

Altar'd



SMALL-GROUP
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Altar'd

THE TRANSFORMING
POWER OF SURRENDER

Small-Group Discussion Guide

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How to Use This Resource

Lent is a forty-day season of penitence and preparation for the observance of Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday before Easter. Traditionally, the Lord's Day (Sunday) is always a feast day, hence Sundays are excluded from the forty-day period.

This small-group reflection guide is intended to help churches journey toward Lent together. The sermon on Sunday will be themed around altars and their Old Testament sacrifices, a theme carried through the daily reader *Altar'd: The Transforming Power of Surrender* by Susan O. Kent. For the highest use of this resource, we recommend having a daily reader (seedbed.com/altard), though this is not required.

The big idea is: space + surrender = shifts (transformation). We seek transformation to experience an awakening of holiness within ourselves and our neighbors and encounter the power of our risen Savior to radically alter the way we live. While we don't become more holy by fortifying our own will, we can remove impediments to the transforming grace of God in our lives. Fundamentally, this looks like surrender.

Some of the questions are open-ended and generally start with an ice-breaker, some are biblical-theological, and some focus on the spiritual state of the participants and may press toward vulnerability. Each group can process these as they are comfortable.

Here is a suggested outline of a meeting:

- Open with a prayer
- Watch the fifteen-minute video (approximate)
- Read the suggested Scripture passage
- Read the summary of the sacrifice
- Share any insights from the sermon or daily readings
- Work through the questions
- End with a prayer (provided)



SESSION ONE

Keep the Fire Burning

SCRIPTURE

The LORD said to Moses: “Give Aaron and his sons this command: “These are the regulations for the burnt offering: The burnt offering is to remain on the altar hearth throughout the night, till morning, and the fire must be kept burning on the altar.” (Lev. 6:8–9)

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14–19)

SUMMARY OF OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a means of grace by which the relationship between God and humanity began to be restored. Ultimately, the sacrificial system was inadequate, and none could repay the debt of life that was owed until Christ defeated death once and for all (Heb. 10:10). In the age of the church, we live in light of Christ’s meritorious sacrifice for us while also offering our own lives as a living and holy sacrifice (Rom. 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5).

QUESTIONS

Share any insights or lingering questions you may have from the sermon or daily readings if you are using *Altar'd* by Susan O. Kent.

1. What have been some of the most memorable places for you? Consider a space where you were married (or proposed to), gave birth to a child, or experienced something difficult. Share as you are comfortable.
2. Instructions were given for God's people to keep the sacrificial fire on the altar in the temple burning all night. What kind of spiritual parallels do you believe this points to?
3. Do you have a designated space in your home, workplace, or in nature where you pray or worship? Are you comfortable praying in undesignated—and even public—spaces? What stories or passages in Scripture indicate that both approaches are helpful and nourishing to our souls in different ways? (See Ezra 10:1; 1 Sam. 1:10–16; Matt. 6:5; Acts 2; 1 Cor. 14:16; 1 Thess. 5:17.) Discuss sacred spaces and how they impact us. As time permits, work through the same questions as it relates to time and schedules.
4. Consider Romans 12:1 and Galatians 6:14. Your body is an essential part of you that is present and participating in every single thought, word spoken, or act performed. What does it mean to be a living sacrifice? What does it mean to be crucified to the world? How do these different metaphors find their convergence in our bodies?
5. Is there a season or event in your life which you haven't completely surrendered to God yet? Perhaps it is painful, or alternately, an achievement which you haven't acknowledged as a divine gift. What kind of prayer—confession, celebration, forgiveness—do you need to offer to God as an altar in retrospect? Offer it to Him that He might transform it, redeem it, and renew its significance for you.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You are the Lord of both space and time, and we bring both to You again today as a sacrifice. Accelerate our surrender that we may be awake to the beauty of the good news of Jesus Christ. In place of resignation, apathy, or mere religious activity, orient us around Your kingdom and Your presence, that the entirety of our beings would be consumed by Your holy love. Amen.



SESSION TWO

Are You All In?

SCRIPTURE

The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When anyone among you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

“If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.” (Lev. 1:1–4)

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Heb. 9:13–14)

SUMMARY OF BURNT OFFERING

The purpose of the burnt offering was for general atonement of sin and expression of devotion to God. The instructions for the burnt offering are given in Leviticus 1:3–17. The offering could be a bull (v. 3), sheep or goat (v. 10), or dove or pigeon (v. 14). The animal was to be burnt whole overnight (6:8–13), though its skin was given to the priest (1:6).

QUESTIONS

Share any insights or lingering questions you may have from the sermon or daily readings if you are using *Altar'd* by Susan O. Kent.

1. What are some activities in life in which half-hearted attempts simply don't work? Share any funny, painful, or instructive stories you have learned along the way.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. (*The Cost of Discipleship*, 1937)

At your church, or in your circle of Christian friends, which of the above have you personally experienced or struggled with? How do the offerings of the Old Testament correct this view?

3. God didn't just dispense with grace and forgiveness from heaven—grace took the form of a person. As Bonhoeffer said, "Costly grace is the Incarnation of God." What would be the parallel in our spiritual walk? How would you describe salvation as forgiveness or admittance into heaven, or would you describe it as something else?
4. If the first half of the gospel is coming to faith in Jesus Christ, the second half is growing in the fullness of the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 5:18). The book of Acts bears witness to a cycle of believers repeatedly being filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 13:52). Is a fullness of life in God something you desire? How would others describe your life aims (see Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3 on being Spirit-filled and Spirit-driven)?
5. What do you need to quit this week in order to surrender your whole self to Jesus?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we repent of half-hearted faith and of lives not fully surrendered to You. We offer You our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths that You may have full and open access to all of who we are. We invite You to increase our trust where it is small, to extinguish attachments that may lead us away from You, and to fill us afresh with the fullness of God, without which we exist as a mere shadow compared to Your promised abundant life. Strengthen us to quit what we need to surrender in order to make space for you. In Jesus's name, amen.



SESSION THREE

First of All

SCRIPTURE

“When anyone brings a grain offering to the LORD, their offering is to be of the finest flour. They are to pour olive oil on it, put incense on it and take it to Aaron’s sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the food offerings presented to the LORD.” (Lev. 2:1–3)

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. (2 Cor. 2:14–15)

SUMMARY OF GRAIN OFFERING

The second type of offering in the Old Testament is the *minchah*, or grain offering. The purpose of the grain offering was a voluntary expression of devotion to God, recognizing His goodness and providence. The instructions for the grain offerings are given in Leviticus 2. Generally it was cooked bread—baked (v. 4), grilled (v. 5), fried (v. 7), roasted, or made into cereal (v. 14)—though always seasoned (v. 13), unsweetened, and unleavened (v. 11). Unlike the whole burnt offering, only a portion of the offering was to be burnt (v. 9). The remainder went to the priests for their meal (v. 10).

QUESTIONS

Share any insights or lingering questions you may have from the sermon or daily readings if you are using *Altar'd* by Susan O. Kent.

1. What is your relationship to bread, pitas, and pastries? How would you describe God's instructions about this offering as it relates to our five senses? Do you ever relate to God using your body rather than just your mind?
2. An important theological distinction is often made that while good works do not justify us (or serve as the merit for our forgiveness and relationship with God), good works must accompany justification as an indication of a relationship in good standing. How might this relate to the purpose of grain offerings?
3. Why do you believe leaven and sweeteners were symbolically forbidden in this offering type (see Matthew 16:6)? What might these elements have to do with decay? Discuss the decaying impact of sin in our world—in families, institutions, neighborhoods, etc.
4. The stories of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16–22), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) serve as cautionary tales about the nature of the offerings God desires. They must be thorough, appropriately motivated, and honest. How does what we offer to God reveal the inner workings of our hearts?
5. Of the abundance of gifts God has provided in your life, what are you willing to offer back to Him as tribute? Is it time, money, influence, talent? Has He ever asked you to abandon good things in order to pursue His kingdom? How do you demonstrably honor God for the work of Jesus Christ and what He has specifically done in your life?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we offer up our lives as a sacrifice back to You. May we carry to all places the sweet aroma of Your good news to our neighbors, both familiar and alien. Purify our hearts, that out of them would flow rivers of living water in order for us to be a blessing to all. Amen.



SESSION FOUR

Make a Choice

SCRIPTURE

“If your offering is a fellowship offering, and you offer an animal from the herd, whether male or female, you are to present before the LORD an animal without defect. You are to lay your hand on the head of your offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” (Lev. 3:1–2a)

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Eph. 2:14–18)

SUMMARY OF PEACE OFFERING

The third offering is the *shelem*, or peace offering. This category, first discussed in Leviticus 3, included thanksgiving offerings (Lev. 7:12), freewill offerings (v. 16), and wave offerings (v. 30). The offering could be cattle (3:1), sheep (v. 7), or a goat (v. 12). It could be male or female, but must be without defect. If it was a thanksgiving offering, it could also include a variety of breads (7:12). The purpose of the peace offering was to consecrate a meal between two or more parties before God and share that meal together in fellowship of peace and a commitment to each others' future prosperity.

QUESTIONS

Share any insights or lingering questions you may have from the sermon or daily readings if you are using *Altar'd* by Susan O. Kent.

1. How do you feel about “just because” gifts? Do you enjoy the surprise when it is offered purely as gratitude to you rather than during a traditional milestone or gift-giving occasion? Do you have a propensity to reciprocate immediately?
2. What do you make of the communal nature of the peace offering? How would you describe its parallel in the Communion table modeled for us at the Last Supper (Luke 22:7–38)?
3. See Matthew 5:23–24. On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate the seriousness with which our culture observes peace with others as a prerequisite for making an acceptable sacrifice to God? Do we actually believe our vertical relationship with our Father is intertwined with our horizontal relationships with our neighbors?
4. Some Christian traditions use rites like baptism or confirmation as occasions to affirm the community’s pledge to seeing them through to Christ-like maturity. In the early centuries of the church, Tertullian noted that it used to be said of God’s people, “See how they love one another!” Is your heart ready for the active, authentic, nurturing presence of Christian community? Are you ready to offer it to others?
5. What is one simple step you could take to move toward being a real presence of peace and a force of gratitude in your neighborhood? Consider your words, your habits, your reaction to current events, etc.

PRAYER

Lord, You are most holy, yet You made a way for us to approach You. Thank You for Your kindness and Your warm embrace, made possible through the goodness of Your Son and the Holy Spirit whom You sent. Together with our brothers and sisters, we offer You our praise for Your past, present, and future work in our lives and for Your glorious power at work in us. We celebrate Your enduring kingdom and all of the ways in which it is being made manifest in our world. Amen.



SESSION FIVE

Invisible Sin

SCRIPTURE

“If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, when they realize their guilt and the sin they committed becomes known, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the tent of meeting.” (Lev. 4:13–14)

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Heb. 10:11–14)

SUMMARY OF SIN OFFERING

The fourth offering was called *chattath*, literally “sin” or “sin offering.” This offering is sometimes seen as a sacrifice of atonement for unintentional sin, as opposed to sin done “with a high hand”—the brazen kind (Lev. 4:2–3, 20; Num. 15:30). Similarly, it is sometimes viewed as a guilt offering, removing the consequences for lack of perfection (vv. 13–14, 22–23). As an atonement offering, it contained elements of a burnt offering (v. 25), yet at the same time had elements of a peace offering (v. 26). Conversely, some of the sins for which one needed atonement were not moral sins, but rather matters of ritual impurity (5:1–5). As such, some have proposed that this could also be called the purification offering.

QUESTIONS

Share any insights or lingering questions you may have from the sermon or daily readings if you are using *Altar'd* by Susan O. Kent.

1. What is one sin (or vice) in our world which you behold easily in others and which you find to be particularly bothersome?
2. What do you make of all the specifications and categories included in this offering's description? How does the sacrificial system under the old covenant inform or correct modern maxims that "sin is sin," or suggestions that assigning greater weight to some is inappropriate or unbiblical? Are some sins worse than other sins?
3. What does the breadth of categories of offenders and offenses say about the reach of sin in our world? Do you believe God's Spirit can meet the problem of sin with lavish, sanctifying grace and actually shift the weight of our spiritual lives toward holy love of God and neighbor? Why or why not?
4. As you read through the New Testament, what are some devices or means of grace that God has instituted in order to curb and eliminate the power of sin in our hearts, homes, churches, and cities?
5. How do you measure spiritual maturity in a person? Do you tend to focus on religious activity? How might you describe the character of Jesus Christ to which the Gospels bear witness? Compare and contrast the lists in Galatians 5:19–23a and share which ones you struggle with, as you are comfortable.

PRAYER

Holy Father, grant us pardon from sin, but more importantly, break its power in our lives. Release us into the world so that our spiritual gravity would shift from fretting over sin to following boldly in the footsteps of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us the grace to embody love for others and to rejoice in discovering new ways to serve them faithfully as we testify to the good news of Your coming kingdom. Amen.



SESSION SIX

Paid in Full

SCRIPTURE

“When anyone is unfaithful to the LORD by sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD’s holy things, they are to bring to the LORD as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. They must make restitution for what they have failed to do in regard to the holy things, pay an additional penalty of a fifth of its value and give it all to the priest. The priest will make atonement for them with the ram as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven.” (Lev. 5:14–16)

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:13–15)

SUMMARY OF GUILT OFFERING

The fifth and final offering under the old covenant was the *asham*, traditionally translated “guilt offering.” Unlike the English word *guilt*, this does not refer to a matter of one’s conscience, but rather to something one owes on account of a sin. Other suggestions for the name of this offering are the “trespass offering” or the “reparation offering.” The purpose of this offering was to make reparations for one’s sin.

QUESTIONS

Share any insights or lingering questions you may have from the sermon or daily readings if you are using *Altar'd* by Susan O. Kent.

1. What has been one of the most awkward or challenging conversations you've experienced?
2. In one context the occasion for the guilt offering is when things belonging to God's holy temple (or tabernacle) service are desecrated. How might the doctrine of the image of God—which teaches us that all people are made in his holy likeness (Gen. 1:27)—explain why this category is later broadened to include sins against people and their property?
3. Which is easier, to ask someone for forgiveness or to follow up and make right what was done against a person? Consider how God's work in Christ Jesus performs the former work while the Holy Spirit does the latter—in appropriating saving grace for us and cementing our identity as sons and daughters of God. Does God ask us to do hard things?
4. The theme of newness is found throughout the New Testament: we follow a new law (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2); we inhabit a new age (1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 1:4); we share in a new humanity (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:10); we live under the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3). How should this impact our relationship to sin? What does this say about the power of God's transforming grace?
5. Consider the following list: wholeness vs. brokenness, fullness vs. emptiness, peace vs. anxiety, trust vs. control, joy vs. despair, healing vs. sickness, service vs. selfishness, beauty vs. chaos. Do any of these contrasts between the new vs. old speak to you, and can you think of others? Are there any residual patterns of being that you would like to surrender more fully to the sanctifying grace of God?

PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, transform our hearts, minds, souls, and strength so that our consecration becomes a demonstration of Your love and faithfulness; that our lives become Your sanctuary, and that You may find a suitable altar for Your presence. For the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, amen.