without number when clouds have been lifted as God has met us at this convenient place of prayer?

Dr. Norman R. Oke has done a splendid piece of work in preparing and writing this most interesting and practical book. In order to be sure of the fullest acceptance of its contents he has had as his collaborators three outstanding fellow ministers of the church—Dr. R. T. Williams, Dr. John L. Knight, and Rev. Harold Volk. These men have followed every step in the production of the book. They have criticized, advised, and reviewed its contents while it was in the making, so that in presenting this book it is more than one man's idea. The readers of this volume will find a new attraction in this hallowed place set apart for prayer. May it ever be a part of every church structure and may it often be bathed with the tears of the penitent. Yes, "We have an altar."

ROY F. SMEE

1. This is the text for First Series Unit 162.4a, "Developing Altar Workers." Six fifty-minute sessions, or the equivalent in time, are required. Each person must read the text.

2. Your class should be registered with the general office at least three weeks before your first class session. This will allow time for us to get the class report forms, individual registration slips, and credit cards to you. It will also give you time to order and receive the texts.

3. Each pupil must be present for five of the six sessions to receive credit.

4. Examinations are optional with the teacher.

5. For Home Study purposes a Study Guide is available and credit is granted when written work has been sent to the general office.

### CHRISTIAN SERVICE TRAINING

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## Foreword

### *There It Stands: Our Trademark*

There it stood beside a busy city street; new, attractively designed—a lovely, though simple, church structure. A car pulled up to the curb and a party of tourists got out to inspect this shining, new church. Though nearly completed, the name was not yet placed on the bulletin board; it was a guess what denomination had built it. The party walked slowly inside, noted the seating capacity and the lighting in the sanctuary, and by this time were approaching the front of the sanctuary.

Then one man exclaimed, "I know who built this church. This is a Nazarene church!"

"How do you know?" someone asked.

"See that altar; that is a trademark of Nazarene churches anywhere."

The party drove away and the church perhaps never saw them again. But the truth uttered by that unknown man is the thrilling basis for the study we are about to begin.

To that man, who was well versed in the ways of the Church of the Nazarene, there is one distinctive architectural identity in Nazarene churches; not the seating, not the lighting, not the design of the sanctuary—but the altar. "See that altar; that is a trademark of Nazarene churches anywhere."

If this assumption be basically sound, and I am inclined to believe it is, it will do us well to study together this Nazarene trademark.

NORMAN R. OKE

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## CHAPTER I

# We Have an Altar

The heading of this chapter and the title of the book I borrow from the Book of Hebrews (13:10), and it is one of the rich bits of scripture in that marvelous book. But I also borrow this title from Dr. Edward Lawlor, for under this caption he has delivered a very effective evangelistic appeal in conventions throughout the country. Having borrowed it, I will endeavor to return it well worn but nonetheless meaningful.

### I. THE STORY OF THE ALTAR

Yes, Nazarenes, "we have an altar." And when we use this expression it not only refers to mere possession, as we might speak of having so many songbooks, or so much debt; it speaks of cherished possession. The altar we guard with extreme care, for it is an asset we do not intend to endanger regardless of our financial need or our denominational growth. "Yes," and we say it with deep meaning, "we have an altar."

But what is the story back of our altar?—for it truly has a story. We, of the Church of the Nazarene, did not create it; we found it and borrowed it, and have made it part and parcel of our crusade for souls to the ends of the earth. So let us lift the curtain of the past, and find the long history back of the altar which graces all of our Nazarene churches from Alaska to Australia.

#### A. *In the Old Testament*

1. *Noah.* Yes, it is Noah who introduces us to an altar. The very first mention of an altar is that one built by Noah when he led his little band from the ark to start all over again the task of making a decent world. *The first structure*



*in the new earth was an altar.* The word itself means "place of slaughter or sacrifice," and we are sure that first altar was not thrown up to be a thing of beauty but the incense that wafted up to God was pleasing to Him, and God announced that the rainbow, a symbol of mercy, would replace the flood, a weapon of wrath. We do not know the size or shape of Noah's altar but it was large enough to serve as a place for sacrifice for a large number of animals (Gen. 8:20). From this first altar we establish the first basic fact—THE ALTAR WAS PRIMARILY USEFUL.

2. *The Patriarchs.* In the Old Testament there is no further mention of the altar until the time of Abraham—some 400 years later. But the altar must have been common to some homes, for when we meet Abraham he was no stranger to an altar. In chapters 12 and 13 of Genesis, Abraham's altar is mentioned four times (12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). But the numerous references are not as noteworthy as the conditions of life in which Abraham built his altar. It was not tragedy nor financial stress that drove this giant of faith to an altar-building program; when most prosperous and financially secure, Abraham clung to his altar.

It had been so interwoven into Abraham's life that his family successors built an altar into their lives as well (Isaac—Gen. 26:25; Jacob—33:20). It was by handmade altars that these worthies knelt at those best spiritual moments of their lives.

3. *Israel.* When God gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, more specific instructions were given relative to the altar and it now became an integral part of the worship of the Israelites. Altars could be made of earth (Exod. 20:24) or of unhewn stone (20:25) or of wood (27:1-8). In usage the altars of earth or unhewn stone were known as "lay altars" where any Israelite could sacrifice, and no priest had to attend the rites. The other altars were known as "horned altars"—some form of projection upward from each corner distinguished these from the "lay altars." At these "horned altars" priests alone could offer the sacrifices.

The Mosaic law ordered two kinds of **PRIESTLY ALTARS**. There were the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense.

a. *The altar of burnt offering* was the larger of the two priestly altars. It differed in size and shape in the successive periods of Israel's history, but it was always a substantial thing. The original altar built in the Tabernacle was approximately eight feet square and five feet high. It had projections at each corner known as the horns. Blood was sprinkled on these horns at the time of the dedication of the priest, and to these horns the fugitive clung when fleeing from pursuers (Amos 3:14). The victim to be offered for sacrifice was also tied to these horns. The expression "the horns of the altar" was, and still is, a rich and meaningful phrase.

Round about the altar and about midway up was a projecting ledge on which the priest stood when officiating. Extending down from the outside of this edge to the ground was a network or grillwork of brass. This made the bottom part of the altar appear much larger than the top. At the four corners of the network were the rings through which the staves were thrust when the altar was being carried. The priests were specifically forbidden to ascend to this ledge by steps in the interest of modesty (Exod. 20:26), so a sloping ramp of earth was made by which the priest walked up to officiate at the altar.

In Solomon's Temple the altar was similar in pattern but much larger, being about 32 by 32 by 16 feet, and had three terraces of earth leading up to the priest's position. Josephus tells us that in Herod's Temple the altar of burnt offering was larger still—about 80 feet square and 24 feet high. A perpetual fire was maintained on this altar to signify the presence of Jehovah.

b. *The altar of incense* was much smaller than the altar of burnt offering—about 3 feet square and 1½ feet high.

The particular dimensions of the biblical altars are not vitally important to this study of the Nazarene altar. These four facts, however, are vital: (1) they were large enough to be adequate, (2) they were substantially built, (3) they

were easily accessible, and (4) there was to be no unnecessary embarrassment in any service at the altar.

These basic principles are to be kept in mind throughout the study of this book.

## B. *Throughout Christian History*

1. *In the Early Church.* It is strange but sadly true that no clear thread of historical accuracy can trace the development of the altar in the Christian Church. In the New Testament the references are few and no detailed instruction is given as to the use of the altar. Jesus recognized the altar as an essential element in church life (Matt. 5:23) by using those with personal differences to discover some method of reconciliation before bringing any gift to the altar. St. Paul makes passing reference to the altar (I Cor. 9:13) but nothing can be learned about the usages that were then connected with the altar. When we come to the Hebrew letter we have the striking little phrase with which we opened this chapter. And when this writer exclaims, "We have an altar," it seems clear that he refers to Jesus Christ, who became the fulfillment of so much of the Old Testament symbolism.

We have noted that the apostles made little reference to any use of the altar as a piece of equipment for worship purposes. This can quite easily be understood when we recall that they were bursting forth beyond Temple walls and carried their ministry to open places, to homes, anywhere that people would listen. Furniture was a small part of their equipment, for they were launching the Christian crusade, and others would follow whose task it would be to consolidate it and give it form and pattern. It is not that the apostles were more spiritual because they made no use of church buildings or facilities; nor does it argue that we are less spiritual because we have built churches and use forms and have developed certain customs. Both have been legitimate stages in Christian development. Our problem is to be sure that we keep as Spirit-blessed as they did in the absence of such material aids as we enjoy.

2. *In Early Methodism.* Certainly it is only just to give credit where credit is due. And we give humble and grateful thanks to the Methodist church for our altar as we know it today in our evangelistic churches. We do not find that Methodism in Great Britain adopted an altar in the evangelism over there, but soon after moving to the American shores we find the altar in use. In fact, it is thrilling to be able to go back in history and find the very birthplace of our present altar. So let's take a little trip and do homage at the spot where the altar was born. In his book *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Dr. Bangs tells us: "In 1806 and 1807 he [Seth Crowell] was stationed in the city of New York, under the charge of the Rev. Aaron Hunt. Here a revival of religion commenced such, I believe, as had never before been seen in that city, and Brother Crowell was one of the most active instruments by which it was promoted. It was during this powerful revival that the practice of inviting penitent sinners to come to the altar for prayers was first introduced. The honor of doing this, if I am rightly informed, belongs to Brother Aaron Hunt, who resorted to it to prevent the confusion arising from praying for them in different parts of the church at the same time."

There you have it: the evangelistic altar was born in the white-heat of a sweeping revival. It was introduced as an ally of evangelism and the focal point for soul winning in the public service. We have thus had nearly one hundred and fifty years of altar history. Let us see to it that our church continues to use the altar in a worthy manner.

3. *The Mourners' Bench.* It seems that as revival fires burned through the colonies the altar was widely used by Methodist and all churches that participated in these mighty movements of revival. In the Kentucky and Tennessee country tremendous crowds gathered for religious meetings and the altar was known frequently as the mourners' bench. Perhaps this was because it often was but a crude plank and seemed too rough to be given the name of altar. Or perhaps it was because the seeking was so rugged and the conviction

so violent that wails of remorse rent the air. A place for mourning was all such persons could desire, so a mourners' bench was the name given to the altar. One thing is certain: the very name "mourners' bench" emphasizes the fact that it was not there to be primarily a thing of beauty but a place for repentance and the very ruggedness of the bench could well have underlined the ruggedness of the ordeal. The mourners' bench was a glorious chapter of the straw shed and the brush arbor.

In his great address "All Out for Souls," the late Dr. J. B. Chapman said of the early days of our church, "The mourners' bench was the only indispensable piece of furniture in our meetinghouses." Though we now build our altars more beautifully they are still frequently known as mourners' benches, and let us never speak in a belittling way of the mourners' bench. It was and is God-blessed. It is our earnest prayer that any refinement in planning, even in our day, will not steal from our altar any of the atmosphere of ruggedness that true repentance demands.

4. *The Communion Altar.* To be absolutely clear in our discussion we must take time to distinguish between the evangelistic altar and the communion altar. In most liturgical churches the altar takes the form of a table, placed at the back wall of the sanctuary. In many formal churches the wide aisle leads right back to this table and there is no center pulpit. On this altar would usually be found an open Bible, candles, and the offering is placed there after being taken up by the ushers. This table is also used at the times when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is served. So in formal churches that is what is meant by the altar.

5. *The Communion Rail.* In many churches that are truly evangelical and react against liturgy and formality, there is a railing attached to the platform which is referred to as the altar. Research shows that this type of adaptation of the altar comes from Methodist history. In a much more recent day than the 1806 mention just above, when the evangelistic altar was first introduced by Methodism, we find a tendency

to make this altar a place largely for sacramental use. In the *Cyclopedia of Methodism* we find the following information. "In the Methodist churches, as the communicants kneel around a railing which partially encloses the pulpit, it is sometimes termed the altar, and in the services persons are invited to kneel at the altar of prayer. When employed in this sense it has no reference to any sacrificial offering, but simply expresses the presentation of the individual in a special service of supplication and prayer."

From this we gather that the altar was being more and more adapted for sacramental purposes and losing its distinctiveness as an evangelistic piece of equipment. In many present-day churches the altar is totally but a communion railing which encloses the pulpit platform. There is certainly no desire in this discussion to suggest that our evangelistic altar should not be used when Communion is observed. No, a thousand times no! Just let us be sure that we do not make any adaptation that will lessen the evangelistic usefulness of our altar. When history is written in a century to come, may it be said that the Nazarene altar was maintained primarily as a place of evangelism, and secondarily as a place of sacrament.

## II. THE VALUES OF THE ALTAR

The altar of the Church of the Nazarene has this in common with the other types mentioned—they have all been public places for prayer and penitence. And we turn now to a discussion of this very characteristic: what are the values of a public altar?

### A. *Atmosphere*

No way has ever been found to measure, weigh, or evaluate a warm, spiritual atmosphere in a church. All who have done evangelistic work know the inestimable value of such an atmosphere for evangelistic preaching and for giving the invitation. And, sad to say, its absence in a church can be a frightening experience and lead to great difficulties in evangelistic labors. No amount of faithfulness in other respects

by the church members can compensate for a lack of atmosphere; no amount of tithing or generosity, no long testimonies, no long prayers or loud "Amens" can atone for the absence of a warm and spiritual atmosphere that all Nazarenes cherish and all Nazarene churches positively must have. Other groups may progress by means of efficient organizations and better equipment, but we must see to it that the house of God is made sacred by that melting and moving of the Holy Spirit which brings an atmosphere conducive to good preaching and ready response.

The creation of atmosphere is one of the undoubted values of a public altar. The invitation has been given, the seekers are kneeling by the altar. Now comes the crux of the entire evangelistic battle. Not even having a great number of saints gathered to deal with the seekers is enough. As the air about us bathes the planet we call the earth, so there must be an atmosphere of faith generated which will envelop those who seek help from the Lord. Without this blanket of atmosphere life on the earth could not exist. And without an atmosphere of spiritual warmth there will be very little life created around our altar. Minus this atmosphere we incline to persuade seekers through prematurely and as a result have anemic finders with short-lived experiences. Hear it, all Nazarenes! This altar-atmosphere is one essential we cannot do without. We can afford to do without most other things if in getting them we are less likely to have that peculiar Spirit-charging that we have come to appreciate and know as atmosphere.

And it is the earnest, united prayer of saints at the altar that helps create the atmosphere conducive to victory. This is no brief for any particular volume of prayer or degree of noisiness, but volume of prayer and strong faith are usually the twin ingredients that bring this atmosphere which is a **MUST** in our altar work.

All of us admit that occasionally a seeker is of such temperament that public seeking amid a group of praying persons results in confusion. Such a one can well be directed to some quieter spot, but this is the exception and not the rule. It

is our contention here that no prayer room or private consultation could do so well for the vast majority of seekers because of the very atmosphere created around a victorious altar.

### B. *Conviction*

We must never overlook the effect of an altar service on the relatives and friends who remain in the sanctuary. These are often unsaved persons and as they witness the altar praying and the victorious climax it leaves an impression on their minds that is beneficial and lasting. For a husband to sit back and see his wife pray through, or parents to watch while children find the Lord—these are convicting influences that only a public altar can produce. More than once have we seen persons, who rejected every invitation earlier, come to an altar after witnessing some friend or loved one get through to shining victory.

### C. *Accessibility*

A public altar squarely in the front of a church sanctuary is a perpetual invitation to needy, broken hearts. And while the custom is to wait till the invitation is extended or, as we sometimes say, "the altar is opened," yet at times people cannot wait that long and hurry to the altar early in the service. This spontaneous type of break is witnessed too infrequently, and it should be encouraged. To be honest, our public altar is never closed—we really don't ever have to open it. And if we used some other method such as an inquiry room, it would be much more difficult for a person to spontaneously break to the altar than when the public altar beckons with welcoming arms right there close at hand. It would be almost an impossibility for one under conviction to move to some prayer room before the formal invitation was extended. And Nazarenes are not ready to announce that the Holy Spirit deals with hearts only when we give the formal altar call. Wise is the pastor or evangelist who can sense that sacred moment during the singing or the scripture read-



ing when hearts are strangely moved. And what is almost more important, may it never be said that any Nazarene service is so neatly and primly prepared that a hungry heart would not dare to break into the prescribed order of service and fall at the altar.

It is the splendid accessibility of our public altar both physically and in spiritual planning that we cherish. It thrills all of us when we hear news that seekers have come spontaneously and revival fires have broken out. I am glad our church founders planned for such Heaven-sent outpourings by insisting on a public, easily accessible altar.

#### D. *Testimony*

There need not be a long discussion at this point, but we need to be reminded of the silent testimony of a good Nazarene altar. The casual visitors to our services are not unaffected by seeing a public altar as a prominent piece of our church furniture. We don't have to put a tag on it saying, "This is for those who would seek God." For almost all the folks who see it placed and built where it can be readily used will easily recognize its mission. And let's be honest; it means more to thinking men to see a workable altar in our churches than to read a score of announcements that we are evangelistic—whether on bulletin board or in newspapers. So there it stands as a silent monument to our long-range evangelistic planning.

#### E. *Avoids Suspicion*

Another value should not be overlooked. A public altar removes all stigma relative to our altar procedures. A prayer room has at times suggested that we are not totally willing to have outsiders witness our procedures and suspicion can develop—but never around a public altar.

We can hear again, some of us, those impassioned words of our sainted leader J. B. Chapman in his great address—"All Out for Souls." Hear him again cry out against barren

altars and hear him plead for an evangelistic passion. It is ours to keep our altars wetted with tears and strategically placed where yearning hearts can easily find the path to peace.

### TO GUIDE YOUR STUDY

1. What was the occasion of the building of the first altar?
2. What was the basic difference of operation between the "lay" and "horned" altars?
3. List the four important principles relative to the Biblical altars of burnt offering.
4. How do we account for the scarcity of references to altars in the New Testament?
5. Give the circumstances surrounding the first use of an evangelistic altar such as we now use.
6. State your own experience regarding the value of a warm evangelistic atmosphere around an altar, or the opposite.
7. What persons are likely to come under conviction by the presence of a public altar?
8. Relative to accessibility what are the advantages of a public altar over a prayer room?

### FOR FURTHER READING

Any good religious encyclopedia—articles on "Altar."

AYCOCK, JARRETTE. "*Save Some.*" Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. Pages 12-13.

## CHAPTER II

# Keep the Altar Central

A few basic principles were noted in our study of the altar in the first chapter. (1) The altar from the first was meant to be primarily useful, and (2) it was large enough to adapt itself to expected usage, and (3) it was placed so it was easily seen and readily accessible. In this second chapter we will develop these principles by showing that the altar is the focus of all our church enterprise—"Keep the Altar Central."

### I. KEEP THE ALTAR CENTRAL IN OUR PLANNING

We Nazarenes will readily give assent to the principles just listed. And I am sure we also will readily agree to the basic concept: **THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IS PRIMARILY EVANGELISTIC.** Now let us join these in a closer discussion.

It is granted that we plan to offer to every community where we operate a rounded program of church activities. We offer a good Sunday school and other church school activities; we have a fine service of worship and our youth groups have a full range of activities; and our training facilities are available to all our members. But after listing all these we sincerely assert that all these other services of the church have their focal point in an evangelistic crisis. I mean that all our church activities are excess baggage if they are not closely related to the crises of evangelism. And, by and large, our evangelism wraps around the success of the Sunday evening and special revival services. So, if all the activities of the week are to come to a studied climax in the evangelistic hour, then that particular service, in turn, comes to its climax in the altar service. The altar service is, then, the fine focus of our broad program. Oh, those golden moments when the preacher has delivered an impassioned plea for souls, and then pleads

with hungry hearts to yield to the pull of the Spirit—those are the high moments of the week!

So, since our church is primarily an evangelistic church, our altar must at all times and at all cost serve this purpose, which brings us to the very important consideration to follow.

A. *The Planning for the Sanctuary Should Begin with the Altar.*

Every architect employed to design a Nazarene church should be clearly alerted to the fact that we build our sanctuary from the altar as a central focus: the altar is not an afterthought. We are not formalists—our services do not revolve around the sacraments; the pulpit as the focus of truth and the altar as the focus of evangelism—from these central points we plan the church sanctuary. And that logically suggests some other considerations.

1. *Make Room for the Altar.* In planning the sanctuary, pew space, choir space, aisle space, and platform space should bow allegiance to the primary need for altar space. Let the designer know with a solid finality that Nazarenes insist on an altar that has workable space on both sides for efficient workers and for earnest seekers. No skimping on floor space at this point should be tolerated. We noted in the first chapter that biblical altars were built in a broad spacing and all sides were open to view and worship.

It is suggested that at least three feet should be provided for work space behind the altar and four feet or more for seekers space between the front pew and the altar form. This means that we will stubbornly dedicate the seven or eight feet between the front pew and the pulpit for altar use. The figures given are minimum and are reasonable even for the smaller churches. Larger churches can well plan to increase the space around the altar. Of course, it is understood that for overflow occasions chairs could be placed in this space, but the primary use of this space in the sanctuary should be for altar use in the high and holy task of soul winning.

In case the front pew seems to be too close to the altar to be used readily, the problem can be met by having a screen, pew-height built just in front of the front pew. Then worshipers are much more free to use the front pew and have a certain sense of privacy at the same time. And we add that the money spent for altar space is a good investment as we plan the church structure. The biblical altars were not made with leftover scraps and in marginal space; the altar area was chosen well and other arrangements had to conform. May we of our day and in our crusade for souls take careful note.

2. *An Altar: Not a Railing.* If the matter of adequate space, which we discussed in the previous section, is not firmly fixed in our thinking then the result will be a desire to conserve seating space and make the altar part of the platform. This is an expensive way to save space! True, it may serve as an altar, and it may, in cases, look even more artistic than a separate altar, but it is decidedly a makeshift when we consider the effectiveness of altar use.

We lose very decidedly if our altar becomes known as a communion rail, for that means that we have permitted our evangelistic altar to be silenced in its distinct testimony. But that is not the chief result of substituting a rail for a separate altar.

Undoubtedly the desire for an architecturally graceful front prompts architects to design railings around platforms rather than separate altars. Men from churches with non-evangelistic backgrounds cannot be blamed. It is our honest responsibility to see that they give us their best architectural experience; only see that they adapt the design to Nazarene needs. It should be added that if such a rail is artistically essential to the beauty of the sanctuary, it need not be forbidden. Only let the altar be a separate piece—a workable, a real Nazarene altar. I repeat that this substitution of a rail for a separate altar has been done innocently, but those who labor in revival work hope that that trend will be checked and ultimately halted.

## II. KEEP THE ALTAR CENTRAL IN OUR USAGE.

We have posited the principle that the Nazarene altar should be placed on the floor-level with the congregation. But in fairness we must give adequate reasoning for this basic assumption.

### A. *Ours Is a "Joint-Operation" Altar.*

Now I am placing myself in the shoes of the seeker kneeling in penitence at the altar; that is exactly where I was a few years ago—and weren't we all?

The seeker-worker unit is what I choose to term a joint-operation. One who has been saved by grace is striving to help a sinner into that same grace. One beggar who has found food is leading a hungry beggar to the same supply. It is not the case of one who never knew sin praying down and talking down to one who grovels in well-deserved shame and remorse. The altar between these two but speaks of the difference made by the grace of God. This is "Operation Altar," and one who looks back to the horrible pit from which he was digged reaches out a hand to one who now battles to escape that same slimy "Slough of Despond." In this kind of sacred battle it is much better if both kneel on the same level. No one may ever say it, but both unconsciously sense the definite advantage when both join in this struggle kneeling on the same level. When the scribes brought the adulterous woman to Jesus they pointed down at her in disdain, but Jesus stooped down to the dust (which was her level) and wrote His only recorded writings. And let us recall that God did not attempt to redeem the race by looking down from a holy heaven; Bethlehem was on the earth-level and so were Gethsemane and Calvary. And the dying Saviour and the dying thief were on the same level, too.

Certainly we would not make a fetish of this and feel that the altar had any special redemptive qualities just because it was on the floor-level. It could be as barren and unfruitful there as though it were a communion rail around the platform. However, we make it much more adaptable to both worker

and seeker when it is so placed that both worker and seeker kneel on the same level.

### B. *Ours Is a Lay Altar.*

A communion rail can well be placed as an integral part of the platform because it is used only in the priestly function during the sacrament. An ordained person officiates at one side and the communicant kneels on the other side. The officiating clergyman does not have to kneel down in passing the emblems; he walks along and, stooping down, serves each kneeling communicant. And it is perfectly fitting that he remain on the same level where he is accustomed to perform his ministerial duties.

But our altars are not essentially or exclusively for the priestly function of the sacrament. We welcome laymen to join with the ministry in working with seekers at the altar. To be bluntly honest, we will fail as an evangelistic church unless our laity feel utterly at ease in working around our altars. So we must have our altar constructed so our lay people will readily use it. It is true that our laymen come to the pulpit for such purposes as leading singing, or singing specials, or leading testimony service, or leading Sunday school. But laymen feel most at home on the pew-level; and that is a major reason why the altar should be constructed on the floor-level—*it is a lay altar.*

Most certainly workers could not come during the altar call and deal with the seeker across the altar when it is a railing, for that would place the worker up on the platform with the evangelist—an impossible situation. As a result the worker is forced to kneel beside the seeker, thus taking up space which should be left for other seekers.

There is a certain hesitation on the part of most laity to come up on the platform to work with seekers. Let's not blame the workers; rather should we place the altar where they most readily feel at home working around it.

In some cases where the pulpit platform is quite high, the space behind the altar is elevated slightly. This does make it

easier for those working on the platform to step down to the altar, but it would appear that what we gain in that regard we more than lose by the fact that we still have the workers kneeling considerably higher than the seekers.

### C. *Some Practical Considerations.*

1. *Easier to Deal with the Seeker.* The floor-level altar has a few other advantages that warrant a brief mention. For one, the worker naturally wants to be able to look directly into the face of the seeker and be close enough to hear even the whispered words of confidence as the seeker may desire to explain some problem. And this type of conversation between worker and seeker is carried on so much easier if they both kneel on the same level.

2. *Easier to Move Around Altar.* Another worthwhile consideration in the readiness with which a worker can move to either side of the altar when the need arises. Perhaps the seeker desires to speak with some other worker besides the one who came originally—perhaps some loved one or relative. Such movement from side to side of the altar are smoother and easier when the altar is on floor-level. Otherwise, those moving to the pulpit side must either find the steps that ascend to the platform or else make an awkward leap to the pulpit level over the altar rail. Such has been witnessed, and we would do well to avoid it in the interest of altar decency.

### III. THE ALTAR CONSTRUCTED.

We have given considerable attention to the placement of the altar and its relation to the pulpit and platform. Now let us discuss together the altar as an actual piece of church furniture. The author is indebted to Dr. Roy Smee and the Department of Church Extension for the altar sketches that are included in the appendix of our text.

#### A. *Height*

Remember that the Nazarene altar carries no sign on it, "For Adults Only!" It is there for all ages, child and adult alike. In planning it, be sure that the young can kneel there



and find the altar adapted to their size. So don't measure it with adults only in mind. Sometimes it is so tall that little children almost have to stand to properly bend over the altar. This should be avoided. The height that seems best to serve all ages who will come to seek the Saviour is not lower than twenty inches or higher than twenty-four.

### B. *Width*

Do not think for a moment that the width of the altar is unimportant. There are some definite reasons why it should be at least six inches in width, and eight inches would be preferable. For one thing, it should be wide enough that a good-sized Bible can lie on it open without danger of sliding off. More will be said later in this study about the use of the Bible at the altar; perhaps some extreme narrow altars have discouraged its use. Then again, in the interest of sheer comfort for an adult, and especially some large person, how much better if he can lay his arms on it while he bows in tearful penitence. The width will also help make for more solid construction. (See Appendix III.)

### C. *Length*

Naturally the dimensions of the sanctuary will largely determine the length of the altar. But remember one thing. We are planning our sanctuary with an ADEQUATE ALTAR in mind. So the length of the altar will be a real consideration when the size and shape of the sanctuary are being decided. A long, narrow sanctuary will necessarily provide room for only a short altar, while a wider sanctuary lends itself much more happily to an adequate altar. One authority on building makes the following suggestion, "The desirable proportion pattern is two-four-five—two for height, four for width, and five for length." Let this be said, in honesty: it is often more costly to build a sanctuary with greater breadth, and is cheaper to construct a longer and narrower building. There are however, many definite advantages if the sanctuary is not too narrow. (1) The audience is seated closer to the speaker

and thus nearer to the altar. (2) There is the other added advantage of a longer altar for the proportionate size of the sanctuary. It can be clearly seen that an altar which reaches across the front of a narrow sanctuary would have a much smaller ratio to the size of the congregation than an altar which stretches across the front of a wider building. The entire altar need not be placed permanently. If it were to be fifty feet long over all, then thirty feet could be the permanent altar, and an extension ten feet long could be placed at either end during revivals. But our espousal of evangelism is outshouted by the presence of a short, tiny altar at the front of a large and commodious sanctuary.

Particular cases must always determine the altar size, but a basic principle will be agreed upon by us all. It is very inefficient to have to bring up chairs or benches when the altar is full. This might be a compliment if an already ample altar has been filled and one of these heavenly deluges brings a greatly enlarged group to the altar. But for regular use the planned altar should be large enough to care for expected seekers. And while seekers can kneel at a chair or bench, those who come to pray and deal with them find discouragements and inconveniences in bowing over or around chair backs or bench backs. And what is really worse, it leaves the impression that we planned better for getting the people to the revival than for getting them into the fountain of Calvary. (See Appendix I.)

#### *D. Altar and Communion Table*

Another practical consideration deserves attention at this point. In purchasing their furniture, many churches desire a communion table, which naturally would be placed right in front of the pulpit. A problem is thus presented when the altar stretches all the way across the front and is not more than three feet from the platform front. Right where the communion table is there would not be room enough to work with seekers adequately. Two suggestions can be made. First, divide the altar in the middle and the communion table thus

would fit in the center opening with still room enough for workers to move freely by going either way. Another solution would be to have the altar movable so that it could be placed as just mentioned for all ordinary services, but when revival times are planned the communion table could be lifted away and the altars moved nearer together to utilize the valuable middle space. Of course, more ideally, we could allow more space between the altar and the platform so a communion table could be there and still have room to work effectively around the altar—this would require approximately five to six feet of space between altar and platform. Some churches have helped solve this by having a curved altar which allows space in the middle for the communion table behind the altar. This necessitates a much more expensive altar. (Appendix II.)

#### E. *Miscellaneous Details*

1. *Altar in Sections.* It is agreed by many who are experienced in evangelism that the best altar is one in sections—perhaps not more than ten feet long. This permits people to move from back to front or vice versa with ease, without the awkwardness and impropriety of stepping over it.

2. *Carpet Around the Altar.* It is poor economy to lavish money on a beautiful, carved altar and then fail to place rugs for those who kneel. We can argue all we want that if the seeker is hungry enough for God he will forget where he kneels. This is true, but remember that the devil is battling, too, in that meeting. And if he can suggest to a lady that the floor is rough and her nylons might be snagged it may be just enough to turn the tide for her. We want seekers to kneel there until they actually pray through. It is our obligation to see to it that we do all we can to make it comfortable for them in case the siege may be long. So even if the rug must be inexpensive, let it be placed around the entire altar.

We would discourage building altars with kneeling ledges along the front. They may appear to be more comfortable, but too often catch people at the knees and become more uncomfortable. Also, they do not permit easy changing of po-

sitions; and when people must kneel at the altar for long periods of time, a good rug around the altar with several piles of padding right by the altar is the most practical we can suggest. Remember, the first seeker who responds to an invitation must sometimes kneel there for fifteen to thirty minutes before people gather to pray. It is our obligation to make these persons comfortable, just as it is for us to do so for guests who come to our homes. (See Appendix III.)

Very closely akin to this is the natural plea that these rugs be kept as clean as can reasonably be done in a public building. No worker or seeker should have to kneel on very dusty rugs and inhale dusty air as he prays. If dust is absolutely unavoidable, be sure it is not old dust!

3. *Handkerchiefs at the Altar.* And then *those wonderful tears!* Blessed is the altar that is often wetted with tears. But how embarrassed is the seeker when he comes and finds that he forgot to bring enough handkerchiefs to wipe away his tears! Right while he is wrapped in a battle for life or death it is unnecessary that he have to worry about his tears. Using the words of the Master, "Give ye them to eat," we urge that this little detail not be overlooked. Recently we saw a lovely altar and the designer had planned for this very need. Spaced along the altar, neat little shelves were built from the back. These were insets perhaps 3 inches high, 6 inches deep, and 12 inches long. Then nice, inconspicuous, spring-hinged doors covered these at all times and were scarcely noticeable from the pulpit. In each inset a box of paper tissues was placed and thus was always close by when needed. (See Appendix III.)

4. *Make It Sturdy.* Just a closing word regarding the construction of the altar. We noted in chapter one that the biblical altar was soundly built and substantial. Let us be as wise. It may sound fine to say that some big two-hundred-pounder pounded the altar in his desperate seeking and smashed it through. It would much more glorify God if it were so well built that it did not yield when the "rains de-

scended, and the floods came." Some construct the altar so it can be lifted away for such occasions as weddings or funerals. If that is to be done a removable altar is practical. This makes it possible to slide it up against the platform when unusually large crowds are expected. But, whether it be stationary or movable, it should be so solid that all who come feel safe.

#### IV. THE ALTAR AND THE PEWS.

You will recall that several significant things were noted about the Old Testament altar: it was large, substantial, and also readily accessible. The first two have been discussed already relative to our altar. But the altar must be easily accessible, so we turn now to a consideration of the altar relative to the seating plan of the sanctuary.

1. *Center Aisles.* When planning the seating arrangements of the sanctuary it is recommended that center aisles be avoided. The traditional reason for center aisles is that they lend themselves better for funeral and weddings. And, of course, in liturgical churches with divided chancels a center aisle is essential; however, we are not liturgical. And as for such occasions as funerals, these are more and more held in funeral chapels and less and less in churches. And weddings can be very well cared for in a church with side aisles. Such occasions are too infrequent anyway to warrant planning the seating with these in mind.

To consider ministers in their pulpit labors, most of them prefer not to preach with a yawning gap down the middle of the congregation. As one authority puts it, "The center aisle leading to a pulpit violates every principle of the psychology of public speaking."

However, center aisles frequently result in longer pews, and that is perhaps the main reason for avoiding them in planning the sanctuary for evangelism.

2. *Long Pews.* Long pews that seat more than eight or ten form a hazard. Some person who brings a visitor hoping to see that visitor find Christ may well be placed at the cen-

ter of that long pew, and when the Holy Spirit convicts the unsaved the enemy may well slip up and suggest that it is too discourteous to have to brush past so many people to get to an aisle. Again, it is much more difficult for personal workers to come to the side of interested persons when the pews are very long. *Let us remember that aisle space is no luxury in an evangelistic church.*

3. *Dead-end Pews.* It may not always be possible to avoid dead-end pews because of the shape of the sanctuary, but they are an undoubted handicap in evangelistic work. When planning the sanctuary seating we should avoid pews that are placed right against the outside walls. For one thing, it is hard for ushers to regulate the ventilation and that is a handicap in many evangelistic meetings. A sinner may even seek out such a spot, for it offers opportunity to lean against the wall in comfort. But when conviction comes on him, that very little hiding place at the dead end of the pew may be enough to keep him from getting to the altar.

Dead-end aisles are largely a relic of older church planning but these would be recognized immediately as an evangelistic drawback. These short aisles were common when circular pews were used, but few churches plan that way today. But just this word may keep it in our minds as one hazard in our planning for church seating.

Through it all remember the altar is central in our thinking and in our planning.

## TO GUIDE YOUR STUDY

1. State the primary and basic concept of the operation of our church.
2. Why is it necessary to carefully instruct most architects regarding our evaluation of the altar?
3. Give the suggested spacings both in front of and behind the altar.
4. Give the reason you think most valid for building our altar separate from the pulpit platform.

5. List the practical considerations for building the altar separate from the pulpit platform.
6. Why is the height of the altar important? width? length?
7. State your reactions to the recommendations for carpet around the altar. For paper tissues.
8. Which one of the basic principles of Old Testament altars as mentioned in Chapter I is emphasized in our discussion of seating arrangements?

### **FOR FURTHER READING**

HARRELL, WM. A. *Planning Better Church Buildings*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press. Chapter III.

### CHAPTER III

## Shall We Train Our Altar Workers?

### *Shall We Train Our Altar Workers?*

I am sure you have caught it already: The basic assumption in this entire study is the centrality of our altar; it is the most significant piece of furniture in any Church of the Nazarene. There most certainly would be no desire to belittle the value of comfortable pews, or nice pulpit furniture, but we would reemphasize the value of the altar in our evangelism.

Thus, if the altar is of supreme physical importance, the next consideration logically follows, "Is not the altar worker also very important from a spiritual consideration?" And it is an honest attempt to answer this question that will consume our attention in this chapter.

#### I. SHOULD WE TRAIN OUR ALTAR WORKERS?

The value of training is becoming more and more apparent in the work of evangelism. This is no sudden revelation, however. We Nazarenes realized from the very early years that we would need a program to give training to the teachers and staff of the Sunday schools. So, to supply that vital and pressing need, the Leadership Training Program came into being. It is Dr. E. P. Ellyson who can be largely credited with the development of that very worthy training program. Texts were written and plans formulated, and teachers by the hundreds gathered to study. That program served its purpose admirably from about 1925 to 1940. At that time the Christian Service Training program came into being. There was a growing realization on the part of our denominational leaders that the training program must be broadened to include all who labored in the local church in responsibilities



other than those connected with the Sunday school. Its slogan describes this change in emphasis—"training in church membership." It set out to offer training to the entire church membership with the view in mind that an informed member will be better equipped to accept any task, and a basic training program will give us better workers in all departments of the church. That, then, is the field of our Christian Service Training program.

There are specific courses designed to assist in enlisting and preparing members of the church in visitation and personal evangelism. Other courses help to keep the priority of evangelism in proper perspective. These courses are:

- (1) Unit 162a, "Winning Others to Christ"  
Text: *We Are Witnesses*, by J. W. Ellis
- (2) Unit 162.1a, "Evangelism in the Local Church"  
Text: *The Labor of Love*, by G. B. Williamson
- (3) Unit 163a, "The Priority of Evangelism"  
Text: *The Church—Winning Souls*, by V. H. Lewis.
- (4) Unit 164a, "Sunday Night Evangelism"  
Text: *The Church—Winning Sunday Nights*, by Orville W. Jenkins

We agree that those who go from door to door with the gospel invitation should be trained, not only in the arts of door approach and in meeting soul needs, but also in the doctrine and history of the Church of the Nazarene.

We also remind ourselves that the Church of the Nazarene believes that such other workers as ushers, youth leaders, and missionary officers should have training facilities provided. Then, we ask, should not the workers at the altar be trained when we train the workers who deal with visitation, with personal or home evangelism; when we train the song leader, who unites the congregation in the bonds of song?

In his splendid book *Overseers of the Flock*, Dr. G. B. Williamson states, "Pastors should train their soul winners to do effective altar work." One of our fine British pastors says, "There is not a task on earth that brings greater joy to

the worker [than altar work], but at the same time it may be said that there is not a task requiring more careful training and preparation . . .”

Why not expect to train those who work with souls at the altar—the most sacred task in all our church activities?

#### A. *A Hazard to Be Considered*

These questions may be asked, and they deserve to be considered carefully: “Is there not a danger of professionalism?” “Are we not liable to lean on training and forget the Holy Spirit in our altar work?” These questions warrant close attention.

Our immediate answer is this, “There is no reason why such a thing must happen.” Training and professional attitudes are not inevitable twins. This thing we know as professionalism in spiritual life has no more necessary relation to the trained than it does to the untrained person. Remember, it was Judas and not Paul who succumbed to the malady of professionalism. It was Aaron and not Moses who fell to the germ of professionalism in Old Testament days. And in both cases the better trained man was the one who saved the day for the nation and for the people of God.

“Training plus the Holy Spirit” is a wondrous combination and it is a worthy goal. The Holy Spirit uses men, not stumps; and He uses trained minds, not mental vacuums. Right here let us be sure to make clear that through all our proposed training of altar workers the Holy Spirit’s presence and help is priority number one. In fact, dependence upon the Holy Spirit shall be a large part of the training of altar workers.

#### B. *The Value of Trained Altar Workers*

Let us take a fresh and careful look at our altar operation. The pastor or evangelist has extended the invitation; people have come to kneel in penitence—this is the crowning glory of our entire week of activities. And what’s more, it is the spot where Satan fights the most violently and stubbornly. In fact, it would almost seem that satanic hindrances are not so

numerous or large in getting people to an altar as in getting them prayed through to real victory after they come to the altar. The devil seems to delight more in altar failures than in invitation failures. It is a more stinging defeat to us when people leave our altars defeated and unsatisfied and disappointed than when they refuse to come to our services or, having attended, refuse to yield to the invitation.

A classic example of this is found in the Acts. The Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem, presumably to worship. But at the Temple in Jerusalem nothing spiritual happened to him. With empty and hungry heart he started the long journey home. But God gave us a dramatic lesson: Deity is hurt more deeply than we humans when people leave church disappointed. So the Holy Spirit sent Philip from Samaria on a hurried trip to the desert. Philip intercepted the Ethiopian, helped him to victory. A well-trained, Spirit-led layman did the job God wanted done. We must constantly remind ourselves of *the desperate need for altar victory, the tragic cost of altar defeat.*

### C. Spontaneous Altar Workers

It is our Nazarene custom to urge our people to gather for prayer as soon as the invitation is concluded. And it has been one of the glories of our Zion, one of the aspects of our evangelistic success, that our laity have been cooperative and loyal in this soul-winning labor. Neither the author nor the book even faintly suggests that we ever do away with the congregational call to prayer around the altar when seekers kneel in spiritual battle.

But there can be improvement in the organization relative to getting people to work at the altar. Here is where the proposed altar-worker training program comes in. Here are some of the problems that have been faced by unorganized and untrained altar workers.

1. *Unwanted Altar Workers.* When a revival gets in good swing it will frequently attract visitors from other groups that also are strongly evangelistic. And at times some of these may desire to work around our altars. We frankly

assert that our church does not want people working around our altars who believe that some ecstatic experience or speaking in unknown tongues must accompany or follow the crisis of entire sanctification. Neither do we want workers, who incline to the Calvinistic teaching of eternal security, coming to tell seekers that if they have ever been saved they are still safe in the fold of God. There is no place at the Nazarene altar for persons who bring in suggestions of error. Our people will have to face this elsewhere but they should be safe from it when seeking spiritual help at our church altars. This may well be a minor problem in altar work but it is a real one.

The best way to solve this problem is for our own tried-and-trained altar workers to be quick to respond to altar work. Then our seekers will be well cared for. If a case should arise where someone is at our altar and suggesting some error to our seekers, the matter must be dealt with promptly though courteously. But all this is but to emphasize the need for training our own people until they are equipped with both the "know-how" and the "know-why" to do effective altar work.

2. *The Altar Worker and the Congregation.* What relation will the trained altar worker sustain to the rest of the congregation? This must be satisfactorily solved or else any further discussion is unnecessary, for we could abandon the whole idea of training altar workers.

I said emphatically earlier that it would be tragic and well-nigh fatal if any program of training altar workers would keep the larger group of our people from readily coming to join in prayer around the altar. This must never be done. The ideal situation would be to have the entire membership trained for effective altar work; and that is a good goal toward which to strive. But it is a realistic fact that only a fair proportion will be trained reasonably soon as altar workers. But there is no suggestion that, because we have trained some for more effective altar work, the others will be placed on the inactive list. It is always expected that those with the closest contacts will wish to help those who seek at our altars, and it should ever be that way. As Dr. G. B. William-

son suggests in his book *Overseers of the Flock*, "The person who has prepared the way for a soul to come to the altar by prayer and personal work is the one to give him help at the altar." But that still does not invalidate the plan of having a group given special training in the fine art of altar work, so that whoever does work with the seeker is fitted to do more effective work.

Take another very realistic look at our altar work. We depend now on the minority who will carry spiritual burdens to do most of our altar praying and altar work. These are the ones who do most of the "in-fighting" and real battling at the altar. These are the ones who move in close beside the seeker, find his heart need, and join in prevailing prayer till the struggle is over. Others of our congregation will move toward the front and pray in a general way for all the seekers; but many of them stay far enough away so the smell of smoke scarcely gets on them. I can see no harm in giving specific training to these who are our best altar workers, for they are the ones who will most likely respond to a call for training anyway. Thus the others will not likely be discouraged from coming to pray at the altar as they have been doing. The trained workers will have no mortgage on the altar; their training will help them know when and how to move in close to seekers, and when to bring someone else in for assistance.

3. *Distractions During the Altar Service.* It is fitting at this point to make some very frank suggestions relative to proper conduct in the sanctuary while the altar service is in progress. And there is no simple answer. When the benediction has been pronounced it is natural for visitors to move toward the exits. And some of the regular congregation usually have reasons or excuses for refraining from going down to the altar for the altar service. How to avoid loud, distracting conversation at the back of the sanctuary during the altar service is the problem. We do not wish to kill the friendly greetings that members should extend to visitors. Yet even this must be all done with careful propriety or we will leave the impression upon our visitors that the altar

service is neither sacred nor very important. This is especially true if visitors have come from more formal churches where any ceremony at the altar is a very sacred moment. We must guard lest we preach as though the altar were the "holy of holies" and then act as though it were but a necessary evil accompanying our evangelistic services.

In this regard the pastor and the people must always be alert. It is usually best for the pastor to stay right at the altar and let some layman greet the visitors at the door when an altar service follows our appeal. It always appears contradictory for a pastor to carry a heavy burden that the unsaved shall yield to the call of the gospel and then go to the door to shake hands with the unsaved while the seeker battles through without the pastor's prayerful attention.

But whoever is the greeter, he should keep his voice subdued, yet maintain a pleasant tone as he shakes hands with the visitors. And as for bidding the members farewell at the church doors, it should hardly be necessary when seekers are at the altar. Just the very minimum of such greeting should be done and as soon as possible the greeter should hasten back to the altar to join the battle for souls.

However, there is still the problem of members who do not for one reason or another come to pray at the altar. Sometimes mothers with little babies cannot come to pray; often younger children of our families will remain in the seats waiting while their parents work at the altar. We must help curb the chatter as the altar service is in progress. It is hardly reasonable to expect others to refrain totally from even whispering while the prayer at the altar is rising in considerable volume. But the very least we should require is that they never be heard by those who are joined in prayer and battle at the altar.

The ushers can help us at this point. They can urge quietness among those who remain in their seats during the altar service. They can, by example, speak quietly to those who are leaving after the final benediction. It might be a help if an attractive, arresting sign were prepared with some such words

as this: "QUIET PLEASE: DURING THE ALTAR SERVICE." Just before the close of the regular service it could be placed in a conspicuous place, where it would be readily seen by those who walk out of the church.

All this is done to improve our altar work. We are not saying that our present altar work is wholly ineffective. But who would not admit that in such a weighty work we should always strive for improvement? Some altar services are hit-and-miss; some leave the seeker with no individual guidance at all; some result in too few workers for the seekers—yes, there is room for improvement. So prayerfully let us proceed deeper into this study of *the Nazarene altar*.

### TO GUIDE YOUR STUDY

1. State your best reason for believing that professionalism is not inevitable when workers are trained.
2. Why does Satan seem to delight in altar failures?
3. Suggest the types of erroneous teachings that could be brought into our altar work if care is not taken.
4. What is your reason for believing that altar workers can be trained without damaging the custom of having the congregation gather for prayer?
5. Suggest some ways to lessen distractions in the sanctuary during the altar call.
6. How would you suggest that visitors be greeted as they leave the service during an altar service?

### FOR FURTHER READING

AYCOCK, JARRETTE. "Save Some." Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. Pages 7-9.

WILLIAMSON, G. B. *Overseers of the Flock*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. Chapter IV, pp. 154-56.

## CHAPTER IV

# What Constitutes Good Altar Workers?

In our discussion so far we have noted the value of our public altar, the type and placement of the altar, and the need for effective workers around our altar. In this chapter we will consider with more detailed care the type of person who makes the most acceptable worker at the altar.

### I. PERSONAL ELEMENTS IN A GOOD ALTAR WORKER

There is no suggestion being made here that we should sift the church membership and use only those with sparkling personalities or high IQ's. This business of training altar workers must be kept on a higher basis than choosing candidates for a popularity contest. Let all who will consent come to train for this sacred undertaking. But, having said all that, the solid fact remains that certain personality traits are valuable and others are detrimental in altar work. This is our shining hope—any person can improve his personality by earnest endeavor. With this as our foundation of assurance we recommend that all be permitted to come, and most persons can develop into acceptable altar workers. Let us look at the personal elements that are helpful in altar work.

#### A. *Love of People*

Some naturally enjoy the fellowship of people more than others. The recluse, who is largely shut up to his own life and likings, would not, by the very nature of the case, easily make an acceptable altar worker. However, that type of person would not likely offer himself for such services. But let this be settled: All can improve in this matter of loving people; even the recluse or hermit can improve in this respect.

We have all met people who had a very wholesome interest in other people, and to fellowship with such a person is



refreshing indeed. When such a person is with you, before you know it he is sharing your cares and your concerns. He is vitally interested in all you are doing, and in all your plans for the future. He deeply enjoys talking about you. Anyone who has such a friend has a jewel indeed. This is one of the characteristics of persons that psychologists call extroverts.

Then there is the other type of person who apparently has no vital interest outside of himself. He will talk freely with you—but only as long as you discuss his affairs. Let the conversation turn to you and your interests and he quickly cools off and pulls back into his shell. He has some of the characteristics of an introvert. His world is largely confined to the horizons of his personal plans and problems. If you have been compelled to companion long with such a person you deserve heaped-up sympathy.

We have no desire here to launch into any detailed discussion of this problem of extroverts or introverts. One thing is very essential for all altar workers: we must all develop a love for people. And here is the reason. If the altar worker has been inclined to be self-centered, the seeker he prays with can well say to himself: Why has he come now? He has acted as though I didn't exist up to this moment. Why does he get excited about me now? This will be a silent reaction of course, though it may be definitely real. How much better when the worker has had a sincere interest in people and then when he kneels beside a seeker this reaction can well be imagined: My, I am so glad he came to pray with me! He has always shown such a deep interest in all my spiritual needs.

Altar worker, look squarely at yourself, and in utter honesty ask yourself whether it is natural and easy for you to be self-centered or others-centered. If you discover that you have to be pried open before you discover the interests of other people, then here are some simple rules that, if honestly applied, will help you at this point. Go out tomorrow morning determined to try them on the first person you meet.

- (1) take the initiative, and begin the conversation. Don't let him

get the jump on you. (2) Direct the conversation toward him. Such a simple question as "How are you doing?" is a good beginning. Only don't let this popular opener be as dry as a chip—squeeze some meaning into it. Then have such questions as these ready for quick reference: "How is your work going?" "What are your plans for today?" "How is the family?" Determine to keep that person talking about himself until any personal need can show itself. If he tries to shift the conversation back to you and your interests, stubbornly resist the temptation and insistently turn it back toward his life. Don't be nosy about his private affairs, but remember people like to talk about themselves. And this is not the practice of flatterers; it is the art of becoming interested in others. It is as practical as learning to sing or speak. It is the door of escape from becoming an introvert. For we love people easier when we learn about them. Our interest in anyone's spiritual welfare depends a great deal on how much we know about his spiritual needs.

#### B. *Sense of the Fitness of Things*

For one mortal, like your author, to try to help others at this most sensitive, yet needy, point is like the baby who is taking his first step offering help to the baby still crawling. But there is definite need for mutual help at the point of "the eternal fitness of things."

The wise man of the Old Testament said that there was "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance . . . a time to love, and a time to hate." I suggest that you read Eccles. 3:1-8, for Solomon was talking about "the fitness of things."

A young man walked out of a Nazarene church and lit a cigarette as he walked away. He had been invited by a soul-winning teen-ager; he had no church background whatsoever but he was a high school buddy. A thoughtless lady sharply scolded him and told him that he would be welcomed when he learned how to behave around the church. You know the result—he left, never to return. What's more, the earnest

teen-ager who invited him was embarrassed beyond words. No one would doubt the sincerity of the woman but all admit she lacked the "sense of the fitness of things." She should have read Eccles. 3:1-8.

Such tactless bluntness costs too dearly. We must help our altar workers at this point. There was the woman who had been invited to one of our Sunday school classes. She stayed for the church service and was convicted of her sin and went forward to an altar. Coming from her particular background, she thought that she was not dressed for church till she wore earrings—and hers were unusually gaudy! A lady who came to deal with her at the altar launched out with "O Lord, get those ungodly rings off her ears!" What a way to start a hungry soul toward Calvary!

What is the "fitness of things"? It is *tact* in action. It is action with a minimum of friction. What would you have said to the young man who smoked? Or the woman who knelt at the altar wearing the gaudy earrings?

Then we have men and women who kneel at our altars reeking with tobacco smoke and liquor. And sometimes a man or woman will come with such objectionable body odor that the seekers nearby will almost surely be distracted. Cases like these test the "sense of the fitness of things." It will usually be best to forget the man's cigarettes and the man's liquor until after spiritual victory is won—or until the Holy Spirit convicts him personally. But the B.O. offender may have to be moved lest he spoil the altar service. Ask him to move over to a vacant pew, or into a side room, that you may better talk over spiritual things with him. If this is wisely done, he will feel that he is getting special attention and the altar service will be saved.

We can all recall occasions where altar workers have been wise or unwise in dealing with similar cases. A "sense of the fitness of things" is the answer. Learn to adapt readily; have gears that shift quickly and noiselessly. Above all, pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to be easily adaptable. All of us should heed the classic words of St. Paul in I Corinthians 9

where he tells how he fits himself into the lives of others. "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22).

### C. *Patience*

I am rebuked often by the Scriptures, and more often at the point of impatience than at many others. I hear St. Paul admonish Timothy, "Be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient" (II Tim. 2:24). And again Paul tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is "longsuffering" (Gal. 5:22). In all of life we need patience: in dealing with our children, our co-laborers, our fellow Christians. But nowhere is patience more needed than when dealing with seekers at an altar.

1. There will be the *slow pray-er*. He has felt the need of salvation, and has come forward, but now he kneels in stony silence—shut up like a clam. How to get those lips opened in a prayer of penitence? Here patience will be needed.

Without becoming too personal probe the man's motives for coming to the altar. Try to discover the hindrance that keeps him in silence. If he has never prayed before, lead him in a simple prayer asking him to repeat it after you. Turn in your Bible to the Lord's Prayer and have him read it—or to Luke 18:13-14. Scarcely ever is there victory until the seeker prays. So by some means we must help him to start praying.

2. There will be the *slow thinker*. He wants to know the reason for repentance, for public confession, for getting sanctified. When Scriptures have been given and personal testimony offered, he still drags his intellectual heels with such remarks as, "I just can't see it." His attitude may be an excuse for avoiding real spiritual digging and earnest prayer. He quiets his conscience by saying that he could do better praying if he saw the real need for it. If necessary, call another altar worker or perhaps the pastor or evangelist, as you move on to another seeker. Perhaps the next worker can help him. When leaving a seeker, remind him that God loves him and will never turn a sincere heart away. There may

be an occasional seeker who would do better to take a few good promises and then go away to meditate and think awhile. Urge him to return the next service. To use a good old-fashioned phrase, "Let him soak awhile."

3. *The Confused.* But there are some seekers who honestly don't understand the steps toward regeneration or to entire sanctification. And the altar worker must lay line upon line, scripture upon scripture, while the seeker gropes and feels his way to the light. No one would think of being gruff with a blind man who was groping his way down the street. Remember that the devil delights in confusing darkened minds, and some are terribly muddled mentally as they come to our altars. A case in point: Recently I visited with a pastor in the home of a lady in her late fifties. She had known wonderful days spiritually some years earlier. But health had declined, nerves were sorely weakened, and relatives had turned bitterly against this woman. In all this sad mixture of gall, she thought that the people of the church had lost confidence in her, and had taken sides against her. This was the final straw in her spiritual defeat. We prayed with her but her faith-life had been so mutilated, and the devil so eternally present to cast doubts in her thinking, that it was hard for her to regain confidence in God's Word or even in her church. But she was honest and it was splendid to see the patience displayed by her pastor as he worked with her.

#### D. *Teachability*

A bit of scripture already quoted, "apt to teach" (II Tim. 2:24), could well be the text for this section under discussion. We know this means "ability to teach" but we think it also means "teachable," for these go hand in hand. Teachability is the ability to be taught, a mind that admits its own limitations. *Deliver us from know-it-all workers at our altars.* It will be better if such will offer their superb and nearly infinite abilities somewhere else. In those who work with souls we need humility, not arrogance. It is the thesis of our study that the altar worker is a humble Christian who has been

saved and sanctified wholly through Jesus' blood, battling to rescue another poor soul even now fettered by sin. The seeker soon knows whether the altar worker is sincerely sympathetic or is a show-off. No seeker wants to be submerged in the affected prayers of a super-saint who struts his "better than thou" attitude around the altar.

The teachable worker will be quick to take advice and seek improvement; he will admit mistakes, and eagerly change his approaches. The teachable worker will gladly enroll in training classes in doctrine and Bible study to be better grounded in the faith. The teachable worker will lean heavily on the help of the Holy Spirit. Let us elaborate this point a bit more fully.

#### *E. Dependence on the Holy Spirit*

Yes, the Holy Spirit is our Master Altar Worker. He alone knows all the answers. He never offers foolish advice. Every Nazarene altar worker must keep his heart open always to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. And we state it very positively here—Each ALTAR WORKER SHOULD BE CLEARLY SANCTIFIED WHOLLY. Otherwise, how can he help one who seeks to be sanctified wholly, and how can he receive the help of the Spirit as he ought? Each altar worker should commit to memory the following verses (at least the general teaching of them): John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13. These remind us that the Holy Spirit is to be our "teacher" and "guide" into truth. And at the altar where souls are at stake there is vital need of the gentle leadings of the Holy Spirit that we may say the right thing, suggest the proper scripture, urge or withhold urging. We cannot emphasize too strongly how absolutely necessary it is that altar workers depend on the help of the Holy Spirit.

#### *F. Cooperation*

Here we refer to cooperation with the pastor and the evangelist. Of course, we don't want mass-produced altar workers that nod and goose-step all the same way, and in-

tone the scriptures always in the same whiny voice. Let's be individuals even in altar work. The Holy Spirit delights in sanctifying our individuality, not in dittoing us; we are still to be persons, not wieners on a string. Yes, expect to be yourself, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, even at the altar; but this doesn't mean being stubbornly independent.

There is no place in altar work for the person who refuses to cooperate in every reasonable program suggested by the pastor or evangelist. He will fit in with the pastor's plan for training the altar workers; he will fit in with the evangelist's plans for using the altar workers. Unless asked to do something that actually violates his sense of propriety, the Nazarene altar worker will be cooperative. This also means that he will cooperate with the other altar workers around the altar. Perhaps some seeker is not progressing well, and the particular worker feels that some other worker might help and asks him to give assistance. No altar worker should feel possessive toward any seeker.

Cooperation is our watchword in bringing the lost to Christ. Someone has said, "It is surprising how much a man can accomplish if he doesn't care who gets the credit." For us it is, "All hands to the ropes!"—get the man to shore and let the praise fall where it may.

### G. *Enthusiasm*

If this quality of life could be purchased at some corner drugstore, that counter would be crowded. For enthusiasm is coveted by all who have any decent interest in life at all. Enthusiasm is a large part of a convincing argument. It is contagious. It is a stimulant to the entire community. He is blessed who has a good natural blending of it in his personality. But if there is a lack of natural zeal or ardor in our actions and speech, then, especially as altar workers, we should set out to develop it. Deliver us from altar workers who instruct seekers in the same drab way they would repeat an algebra equation. Let our voices reveal our inner joy with salvation; and let our faces light up when we talk about Him and what

He has done for us, and will do for the sincere seeker. The Psalmist prayed that the Lord would "restore . . . the joy of . . . salvation. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways." The altar worker who glows with his inner joy will find it much easier to help seekers battle through to victory. Enthusiasm can be developed and is well worth the try.

#### H. *Wisdom*

Under this heading let us note a few other elements of a good altar worker that still deserve attention.

1. *Know when to be silent.* It is well-nigh tragic for a worker to interrupt a seeker when he is doing honest-to-goodness praying—even for the sake of giving good advice. When the seeker is earnestly praying, it is usually best for the worker to engage in equally earnest prayer and join the battle with him. There could be exceptions to this, such as a case where the seeker was clearly praying amiss and the worker knew he needed definite instruction. But it is the best policy to give instruction and give the scriptural foundation before praying gets well under way. When the instruction stage is over and praying is the pressing need, the wise worker will close in with the seeker in a battle of prayer. Wisdom to speak and wisdom to be silent are valuable elements in a good altar worker.

2. *Know the use of choruses.* We make it basic in this study that our seekers are to pray through, not be shoved through. And perhaps some workers have been guilty of singing seekers through. However, there is a very fine ministry that certain choruses have had in helping a seeker grip the promises of God. Many a backslider has been given the help he needed to trust for God's reclaiming grace as workers sang, "I wandered far away from God; now I'm coming home."

The one exhortation we would make here is to be sure a good period of prayer has been given before the seeker is urged to join in prayer, or before singing takes the place of



prayer. And the choruses used should be well known, simple, and proved by usage across the years.

3. *Let the seeker find his own experience.* Don't insist that he climb up your rope to get aboard the Good Ship Zion. God is throwing to him the gracious offers of mercy; let God and the person meet on God's terms and find a personal and vital experience. Philip was smart enough to leave the Ethiopian at the appropriate moment, and let him shape the chains of victory in his own forge. Let us carefully avoid such an approach as this: "When I got saved, I . . ." The man born blind, whose story is given in John, chapter nine, did not demand that others follow his pattern of deliverance step by step. Had he been a modern Christian he might have insisted that no real cure for blindness could come without the application of mud from the Jerusalem street and the washing in the Pool of Siloam.

Superimposing our personal experiences on seekers is to be carefully avoided. However, here again there may come an exception when the seeker asks the worker how he received assurance. Perhaps the seeker will ask how others have been sure of a call of God. Even then the worker should not relate his experience as though God dealt with all men that way. Be sure to close by reminding the seeker that God does not mass-produce salvation. God deals with His children as He makes flowers and snowflakes—each an example of His workmanship and each blessedly different.

Now, let us sum up the chapter. We are not starting out to sift the church membership for persons who have all these suggested elements in a high degree. We are accepting those who will come with the plan of training them in the fine art of personality improvement. The run-of-the-mill church member is our prospective material. Remember again, personality is not a static ingredient, as we have so much blood, or so much brain capacity. Personality can be improved if there is a sincere desire to do so. And we have pointed out those elements of personal life that make an altar worker more

acceptable and more effective in the winning of souls. Who could object to such a program?

### TO GUIDE YOUR STUDY

1. Why is it essential that an altar worker have a vital interest in others?
2. How would you suggest that a person go about developing an interest in others?
3. Recall occasions where tact has been exemplified. Where absent. How would you have improved either instance?
4. What types of seekers required patience? How best can each be helped?
5. How will an altar worker reveal his desire to be taught?
6. Why is it so essential that altar workers be sanctified wholly?
7. With what persons should the altar worker cooperate?
8. Why is it usually wise to give instruction before prayer is begun?
9. Outline a wise policy regarding use of choruses with seekers.
10. Why should the worker be careful not to urge his own type of experience upon a seeker?

### FOR FURTHER READING

AYCOCK, JARRETTE. *"Save Some."* Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. Pages 10-11.

CORLETT, D. SHELBY. *Soul Winning Through Visitation Evangelism.* Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House. Chapter I.

## CHAPTER V

# Training the Altar Worker

### *Training the Altar Worker*

In the preceding chapter we dealt with those personality elements which combine to make the best type of altar worker. Now join us as we focus our attention directly on the know-how that should be part of the altar worker's equipment.

#### I. BE CAREFUL AT THE ALTAR

##### A. *Avoid Personal Offense*

In such a discussion as this we must be very frank and explicit, for generalities will not be satisfactory. We very simply and very honestly mean that the altar worker is to avoid anything that might hinder the seeker or be abhorrent to other altar workers.

1. There is nothing sinful about *body odor*, but it certainly is not a necessary part of saintliness, and should be carefully avoided in such close work as is necessary at an altar. Some are bothered more than others with this particular problem. And those who know that it is their problem should endeavor to be fortified against such offense before coming to church. We are not giving a commercial for any brand of deodorant but urging the use of some good brand rather than taking a chance on offending a seeker at the altar. This is nothing more than is expected of salesmen who work in stores or in homes. And it is certainly not too much to ask of a Nazarene altar worker.

2. A closely related problem is that of *bad breath*. This is probably less widespread, but if we are bothered with it, let us be sure that gum or mints of some kind are readily available to help us avoid offense when we instruct and pray with seekers at the altar. This is more necessary at an altar than in other types of contact, for one works in such close

proximity that bad breath is especially offensive. I am sure no one wants to be fogged by bad breath when praying for God's grace.

### B. *Appropriate Apparel*

When we speak of the proper clothing for an altar worker it is most assuredly a ticklish subject but deserves some consideration. When working around an altar one should be dressed so he can forget his clothes in the burden for the lost. If we are terribly afraid of getting our clothes wrinkled or soiled slightly we will not get into the spirit of altar work. Yet neatness is certainly becoming in an altar worker. Perhaps this could be as good a rule as any: neatness without fastidiousness. Dress so as not to be ashamed when the seeker finds victory and then takes time to look more carefully at the one who helped him through to God. Yet dress simply enough so you will not mind kneeling by the altar in thoroughly earnest fashion. I have seen a few altar workers who maintained a squatting position for fear of spoiling trousers or hose, and they reminded me of a city slicker trying to hoe in a garden.

And one more frank suggestion is surely in order. Ladies should be careful to wear high neck-lines and adequate sleeves when planning to do altar work. If this is not done it can be embarrassing for both the worker and the seeker alike. These points of modesty in apparel are always appreciated by our church, ladies, but especially so in the business of altar work. A similar word can be said relative to the wearing of sheer nylon blouses. Let us recall that in the Old Testament the priest at the altar was pointedly instructed to avoid any impropriety or least sense of immodesty.

### C. *Working with the Opposite Sex*

In a recent questionnaire relative to work around the altar one question was, "What is your attitude toward physical contact between the worker and the seeker?" The answer was a thunderous "NO!" when the opposite sex was involved. This is a point where we can afford to lean backward with

extreme care rather than to take chances in creating any whisper of scandal. And this is another reason for a public altar. Nonchurch people might have suspicions about inquiry rooms or prayer rooms, but a public altar avoids any such suspicion. Our public altars should be safeguarded with extreme care. So, as much as possible, have men work with men and women with women. The exception will be when a man and wife are involved, or a father and daughter, or engaged couples. But the rule stands and should be emphasized. Satan will enter our altar services to bring disrepute if he can. Let us close the door before scandal arises. When men must work with ladies in altar work, a "hands off" policy should be adopted.

#### D. *Ushering at the Altar*

It will help us very substantially at this very point if the church ushers will act as altar ushers as well. Or if the pastor or evangelist preferred, special ushers could be used. This is especially important in revival seasons, when larger numbers are likely to come forward. But the idea is to have persons who will move quietly to the front of the aisles and as seekers come forward have the men kneel in one section of the altar and ladies in another. Have one end of the altar for men and the other for ladies and start lining the altar from the ends; then if it is filled up, the ones in the middle who kneel closely side by side will not be there any longer than necessary. An altar divided in the middle and made in two sections is more ideal for working this plan. Then if the male section fills up before the other is full, additional chairs can be placed on the men's side to avoid intermingling of the sexes. We will be wise to plan carefully to avoid having men and women kneeling as seekers in an intermingled fashion along the altar. The ushers can very easily help in this regard, for as the seeker approaches the front an usher can give whispered instructions in courteous, yet firm, tones, "You may kneel over there." Don't ask them where they would choose to kneel; tell them where they should kneel.

It is undoubtedly tempting providence and giving cause for suspicion when we allow our seekers to come haphazardly and kneel in intermingled fashion and then have workers of both sexes working in extremely close fashion around the altar. Let us keep our altar work above reproach. Keep the sexes separate as much as possible at the altar.

#### E. *Help Seekers: Don't Confuse Them*

Experienced evangelists recommend that in most cases one worker deal with each seeker and that the instruction be restricted to that one person. If the worker chooses to ask some other person for aid, it is well and good. But avoid the confusion which arises in haphazard altar work where several zealous workers gather around one seeker and shout confusing suggestions in his ear. For instance, "Hold on!" from one side and, "Let go!" from the other. Or, "Let him die!" from one side and, "Give him life!" from the other. Among those questioned at this point there was unanimous agreement that we should let one worker give instruction to the seeker while the others join in prayer.

#### F. *Careful with the Hands!*

We are not now thinking of the danger when opposite sexes work together. We are thinking of the problem when an overzealous worker decides to pummel the seeker or beat him heavily on the back. We would never suggest that no physical contact should be the case. More than one seeker has been stimulated into active prayer and faith by the earnestness of the worker and this earnestness was shown by placing an arm around him, or a gentle slap on the back, or a gentle shaking of his shoulders. This physical contact must be carefully controlled, and any violent physical coercion should be discouraged.

## II. BACKGROUND TRAINING

For the most acceptable type of altar work there are two kinds of training needed: specific training to help with the

immediate problems met at the altar, and background training in the fundamentals of our faith. Let us give attention to this latter type of training now.

Any who have ever worked in the field of salesmanship know how vital it is to build a basic confidence in the product. Perhaps by memorizing a few answers we can begin a selling career, but for happy and really successful salesmanship there must be a thorough familiarity with the product until we feel at ease in all situations. Whether we say so or not we unconsciously think, Now I feel confident. I think I can meet whatever emergency may occur. That type of confidence is a "must" in secular salesmanship and is also a vital factor in successful altar work.

In building this background training a good, working knowledge of our doctrines and especially of the doctrine of entire sanctification is needed by all. To have a satisfying grasp of the meaning of repentance, regeneration, justification, adoption, greatly helps us when we meet difficult situations in altar work. There comes a depth of confidence in the mighty grace of God that undergirds the altar worker in such an occasion. Then, too, a thorough understanding of the doctrine of holiness is essential, for then altar workers are much more ready to move in close to the seeker. Without this confidence there is a mental hesitancy—a fear lest the seeker for holiness might ask some question the worker would not be able to answer. Experience shows that more of our altar workers are hesitant to deal with seekers for holiness than with seekers for forgiveness. We rather feel it is not so much a lack of sanctifying grace in the life of the altar workers as a lack of understanding of the doctrine of entire sanctification that causes this hesitancy. It brings us to assert that at least we must do our best to overcome this lag by grounding our altar workers in the basic doctrines of our church.

In our Christian Service Training program we have a number of splendid courses on Christian doctrine and holiness. It is best to arrange classes so each person can have the benefit of a teacher and class discussion. However, these

courses can be taken by the Home Study Plan. Consult the Christian Service Training bulletin for further information.

### III. SCRIPTURAL TRAINING

In the previous section we discussed background training; now we will turn our attention to training for specific needs. There is no better way to meet the specific needs of the seeker than by the use of scripture. Suggested scriptures will be grouped under the following three general types of need.

#### A. *Those Seeking to Be Saved*

1. *Show the Seeker That He Is Lost.* Usually the seeker who comes to our altar is under deep enough conviction that there is no need to prove to him his lost condition. If he had not felt the sense of lostness he would not have responded to the invitation. However, there will be times when the following scriptures can well be used when personal contact is being made in the congregation and also in work at the altar.

"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

These could be quoted, but it will often be more effective if the Bible is opened and the seeker reads the verse himself. This requires a real readiness in Bible use as well as a Bible-trained memory.

2. *Show the Seeker That There Is Hope.* Sometimes satanic discouragement grips a seeker, especially one who has gone deeply into vicious sins like drunkenness and dope. The



devil delights in making him think that there is no hope, that he is too sinful to get saved. Here are some scriptures for the worker to have in mind.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18).

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

The old favorite should not be overlooked, for it is not only a strong scripture, but it is so well known. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

A word of suggestion is in order at this point. If a seeker is so overwhelmed with the feeling of his unworthiness that he thinks he is beyond hope, be sure you turn him to the promises of the Bible. Don't try to argue him into thinking that he is not so bad after all. Don't say, “Oh, you are a better man than you think”; or, “You are not so bad.”

A drunkard knelt at the altar in prayer. He had been guilty of terrible cruelty to his family as well as deep and protracted drunkenness. When he fell at the altar he was under tremendous conviction. He kept exclaiming, “I am too bad, I can't be saved.” The minister was tempted to tell the man that he wasn't so bad after all. Then the Holy Spirit checked him and instead he said, “Sure, you are bad, you are a moral mess; what you have done is enough to send any man to hell. But God in His mercy is offering to save you.” Remember, it is the Holy Spirit that convicts of sin, but it is Satan who inclines toward discouragement. When the Holy Spirit makes a person's sinfulness seem terribly abhorrent it is not our part to try to soften that sense of conviction by arguing the man's goodness. Let us help encourage the seeker without minimizing his sinfulness.

3. *The Seeker Must Repent and Turn to Christ.* We take our place among all true evangelicals in stressing the need for repentance. If the seeker has been strongly gripped by conviction he knows that he is a lost soul. But recognition is not repentance. Even bitter weeping over one's lost condition is not identical with true repentance, for a picture of eternal hell can well make a sinner quake and cry. Repentance is not primarily fear of torment; repentance is sorrow toward a wounded Person, that Person being God Almighty. Here are some scriptures that will aid in presenting the need for repentance to the seeker who does not seem to know the path to salvation.

a. To show that all sin is a personal affront to God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). David recognized that the harm done to Uriah and Bath-sheba was secondary to the deeper hurt to God himself.

b. To urge honest repentance. "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). The context of this scripture shows that those addressed thought themselves above the need for repentance because no tragic judgment had befallen them. We still have some people who think that unless misfortune has befallen them they are actually not under the wrath of God.

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

"Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10).

4. *After Repentance There Must Be Faith in Christ.* Even repentance, as essential as that is, does not save any person. Finally, it is faith in Christ that brings salvation. Saving faith cannot come until repentance and forsaking of known sin are honestly completed. But at times we find people who seem to think that extending the period of remorse and weeping will finally bring salvation. And, strange but true, some seekers find it much easier to repent deeply than to believe savingly. And some almost seem to prefer the chastisement of soul that repentance demands to a brighter path of faith. Such have to be encouraged to turn to Christ once repentance is completed. Here are some scriptures that will help in getting their minds lifted to the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10).

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

And the favorite of all verses is very usable in this connection as in others as well, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

### B. *Those Coming to Be Reclaimed*

In dealing with backsliders there are frequently two problems to be faced. First, the devil tries to discourage the seeker, making him think that he has failed so miserably that God will not take him back. Second, the backslider feels that he must have the identical feelings and emotions and assurances that he received the first time he was saved. He must be taught that faith this time may not bring the same inner reactions; faith will bring the same peace with God. And after all, that is what he is seeking.

1. *None Is Too Bad.* A special word is in order relative to those who come to the altar and, because they have had wonderful opportunities and have backslidden so deeply, they have allowed the devil to tell them that they have committed the unpardonable sin. The worker should give quick and firm assurance that as long as the seekers have a desire for God, that, in itself, is proof that the Holy Spirit is still striving with them. If the Holy Spirit is still striving with them they have not committed the unpardonable sin. For when the unpardonable sin has been committed the Holy Spirit is withdrawn and desires for spiritual things cease.

Here are some scriptures to help in working with the backslider at the altar:

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him *return* unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7). Emphasize the word “return,” for it suggests someone who has been with the Lord, has strayed away, and now is being invited back.

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him" (Hos. 14:4).

"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Emphasize the sweeping, unconditional "whosoever" of this promise. There is no faint suggestion that only those who come for the first time are included.

2. *Show Them That They Can Live It.* So often backsliders tell us at the altar, "It is no use; I can't live it. I have tried so often, and failed." Turn their thoughts to such scriptures as these:

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

"Let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (II Pet. 2:9).

"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (Jas. 4:7-8).

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9).

3. *Faith, Not Feelings.* Turn the seeker to such verses as this one: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). The result of God's regenerating grace is "peace with God," not any particular brand of feeling or emotion. Suggest that feelings are not attached to any of the scripture promises. And to avoid putting the suggestion into the seeker's mind, don't ask him, "Do you feel better now?" or, "Don't you feel like God has saved you?" Keep the word "feelings" in the background in dealing with seekers at the altar unless they ask you about feeling in relation to experience. The feeling problem is usually more prominent

with the backslider who was given a mighty, assuring touch of God when initially saved and he finds it hard to believe God unless the same type of reaction accompanies his faith.

### C. *Those Coming to Be Sanctified Wholly*

We suggested earlier the very great value of a training course in the doctrine of holiness, for it will aid you immeasurably in dealing with seekers for holiness. And we remind all our readers again, *Be sure you are prayed up and in good victory yourself*. For one cannot easily lead others into Canaan if he himself is living on the east bank of the Jordan.

In dealing with seekers at the altar there may be those who are spiritually confused and know only one thing: I need spiritual help. In checking with them they may assure you that they know they are children of God and that their sins have been forgiven. When you urge them to seek a clean heart, they may reply that they are ignorant of any such experience or else just don't believe it is promised in the Bible.

1. *Helping Those Who Need Knowledge of Holiness*. It is well to begin in the Old Testament with such verses as these:

"An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it" (Isa. 35:8).

"Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2).

"Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:16).

These verses bring the commandment of holiness from early Levitical days down to the present Christian era. Other good verses:

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (I Thess. 5:23).

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12).

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved

blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (I Thess. 5:23-24).

In using these verses from Thessalonians it is often wise to go to the opening verses, which prove conclusively that the people in the church at Thessalonica were Christian (I Thess. 1:6, 8-9). So these strong admonitions to seek God's sanctifying grace were addressed to good, solid Christian people.

2. *Helping Seekers Get Sanctified Wholly.* Many of the same verses which are applicable to the seeker who needs to be convinced that the Bible urges every Christian to be sanctified also can be used when the seeker begins to pray earnestly for the blessing. Perhaps it will be wise, then, to add some scriptures that give encouragement to show the seeker that God delights to sanctify His children. Here are some good passages for this purpose:

"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12).

One of the finest scriptures, but one not often used, is the closing section of Peter's sermon at Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39).

#### IV. SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

In this chapter we have dealt largely with the actual use of scripture in dealing with the seekers. Let us give some brief consideration to a few practical suggestions.

### A. *The Bible You Use*

Usually the worker will want to use his own, well-marked Bible and that custom is strongly recommended, for it is amazing how much easier it is to find your way around in your own Bible than in one loaned to you. So carry your Bible and use your own. It is also recommended that altar workers stay with the well-known and universally loved King James Version. The reason for this suggestion is obvious. This particular version in the thinking and feeling of people in general has been the only Bible seen or known. When a seeker is battling for spiritual help it would very probably bring him less comfort to present before him some other version which in its general appearance and perhaps in its wording is unfamiliar.

### B. *Those Tears!*

We appreciate and wish to encourage tears at the altar. And when a seeker comes and breaks down in weeping, only to discover that his handkerchief was missing when he dressed for church, it is a good time for the worker to make good use of the Kleenex box which has been provided in the little shelf at the back of the altar. (See pages 28-29.)

Slip a paper hankie into the hand of the seeker in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, and he will not only appreciate your help, but it will keep the devil from distracting him from earnest penitence because of the shame of unwiped eyes. When you are to work at an altar where no provision has been made for a supply of Kleenex for altar workers, it is wise for women to take extra ones in their purses, and men to carry some in their pockets. Let the seeker know by such acts that you planned all along to work at the altar with him.

## TO GUIDE YOUR STUDY

1. Suggest one reason why we should be especially careful to avoid personal offense in working around the altar.
2. Why is it generally best to have men work with men and women with women at the altar?



3. Why and how would you suggest that ushers aid in placing seekers at the altar?
4. How can we avoid confusing seekers with our instructions?
5. Suggest reasons why the altar worker should possess a working knowledge of Christian doctrines and especially the doctrine of holiness.
6. Give and locate at least four favorite scriptures to use in helping those seeking to be saved.
7. Give and locate at least four favorite scriptures to use in helping those seeking to be reclaimed.
8. Give and locate at least four favorite scriptures to use in helping those seeking to be sanctified wholly.
9. What Bible is best to use in helping seekers at the altar?

#### FOR FURTHER READING

AYCOCK, JARRETTE. "*Save Some.*" Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. Pages 22-29.

———. *Win Them.* Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House. Pages 38-53.

## CHAPTER VI

# Working at the Altar

### *Working at the Altar*

Through the preceding five chapters we have brought you in your thinking and planning all the way to the actual altar service. Had this been a book on fruit farming we would have passed through the stages of planting, pruning, and now would want to know how to pick and pack those ripe, juicy apples. No altar worker will ever desire to prepare carefully for the work at the altar and then be satisfied with mere preparation; he will yearn for opportunity to help some seeker through to victory. So we conclude our book with a study of the actual work at the altar.

#### I. WHEN SHOULD WORKERS COME TO THE ALTAR?

There are only two possible answers to this question, "When should workers come to the altar?" It must be during the course of the invitation or else after the invitation has been completed. Both these possibilities will be considered.

##### A. *At the Close of the Invitation*

This is, by and large, the plan that has been used through the years of our history. Those who engage in evangelistic labors have handed down this pattern and it has been of real value to us. Here are some of the distinct values.

1. If the seekers kneel at the altar the evangelist can keep the entire altar service in hand and prevent possible confusion. Recalling that invitations will sometimes continue for as long as fifteen minutes or longer, it is of real value for the altar scene to be kept under careful control.

2. The present custom of altar workers all coming at once together at the close of the invitation does have this value: Each worker, as he comes, can choose the seeker for whom

he feels most inclined to pray and each seeker can begin the earnest business of prayer, and each worker can begin the serious task of instruction and prayer—all at the same time.

These seem to be the reasons for our present practice and they most certainly have been responsible, under God, for great success in Nazarene altar work. And now, we ask you to give careful consideration to the other of the two alternatives suggested at the opening of this section, namely, having the workers come during the invitation.

#### B. *During the Invitation*

Most assuredly, if there are not worthy arguments for this type of thing, no Nazarene would vote for it. For Nazarenes don't believe in changing merely for the sake of change. We are definitely conservative in this respect; substantial reasons must be given before we can make either doctrinal or practical changes in our church life. Nazarenes need more arguments in favor of a change than do many denominations, and lots more than do our interdenominational friends. It is this very fact that has given us a denominational solidity and unity. Still, we are all glad to make shifts in practice when adequate reason can be given. And I ask you to consider some reasons for having altar workers come forward during the invitation.

1. *Helps to Share the Lonely Moments.* Can't you recall that vivid experience when you walked out of a congregation and down to the front of a church, and you felt as though every pair of eyes in the church was glued on YOU? We who have removed ourselves farther away from this experience by the very passing of the years may think it is a trifling thing for a hungry-hearted sinner to come to the altar. Especially if he is the first to respond to the invitation, it is like crossing the Rubicon; it is a struggle against satanic pressures. Indeed, added to the real spiritual issue is a battle to overcome the very normal hesitancy of the average person. For as soon as he goes forward he becomes a spectacle, and all the people will be pondering on the sinfulness of his past

life; all this is part of the thinking of a sinner in those moments before he gathers up the courage to move away from the warm protection of the pew into the glaring spotlight of the altar. And let us not minimize the fact: it is a great and a lonely moment, especially if it is his first trip to an altar.

Those who use the inquiry room are usually more tender in their dealings with the seekers than we who use the public altar, for they permit the seeker to walk away into the seclusion of another room, where he has a degree of privacy. But we who use the public altar ask that first seeker to come and remain under the gaze of the audience as long as the evangelist may continue the invitation. All of us who have done evangelistic work have deep appreciation for that first seeker who leads the way; so it is in his particular interest that I suggest that a worker come to kneel with that seeker as soon as he has come forward.

If the spiritually needy know that such will be our custom, at least one of the arguments of the devil will be countered; for he will know that his isolation and loneliness will be shared by a sympathetic worker who will kneel across the altar from him.

2. *Make Best Use of First Moments at the Altar.* This is an even more solid argument than the one just presented. If it is logically sound to have a worker come to be with the first seeker, it follows that workers should come with each seeker in turn—at least until the altar is well lined with workers. And we take this position, not only that the worker may share the seeker's altar-isolation, but, more important still, that he may help the seeker get properly and immediately started in the search for divine help.

We know from experience that Satan does not give up his battle just because a seeker leaves his seat and walks steadfastly to a public altar. At times it seems that the satanic pressure only intensifies at the altar. And in those first moments the devil will try, by every possible means, to hinder the seeker and distract his thoughts and discourage his good intentions. In these moments of battle it is worth a lot to

have a sincere friend close by to instruct, to encourage, and to pray. We are suggesting in this connection that, when workers do not come until the invitation is over, good and profitable moments for spiritual progress are left unused.

However, some very practical problems must be considered when this suggestion is made.

a. The worker must know how to work silently or else the altar service would be fatally disrupted. And here is where training comes in. There must be close cooperation with the evangelist to insure no distraction around the altar, and the worker must work quietly and intensely to give the seeker the help he needs.

b. This is the best time for the use of the Bible in giving scriptural instruction as it is needed; there can be whispered advice; there can be quiet, yet intense, prayer. But the very fact of a sympathetic presence close by will in itself mean much to the seeker. The seeker can be doing some real digging with the help of the altar worker during the process of the invitation. If there is as much as ten or fifteen minutes from the coming of the first seeker until the close of the invitation, there must be effective use made of this time.

We have found that most seekers obtain victory in the period of general prayer after the invitation has closed and the larger group gathers for concerted prayer. But the seekers will be better prepared for that time of volume prayer and the intensification of the atmosphere of faith if the worker has done good work with the seekers during the invitation.

3. *Creates Movement Toward the Altar.* Those most successful in revival work know the value of having some movement in the aisles. It is a real victory for that meeting when the first seeker walks forward. We say then that "the ice is broken." And it is a hindrance if there is no further movement for some considerable time; we dislike having the aisles "freeze over" again. Undoubtedly, one of the arts in successful invitations is the ability to keep movement in the aisles

during the invitation. When we accept the plan of having altar workers come during the invitation, then there will be as many workers moving toward the altar as there are seekers. This, in itself, will be a real help in keeping the movement forward to the altar in the aisles. This has been just the encouragement that some deeply convicted souls have needed: to see someone slip out of the pew and walk down the aisle to deal with a seeker. This has been just the help that hesitant one has needed to start him toward Calvary. And this value in an evangelistic meeting is certainly not insignificant.

The extreme use of this type of response could well be harmful and a note of caution is in order. Care should be used in having Christians walk the aisles merely to be out there in motion to encourage seekers. However, some of our most successful evangelists have urged Christians who are especially burdened for particular persons to come to the altar early in the invitation. This, of course, would have to be done guardedly. Our evangelistic methods must never deteriorate into purely psychological traps. That must never be countenanced in Nazarene evangelism.

One of our most successful evangelists also urges personal workers to move freely in the aisles for the purpose of encouraging seekers to move out, and it has been a fruitful practice in his very effective ministry of evangelism.

Let us be very careful on one point. Any plans suggested must be held subservient to the will and plans of the individual evangelist who is holding the revival. In this book we are urging the formation and training of a corps of altar workers who will be available for altar work. In case some evangelist objects to procedures suggested here, naturally the pastor and altar workers would cooperate fully. This would, of course, be talked over with the evangelist in advance, so a thorough understanding would be obtained.

It is our belief that a system similar to the one suggested above will be found very helpful in both the regular Sunday

night evangelistic services and also the special evangelistic meetings held.

4. *Develop Personal Initiative on the Part of the Altar Worker.* There is another value in having workers come down to help seekers during the invitation: it trains them in the art of carrying individual responsibility before the larger body of prayer warriors gather. To shoulder the burden alone before other altar workers come to help him is what flexes the prayer muscles of the soul. We have all too many Nazarenes who rather shun the hand-to-hand "in-fighting" at the altar, and choose to lose themselves in the general burden of those who pray for all the seekers, but yearn over no one in particular. In fact, it could well result in some of our seekers getting through to victory before the invitation was concluded. In that case, there will be one more to add to the forces to battle with and for the seekers.

## II. PLAN FOR WORKERS COMING TO THE ALTAR

We have been talking about the value of altar workers during the time of invitation. Now we must look at the mechanics of working this out so as to avoid confusion.

It is taken for granted that these trained altar workers will be faithful in attendance. Naturally there will be times when all cannot be in attendance, but in the main these will be your main standbys in revival time.

### A. *The Numerical Plan*

Here is the plan as outlined by one evangelist. Number the men and women separately who make up your corps of altar workers. Let us suggest that there are a dozen—half a dozen men and the same number of women. If the first seeker is male, then man No. 1 will be the worker to go forward. If a lady is the first seeker, then lady altar worker No. 1 would go. Then the other altar workers would go in turn as they are numbered. These workers would be trained in adaptability.

If No. 1 of either sex were absent, then No. 2 would go first, and the rest follow in order. The operation would need to be closely knit, and that would not be difficult.

Another adaptation might be necessary in case some altar worker had been carrying a special burden for some particular unsaved friend. Suppose worker No. 3 carried this soul-burden and had made several personal contacts, and the one for whom he was burdened was the first seeker. Then altar worker No. 3 would go down with seeker No. 1 and the order would follow: No. 4, No. 5, No. 6, and then back to No. 1. Some exceptions would often occur but the understanding on basic principles of operation would be this: keep the order following any break in regular routine.

In this framework there is room for system and order, yet plenty of flexibility to allow for exceptional cases. We would reemphasize the need for closest cooperation. Any indication of possessiveness or independency of action would have to be utterly avoided.

#### *B. The Personal Contact Plan*

Another method of choosing the ones who work at the altar with the seekers has been suggested by one of our very successful pastors. He urges those who have made the personal contacts in the homes to be the ones who come to deal with the seekers at the altar. They know the conditions that make up the seekers' background and can pray all the more effectively. And in such a case the worker would not have to interrupt the seeker to find out what the need was. One of the values in this plan is that those who are the visitation workers get the privilege of seeing their prospects pray through to victory. This is their just reward for having done the "spade work" back in the home or in the shop. Of course, regardless of what group is used as altar workers, the same training will be necessary.

These suggested procedures are not meant to be followed doggedly. They but show the various plans that might be



adopted. The basic idea is this: some plan should be used and the one that best suits your local needs is the best one for you.

### III. USING ALTAR WORKERS IN THE CONGREGATION

Evangelists and pastors vary in their attitude toward having people do personal work through an audience. Most of the large city-wide, interdenominational evangelistic campaigns organize their personal workers (they often call them counselors) and have each person stationed to be alert to those who reveal spiritual need in his given area.

At the other extreme are the pastors and evangelists who react against any personal workers' making contacts in the congregation. This attitude usually stems from some objectionable scenes they have witnessed when unwise persons embarrassed visitors so they refused to return to church.

Clearly, then, any plan for personal work in an audience must avoid the two extremes: the heedless and the over-cautious. Those who are trained for altar work will likely be the most useful in personal work in the audience.

#### A. *Workers Stationed in the Congregation*

We mentioned earlier that in any plan of using workers at the altar during the invitation there would be some who would still be in the congregation likely until the altar call was finished. How can we make the best use of these workers for personal work in the audience? One very simple, yet very important, thing is to have them accept positions throughout the sanctuary so they can readily keep the entire congregation under observation as the invitation is given. Some evangelists ask for raised hands before the invitation is extended. The workers could be on the watch for these raised hands. If there is no request for hands to be raised, an alert person can note other indications of conviction, such as a tear, a troubled countenance, a sense of nervousness. The Holy Spirit has many ways of revealing His work in the life of the sinner.

Now, how about stationing these workers? First, let them voluntarily choose the section of the church where they prefer to sit. People are always much happier if they can sit where they normally prefer, rather than to be coerced into sitting somewhere else to satisfy a speaker's desire. We are creatures of habit and get accustomed to hearing and observing from certain spots in church, and, especially as we get older, we dislike changing locations. So let the workers choose their preferred stations. There will likely be some who normally like to sit near the front. Personally I much prefer sitting near the front. I guess it is because my mentality cannot withstand the distractions that always come farther back in the congregation. So some will choose the front sections. Then there will be those who prefer sitting near the rear (perhaps they are parents with small children). It is likely that without too much adaptation of the present seating preferences of your workers you can have the entire congregation under observation.

The workers must know their duties as they keep alert hearts and eyes in their sections of the church. As already mentioned, they are to watch for the raised hand or the sign of conviction. But that is not all. If a mother with a squirming baby is under conviction, the worker can offer to assist with the child by taking it to the nursery or caring for it personally to permit the mother to go to the altar. The worker can see to it that aisles are kept open near someone who is under conviction. But the pressing opportunity for the worker is this. When that person is known to be moved on by the Spirit, he slips quietly and unobtrusively to the side of the sinner friend and offers, "I will be glad to go forward with you."

Remember: NO ARGUING. Just plead for the person's soul. Only in infrequent cases should several gather to urge one individual to go forward. Usually the simple, but sincere, word of compassionate interest is the best approach: "I am here to help you; let us seek God together."

## B. *Suggestions for Personal Workers*

No matter how well we are trained and coached in this sacred task of soul winning we will not all act alike, for we are people, not puppets. But there are some simple rules that will apply for all alike.

1. *Avoid Lightness.* Any least tinge of joking or levity must be definitely avoided. The convicted sinner is mightily serious and will resent lightness on the part of the personal worker, as though it is all a casual thing. If the person is not under conviction, a worker's approaching without seriousness makes our evangelism appear to be trifling and half-hearted. Avoid mirth and levity in inviting people to the altar even as you would avoid joking with a seeker about his spiritual need at the altar.

2. *Avoid Drab Cheerlessness.* Our admonition to avoid joking does not suggest that long-faced solemnity is the ideal attitude. A winsome, cheerful countenance will do more good than a sour, vinegary appearance. The one who is even now under the whiplash of conscience wants to know that the Christian life is happy and victorious. So a natural, unaffected pleasantness is the best way to approach people about their souls.

3. *Avoid Unnatural Tones of Speech.* Don't whine at people. It is a too-common tendency of Christians to adopt a certain sanctimonious tone when praying or speaking of religious things. There is not a grain of rhyme or reason to it, in the pew or in the pulpit. Sinners abhor it, and I don't blame them. Who wants the brand of salvation that makes the vocal cords whine? And, again, don't be loud or boisterous. A quiet, subdued tone of voice will be more effective than a voice that sounds halfway across the church. You see, this is a crisis when a man's most private life is being searched by God. Salvation is a matter of the inner man. And those who are under conviction will appreciate it if we grant them all the privacy we can in the midst of the congregation.

To the rule just suggested there will be some exceptions. Occasionally some person for whom multitudes of prayers have ascended and for whom many are concerned may be in the service. The Holy Spirit may well burden several people for his salvation and several may gather around him to urge him to go forward for prayer. At times it has even been the case where these burdened souls would kneel in prayer around this stubborn sinner until he broke down and yielded to God. We honor such instances as sublimely splendid, but these are clearly the exception. The majority of people who are invited forward will best be served if we follow the rules already stated.

4. *Have Some Scriptures Ready.* While Christians are working in the congregation there may easily be times when questions are asked that require scriptural answers. You may be asked the reason for a public confession and should have Matt. 10:32-33 right on the tip of your tongue: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." Or someone may suggest that he does not have enough conviction yet. Our answer could be Isa. 55:6-7: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." If he insists he will not go forward until more deeply moved, then counter with this question: "What are you doing to get deeper conviction?" The answer will likely be, "Why, nothing, I guess." Then urge him to pray for his own need, to read his Bible, to request the aid of Christian friends. Thus you are not leaving totally defeated; the unsaved person is being forced on the defensive and that itself is partial victory.

5. *Keep One Eye on the Altar.* Through all the work done in the audience by the altar worker let him recall that

he is not to forget the scene down at the altar. Some incline to substitute contacts in the congregation for the actual assistance at the altar. Remember, we are to be altar workers and our hearts must ever draw us in that direction.

So as seekers begin to move forward be sure you do not neglect the sincere seeker who kneels in prayer. Whenever your duty pulls you down to his side for help in the battle for salvation, respond eagerly and enthusiastically. It is well that we Nazarenes be quick to phone or write invitations to our services; it is well that we be quick to speak to those in the congregation who are convicted of the Lord; but it is more splendid still when we eagerly rally to the seekers who pray at our altars. The glory of a Nazarene is his altar attitudes and ability.

#### AND NOW, IN CONCLUSION

We have journeyed together, you and I, through a study that is sacred and thrilling. The highest and most rewarding task in all of Christian life is winning souls. Effective methods are certainly to be preferred to haphazard, rough, and crude procedures. That is why we have asked you to improve your thinking, to train your heart and hand, to sharpen your wits, that more souls may be saved as you labor for the Master.

Yes, the best service we can render is none too good, for life is short and opportunities are golden. But let me urge one final word. Don't let *methods* ever substitute for the help of the HOLY SPIRIT in your altar work. We are strong exponents of the work and ministry of the *Holy Spirit*; so let us not become overwhelmed by the "hurry spirit." No steps we take, no plan we outline will succeed unless there is a saturation of the Spirit of the living God upon us and all our program.

So be sure you are sanctified wholly; if not, seek His grace until you are assured of the blessing of entire sanctification. There is no substitute for holiness in all of our planning. Get sanctified and then keep sanctified.

May the Lord of Harvest give you, and you, and you a great number of sheaves that may someday be cast at His feet "in that city where they need no sun."

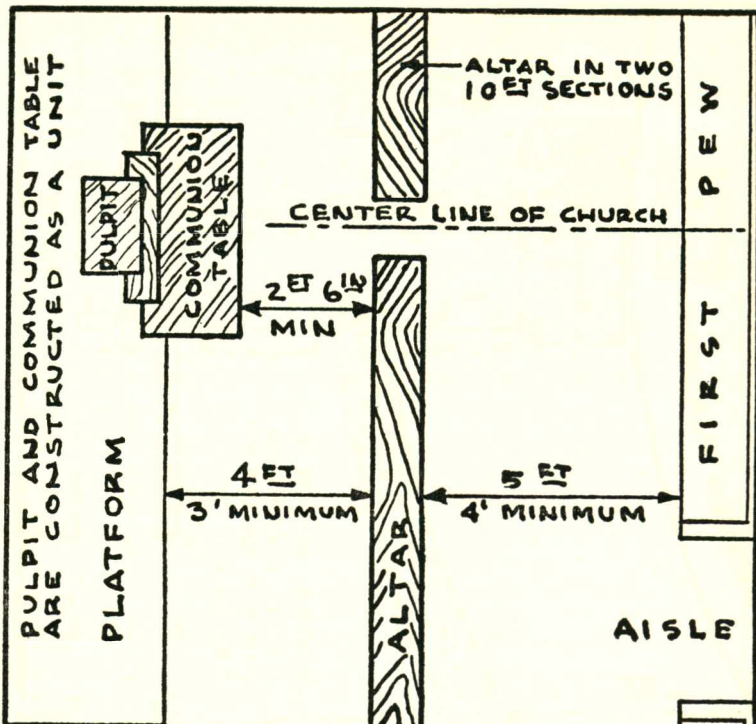
### TO GUIDE YOUR STUDY

1. State the values in the custom of having workers come to the altar only after the invitation is completed.
2. State and explain the values in the custom of having workers come during the progress of the invitation.
3. What effective help can a worker give a seeker during the invitation?
4. Recall any occasion where workers moving forward in the aisles have encouraged seekers to move to the altar.
5. What in your mind is the best plan to insure having workers come to assist seekers during the invitation?
6. How can an altar worker assist in doing personal work in the audience during the invitation?
7. Suggest the proper attitudes in making a personal contact during the invitation.

### GENERAL READING OF REAL VALUE

SWEAZEY, GEORGE E. *Effective Evangelism*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

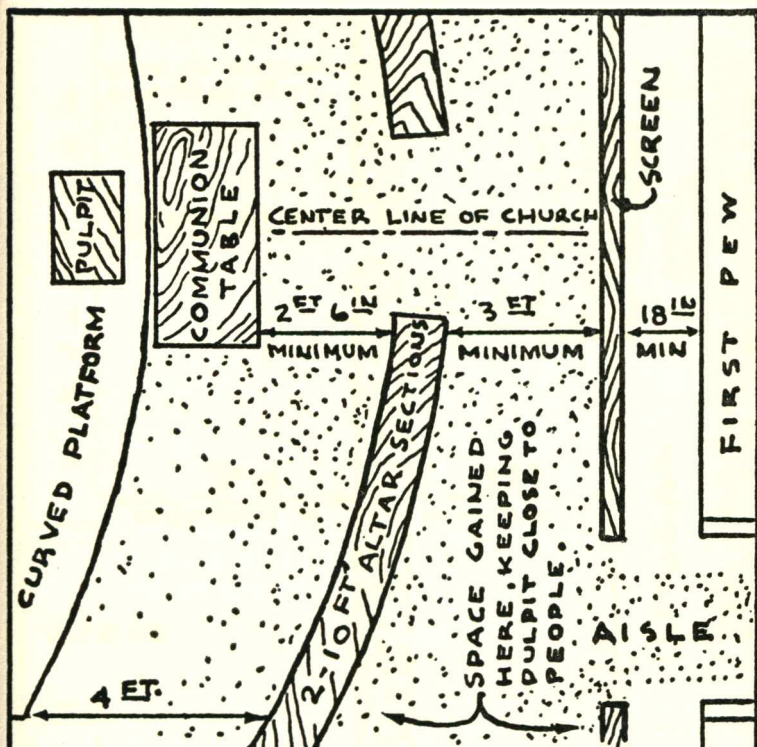
WILKINS, CHESTER. *A Handbook for Personal Soul-Winning*. Berne, Indiana: Light & Hope Publications.



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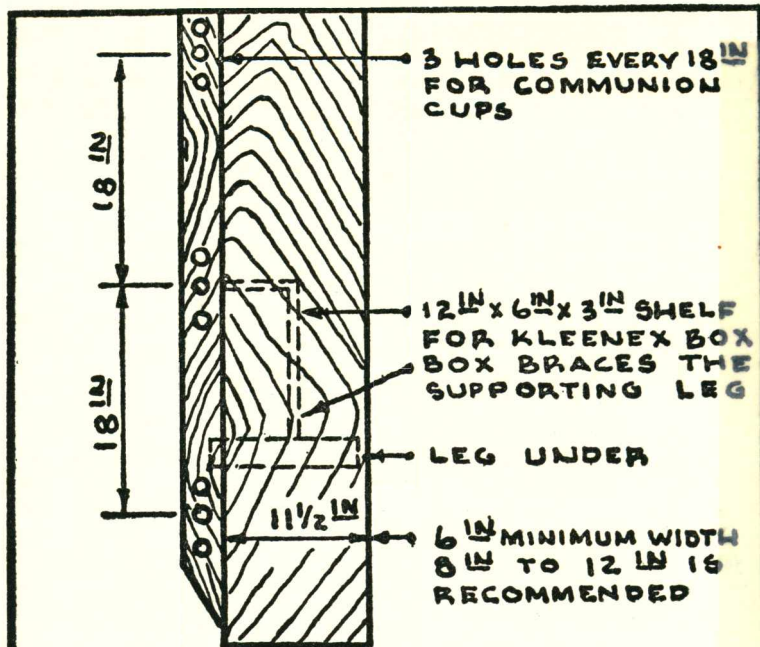
ALTAR, FOCUS OF EVANGELISM



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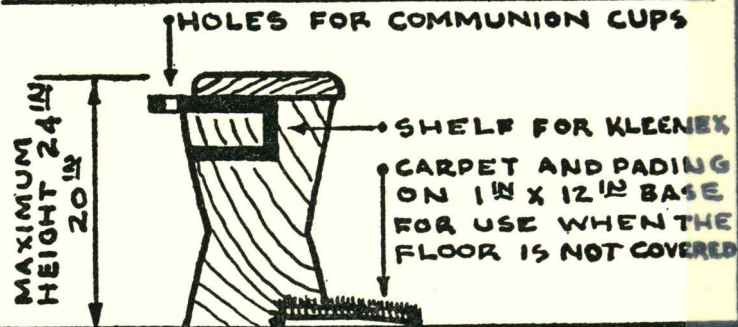






ABOVE • PART PLAN OF ALTAR •

BELOW • END VIEW OF ABOVE PLAN •



**MAKE THE ALTAR STURDY**