

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: Seek the Lord and Live

Amos 5:1-27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson confronts one of the most searching truths in all of Scripture: that worship divorced from righteous living is not merely incomplete, it is offensive to God. Israel had every form of religion in place, the feasts, the offerings, the songs, yet God says He hates it, because the same people filling the sanctuary were trampling the poor and perverting justice at the gate. The doctrinal stakes are high. We must teach that God has joined together true worship and justice toward our neighbor, and that no amount of correct religious activity will be accepted by Him while we wrong the people He loves. At the same time, this is no call to abandon worship for mere social activism; God is not asking for justice instead of worship, but for worship that flows from hearts that also love mercy and do right. Guard against turning this into a partisan political program. Amos is pressing the matter into the individual heart and into the life of God's people, calling each person to let justice and righteousness run like a river through every part of life.

The formation aim is to lead each student to hear God's tender, repeated plea, 'Seek ye me, and ye shall live,' as an invitation extended to them personally and still open today through Jesus Christ. We want students to stop assuming that church attendance and outward religion automatically settle their standing before God, and instead to examine whether their worship and their weekday lives flow from the same heart. The 'day of the Lord' warning (5:18-20) presses us not to presume on grace but to seek the Lord in genuine repentance and obedient faith. The goal is that each student would leave longing to be the kind of worshiper God receives, one in whom Christ has joined together what Israel tore apart, so that the songs we sing on the Lord's Day and the justice and mercy we show all week pour from one undivided heart.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read Amos 5:1-3. Amos lifts up a 'lamentation,' a funeral dirge, over Israel while the nation is still standing and prosperous. What does it tell us about God's view of sin that He mourns the coming death of a people who feel perfectly secure, and how does this differ from the way the nation saw itself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Amos opens chapter five by calling Israel to 'hear this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation.' The Hebrew word behind 'lamentation' is qinah, the technical term for a funeral

dirge, the mournful, broken-rhythmed song sung over the dead. The shock is in the timing. Israel under Jeroboam II is enjoying its golden age: expanded borders, military success, booming trade, and abundant wealth. By every visible measure the nation is alive and well. And Amos walks into that confidence singing a song you would only ever hear at a graveside.

The image in verse two is devastating: 'The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up.' Israel is pictured as a young woman cut down in the prime of life, lying in the dust with no one to lift her. Verse three drives it home statistically: the city that sent out a thousand soldiers will have a hundred left, and the one that sent a hundred will have ten. A ninety percent loss. The prophet sees the funeral so clearly that he sings the dirge in advance, while the corpse still imagines itself in perfect health.

This tells us something profound about God's vision of sin. He does not measure a people by their bank accounts, their borders, or their festival crowds. He sees what is dying beneath the surface, the rot of injustice and false worship that no prosperity can hide. The nation felt secure precisely because it was spiritually blind. Amos's tears are God's tears, mourning a death the people cannot yet see, and pleading with them to see it while there is still time to turn.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's assessment of a people can be the exact opposite of their assessment of themselves; outward prosperity is no proof of God's favor.
- The funeral dirge over a living nation shows God's grief over sin, not cold indifference; judgment is something He mourns.
- Personal and national security can be a spiritual anesthetic, numbing us to the very condition that is killing us.
- Romans 15:4 reminds us this was written for our instruction; we too can mistake comfort for blessing.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think prosperity so often blinds people to their true spiritual condition?
- What does it mean that God mourns over the death of a sinful people rather than simply condemning them?
- How can a church or a Christian look thriving on the outside while something is quietly dying within?

Question 2

Student Question:

When have you felt secure and successful in some area of life, only to realize later that something was already dying beneath the surface? How does Amos's funeral song over a living nation challenge you to let God show you the true condition of your own heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question turns Amos's funeral song into a mirror. We have all known seasons when life looked successful, a career advancing, a family intact, a reputation secure, only to discover later that something essential had been quietly dying: a marriage growing cold, a faith going through the motions, a conscience slowly hardening. The danger Amos exposes is that the very feeling of security can keep us from seeing the truth.

Israel's blindness was not for lack of evidence. The injustice was happening at the gate where everyone could see it; the empty worship was filling the sanctuaries. They simply did not want to look. Genuine self-examination means asking God to show us what we would rather not see, trusting that His diagnosis, however painful, is the beginning of healing. 'Search me, O God, and know my heart,' David prayed (Psalm 139:23-24), and that prayer is the opposite of Israel's complacency.

The pastoral aim here is to help students lower their defenses long enough to let God speak honestly into the secure places of their lives. The funeral song is not meant to crush but to wake. As long as the dirge is being sung, there is still time to rise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual self-deception is comfortable; honest self-examination is uncomfortable but life-giving.
- We tend to guard most carefully the very areas where we feel most secure, which is often where decay hides.
- Inviting God to expose our true condition is an act of trust, not self-condemnation.
- The goal of seeing what is dying is repentance and life, not despair.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so hard to examine the areas of life where we feel most successful?
- What helps you actually hear God's honest assessment of your heart rather than your own?
- How can the discomfort of seeing what is dying become the doorway to new life?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read Amos 5:4-6 and 5:14-15. Three times God pleads, 'Seek ye me, and ye shall live,' and pairs it with 'seek good, and not evil.' According to these verses, what does it actually mean to 'seek the Lord,' and how does genuine seeking show itself in how a person lives, not merely in religious activity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Into the funeral song breaks the most hopeful word in the chapter: 'For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live' (5:4). It is repeated in verse six, 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live,' and again in verse fourteen, 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live.' Three times the door is held open. The God who mourns their death is the same God offering them life, and all He asks is that they turn and come to Him.

Crucially, God defines what seeking Him does not mean. Verse five: 'But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal.' These were the popular religious shrines where Israel went through all the right-looking motions of worship. To seek the Lord is not the same as visiting the holy places. Real seeking, verse fifteen makes plain, means to 'hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate.' Seeking God is not an emotional experience or a ritual checkbox; it reaches all the way down into how we treat people and what we love.

This is one of the great pictures of repentance in the Old Testament, and it points forward to the gospel call to genuine, life-changing turning to God. Under the New Covenant, seeking the Lord means coming to Him on His terms, through obedient faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that hates evil and loves good because it has been transformed. The promise is the same: 'and ye shall live.' To seek Him truly is to find life itself.

Notice too the sober realism of verse fifteen: 'it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.' There is no presuming on God here, no treating grace as automatic. Seeking is humble, hopeful, and dependent on the mercy of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- To 'seek the Lord' is not the same as religious activity at the right places; it engages the will, the loves, and the conduct.
- Genuine seeking shows itself in hating evil and loving good, not merely in feelings or attendance.
- This is a clear Old Testament picture of repentance, fulfilled in the gospel's call to turn to God through obedient faith in Christ.
- The promise 'ye shall live' ties seeking God directly to life itself, then and now.
- Verse fifteen's 'it may be' guards against presuming on grace; seeking is humble and dependent on God's mercy.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between seeking the Lord and simply showing up at religious gatherings?
- How does genuine seeking of God show itself in the way a person actually lives?
- Why does true seeking always involve both hating evil and loving good, never just one?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where in your own life is the Lord inviting you, right now, to 'seek good, and not evil, that ye may live'? Name one specific habit, attitude, or relationship where you sense Him calling you to turn and choose good.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse fourteen makes the seeking personal and specific: 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live.' This question asks the student to name the actual place where that call is landing. Amos refuses to let seeking God stay abstract; he ties it to concrete moral choices, loving good, hating evil, establishing justice in everyday dealings.

The phrase 'that ye may live' is the promise attached. God is not asking for grim duty for its own sake; He is showing the path to life. Every turn from evil toward good is a step toward the abundant life God designed us for. The choice between good and evil is, finally, a choice between life and death.

Encourage students to be specific rather than general. Vague resolutions ('I'll try to be a better person') rarely change anything. Naming one habit, attitude, or relationship where God is calling them to turn is where seeking becomes real. The Lord meets us in the specifics.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking good rather than evil is meant to be concrete and specific, not a vague aspiration.
- God ties the turn from evil to good directly to life, 'that ye may live'; obedience is the path to flourishing.
- Naming one specific area of needed change is where repentance moves from idea to reality.
- The choice between good and evil is ultimately a choice between life and death.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God connect choosing good over evil with the promise of life?
- What makes specific, named change more powerful than general good intentions?
- Where do you sense God inviting you to turn this week, and what is one first step?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read Amos 5:7-13. God indicts Israel for turning 'judgment to wormwood' and treading down the poor, for taking bribes and turning aside the needy at the gate. Amos then lifts up the God who made the stars and turns night into morning (5:8). Why does the prophet anchor his call for justice in the truth that this is the Creator of heaven and earth speaking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses seven through thirteen lay out the indictment in detail. Israel has turned 'judgment to wormwood,' a bitter poison, and cast righteousness 'to the earth' (5:7). They hate the one who reproves them honestly in the gate (5:10), they tread upon the poor and extract burdens of wheat from them (5:11), they take bribes and 'turn aside the poor in the gate from their right' (5:12). Justice, which should flow freely, has been bottled up and sold to the highest bidder.

Right in the middle of this indictment, in verse eight, Amos lifts his eyes to the heavens: God 'maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning... that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord is his name.' Why this sudden burst of cosmic praise in the middle of a courtroom scene? Because the One demanding justice is the Creator of the universe. The God who set the constellations in place and commands the seas is not a tribal deity who can be bought off; He is the Maker of heaven and earth, and His moral order is as fixed as the stars.

Anchoring justice in creation matters enormously. It means justice is not a human invention or a cultural preference we can adjust to taste. It is woven into the fabric of reality by the God who made all things. To trample the poor is not merely to break a social custom; it is to defy the Creator Himself. And the same God who turns 'the shadow of death into the morning' is the only One who can bring His people from the darkness of their sin into the light of life.

Verse thirteen adds a sobering note: 'the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.' In a society so corrupt, even speaking the truth becomes dangerous. This sets up the costly courage that doing right will require.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God grounds His demand for justice in His identity as Creator; the moral order is as fixed as the stars He made.
- Justice is not a human invention or cultural preference but woven into reality by God Himself.
- To oppress the poor is not merely a social wrong but defiance of the Creator of heaven and earth.
- The same Creator who turns death's shadow into morning is the only One who can bring His people from sin into life.
- An 'evil time' can make even speaking truth costly and dangerous (5:13).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Amos interrupt his indictment of injustice with praise of God the Creator?
- How does grounding justice in creation change the way we think about wronging the poor?
- What does it mean that the God who demands justice is also the God who turns death into morning?

Question 6

Student Question:

Amos says that in such a corrupt time 'the prudent shall keep silence' (5:13). Have you ever stayed silent when you should have spoken up for what is right, or spoken up when staying quiet would have been easier? What does the fear of God, rather than the fear of people, do to that struggle?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse thirteen observes that in such a corrupt time 'the prudent shall keep silence.' This question presses the student to examine their own courage. There are times we stay silent out of fear when we should speak up for what is right, and times we speak rashly when wisdom would have us wait. The issue underneath both is whom we fear: people or God.

Amos himself models the alternative. A simple herdsman and tender of sycamore fruit (Amos 7:14), he stood and spoke God's truth in the king's sanctuary at the cost of his own safety. He feared God more than he feared Jeroboam or the priest Amaziah. 'The fear of man bringeth a snare,' Proverbs 29:25 says, 'but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.'

The fear of God does not make us reckless or harsh; it frees us. When God's approval matters most, the disapproval of people loses its power to silence us. Help students see that courage to do right is not the absence of fear but the redirecting of fear toward the One who truly holds our life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Silence in the face of evil is sometimes cowardice, and rash speech is sometimes folly; both can be rooted in fearing people.
- The fear of God frees us from the paralyzing fear of human opinion.
- Courage to do right is not the absence of fear but fear rightly directed toward God.
- Amos models costly truth-telling that flows from fearing God above people.

Discussion Prompts

- When have you stayed silent out of fear, and what did that silence cost?
- How does fearing God reshape our fear of what people think of us?
- What helps you find the courage to speak or act rightly when it is unpopular?

Question 7**Student Question:**

Read Amos 5:18–20. The people longed for 'the day of the Lord,' assuming it would be light for them, but God warns it will be 'darkness, and not light.' Why were they so confident that God's day would vindicate them, and what dangerous assumption about their standing with God does this expose? How does this warn us against presuming on grace?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses eighteen through twenty shatter a cherished assumption. Israel longed for 'the day of the Lord,' confident it would be a day of triumph when God would crush their enemies and exalt them. But Amos turns it upside down: 'Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.' For a people living in sin while keeping up the forms of religion, God's coming would not be rescue but reckoning.

The picture in verse nineteen is almost grimly humorous: it is 'as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.' There is no escaping it. The very day they counted on for salvation would corner them. Verse twenty repeats the warning: 'Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?'

The dangerous assumption exposed here is presumption, the belief that because they were God's chosen people and kept His feasts, His day would automatically favor them regardless of how they lived. They mistook covenant privilege for unconditional immunity. This is a warning for every generation. Being part of the people of God is no guarantee of His favor if our hearts and lives are far from Him.

The New Testament carries the same warning forward. 'Let us therefore fear,' Hebrews 4:1 says. We dare not presume on grace, treating our church membership or religious background as automatic protection. The day of the Lord, the day of Christ's return, will be light for those who genuinely seek Him and darkness for those who only assumed they were safe (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Israel presumed that covenant privilege guaranteed God's favor regardless of how they lived.
- The day of the Lord is not automatically good news; for the unrepentant it is darkness, not light.
- Religious heritage and church membership are no substitute for a heart that genuinely seeks God.
- The New Testament repeats the warning against presuming on grace (Hebrews 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).
- Mistaking privilege for immunity is a danger in every generation, including ours.

Discussion Prompts

- Why were the Israelites so confident the day of the Lord would favor them?
- How can religious people today fall into the same presumption about their standing with God?
- What is the difference between resting in genuine assurance and presuming on grace?

Question 8

Student Question:

Is there any place where you have quietly assumed that you are 'fine' with God, that the day of judgment holds no real concern for you, simply because you are religious or have always been part of the church? How does Amos's warning press you to examine that confidence honestly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examination question gently applies the day-of-the-Lord warning to the student's own heart. It is remarkably easy, especially for those raised in the church or long accustomed to its life, to settle into a quiet assumption that we are simply 'fine' with God. We attend, we sing, we know the language, and somewhere along the way the urgency of seeking the Lord can fade into routine.

Amos's warning is not meant to rob a faithful Christian of genuine assurance; the New Testament gives real assurance to those who walk in the light (1 John 1:7). But it is meant to dismantle the false confidence that rests on religious activity rather than on a heart that truly belongs to God. The question for each of us is not 'Do I attend?' but 'Am I genuinely seeking the Lord, hating evil and loving good?'

Help students examine this honestly without spiraling into despair. The same chapter that warns of darkness pleads three times, 'Seek me and live.' The goal of honest self-examination is not paralysis but a fresh, genuine turning to the Lord while the door of mercy still stands open.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Long familiarity with church life can breed a quiet, untested assumption that we are fine with God.
- True assurance rests on a heart that belongs to God, not on religious activity alone.
- Honest self-examination is meant to renew genuine seeking, not to produce despair.
- The warning and the invitation belong together; the door of mercy still stands open.

Discussion Prompts

- How can someone tell the difference between genuine assurance and untested presumption?
- Why is it especially easy for lifelong church members to drift into complacency?
- How does the threefold invitation to 'seek me and live' keep self-examination from ending in despair?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read Amos 5:21-27. God says He hates and despises their feast days, will not accept their offerings, and will not hear their songs, then cries, 'Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream' (5:24). Why does God reject worship offered by people who trample the poor and pervert justice? What does this teach us about the inseparable bond between true worship of God and justice toward our neighbor, and how does our worship today, when offered with hearts that love mercy and live righteously, become acceptable to God through Jesus Christ? (See Acts 7:42-43; John 4:23-24; James 1:27; Micah 6:8.)

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the chapter reaches its searing climax. God speaks of the very worship He once commanded and says, 'I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies' (5:21). He refuses their burnt offerings and meat offerings (5:22), and then, unforgettably, 'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols' (5:23). The songs Israel offered to God had become, in His ears, mere noise. How can this be? How can the God who instituted the feasts and the offerings reject them?

The answer is in verse twenty-four, which is not a change of subject but the very heart of God's complaint: 'But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.' Israel had torn apart two things God had joined together. They worshiped Him fervently in the sanctuary while trampling the poor and perverting justice at the gate. They sang to heaven on the feast day and oppressed their neighbor the rest of the week. And God will not accept worship from hands that are crushing the people He loves. The river of justice had dried to nothing, and so the songs became noise.

This is the inseparable bond Amos drives home: true worship of God and justice toward our neighbor belong together. They cannot be divided without making both false. Worship without justice is hypocrisy; justice without worship is mere humanitarianism cut off from its source. God demands a life in which both flow from the same heart, justice and righteousness pouring out like an unstoppable river through every relationship and dealing. This is not a call to replace worship with social activism, nor is it a partisan political program; it is a call to let the God we worship rule the whole of our lives.

Verses twenty-five through twenty-seven press the point further and look back to the wilderness, asking whether Israel truly offered sacrifices to God there, or already carried the idols of false gods in their hearts. Their religion had long been mixed with idolatry. Stephen quotes precisely these verses in Acts 7:42-43, indicting his own generation: they too honored the temple and the law outwardly while resisting the Spirit and rejecting the Righteous One, Jesus. The pattern of worship divorced from a righteous heart runs straight from Amos to the cross.

For us, the gospel both deepens and answers this. God still will not be honored by worship from hearts that despise mercy and justice (Matthew 23:23; James 1:27). But in Jesus Christ, the One who perfectly joined worship and righteousness, our worship becomes acceptable. When we

worship 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23–24), with hearts cleansed by His blood and lives that love mercy and do justly, our songs are no longer noise but a pleasing offering through Him. Christ joins together in His people what Israel tore apart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God rejects worship, even worship He once commanded, when it comes from people who trample the poor and pervert justice.
- Amos 5:24, justice and righteousness as an ever-flowing river, is the heart of God's complaint, not a change of subject.
- True worship of God and justice toward neighbor are inseparable; divided, both become false.
- This is not a call to replace worship with activism nor a partisan political program, but to let God rule the whole of life.
- Stephen applies Amos 5:25–27 in Acts 7:42–43 to a generation that honored the temple yet rejected Christ.
- In Christ, who perfectly joined worship and righteousness, our worship in spirit and truth becomes acceptable to God (John 4:23–24; James 1:27).
- Worship without justice is hypocrisy; justice without worship is humanitarianism cut from its source; God wants both from one heart.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God reject the very feasts and offerings He had commanded Israel to bring?
- What does it mean that justice and true worship are inseparable, and how have we sometimes torn them apart?
- How does Jesus join together in His people what Israel divided, so that our worship becomes acceptable to God?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across the whole chapter, the funeral song, the threefold 'seek me and live,' and the river of justice that God longs to see, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through Amos 5. Where is He joining together in you what Israel tore apart, so that your worship and your daily justice and mercy flow from the same heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole chapter into one personal reckoning. Amos 5 moves from a funeral song over a complacent people, through the tender threefold plea 'seek me and live,' to the great river of justice God longs to see flowing through His people's lives. The thread tying it all together is integrity, a life in which worship and justice, devotion to God and mercy to neighbor, are no longer divided.

The aim is for students to name one specific way Jesus is forming them through this chapter. Perhaps He is exposing a place where their Sunday worship and their weekday conduct have drifted apart. Perhaps He is reviving a genuine seeking after God where routine had taken over. Perhaps He is opening their eyes to a neighbor in need they had walked past. Whatever it is, the goal is one concrete, named work of grace.

Christ is the One who makes this possible. He worshiped the Father perfectly and loved His neighbor perfectly, and through His death and resurrection He pours His Spirit into us to join together what we, like Israel, are prone to tear apart. When students leave able to name how He is doing this in them, the chapter has done its work: not merely informing them about justice, but forming in them a heart from which both worship and justice flow like a single, unstoppable river.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The chapter calls for integrity, a life in which worship and justice flow from one undivided heart.
- Jesus joins together in His people what Israel, and we, are prone to tear apart.
- Genuine formation is concrete; naming one specific work of grace makes it real.
- The goal is not information about justice but a transformed heart from which both worship and justice flow.

Discussion Prompts

- Looking across the whole chapter, where is Jesus joining together your worship and your daily justice?
- What is one specific way you sense Him forming you through Amos 5?
- How can this group encourage one another to let both worship and mercy flow from one heart this week?