

Small Group Guide: The Altar Kills Options

Series: The Next

Introduction for Group Leaders

This week's message drew from Joshua 4 to explore how memorials of God's faithfulness are meant to activate us, not immobilize us. The altar -- represented by the stones Joshua set up in the Jordan -- kills off options that lead us back to the old life and calls us forward into obedience, movement, and generational faithfulness. Use this guide to help your group move beyond hearing the word to living it out.

Key Takeaways

- The stones Joshua set up in the Jordan were not just historical markers -- they were living memorials meant to create movement in every generation that followed.
 - Baptism is not merely a public declaration of faith; it is a permanent altar moment that kills off the option of returning to the old life.
 - Memorials of God's faithfulness are meant to be passed from generation to generation, not as religious nostalgia but as active, living testimony.
 - What we reinforce privately will be enforced publicly. Our private integrity becomes public power.
 - We are called living stones -- chosen and honored by God -- not because of anything we have done, but because of the finished work of Jesus Christ.
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Opening Question

Take a few minutes before diving into the scripture to get people talking.

- What is one object, place, or moment in your life that serves as a personal reminder of God's faithfulness? Share it with the group.
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Scripture References

The following passages were central to this week's message. Read them together as a group before moving into discussion.

- Joshua 4:1-9 -- The twelve stones are set up as a memorial of Israel crossing the Jordan
 - Romans 6:1-11 -- Paul describes what it means to be baptized into Christ's death and raised to new life
 - Colossians 2:6-7 -- The call to walk in Christ, rooted and built up in Him
 - 1 Peter 2:4-8 -- Believers described as living stones being built into a spiritual house
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. In Joshua 4, Joshua set up two sets of stones -- one at Gilgal on the bank and one in the middle of the Jordan where the priests stood. Why do you think both sets of stones mattered? What might each one represent?
2. The message pointed out that the stones in the middle of the Jordan were eventually covered by water -- a picture of baptism. What does it mean to you that your old life is meant to be buried under the water, not just set aside?
3. Romans 6:1-11 uses the language of death, burial, and resurrection to describe what happens at baptism. How does that imagery change the way you think about your own decision to follow Jesus?

Going Deeper

4. The pastor warned that the memorial at Gilgal eventually became a place of empty religious activity, as the prophet Amos later addressed. What is the difference between a living memorial that creates movement and a memorial that produces religious routine or false security?
5. The message emphasized the phrase "what you reinforce privately will be enforced publicly." Where in your own life do you see that connection -- for better or for worse?
6. 1 Peter 2:4-8 describes believers as living stones being built together into a spiritual house. How does that image challenge the tendency to read the Bible individualistically,

as if faith is only a personal matter?

Personal Reflection

7. The pastor described wanting to leave his children journals, notes, and commentaries on scripture as memorials of faith. What are you currently doing -- or could you begin doing -- to pass on a living testimony to the people who come after you?
 8. The message said that a memorial has to create movement, not immobility. Is there an area of your life where a past experience with God has become more of a resting place than a launching point? What would it look like to let that memory fuel forward movement?
 9. The altar kills options. What is one option -- a habit, a mindset, an attachment to the old life -- that your baptism and commitment to Christ is calling you to lay down?
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Practical Applications

Choose one or two of the following to commit to before your group meets again.

For individuals:

- Write down three specific moments in your life where God was faithful. Pray over each one and ask God how those moments are meant to fuel something in your present or future.
- If you have not been water baptized, prayerfully consider taking that step. Talk to your group leader or pastor about what that process looks like.
- Identify one area of your private life where your integrity does not yet match what you want your public life to reflect. Bring it to God in honest prayer this week and share it with a trusted person in your group for accountability.

For families:

- Start a simple practice of telling your children or grandchildren one story of God's faithfulness each week. It does not have to be elaborate -- a sentence or two around the dinner table is enough to begin building a memorial.
- Consider creating a physical reminder in your home -- a journal, a written prayer, a framed verse -- that marks a significant moment of God's faithfulness in your family's story.

For the group:

- As a group, take time to share one "stone" each -- one moment of God's faithfulness that the group can collectively remember and celebrate. Pray together over those moments and ask God to use them to fuel what He is building next.
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Closing Prayer Focus

Close your time together by praying specifically over these three areas:

1. That each person would have a clear and active memorial of what God has done in their life -- not as a resting place, but as a launching point.
2. That the group would be living stones being built together, not isolated individuals trying to carry faith alone.
3. That the next generation -- whether children, younger believers, or those who do not yet know Christ -- would see something worth inheriting in the lives of the people in this room.