

Seek God

God expects His people to seek Him and demonstrate His character.

AMOS 5:4-15



272

land of
ough the
Amorite.
s for proph-
(Nazarites,
dren of Israel?

rites wine to drink;
prophets, saying,

ISRAEL'S SINS

I am pressed under you, as a
ed *that is* full of sheaves.
ore the flight shall perish from
and the strong shall not strength-
force, "neither shall the mighty de-
himself:
Neither shall he stand that handleth
e bow; and *he that is* swift of foot shall
not deliver *himself*;" neither shall he that
rideth the horse deliver himself.

¹⁶And *he that is* courageous among the
mighty shall flee away naked in that day,
saith the LORD.

GOD HAS SPOKEN

3 Hear this word that the LORD hath spo-
ken against you, O children of Israel,
against the whole family which I brought
up from the land of Egypt, saying,

²You only have I known of all the fam-
ilies of the earth: therefore I will punish
you for all your iniquities.

³Can two walk together, except they be
agreed?

⁴Will a lion roar in the forest, when he
hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of
his den, if he have taken nothing?

on
the
father
profane

down upon
ery altar, and
condemned *in*

FAITHFULNESS

the Amorite before
ght *was* like the height of
e *was* strong as the oaks;
ed his fruit from above, and
n beneath.

3

What is something people must seek to find? How does one go about the seeking?

Three year olds love to play hide and seek. They want us to count while they run and hide. However, they typically pick places to hide where they can easily be seen—under the piano bench, poking out from behind the recliner, or behind the glass coffee table. They hide in easy places because they want to be found. As we begin a lesson about seeking God, it is good to note that He is not hiding in difficult places far away from us—because He, too, wants us to find Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

When Israel divided into two kingdoms, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, became king of Judah, including the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Jerusalem remained the capital city and worship in the temple continued. Jeroboam and the other ten tribes revolted and formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Israel was separated by political boundaries from the temple in Jerusalem, and Jeroboam knew that to hold the nation together, they needed their own place of worship. In the place of the temple, he established two centers of worship in Israel—Bethel and Dan—and fashioned two golden calves (1 Kings 12:28). The altars were conveniently located for people throughout the kingdom with Bethel in the south and Dan in the north. However, worship that is convenient but misplaced is not a good thing.

After establishing new places of worship, Jeroboam instituted new practices of worship. He established a feast in the eighth month that was designed to rival the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month in Judah (1 Kings 12:33). At this feast, worshipers

offered sacrifices and burned incense on the altar, practices that modeled worship in the temple. The worship did not bring them closer to God but further separated them from Him (Amos 4:4). The people attended worship under the pretense of seeking God but did not seek Him in the way He wanted to be sought. They wanted a god on their own terms rather than the true God of Israel.

In Amos 5:18–6:14, Amos confronted the people of Israel with three misconceptions. First, they believed the Day of the Lord would be a day of salvation for them. Amos indicated it would be a day of catastrophe (5:18-20). Second, they believed they were secure in their relationship with God because of their repetitive meetings for worship and the offerings they presented to Him (5:21-27). Amos revealed to them that God had rejected their pretentious religious displays. Third, they thought they could trust in their military and affluence to protect them from their enemies (6:1-14). But there was nothing that could protect them from the judgment God was going to bring upon them.

AMOS 5:4-15

4 For the LORD says to the house of Israel: **Seek me and live!** ^A **5** Do not seek Bethel or go to Gilgal or journey to Beer-sheba, for Gilgal will certainly go into exile, and Bethel will come to nothing.

6 Seek the LORD and live, or he will spread like fire throughout the **house of Joseph** ^B; it will consume everything with no one at Bethel to extinguish it.

7 Those who turn justice into wormwood also throw righteousness to the ground. **8** The one who made the **Pleiades and Orion** ^C, who turns darkness into dawn and darkens day into night, who summons the water of the sea and pours it out over the surface of the earth — the LORD is his name. **9** He brings destruction on the strong, and it falls on the fortress. **10** They hate the one who convicts the guilty at the **city gate** ^D, and they despise the one who speaks with **integrity** ^E.

11 Therefore, because you trample on the poor and exact a **grain tax** ^F from him, you will never live in the houses of cut stone you have built; you will never drink the wine from the lush vineyards you have planted. **12** For I know your crimes are many and your sins innumerable. They oppress the righteous, take a bribe, and deprive the poor of justice at the city gates. **13** Therefore, those who have insight will keep silent at such a time, for the days are evil. **14** Pursue good and not evil so that you may live, and the LORD, the God of Armies, will be with you as you have claimed. **15 Hate evil** ^G and love good; establish justice at the city gate. Perhaps the LORD, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Key Words

- A. A call to return to faithfulness to God (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).
- B. While the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh descended from Joseph, the intent here is the entire Northern Kingdom (see Ezekiel 37:16,19).
- C. Amos reminded Israel of the magnitude of God's power. Even these well-known constellations are under God's control.
- D. In ancient Israel, law cases were argued at the city gates. They were the equivalent of our modern courthouses (Ruth 4:1-12).
- E. Honest and blameless; a fulfillment of the ninth commandment. However, in this circumstance, the officials despised the following of the Law.
- F. The poor were being overtaxed and were left with too little to provide for their families.
- G. For God's people, evil isn't to be tolerated, or simply avoided, but it is to be hated.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

1. THE CHOICE (AMOS 5:4-9)

All people must choose to trust God.

What are substitutes that people seek instead of God, and how do those substitutes fall short of true worship?

How does focusing on God's rule over all things created impact a person's worship?

2. THE REALITY (AMOS 5:10-13)

Believers should expect God to take action to discipline His people.

Why might a person believe that God would overlook the mistreatment of the poor and unethical gain because of that mistreatment?

Why it is easy to remain silent in the midst of injustices around us? Why is it difficult to remain silent when we are in the middle of God's discipline?

3. THE SOLUTION (AMOS 5:14-15)

Believers are to be characterized by loving good and upholding justice.

Why are loving good and upholding justice indicators that a person is seeking God?

APPLY THE TEXT

What does pursuing good and establishing justice look like in your Bible study group?

What principles should guide your group as you seek God by seeking to do those things?

KEY DOCTRINE: God

There is one and only one living and true God. (See Exodus 3:14; 1 Timothy 1:17.)

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary to better understand the background.

Read articles in a Bible dictionary about Bethel, Gilgal, and Beer-sheba. Note what events recorded in the Old Testament happened at these locations in Israel's history and consider how Israel allowed commemorating those events to become a substitute for their own devotion to the Lord. What should believers today learn from what Israel did in Amos's day?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Amos 5:4 and 6a. When have you needed a directive repeated to you?

A century after Amos, Jeremiah proclaimed a similar message to Judah (Jeremiah 29:13). But seeking must be combined with right conduct towards others. Seeking God means reorienting our life to God's service. The object of seeking God is not personal satisfaction, self-confidence, or even spiritual wisdom. The ultimate object is life itself, in all its fullness. Experiencing life means that we pass that life on to others through daily conduct that honors God.

Seeking God sounds simple but the repeating of the command points to the challenge. What makes seeking God such a challenge?

The call to seek God is not about finding something lost, but about passionately pursuing Someone. Jesus spoke of this pursuit of God, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matthew 6:33).

Discuss how what Jesus said in Matthew 6 helps us understand what Amos meant by seeking God so that they could live. How does seeking God give us life?

Agree to text Amos 5:4 to each other as a reminder to pursue God in all things.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Amos 5:4-7

Underline the phrase, “Seek Me and live.”

Amos called the people to seek God rather than participate in idolatry. This came as an invitation from God: *Seek me and live*. Whenever this phrase is used in the Old Testament it has one of three meanings. First, it could describe a prophetic consultation with the Lord (1 Chronicles 10:13-14). Second, it described a turning to the Lord in repentance and faith (Deuteronomy 4:29). Finally, to seek the Lord was to visit Him in His temple at Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 11:16). All of these meanings reflected ways Israel needed to seek the Lord. If Israel refused to turn from false worship at false altars, God would *break out like fire in the house of Joseph*. Fire was synonymous with the judgment of God, and even the sacrifices offered by fire on foreign altars at *Bethel* would not save them. The house of Joseph was a clear reference to the nation of Israel, which included the defection of the largest tribe, Ephraim, which was named for Joseph’s son. In verse 7, Amos described their worship as turning *justice to wormwood*. Wormwood was the most bitter of plants, and by worshiping with impure lives on false altars the people had changed sweet justice into bitter injustice. God desires worship on His terms from lives that are surrendered to Him.

What substitutes have you sought in the past instead of God, and how did those substitutes fall short of true worship?

Day 2: Amos 5:8-9

Note the descriptions of God’s strength.

God was not a localized deity present only in Jerusalem, Amos identified Him as the One who *made the Pleiades and Orion*. These were two well-known constellations. The God the Israelites needed to seek was in charge of the heavens. Baal worshipers thought Baal sent the rain, but it was God who *turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, and calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth*. *The Lord*, not Baal, was *his name*. Amos declared that God *makes destruction* on those who think themselves to be *strong*. Even the strongest people are not immune to the judgment of God. Neither is the *fortress* strong enough to withstand God’s judgment. Israel may have considered themselves stronger than Judah, and they were politically and economically stronger at times. But what were they in comparison to God?

How does focusing on God’s rule over all things created impact your worship?

Day 3: Amos 5:10-11

Consider how verse 11 applies to your own life.

The refusal to seek God not only manifested itself in the wrong places the Israelites went to worship but also in their lack of character. Their lives at the altar were polluted by their lives at the *gate*. The gate was a reference to their business transactions at the city gate. The perverted justice of the Israelites was seen in their attitude toward *him who speaks the truth*. They loved to *trample on the poor* by collecting a grain tax from them. The word trample can be used of one who levies taxes, indicating they were targeting the poor with taxes they couldn't afford. Because Israel refused to care for the least in their society, God would take action against them. He would cause them to *not dwell in their houses of hewn stone*. The Israelites were using their oppression of the poor to build grand homes. But because their nation was going into exile at the hands of the Assyrians, they would never inhabit them. The Israelites had planted *pleasant vineyards* but would not see the fruit. Payday for our sins always arrives. In that day, what will it matter what we have profited because of our own sin?

Do you believe that God would overlook the mistreatment of the poor and unethical gain because of that mistreatment? Explain.

Day 4: Amos 5:12-13

Identify the response to injustice seen in this passage.

The sins of Israel were *great*. Though Amos did not list them all, he did refer to three representative sins of the nation. First, they *afflict the righteous*. To afflict someone was to cause distress in their lives by hindering them or impeding them. They held the poor down by their restrictive actions. Second, the Israelites took a *bribe*. By referring to the poor as righteous, Amos indicated that they were innocent of the crime, but the Israelites accepted a bribe to convict the poor. Third, they deprived *the needy in the gate*. They deprived them the opportunity to have their plea heard and tried. Because the poor could not have their day in court, they were silenced by their oppressors. However, God would turn the tables on the Israelites when it was their day in court. *The prudent, who had insight* into what was taking place, would be silent under the judgment of God. They would sit in silence as God exacted His judgment upon them. They would be unable to defend themselves, as the poor were currently unable to defend themselves. Far from oppressing the Israelites, God was exacting justice against them.

Why it is easy to remain silent in the midst of injustices around you? Why is it difficult to remain silent when you are in the middle of God's discipline?

Day 5: Amos 5:14-15

Highlight verse 14.

True repentance is accompanied by action, and Amos called the people of Israel to *seek good, and not evil*. To seek the Lord (v. 4) was also to seek good (v. 14). God sought a remnant of people to follow Him, and they would not be able to do so until they addressed their oppression of the poor. Israel claimed that *the Lord, the God of hosts* was with them. But that claim was false as long as they continued to walk in disobedience to Him. By all outward standards, the Israelites were religious, but their worship was misdirected and their lives were ungodly. True religion was about more than rituals. It was about a relationship with God that reflected itself in one's relationship with others. If the Israelites would turn from their sin, then God would *be gracious* to them. The use of *it may be that* is a reminder that God's grace cannot be earned, bought, or bartered. It is a sovereign act of God alone, who shows mercy on those whom He desires (Romans 9:18). We cannot barter for His grace; neither can we buy it. We must repent and trust Him. If the nation was willing to confront its own sin, then God would perhaps spare a *remnant of Joseph*. A remnant was a portion rather than the whole. God's judgment awaited Israel in 722 BC with the invasion of Assyria. Amos held out hope that some would avoid that wrath by turning from their evil ways and throwing themselves upon the mercy of God. Those who loved good and upheld justice would indicate they were sincere in seeking God, and therefore they would live.

How are loving good and upholding justice indicators that you is seeking God?

APPLY THE TEXT

Look for ways you may be seeking a substitute for God rather than seeking the Lord. How can you more fully seek the Lord in your life?



Seek God

ENGAGE

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, invite them to share about things they misplaced but later found in an obvious location.

DISCUSS: Invite volunteers to share their interpretation of the phrase “Hiding in plain sight.”

ASK: *What is something people must seek to find it? How does one go about the seeking?* (p. 29)

TRANSITION: *Sometimes we may feel far from God, but He isn't hiding, He wants us to find Him. We just aren't looking in the right places. This was the situation the Israelites were facing in the time of Amos. God is always present, so the question must be: Are we seeking Him?*

EXPLORE

REVIEW: Using **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets of the Eighth Century*), **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outlines of Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah*) and *Understand the Context* (p. 29), review what has already been covered of Amos in the previous sessions.

OVERVIEW: Highlight how the split between Judah and Israel led Jeroboam, king of Israel, to establish two new centers of worship. Summarize

1 Kings 12:26-33, revealing how the people's worship changed.

TRANSITION: *In his third recorded sermon, Amos called for the people of Israel to seek God. He announced a coming judgment on those who distorted justice. Amos identified the Lord as the sovereign Creator who brings judgment to all, even the strong.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Amos 5:4-9** aloud, while the group listens for at least three key words or phrases in the verses.

- **(5:4)** Seeking the Lord meant having a devotion to God demonstrated by faithful obedience to His Word. However, seeking the Lord would require them to discontinue their empty religious practices at their sacred shrines.
- **(5:7)** In the book of Amos, justice and righteousness coupled together defined Israel's covenant responsibilities to the Lord. Justice emphasizes fairness, righting wrong, and punishing those who do wrongly. Righteousness emphasizes faithful obedience to God and treating others, especially the weak and poor, in a way that is in line with God's character and instruction.
- **(5:8)** Every day all of creation is dependent on God's constant rule. The Lord controls the waters of the earth both for the provision of

life and the destruction of life through floods. It is this God for whom Israel needed to prepare to meet in judgment.

IDENTIFY: Record the words or phrases identified by the group on a board or large sheet of paper. Put a check mark beside those mentioned more than once.

EXPLAIN: Amos had previously prophesied that Israel as a nation would be judged, but that a remnant would survive. In Amos 5:4, we see the words “Seek me and live” as Amos indicates that individuals could still turn and seek the Lord, even as judgment was coming for Israel (p. 33).

ASK: *How would you define the word “seek”?* (Ex: search for or try to reach or obtain)

DISCUSS: *Where might a person search for God?*

EXAMINE: Instruct the group to reread Amos 5:4-9, looking specifically for characteristics of a sovereign God. As they share their findings, list them on the board.

DISCUSS: *What are substitutes that people seek instead of God, and how do those substitutes fall short of true worship?* (p. 31)

TRANSITION: *Amos delivered an indictment against the people of Israel, calling out their perversion of justice and oppression of others. As a result, the people would not enjoy their gains because of their mistreatment of others.*

READ: **Read Amos 5:10-13 aloud** while the group listens for the actions exhibited by the people and the consequences of their actions.

- **(5:10)** Amos confronted the corruption that had swallowed up Israel’s judicial system. They had totally disregarded God’s law concerning the forbidding of false testimony against another person (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). The people hated any judge who was willing to render fair judgments and convict criminals, and they despised any witness who faithfully spoke the truth in defense of the innocent.
- **(5:11)** Through Amos, the Lord declared that these greedy rich people who were oppressing and profiting from the poor would not live in the houses they built or drink wine from the lush vineyards they had planted. Just as they had deprived the poor of the fruit of their labors, so also God would deprive the greedy rich people of the fruit of their unethical labors.

HIGHLIGHT: Not only did the Israelites have a worship problem, they had a character problem. Comment that Israel had numerous sins, but Amos specifically listed three. Invite volunteers to identify the three sins and write them on the board.

ASK: *Why might a person believe that God would overlook the mistreatment of the poor and unethical gain because of that mistreatment?* (p. 31)

ANALYZE: Guide the group to pair up with someone and review Amos 5:10-13. Instruct the pairs to look for a connection between these verses and Amos 5:7. After the pairs have had some time to discuss, invite volunteers to share what they discovered.

TRANSITION: *Amos called for the people to begin to pursue good and establish justice with the hope of God being gracious to them. Seeking God leads to life.*

READ: Direct the group to read

Amos 5:14-15, watching for how Amos presented a possible solution for some of the people.

- **(5:14)** When it comes to one's salvation and eternal life, there is nothing anyone can do to save oneself. Salvation comes through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.
- **(5:15)** The people of God should hate evil because God hates evil. Hating evil begins with hating one's own sin. To hate sin does not mean one should hate oneself or anyone else. People are not sin; they commit sin. However, if one loves God, then one despises one's own sin and wants to rid oneself of it.

IDENTIFY: True repentance is accompanied by action. Invite the group to identify the actions Amos called for in these verses and write them on the board. Point the group to the Day 5 Daily Exploration on page 35 for reference.

DISCUSS: *Why are loving good and upholding justice indicators that a person is seeking God?* (p. 31)

HIGHLIGHT: Note the word *Perhaps* in verse 15. Read aloud Romans 9:18. Ask: ***Is God's grace guaranteed? Explain.***

TRANSITION: *Amos called on the Israelites to seek God by changing both their worship and their character.*

CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Sometimes we think God is hiding from us when He is in plain sight. The problem is within us, as we fail to seek Him and fail to recognize that He is around us.

DISCUSS: Guide the group to discuss the question set under Apply the Text on page 31: ***What does pursuing good and establishing justice look like in your Bible study group? What principles should guide your group as you seek God by seeking to do those things?***

CHALLENGE: Encourage the group to take time this coming week to reflect on the question set under Apply the Text (p. 35): ***Look for ways you may be seeking a substitute for God rather than seeking the Lord. How can you more fully seek the Lord in your life?***

HIGHLIGHT: Display **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Key Verse: Amos 5:4*) and read the verse aloud together. Point out that this is the memory verse for this week, and encourage everyone to commit it to memory.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking the Lord to reveal areas in our worship and our actions toward others that need to change. Pray that He will open our eyes and guide us to seek Him each day.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the study by texting or emailing Amos 5:4 to the group with a reminder that God doesn't hide. He wants us to find Him and He wants to be found.