

**An Altar in the World**  
**Chapter One**  
**The Practice of Waking up to God**

This study guide is formatted for a small group gathering. If you choose to use it as a small group leader or as an individual, feel free to adapt it in whatever way seems meaningful to you. Enjoy!

Amy Fryar Kennedy

**Quotes and ideas worth repeating:**

*St Francis read the world as reverently as he read the Bible.*

*In the Bible, people encounter God under shady oak trees, on river banks, at tops of mountains, and long stretches of barren wilderness. God shows up in whirlwinds, starry skies, burning bushes and perfect strangers. When people want to know more about God, the son of God tells them to pay attention to lilies of the field and birds of the air, to women kneading bread and workers lining up for their pay.*

*Whoever wrote this stuff believed that people could learn as much from paying attention to the world as they could from paying attention to scripture.*

*This is wonderful news. I don't have to choose between the Sermon on the Mount and magnolia trees.*

*What is true is what happens, even if what happens is not always right.*

*Wisdom is not gained by knowing what is right. Wisdom is gained by practicing what is right and noticing what happens when the practice succeeds and when it fails. Wise people do not have to be certain what they believe before they act. They are free to act, trusting that the practice itself will teach them what they need to know.*

**Related Scripture:**

Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob at Bethel and his dream of the ladder with angels to heaven

**Introductions:**

If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?

**Gathering Activity:**

Have crayons and paper out. Invite people to remember a tree that had special significance for them and draw something that reminds them of that tree. Later invite them to share what they have drawn.

**Reflection/discussion:**

Where have you found God out in the world, in people you encounter, in nature?

Do you tend to over think decisions before acting or are you reckless enough to try something and see what happens?

Where does our church/most churches encourage people to find God more: in church or in the world?

Have you ever been disappointed when you looked for God in church?

When do you make time to consider the lilies?

**Closing:**

People share their tree pictures

**Materials need to lead:**

Print out homework assignment slips

Paper, crayons

**Homework for next week:**

Do one or both of these activities before next week's class:

Sit down outside or by a window (preferably by a body of water).

Pay attention for 20 minutes.

OR

With pencil and paper, spend 20 minutes drawing your hand.

Include lots of detail. Does your hand tell a story?