

FURTHER STUDY GUIDE

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE: CHRIST OUR INTERCESSOR

ICEBREAKER QUESTION

What scent or aroma immediately brings back a specific, fond memory for you, and why do you think it sticks with you so vividly?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

INCENSE—THE SYMBOL OF PRAYER AND INTERCESSION

Background Info: In the Old Testament Tabernacle, the Golden Altar of Incense stood directly in front of the veil leading to the Most Holy Place. Every morning and evening, the high priest burned a specific, holy blend of sweet spices, creating a cloud of smoke that wafted into God's very presence. This physical act vividly pictured how God receives the prayers of His people—as a pleasing, sweet fragrance rising to Heaven. However, this sacred space carried strict warnings: treating it casually or offering unauthorized fire brought immediate and severe judgment, showing that approaching a holy God is a privilege to be treated with absolute reverence.

1. **Read Exodus 30:1–10:** Why do you think God required the altar of incense to be placed directly in front of the ark of the testimony, and what does this location teach us about the priority of prayer in approaching God?

2. **Read Leviticus 16:12:** The high priest had to take a censer filled with burning coals and sweet incense into the veil so the cloud would cover the mercy seat. What does this reveal about our human vulnerability when we try to enter God's presence without a proper covering?

3. **Read Leviticus 10:1-3:** Nadab and Abihu offered "unauthorized fire" and died before the Lord. How does this sobering event help us understand why we cannot approach God on our own terms or through our own self-righteous efforts?

JESUS AS OUR INTERCESSOR

Background Info: Human priests in the Old Testament eventually died, so their ministry and prayers always came to an end. In contrast, Jesus possesses an indestructible life, which allows Him to serve as our permanent, ultimate High Priest. Sitting at the right hand of God, He serves as our Mediator and Advocate. When our weak, imperfect, or messy prayers go up, Jesus refines them, rephrases them perfectly according to the Father's will, and pleads

our case. Because He lives forever to speak on our behalf, we have ultimate security and access to God.

4. **Read Hebrews 7:23-25:** What comfort do you find in the reality that Jesus' priesthood is permanent because He "ever lives to make intercession" for you? How does this contrast with human leaders or mentors?

5. **Divine Refining:** Knowing that Jesus takes our flawed, everyday prayers and refines them before presenting them to the Father, how does that change the pressure you might feel to say the "perfect words" when you pray?

6. **The Advocate's Role:** If Jesus is actively defending you and pleading your case against accusations and sin, how should that truth change the way you respond when you experience guilt, shame, or failure?

INTERCESSORS FOR OTHERS

Background Info: Because we belong to Christ's spiritual family, we have been called into a "holy priesthood." This means we don't just pray for our own needs; we are commanded to step into the gap and intercede for others. Just as a physical bridge spans a gap, intercessors build a spiritual bridge between a person's desperate need and God's abundant grace. We are explicitly instructed to extend these prayers to everyone—including leaders and

government officials—so that peace can prevail and the gospel can spread freely. When we do this, our collective prayers are stored in Heaven like golden bowls of incense, waiting to be answered.

7. **Read 1 Timothy 2:1-2:** Why do you think Paul specifically prioritizes praying for kings and "all who are in high positions"? How easy or difficult is it for you to sincerely pray for leaders you might disagree with politically or socially?

8. **Read Revelation 8:3-4:** This passage depicts an angel adding incense to the "prayers of all the saints" on the golden altar before God. How does this grand heavenly vision change the way you view your seemingly quiet, private prayers for a sick friend or a struggling family member?

9. **Building the Bridge:** Intercession means "going between" or pleading for another. Can you share a time when you felt a sudden, strong urge from the Holy Spirit to pray for someone else? What did you learn about God's heart through that experience?

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL: THE SWEET FRAGRANCE OF TRUST

Scripture Meditation: *"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"* — Psalm 141:2

Reflection:

Think about the last time you felt too exhausted, distracted, or heartbroken to pray. In those moments, it can feel as though our words never leave the ceiling—let alone reach the throne of God. We worry that our prayers are too messy, too repetitive, or too weak to matter.

But the imagery of the altar of incense rewrites this narrative. When you whisper a prayer in your weakest moment, it doesn't enter heaven as a disappointing sigh; it rises as a fragrant aroma. Why? Because your prayers do not travel alone.

Jesus, your eternal High Priest, catches every stuttered word, every unspoken groan, and every tear. He mixes them with His perfect righteousness and presents them to the Father. Through Christ, your prayers become sweet-smelling incense. You don't need perfect words to be heard; you just need to offer a willing heart. Your voice is a delight to the Father because you belong to the Son.

QUESTIONS | REFLECTIONS | OBSERVATIONS
