

ALTARS

Title: **CHRIST'S GUIDELINES BEFORE OFFERING A SACRIFICE**

Date: February 18, 2024

Leader's Notes:

1. Start and end the life group on time.
2. Facilitate discussions with your group and **give all attendees opportunities to share their thoughts**. Encourage participation.

Life Group Discussion Proper

WORSHIP: (15 mins)

Option 1: In person - Home gatherings

Suggestions: Assign someone to lead worship or play two praise & worship songs from You Tube.

Option 2: In person gatherings at a public place (park, school, café) or Online home gathering (via Zoom).

Suggestions: Ask people to share testimonies of answered prayers or ask the question: Ask the group, "What are you thankful to God about this past week?"

Main Text: Matthew 5:21-24 NLT

Ice-breaker Questions:

Q: How many of us growing up remember the sacrifices our parents made for us (providing our needs, sending us to school, etc.?)

Q: How many of us appreciate the freedom we have in Canada all because of the sacrifices of those who fought in previous wars?

Intro: During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus communicated a very important guideline regarding what to do before offering a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem, which in principle is still relevant to our present-day worship of God.

WELCOME:(15 mins): IWC - Introduce yourself. Welcome guests/first-time visitors. Cheerfully call someone to do the same.

Ice-breaker: Ask the group, what is your definition of "Sacrifice?" Ask for participation.

Sacrifice - means the surrendering of a possession as an offering to the Lord. It means giving something up something that we value.

- Sacrifice often involve surrendering or relinquishing something cherished, whether it be possessions, time, effort, comfort, or personal desires, in order to achieve a desired outcome, fulfill a duty, or honor a commitment.

WORD (30–45 mins)

1. When a worshiper recall having a relationship issue with someone, they are instructed not to offer anything to God until they have taken steps towards reconciliation—Read Matthew 5: 23-24

Jesus instructed **anyone** intending to offer a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem **to stop immediately upon recalling a relationship conflict with someone**. He taught His disciples **to prioritize fostering positive relationships with others above engaging in religious rituals or practices**.

Regardless of the circumstances, it is a must for a worshiper of God to respond towards reconciling any broken relationships before presenting a sacrifice to God. Whether **you are the offended party** or the one who caused the offense, the worshiper must actively engage in the process of reconciliation. However, when all attempts at reconciliation have been made and the other party refuses to participate or cooperate, then the worshiper is permitted to proceed with offering their sacrifice.

Discussion Questions:

Q: Do we have someone we have unsettled issues and therefore need to be reconciled with?

Q: What do you think could be holding you back in doing reconciliation with someone?

Unresolved relationship conflicts is a breeding ground to anger and hatred. It will keep us from meaningful worship with God. Jesus equates harboring hatred with the severity of murder, violating the sixth commandment. If anyone nurtures anger in their heart towards another, it is similar to committing murder, rendering any animal sacrifices on the altar ineffective in pleasing God. Jesus is talking about was the one at the Temple that serves as a site for repentance and atonement for sins committed; thus, Jesus emphasized the importance of reconciliation with those we are in conflict with before presenting a sacrifice. Jesus is emphasizing *the deeper spiritual reality* behind the commandment against murder.

Continuation:

Application: *We are to prioritize being reconciled with the person or people we are having issues with before participating in ministry activities or engaging in acts of devotion to God.*

Conditions:

If you've already attempted to reach out and communicate with the other party through all the different channels, including in person, over the phone, or via text messages or even through social media platforms like Messenger, and they still decline to participate in reconciliation, *then, you are then permitted to move forward in serving God, or going to a church worship service or any other expression of worship to Him.*

God commands us and encourages us to *love and forgive genuinely from the depths of our hearts even when the other party rejects your kind and loving gestures.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, even when faced with people harboring hatred towards Him, He still maintained a pure and loving heart towards them. He was unhindered in His devotion to God and His pursuit of fulfilling His God-given purpose on earth.

Q: Was there a time in the past that you tried avoiding reconciliation with someone? What could have been the reason?

Q: Was there a time in the past you have reached out to be reconciled with someone? How was your experience?

2. Address the matter directly with the individual involved—Read vv.23-24

From these verses, Jesus clearly stated to go to the person concerned. He didn't say share the issue with your best friend, workmate, Life Group mate, mentor, prayer group, on social media other than the person you need to be reconciled with. If you are not directly involved in the relationship issue, please refrain from entertaining anyone who shares their side with you. Engaging in such conversations does not benefit anyone. In situations like these, being always "in the know," is not a godly behavior. Not unless you are a mediator required to facilitate reconciliation between both parties. However, the most effective approach is to hear both sides with both parties present. Without gathering information from both parties, you lack sufficient details to facilitate reconciliation or resolve issues between them.

Read: Proverbs 18:17 TPT

Moreover, if they freely discuss other people's problems with you, how sure are we that they will not divulge their issues with you with others in the future. *If they're comfortable gossiping about other people with you, what's to prevent them from discussing yours later on?* Beware of people like these.

Read: Proverbs 25:9-10 NLT

Q: How many of us should refrain from engaging in any outward expressions of worship to God (ministry or church volunteering, etc.) until we have reached out to the person or people with whom we need reconciliation?

Q: In the past weeks or months, have we harbored grudges or unforgiveness towards someone? Have you taken some steps to reach out to the person or people with whom we need reconciliation?

Q: Would you be willing to reach out to someone and be reconciled with in the coming days?

Conclusion: *Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.* v.24

Once we have made the necessary efforts to reconcile with someone you are in conflict with, we are then allowed to present your sacrifice on the altar. Our top priority on our to-do list today should be reaching out to the person or people we need to reconcile with. If we are struggling to do this, pray and ask the Lord for His help and strength to enable you to do this. However, we cannot expect anything from God in terms of our service and worship to God unless we are willing to obey this particular command of the Lord Jesus regarding the broken relationships we have.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST TAKE-AWAY FROM THE LESSON?

Tell your group to partner with someone and ask this question to their partner.

Q: What impacted you the most from this lesson?

WORK: The Challenge & Closing prayer (15 mins.)

1. Memorize a verse from your devotions this week and be prepared to share it on our next gathering.
2. Please take time in your smaller groups to pray for one another. If there are specific needs, take time to lift them up to God in prayer as well. Ask each other, "**what can I pray for you?**"

Leader's Notes:

1. Please remind your group of your next gathering and ask them to invite a friend.
2. Please encourage the group to remember to pray for one another during the week.