

Generosity

GOD'S GENEROSITY OVERCOMES SELFISHNESS

Focal Verses • AMOS 6:4-8, 11-14

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE God's response to injustice as recorded by Amos; feel RIGHTEOUS ANGER for ways people practice greed and selfishness; and DISCOVER ways God does justice amid injustice, and ways humans can join God in the fight against injustice.

In Focus

Craig was a successful businessman who worked for a large corporation. He lived in a massive mansion with a four-car garage in a gated community. Craig had attended several prestigious universities. The degrees he obtained helped promote Craig to a high position at his company. He quickly rose to an upper-level management position and had a huge office. Craig made over seven figures each year in salary, not including his annual bonus. He was living the good life.

Craig's driver would pick him up from his mansion daily and drive him to work. When the driver exited the highway, they typically drove through a poor neighborhood. Craig would often see people on the streets who looked as if they were homeless and suffering from different addictions. One day, as the car was approaching the office, Craig saw a young mother trying to walk her children to school. She was visibly struggling to push the stroller while tending to her two smaller children. Even though the scene caught Craig's attention, he chose to ignore the young mother and instructed the driver to proceed to the office.

God invites us to participate in ending the injustices that oppress other humans. In today's lesson, we will learn how God desires radical generosity. What are some ways you practice generosity towards others?



Keep in Mind

"Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock." (Amos 6:12, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Amos 6:4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;

5 That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;

6 That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

7 Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

8 The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

11 For, behold, the LORD commandeth, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts.

12 Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock:

13 Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?

14 But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness.

The People, Places, and Times

Viol. The viol referenced in Amos 6:5 KJV were instruments similar to a harp or lyre. They were often used in temple worship and had ten strings (Psalm 33:2). The Hebrew word is also used for bottles or pitchers, probably because they had the same conical or triangular shape. They were plucked by hand instead of a pick and were mainly used during times of feasting and celebration.

Ointments. In biblical times, people used ointments for medicinal, cosmetic, and even religious purposes. These ointments served the purpose of not only healing the skin but also masking odors. They were similar to our modern lotion and made the skin glisten. Rubbing ointment on the body was often done in preparation for a festival and was a mark of sanctification. Oils or ointments were also used to prepare bodies for burial, and they marked various types of leaders as ordained by God (priests, prophets, kings). They could signify both luxury and holiness.

Hemath to the River of the Wilderness.

Hemath was situated on the Orontes River and was the northern boundary of ancient Israel. Hemath represented the farthest north you could go before you ventured outside of Israel (Numbers 13:21). The river of wilderness was a desert wadi or brook that ran through the Arabah valley, which was a barren depression on the southern side of the Dead Sea. This brook flowed on the border of Moab and Edom. The river of the wilderness represented the farthest southern border of undivided Israel that could be inhabited. Thus the phrase "Hemath unto the river of the wilderness" encompassed the entirety of the undivided kingdom of Israel.

Background

The upper crust of Israel had become very complacent and comfortable with their wealthy lives. They were secure in the strength of their army and able to maintain a certain lifestyle that made them oblivious to the world around

them. Those in leadership believed that Israel's cities were superior to others because of their extravagant and materialistic luxuries. They had become so focused on their wealth that they had forgotten those who were suffering and less fortunate. Israel had forgotten that God had blessed them tremendously over the years. God had delivered them from oppressors and shown them favor. Unfortunately, they sinned against God by rejecting His call for love and obedience. They had also sinned against God by oppressing others and therefore violating His Law. Israel's blatant disregard for others and overindulgence in their wealth angered God, provoking His wrath.

Amos proclaimed prophecies from God that convict leaders for a lack of social justice and warning them of the "day of the LORD" when judgment would come to Israel. He had opposed the nation's sins and had encouraged them to repent for their evil and unjust ways. However, Israel had refused to turn away from their wickedness and remember the God they worshiped when they were in bondage. They were at risk for God's divine punishment.

At-A-Glance

1. A Selfish Lifestyle (Amos 6:4–8)
2. Punishment for the Self-Indulgent (vv. 11–14)

In Depth

1. A Selfish Lifestyle (Amos 6:4–8)

The rich leaders of Samaria completely turn all of their attention to their material wealth. They are consumed with a lifestyle that is rich, elegant, exquisite, lavish, and excessive. They are only concerned with a higher standard of living that requires the finest and best. From dining selections, fine clothing, wild parties,

extravagant celebrations, grand mansions, and expensive skin creams, the influential people of Israel are accustomed to a lifestyle that only served an elite class. Their lifestyle causes them to lose focus on real-life issues around them. They are blind to the fact that as the elite become richer, the poor become poorer. Often when we experience an increase of wealth, we forget about God and the plight of others. The elite of Israel had only used their wealth for selfish and luxurious needs, forsaking those who were suffering among them. Amos declares an oath from the Sovereign Lord that God is angry at their conceited and arrogant way of living. God holds the wealthy accountable for the use of their resources and whether they use it for the blessing of others instead of selfishness.

2. Punishment for the Self-Indulgent (vv. 11–14)

The Lord has promised to enact severe punishment on Israel because of their refusal to repent. God will not only punish individuals, but plans to completely destroy their houses and buildings. The prophet explains that God will punish them because they twisted justice into a poison doing more harm than good. God mocks Israel for their prideful celebration over smaller cities that they had successfully conquered. Finally, their ultimate judgment is given as God announces that another force will be raised up against them to return the oppression that they have afflicted on others. Selfishness always ends with judgment; the selfish can expect to reap the fruits of what they have sown.

Search the Scriptures

1. What are the the signs of the people of Israel's selfishness (Amos 6:4–6)?
2. What does the Lord despise and hate about Israel (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

There is a huge debate on whether it is possible to be a follower of God and also have great wealth. Should Christians have nice things (cars, houses, clothing, etc.)? Does serving God mean that we can't spend our money on the things we can enjoy?

Liberating Lesson

In many places around the world, people are living in underserved and impoverished areas. They are suffering from lack of clean water, fresh produce, safe living conditions, and other resources that affect their everyday lives. There is not an equal distribution of wealth in our world. The powerful will continue to get rich, while the poor and working class will continue to suffer. The issue with wealth that is mentioned in this text is not the possession of wealth, but the dangers of being selfish, prideful, and sinful in the ways we use it. If we choose to ignore the injustices of the poor and needy, then we are at risk of God's punishment.

Application for Activation

We are tempted to ignore injustice when we are wealthy and comfortable. To combat this tendency, we can show solidarity with those who are disadvantaged. As a class, make a commitment to eat only one meal a day as an act of solidarity with those who live in hunger. While you are doing that, research ways in which you as a class can help fight global hunger. You can find many resources for this at the Bread for the World website (<http://www.bread.org/help>).

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

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- Boling, Robert G. *The Anchor Bible: Judges. Vol. 6A*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975.
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- Gowan, Donald E. *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Nashville, TN: Abdingdon Press, 1996.
- Hubbard, David Allan. *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
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Say It Correctly

Lo-Debar. lo-de-**BAR**.
Karnaim. kar-**NAH**-yim.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 162

Isaiah 49–53
Psalm 68:15–23

DAY 163

Isaiah 54–58
Psalm 68:24–31

DAY 164

Isaiah 59–63
Psalm 68:32–35

DAY 165

Isaiah 64–66
Psalm 69:1–5

DAY 166

Jeremiah 1–3
Psalm 69:6–12

DAY 167

Jeremiah 4–6
Psalm 69:13–18

DAY 168

Jeremiah 7–9
Psalm 69:19–28

Notes
