**Lesson for July 7**

**Open the Conversation:** Do you ever feel spiritually tired? It’s easy to feel swamped by the ungodliness we see around us. Can you point to a moment when you felt burdened by the sinful talk and activity going on seemingly everywhere you look? Ask God to help you be aware of times when your spirit, and the Holy Spirit in you (if you know the Lord) is grieving about sin, either your own or your friends’. Sometimes tears come, sometimes anger, sometimes reflection and prayer. These burdens aren’t bad—they mean we are spiritually alive and cause us to seek God and long for restoration with Him. I think Amos must have felt this way when he looked around at the people and culture he lived in.

**Introduction:** Have you ever needed to take a message about consequences to someone that you knew they wouldn’t want to hear? (Your parents get to do this sometimes…) On the other side, have you ever received correction or discipline? How did you respond? We all want to hear happy, encouraging messages, and talk about celebrations and rewards, but can have a hard time receiving negative consequences to our own choices.

Amos (whose name meant “burden bearer”) was told by God to take the message to his community that God was preparing to judge their long-time sin and half-obedient lip service to Him. Devastation was coming and God was giving them an opportunity to hear the warning and repent. They liked to prosper in the blessings of God, but refused to worship Him in spirit and truth. Not surprisingly, they didn’t want to hear Amos’s message and did not receive him well.

**Read Amos 1:1-5**

* God asked Amos to do something difficult. How can you prepare for the time when God asks something difficult of you?
* The people of Israel became ungodly during a time of great prosperity. How do we face this temptation today?
* Why is it important for Christians to treat others justly and work to address injustice in the world?

**Read Amos 2:1-6**

* How is it comforting and/or challenging to know all people will be held accountable for their actions? How does this free us from seeking vengeance on our own? How does it encourage us in spreading the gospel?
* Why is it grace to have areas where we are out of step with God revealed to us?
* The people of Israel gradually turned away from God’s Word over a few generations. What are the most common places you find lies against God’s Word challenging you? How can you guard against this?

**Read Amos 9:1-4, 11-15**

* How can this reminder of God’s ultimate power and presence serve as both a warning and a comfort?
* What do you imagine for the people of Israel when you read Amos 9:11-15?
* How does it bring comfort to know that God has complete restoration planned for his people spiritually through Christ in this life, and completely in heaven for all of His people?

**Wrap Up:** Read Amos 5:24 together. Write out this verse where you can see it this week and work to memorize it. Remember the context of the verse. It’s clear God cares about how people live, not just how they worship one day a week. God seeks those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. (2 Chronicles 16:9)

**Extended Cut:**

An ordinary shepherd named Amos was given the assignment to take God’s warning to his people who had fallen into sinful, idolatrous ways. Amos was not well received or welcomed as he brought words from the Lord of the coming devastation the people would soon experience. The message of this book is tough but necessary because it reminds us that all decisions carry consequences.

Whether for a Gentile nation or the chosen people of God, actions have consequences. The godless need to see who they are attacking and coming against. Those in covenant relationship with the Lord need to be held to a high standard of accountability for the truth they have been given. **God does not bring punishment for the sake of punishment but with the goal of restoration**. He will stay true to His character and seek to save the lost as well as pursue those who know Him so they will be restored by His great love and mercy.

Despite God’s faithfulness, Israel was repeatedly and decisively unfaithful. Their choices to sin and embrace ungodliness were a rejection of the law of the Lord that drew them farther away from God. The Lord confronted their sin by sending Amos to warn them of the coming punishment. Through graphic visions, the Lord stressed that His people are held accountable for their actions and sins. Amos plead with the Lord to stay His hand and while God relented a couple of times, the third time it was evident that this punishment was going to be used by the Lord to bring restoration to His people.

Because Judah continued in sin, God would bring the same consequences for His chosen nation as the six godless Gentile nations**. If we aren’t careful, believers will rebuke or chastise the actions of those who don’t follow the Lord while turning a blind eye to our own indiscretions and infidelities**. It is much easier to excuse our own sin and justify our decisions while judging others.

Judah knew what was right, good, and godly, but they chose to dishonor and disobey. God’s law was a blessing given for guidance. There was a higher level of accountability for the people of the Lord because they were blessed to be in covenant relationship with God. God made it clear in this book that He is a God of justice. In keeping with His very character, no one escapes judgment, and all are accountable for their actions.

God’s people did not turn away from Him overnight. The people of Judah allowed small lies to slip into their thoughts, which began to affect their words and deeds. What may have seemed like a small or inconsequential compromise eventually led them to reject God in major ways. It is a slippery slope when we allow our minds to engage with the lies of the world and begin to resist the Word of God as the ultimate standard of truth. These lies led to turning their hearts away from injustice and a lack of care for things that break the heart of God. In this world of information overload, guarding our minds from allowing lies to slip in is vital.

God’s people were comfortable and wealthy in this season of time. They had gradually rejected God’s Word and His worship and drifted info worship of idols, though they still prided themselves on being God’s people. More than questionable worship practices defined their seasons of prosperity: injustice was rampant, and abuses of different kinds were common. God sent Amos to make known His disapproval and the coming consequences of their choices. A well-known verse, Amos 5:24, makes clear God’s desire for justice among His people: “But let justice flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream.” In the face of the people’s failings, in Amos 1, the prophet described the Lord as a roaring lion who would bring justice on both the people and the land. God’s desire for justice is no less today. As God’s people, we are to long for and act toward justice in the same way God does.

A lot happens in the middle chapters of Amos. Amos called out the leaders who had given no thought or care to those around them as they neglected their relationship with the Lord, while enjoying their lives of luxury. God gave visions to Amos describing the details of destruction to come and those visions disturbed the prophet so much he begged God to relent and hold off. This happened more than once and God did relent, then the third vision came, and Amos accepted the inevitability of God’s judgment on the people as the necessary way of turning the hearts of His people back to God.

In this final chapter of Amos, **God made it clear that the Israelites couldn’t hide from Him or pretend everything was fine**. God held them accountable for the terrible greed, idolatry, materialism, and injustice that they had sunk into. They couldn’t go anywhere to escape from what they deserved and what their actions brought on them as a people, land, and nation.

**We can be comforted by the fact that God is true to His nature and character. He will bring judgment and allow us to reap consequences for our actions, and He will also show us mercy and love when we turn back to Him.** **Amos reminds us that God pursues His people to bring them back, and we can rest assured that there is no place we can go where His love will not find us. This is made most evident in the person of Christ, who paid the ultimate price for our sins so that we might be finally restored to the Father.**

**One of the most important things we can learn during our growing up years is how to respond well to correction.** Being parented helps us learn to follow the authority of family we can trust. When we obey and honor our parents we are practicing what it looks like to obey and honor God. Obviously our parents aren’t perfect like God, nor are they supposed to be. But they do undertake a serious responsibility God gives them when they guide us, warn us, and allow us to experience painful consequences to shepherd us back to the right way, and to the Lord. We can respond in repentance and humility when confronted with our sins.