

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

THE BOOK OF **AMOS**



AMOS: CHANGING FOR THE BETTER

Harry Houdini took the world by storm in the early 1900s by performing mind-blowing magic tricks and life-threatening stunts. Millions of people packed into theaters to watch Houdini in his prime. He toured with the same celebrity status that'd you see from a K-Pop band today. He was good. He was skilled. He was also an illusionist, so all of it was fake.

Here is the interesting thing about Houdini. He spent the later part of his life debunking psychics. As a master of magic, he knew all the tricks of the trade. While Houdini was gaining popularity, another group of people gained public attention as well. They were called "spiritualists." These individuals claimed to predict the future, speak to the dead, and read minds. Unfortunately, they took advantage of mourning people to make a buck. This made Houdini's blood boil, so he decided to put a stop to it. Famously, he attended these psychic gatherings in disguise, analyzed their tricks, then stood to his feet to announce, "I am Houdini, and you are a fraud." He would walk to the front of the room and reveal every trick the psychic leveraged by pointing out mirrors, exposing their manipulations, and repeating the trick to show the illusion. They were all fakes.

What Is a Prophet?

As we study prophets, we have to deal with some cultural baggage. A lot of people think of prophets as psychics. Houdini and I want you to know that this is far from reality. Most people think of prophets as fortune tellers, but that has nothing to do with Biblical prophets. They weren't primarily predicting the future; they were proclaiming the truth in the present. In the Biblical sense, a prophet simply means, "someone who is empowered by God to speak God's truth to others."

Imagine that you have a dear friend with dangerous behaviors. Maybe they are addicted. Maybe they are in an abusive relationship. Maybe they are getting consumed by debt. Whatever it is, think about someone you love getting caught up in a destructive pattern. What would you do? First, you'd tell them that you love them. Second, you would warn them about the damage they are doing to themselves. Third, you would offer to help them break free and remind them that they can start fresh.

That is what a prophet does. God sent them to prevent His beloved people from getting entangled in the consequences of their actions. Prophecy looks way more like an intervention than a prediction.

Let's take a look at the prophetic intervention of a small-town farmer with a big heart. His name was Amos, and he gave His people a two-step prophetic plan to get their lives back on track.

READ: Amos 5:21-24

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"

Intervention

Amos preached at a time when Israel was in a cold civil war. God's chosen people were divided into two regions -- the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The north was led by King Jeroboam. The south was led by King Uzziah. Why is this important? This context is not too unlike our own. While Amos's prophecies were written for ancient Hebrews living in a divided Kingdom, they are also helpful for us today. Our world is deeply divided, isn't it? Whether it's by economic class, nationality, or politics, our division is daunting. When God's people are divided, damage is inevitable. We need an intervention.

Israel had experienced unimaginable wealth and prosperity during this era and it was starting to erode at their morals. God's people were called to love the world, serve the weak, and humble themselves. Instead, they were prideful, selfish, and taking advantage of the poor. As we can see from Amos's prophecy, it made him sick.

Amos stepped in with a stern warning. Go back and read the passage in Amos 5:21-24. Can't you feel the intensity in his writing? Sure, their worship services were spectacular, but they weren't sincere. Their worship songs were just noise. Their offerings were empty. Their festivals were despised. They needed an intervention, but

what good is an intervention without a way out? That's why God's interventions always include an invitation.

Invitation

Whenever God calls you to change, it's because He wants something better for you. God calls His people out because He wants something better for them. God may want you to change your behavior because it's harming your health. God may want you to serve in church because it will help you get closer to your ultimate calling. God may want you to change schools because you need to meet someone at the other one.

An invitation is always attached to an intervention. God wanted Israel to evaluate their lifestyle because He wanted them to change their culture for the better. He does it pretty intensely, though. God says, "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me" (Amos 5:21).

What's with the harsh tone, Amos? Doesn't God enjoy our music? Shouldn't we continue throwing extravagant religious festivals? They're fun and for God, so what's the harm? Amos explained that all their activity was empty. Why? Look at verse 24. God wants "justice to flow like a river" (Amos 5:23).

I love that imagery. God wants justice to roar like a powerful river after a storm. God's people are called to let justice flow like an unstoppable stream. So what exactly is Biblical justice? We likely think of court cases and police reports, but that's not what's going on here. Amos lays out the framework for justice towards the beginning of chapter five. He writes, "Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them" (Amos 5:10).

What does Amos mean when he says justice? We see the answer right here. Treat the poor well. Protect those on the outskirts of society. Give a voice to those who don't have one. Refuse to take advantage of people in need. Israel's social structures created their division. The poor became poorer while the rich became richer. It was time to destroy those systems before they destroyed their nation.

The message of Amos should make us squirm a little. Amos reveals that God is far more concerned with how we treat people than the quality of our weekend services. What good is a weekly service without community service? Our faith should lead to action.

So what should we do? Stand up for the poor and powerless. Listen to Amos. Give generously to those in need. Fight against any structures that create division. Serve people. Help people. Love everyone. Let justice flow like a river. That is true worship.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out to you from today's message?

Q2: What did God call Amos to do as a prophet for Israel?

Q3: Why do you think God always attaches an invitation to an intervention?

Q4: What are some parts of your life or your society that God would want to change?

Q5: What better situation do you think God could be inviting you into if you were to make those changes?

Application: What is something that you need to change in your life? What's one small step you can take this week towards making that change? Also, support your circle while they work on making changes as well.

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Amos 1-2

Amos 3

Amos 4

Amos 5-6

Amos 7

Amos 8

Amos 9

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.