Discovering Exodus: Finding prayer points, testimonies, reflection and journaling questions that will engage your heart with the Father.

Chapter 30: Fragrant Offering

**□ The Invitation**: Invite the Holy Spirit to show you something new as you read through the chapter. The Father desires to meet with you and share something with you today. You may find it in the reading or you may hear His Voice speaking to Your Spirit in the quiet of this moment.

**□ The Reading:** Read Exodus Chapter 30. Record any thoughts from the chapter, questions you have or verses that the Holy Spirit highlighted to you while reading.

**□ The Focus**: Today’s focus is a reflection. Write your thoughts as you meet with the Father.

Fragrant smoke ascended with the sweet smell of incense burning on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. This Golden Altar of Incense was placed before the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This was as close as the priests could get to the presence of God, which settled between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. As the priests stood at the Altar of Incense and offered up the sweet aroma before the Lord, they were near to God Himself. The priests were literally feet away from the Shekinah (real, tangible, manifest presence) glory of the Lord.

In my mind I have a picture of the priest coming in to minister before the Lord at the Altar of Incense. He burns the incense on the Altar, watching the smoke rise filling his nostrils with the fragrance of the incense. With a holy fear and reverence he performs his duties, knowing that beyond the veil rests the Glory of God. What awe the priest had for His God.

How about you? Do you approach God with a holy fear and reverence, knowing who He is? Personally, I have rushed right into His presence, pushing the curtain aside and demanding, like a child, that He listen to me and answer my requests. Do you have a tendency to rush in?

The Tabernacle model teaches us to treasure the presence of God with honor and respect, remembering that the only way I even have access to a Most Holy God is based on the sacrifice of His perfect Son, Jesus, who willingly gave up His life for me (and you

The placement of the Altar of Incense is at the heart of God. I want to take a few minutes to define the ministry of worship, prayer and intercession that takes place at this Altar.

Many people hear the word “worship” and immediately think of music. Now, music can be part of worship, but it is not the definition of the word. Worship is a life surrendered to God totally, in every area. In Bible references when one would encounter the angel of the Lord or the manifest presence of God, the person would fall prostrate, on his face. The first mention of the word worship is in Genesis 22:5, “*Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.’*” There is no mention of singing praises to the Lord, in this case. In fact, as James Goll says, in his book, The Prophetic Intercessor, “We often connect worship with music and sometimes make them synonymous. But there is no mention of music here. The only instruments listed are wood, fire and a knife, and I don’t think Abraham had in mind to whittle a flute and play a tune. All he offered was sacrifice, obedience and faith. This is worship in its highest form~ a life prostrate before God. Worship is about bending the knee.” (p.200)

There is a difference between prayer and intercession. James Goll describes intercession as “one who stands in the gap between God’s righteous judgments and the people’s need for mercy”. (p. 27 in The Prophetic Intercessor). This was one of the ministries of the priest when he approached the Altar of incense. He stood in the gap between God and the people. That is our ministry of intercession as priests of the new covenant. And Jesus, the Great High Priest intercedes on behalf of His people, *“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them,”* Hebrews 7:25. What a privilege to participate in intercession. May we be faithful in this divine ministry. Ezekiel 22:30 gives us a warning: “*I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none*.” Oh Lord, let that not be said of us! Do you have a heart to intercede? Ask the Lord to give you a spirit of intercession, a desire to intercede and a heart that breaks over what breaks his heart. In intercession, we are asking God what is on His heart and then we intercede.

Richard J. Foster, in his book, The Celebration of Discipline speaks of prayer, “to pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.” (p.33). Before we can move into intercession, we have to have our ears tuned to the voice of our Shepherd. Many people pray by handing their list of requests to Jesus and turning and walking away. The joy of prayer is listening to Him. What does He want to say to you? However, this is not a fast-food, drive-thru experience. It takes time to get to know the Father’s whisper. He is wanting to tune our ears to hear Him. In order to do that, we need to turn off the noise and distractions of life. We are so accustomed to noise, that we don’t know how to sit and be quiet. Begin by turning off the stuff of this world. Foster goes on to say of prayer, “Listening to the Lord is the first thing, the second thing and the third thing necessary for successful intercession.”

Do not wait to begin a life of prayer. Start today. Take five minutes to just listen to the voice of the Lord. Get a journal and pen. Be ready to write what you hear. It may take time and you may not hear anything for a while, but the more you set your heart to listen, the more you will hear.

The Altar of Incense was a place to tarry before God. The priests were not in a hurry to rush through their ministry to Him. They offered sacrifices of praise, prayer and intercession. Psalm 51:17 says, “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* A heart offered to Him, surrendered to God’s will. “*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise~ the fruit of lips that confess His name, “ Hebrews 13:15.* The sacrifice of praise ascends before the throne of God. It is a sweet incense to Him. “*May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting of my hands be like the evening sacrifice,” Psalm 141:2.*

This beautiful Altar made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, three feet tall and 1 ½ feet square, horns at each corner, with a gold molding or rim around the perimeter had rings and poles used to carry it when the Israelites were led by the pillar of fire or cloud. Most scholars believe that there were only two rings (not like the four of the Bronze Altar and the Table of Showbread). The poles would fit in the rings and as the priests carried the Altar. It would swing on the poles, becoming a large censor as they walked. Imagine the fragrance of the incense and the smoke ascending to the Lord, an offering that would be pleasing to the Lord, a continual fragrance.

“*Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the alter every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for generations to come,”* Exodus 30:7-8. The Hebrew word for “regularly” means “continually, constantly, daily or always”. The smell of the fragrant incense was constant in the Holy Place. Is there a continual fragrance of incense in your life, represented by prayer, worship and intercession?

Several years ago, our family experienced a time of pain, as we walked through a very difficult church split. For many months we struggled in the desert, asking some hard questions: “Lord, where do you want us?” “What are we to do?” The pain caused our hearts to press in closer to Jesus. He alone sustained us. It was a time of focusing our attention on our Savior, not on man. Have you experienced any loss? Or any hard time that has caused a refocus in your life? This happened at the beginning of the school year and I was missing corporate worship. The worship band, that my daughter was involved with led worship at the chapel services weekly at her high school. Jon, our son, whom I homeschooled, decided to go to chapel weekly for our time of corporate worship. That worship time invited the Lord to come and heal the broken places in our hearts. For months we trekked up to the high school on Thursdays for Chapel services. I cried through the entire half hour of worship, as these young people (ages 14-18) led me into the throne room of heaven. The tears that streamed from my eyes were healing to my soul. Those kids did not know what a healing balm their worship was to me. The Lord tenderly healed us. We met Jesus at the Altar of Incense and the fragrance of the tears of intercession rose before the Lord. I have shared with the worship team how their sweet, pure worship was the healing balm that moved us from woundedness to restoration. Praise the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me praise His holy name! What a fragrant offering. If you are in a place of brokenness or have experienced a wounded heart or have suffered loss, come to the Altar of Incense and let the incense ascend before Him. Do not be in a hurry. Come and tarry at the Altar.

**Reflection:** Intimacy is the reward of spending time at the Altar of Incense. Today, spend some time at the Altar.

Tarrying at the Altar of Incense:

1. Find a quiet place where you are not interrupted.
2. Begin by focusing on who God is. This gives focus to our minds (which often wanders). Read a Psalm and highlight in your mind the character qualities that are written about our God.

God You are… Jesus You are… Holy Spirit You are…

1. I John 1:9. Spend a couple minutes in confession. Ask God to reveal any sin. Agree with God about your sin. Repent and accept God’s cleansing.
2. Ephesians 5:20. Spend some time thanking the Lord for His gifts of blessing upon your life. Thank you Lord for:
3. Philippians 4:6. Bring prayers and petitions before the Lord (for others & yourself).

In the Old Testament model, this altar stood before the Ark of the Covenant, which held God’s presence which we see this mirrored in the heavenly city*. “Another angel, who had a golden censor, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the Golden Altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” (Revelation 8:3-4)*  What a privilege to offer prayers, petitions, and intercession to be gathered and placed in a golden censor before the throne of God.