

# **Altar Worker Training**

## **Definition**

Altar work is instructing, assisting, and/or leading the seeker to an experience with God.

## **Objective**

To pray with, instruct, encourage, and to assess needs of the seeker as you help them pray through to the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

## **Where**

Anywhere

## **The Basics**

It is important that you pray with family members and friends who are seeking for the Holy Ghost. Friends need a familiar voice. Woman to woman, man to man is preferable. Often, when there are several seekers present, you can assess who is most ready to receive the Holy Ghost by watching their body language (note intensity)—if they are kneeling, crying, quiet, excited, shaking, smiling, calm, tight, scared. Don't be afraid to have a conversation with the seeker prior to praying. There may occasionally be times you have to ask them to stop praying in order to ask:

“What is your name? Are you praying for the Holy Ghost? Is this your first time to pray for the Holy Ghost? Do you know how to receive the Holy Ghost?”

As you talk to the seeker, use their name. If there are many people assisting the seeker, it is important that only one person speak in the seeker's ear—giving directions—at a time. Teamwork is important. You should always be sensitive to the needs, feelings, frustrations, and fears of the seeker. Many times, a seeker does not understand what they are supposed to be doing and how they are to do it. Help them by giving clearly spoken, easy-to-understand directions.

## **Common Problems**

It is common in our services today to have many people who have never prayed before in their life. They don't know how to pray for the Holy Ghost. Some don't even know to whom they should pray. Take the time to tell the seeker how to pray. Tell them that Jesus hears their prayers. Tell them that He wants to answer their prayers.

Many people, especially chronic seekers, do not receive the Holy Ghost because they have preconceived ideas as to how the Holy Ghost will come. Discuss their preconceived ideas. Let them know that rarely does anyone receive the Holy Ghost the way they think

they will. Chronic seekers often get into a rut of saying the same things over and over again, like a “stuck needle” on a phonograph. Get them to say and do something else.

For quiet people, discuss scriptures that relate to speaking out, shouting, lifting one’s voice, etc. Others: Sometimes you will work with people that cannot seem to break through to the Holy Ghost. You may consider that they have not repented, or they doubt God’s willingness and ability to forgive them of their sins. In either case, these are major hurdles that must be dealt with through prayer (repentance) and faith before the seeker will be able to receive the Holy Ghost.

### **Don’ts**

- *Hit or slap a seeker* on the back, arms, shoulders, or anywhere else. Control your emotions while you are working with seekers.
- *Shake the seeker.* It is very important that you keep your attention on assisting the seeker. You are not there to get a blessing yourself and forget about helping them.
- *Work the altars* with bad breath or body odor.
- *Spit in the seeker’s face* when you are praying for him.
- *Yell in the seeker’s ear.* Altar services can get very loud. Get close to the seeker’s ear and ask in a low voice, “Can you hear me?” If they are having trouble hearing you, you can turn up the volume a little at a time until they do hear your instructions clearly.
- *Mess up their hair or clothing.* Though many try, we cannot shake the Holy Ghost into a person.
- *Put words in their mouth* to get them to speak in tongues. Never tell a seeker to repeat after you or to say something (i.e. “la-la-la”, etc...).
- *Get in their face* (remember infectious diseases).

### **Do’s**

- *Get consent* from the seeker before you lay hands on them.
- *Be sensitive,* inoffensive, empathic (feel what they feel).
- *Be perceptive.* Observe what they are saying and what they are doing. Look for both positive and negative signs.
- *Touch* (shoulder, back, arms, head). You lay your hands on the seeker for the purpose of transmitting faith.

- *Be positive* in all your comments. It is good to tell the seeker often that they are doing well. They are usually in unfamiliar territory and your positive comments will set their mind at ease.
- *Encourage them* to press on. Many times a seeker will get the Holy Ghost on the second or third attempt. Answer any questions they might have. Give your opinion as to what is hindering them from breaking through to the Holy Ghost. Then encourage the seeker to pray again.

Pray out loud with them. When the seeker hears you pray, and even speak in tongues, it helps them to know how to worship as well as how to yield to the Holy Ghost.

### **The Seeker Must Repent.**

It is impossible to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost without first repenting. In order to come to Jesus, the Bible says you must first repent. Define repentance... It is asking the Lord to forgive you of your sins, being sorry for your sins, making a 180-degree turn and going in the other direction—a death to self, saying not *my* will but *thine* be done, walking toward Jesus. Have them to understand that they must confess and forsake their sins (Proverbs 8:13). Repent with them. (A kneeling position is good but not absolutely mandatory.) Encourage Godly sorrow (It worketh repentance II Cor. 7:10). Make sure the seeker understands that God loves them and that He will forgive them. God is faithful. He will cast their sins into the bottom of the sea. He will throw their sins as far as the east is from the west and remember them no more. It's His promise.

### **The Seeker Must Have Faith.**

The seeker must believe that God will give them the Holy Ghost just as He promised He would do. The scripture teaches, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). You should be continually speaking faith into the heart of the seeker. The reason you lay your hand on the seeker is to transmit your faith to them. If you do *not* have faith for the seeker to receive the Holy Ghost, you should *not* be praying with them. Your unbelief is transmitted the same as your faith is.

### **The Seeker Must Praise.**

Once the seeker has repented, instruct them that just as it is impossible to receive the Holy Ghost without repenting, it is impossible to receive the Holy Ghost while the seeker is repenting. He/she must move past repentance and begin to worship God. Praise is like a magnet that draws the Holy Ghost. He inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). Praise is acknowledging God for His greatness, excellence, goodness, mercy, perfection; all that He is, etc. Encourage the seeker to worship the Lord out loud. Getting them to say “Hallelujah” is the highest praise we can give God. It means, “Praise ye Jehovah,” frequently rendered, “Praise ye the Lord,” and stands at the beginning of ten of the psalms (Ps.106, 111–113, 135, 146–150), hence called “hallelujah psalms.” From its frequent

occurrence, it grew into a formula of praise. The Greek form of the word (*alleluia*) is found in Rev. 19:1, 3, 4, 6. (Easton's Bible Dictionary). "I praise you, Lord. I magnify you, Lord. I exalt you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus, for the Holy Ghost." Some people, especially those who have been exposed to Pentecostalism of some sort, will want to shout, clap, dance, jump, etc. Discourage this outward emotional experience until *after* they have received the Holy Ghost. Many times, people will get caught up in the emotion and not receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It's usually best to pray with people standing up. This is more of a worship and praise posture than kneeling (more of a repentance posture). Besides, it is easier to pray with a seeker who is standing. However, people have received the Holy Ghost sitting, standing, kneeling, and even laying on their back.

### **The Seeker Must Stay Focused.**

The following suggestions will help keep them on track: Put everything on the altar. Get your mind on Jesus. Ask earnestly for the Holy Ghost because it is a gift from God. Die out to yourself. Close your eyes; focus on Jesus. The greatest miracle God has ever performed, or ever will perform, is to fill a seeker with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. You should continually encourage them to believe in the miracle that God is working in their life right now.

### **When the Seeker is Filled**

Do not tell the seeker they have the Holy Ghost if they are not clearly speaking in other tongues. But, if they are speaking in an unknown tongue, you can say to them: "That's the Holy Ghost. That is God speaking through you in a heavenly language. Allow God to speak through you all He wants to." After it is obvious that the seeker has clearly received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, encourage them to enjoy their new experience with God. Rejoice with them. Dance and shout with them before the Lord for the wonderful work He has done in their life.

### **After the Seeker is Filled**

If the seeker has *not* been baptized in water, talk to them about the necessity of water baptism while they are still at the altar and still feeling the power of God. Talk to them about the benefits they will enjoy by joining the New Converts class. If possible, *always* introduce a new seeker to the pastor, pastor's wife, ministers, elders, leaders and as many other members as possible. When you introduce the seeker to the pastor, it is important that you express your love for, appreciation of, and trust in, the man or woman of God.

### **Altar Worker's Responsibilities**

Always go forward to the altar area with a seeker or meet a seeker without being publicly asked to do so. Altar workers need to always be ready. It is embarrassing to the seeker and to the church if the pastor has to plead with people to come to the altar to help a seeker receive the Holy Ghost. *Don't let the seekers go alone!* Record keepers should be

assigned to every altar service. Larger altar services should have several record keepers. Record keepers are *not* people who are also praying with seekers. Their full attention should be on getting proper and complete records. Altar cards are essential to an effective altar service. Make sure an altar card is filled out on every seeker, whether they receive the Holy Ghost or not. If possible, give every seeker a copy of *Power to Witness for Christ*, a study on the power of the Holy Spirit, available through Church of God Lay Ministries. A chief record keeper should be appointed in larger churches. All records should be turned into the chief record keeper before the record keeper leaves the church.

### **How Would Your Church Rate?**

A Lincoln, Nebraska church paper recorded the research of a lady who visited 18 churches on successive Sundays. To evaluate the friendliness of each church, the researcher sat near the front of the sanctuary each time and walked slowly to the rear, then returned to the front using another aisle. On each occasion, she was dressed neatly, and with a smile asked at least one person to direct her to the social hall, pastor's study, etc. She used the following point scale to rate the reception she received:

- 10 pts. smile from a worshipper
- 10 pts. greeting from nearby person
- 100 pts. exchange of names
- 200 pts. invitation to coffee or dinner
- 200 pts. invitation to return
- 1,000 pts. introduction to another worshipper
- 2,000 pts. invitation to meet the pastor

On this scale, all of the 18 churches visited earned fewer than 100 points. The researcher's conclusion is as follows:

The preaching may be Biblical, the singing inspirational, or the sermon uplifting, but when a visitor finds no one who cares whether he/she is there, he/she is not likely to come back.

Read that conclusion again. Let the truth of it sink in. People in our community and our area usually enter the church building because of some spiritual need. However, it is vital that the particular person or family visiting feel welcome and wanted in the place of worship. Where they find common ground and fellowship, they should find a welcome. How well would your church do on such a rating? Would its faith and love be expressed through friendliness?

### **The Church Is in the People Business.**

Building something into the lives of people is the fundamental responsibility of the church and ministry. Each church and minister should build its "concept of ministry" around meeting the real needs of real people. All ministers and leaders should be

continually developing their people skills. Why? Because people are souls, because souls are eternal, and because the church is in the people business. We allow many things to occupy our time: buildings, grounds, vehicles, computers, musical instruments, organization, administration—and the list goes on. Yet these things, though necessary responsibilities of the ministry, are not the business of the church. The primary business of the church is people. And, by the way, people are God's primary business, too. When He returns to the earth to take with Him that which He considers to be precious, buildings, buses, and computers will not be going up in the rapture. The only thing that God is going to take up in the rapture of the church is people! Anyone dealing with the public is in the people business! The successful restaurateur knows that he is not in the food business—he's in the people business. The successful clothier knows that he is not in the clothing business—he's in the people business. The successful church pastor knows that he is not in the building, music, preaching, or organizing business—he is in the people business.