



God Calls for Justice

Goal: To explore simple and positive ways to challenge unfairness.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Amos 1:1; 5:6-8, 10-15, 21-24

The prophet Amos often spoke blistering words to the people of Israel. He warned the people about the consequences of neglecting justice and practicing injustice against the weak (5:11). God calls the people to justice and to “seek the LORD and live” (1:6). If they do not, fire and doom await (vv. 6-9). God’s judgment is sure.

Injustice against the weak occurs when heavy taxes are levied and the rich live luxuriously by “afflicting the righteous, taking money on the side, turning away the poor who seek help” (5:12, CEB). Injustice corrupts worship, which is rejected by God (vv. 21-23).

Amos’s word is to “seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of heavenly forces, will be with you just as you have said. Hate evil, love good, and establish justice at the city gate” (vv. 14-15, CEB). Then perhaps God will be gracious (v. 15). Amos proclaims: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (v. 24).

As those who have experienced God’s grace—Israel in the covenant, we in Jesus Christ—God’s people are to live justice, to care justly for the weak and needy. This is our response of gratitude.

. . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Children have a good sense of fairness. Cutting one slice of cake to make it exactly even for two siblings to share is something they may have experience with. The story of the prophet Amos’s message to God’s people will invite them to go a bit deeper as they consider fairness on a larger scale.

Younger and older children will be able to share examples from their experiences of what is fair and what is not. As you discuss this story with them, you will be able to help them see how God’s hope for us is that we learn how to live together so that all have equal access to what they need to live.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

The story for today also offers children a chance to consider what it means to be a good person. It will be really interesting to begin by asking them to think about their response to this statement: “A good person is someone who . . .” This will be a great introduction to telling them the story of the prophet Amos, who looked around and was saddened by how he saw people treating each other.

After telling the story and engaging children with the learning activities, you could return to the statement and see what else the children would like to add.

O God, inspire me to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies

bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 12, 14, 23–24

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

cloth

candle

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1 on card stock

copies of **GN 2**

Responding

Praying

footprints

Offering

variety of empty
containers such as
tissue boxes, potato
chip cans, butter tubs,
and so forth

Extra

copies of **GN 3**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Offering God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **A** **B** **M** **MS**

Welcome each child by saying, “Grace and peace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.” Invite the children to place a cloth, candle, and Bible on the worship table.

Ask some children to prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two lead today’s singing.

Give each child a copy of **GN 1** on card stock. Ask the children to cut out the two feet and tape them to the floor in a random pattern. Pairs do not need to stay together, and they do not need to form a walking pattern.

Singing

SD

Hand out rhythm instruments. Invite the children to sing and play along with “All Creation God Made”—**SCM 14**.

Praying

Turn on the candle to remind everyone of God’s presence. Invite the children to share one glad thing and one sad thing from their week. Prompt the children to respond accordingly to each share with “Praise God!” or “Hear our prayer, gracious God.” Then end by saying:

God of all creation, thank you for the strong oak trees,
the fast-flowing waters in rivers and lakes, and the quiet
footsteps of deer in the forests. Thank you for the food we eat
each day and the earth that supports all of us. Amen.

SD *Children with sensory issues may be affected by one sense, like hearing, touch, or taste, or by a number of senses. For some children, common sounds may be painful or overwhelming. Help these children feel more comfortable by providing advance warning. Putting them in charge of challenging situations, such as handing out rhythm instruments, allows them time to process the stimuli. Avoiding sensations like loud noises may be the best course of action for some children.*



Preparing to Hear the Story C

Hand out Bibles to the children and invite them to find the Table of Contents in the front of the Bible. Have the children find Isaiah in the Table of Contents. Explain that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations (traditionally attributed to Jeremiah), Ezekiel, and Daniel are called the Major Prophets. Hosea through Malachi are called the Minor Prophets. Ask them why some prophets might be called major or minor. Suggest that they look at how many chapters are in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, and Jonah for a clue. Suggest that the Major Prophets also have broader themes in their messages while the Minor Prophets are more focused. Ask how many Minor Prophets there are.

Invite the children to find Amos 1 in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read the first verse aloud. Encourage the children to follow along with their first finger. Acknowledge that there are a lot of strange names in this verse! Ask the children what they learned about Amos from this verse (*he is a shepherd; he was giving messages while two people were kings of Israel; it was two years before an earthquake*).

Tell the children that Amos spoke God's message to inform the people that they have neglected God's laws and that they have not cared for God's people as they should have. Ask the children to close their Bibles and place them on the worship table.

Hearing the Story C LD L

Gather the children in a circle and hand out copies of **GN 2**. Invite the children to read the response lines as you read Amos's message. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace." Prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story on **SCM 12**, or use the story audio. Invite the children to listen for things that are not fair or unhelpful and put their thumbs down when they hear them. When they hear things that are fair, or ways to be helpful, they should put their thumbs up.

Reflecting on God's Grace C MS

Explain to the children that you are going to ask them a series of questions that require a "yes" or "no" answer. After each question, they need to stand on a footprint with either *Yes* or *No* on it and shout out their answers. They cannot stay on the same footprint for two questions in a row. They must find another footprint even if the answer is the same.

Ask the following questions"

- Was Amos always a prophet? (*No!*)
- Was God unhappy with the behavior of the Israelites? (*Yes!*)
- Did Amos scold them for their bad behavior? (*Yes!*)
- Does God want us to be selfish and keep all that we have for ourselves? (*No!*)



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.



- ▼ Does God want us to use showy religious words but not do anything that shows our faith? (*No!*)
- ▼ Does God want us to care for others and show God’s justice and righteousness? (*Yes!*)
- ▼ Does God want us to say one thing and do another? (*No!*)
- ▼ Does God want us to be faithful and live our lives according to God’s will? (*Yes!*)

Invite each child to take one of the footprints and write a question on the footprint based on Amos’s message. The question should be answered by the footprint they have chosen. For example, a “Yes” footprint might have the question, “Does God want us to show justice to others?” and a “No” footprint might have the question, “Should we just go to church and ignore those in need in our community?” You may need to help the children with their questions.

Singing



Give God an offering of music. Play and sing “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”—SCM 24. Have the children sit in a circle. Show them how to draw an imaginary semicircle in the air with their right hands, starting in the center going down to their right and up and around, resting with their palm facing left on “Lord, I want to . . .” Continue with the left side, mirroring the motion and ending with both palms joined in prayer hands on “. . . be a Christian.” When the song says, “in my heart, in my heart,” have the children bring their hands to their hearts in a beating motion.

Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace

Suggest that some of Amos’s words would make wonderful billboards, signs, or placards. Hand out Bibles and invite the children to turn to Amos 5. Have the children follow along as you read aloud verses 14a and 24. Invite the children to choose one of these verses, or one of their own phrases or images, to put on a sign. Distribute pieces of poster board or cardboard. Ask children to decorate their signs with images of God’s justice in our world today. Invite everyone to place their signs in a window at home.

Consider having the children line up one by one holding their signs and take pictures or video them. Show the pictures or video in church or post the pictures or video to your church’s website. Remember to have signed photo release forms. Forms are available at bit.ly/2ybF3eK.



Praying God's Grace L

Have the children show their footprints from "Reflecting on God's Grace." Invite each person to read his or her question aloud and have the class respond with a loud "Yes!" or "No!" Tell the children that Amos said that if we are going to talk the talk (professing to be people of faith and followers of God), then we need to walk the walk (practicing what we preach and putting our faith into action).

Read each of the following sentences. Invite the children to respond aloud with "If we're going to talk the talk, then we have to walk the walk!" at each asterisk (*).

If we say we love others but are unkind to them, we need to change our actions. *

If we say we are thankful for God's creation but litter or harm the earth, then we need to change our actions. *

If we say we love God but do not serve God or put God first, then we should change our actions. *

You are God's messengers! Talk the talk and walk the walk! *
Amen (*say together*).



In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous act; it is simply an act of justice, a duty that gives poor people what they deserve.

Offering God's Grace LG

Invite the children to participate in a project based on the Jewish tradition of placing a *tzedakah* (tsu-DAW-kuh) box in their home or community to collect coins for different organizations. Tell the children that the word "tzedakah" is derived from the Hebrew word for justice. Explain to the children that they will make a box, collect coins, and bring their offering to the church. There will not be a designated date for the offering. Rather, it is for each child to decide when to bring their offering.

Encourage the children to raise funds for their tzedakah boxes by doing odd jobs around their house or, with parental permission, for neighbors.

Invite the children to choose a container to make their tzedakah box and decorate it as they choose with the craft supplies provided. Encourage them to use the word "justice" somewhere on their boxes. If the container has a lid, help the children cut a slot in it.

LG *Help children understand the need to share, act generously, and give freely. They learn that they are responsible for their part in creating a caring community. Kindness and generosity are contagious.*



GN 1 Solution:

The shepherd's staff is upside down. One sheep has the coat pattern of a dog. Amos is wearing a rain boot and wristwatch. Someone is holding a briefcase and cellphone. Someone is flying a kite. There is a baby stroller. A modern city is in the distance. A sign says, "Toronto, Canada, 10 miles." There is a whale. One of the children is wearing headphones. The sun and moon are both in the sky.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

Extra Activity

Have the children form pairs. Hand out copies of **GN 3** and invite the children to look together at the picture of life around the time of Amos the shepherd. Amos told people about things that needed changing. Ask the children to work together to find the mistakes in the picture, things that would not have been around in Amos's time.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

LG

Ask the children to help clean up the space.

Invite the children to gather in a circle. Sing "God Gives Us a Gift"—**SCM 23**—together.

Place a candle in the middle of the group and turn it on. Pray, or have a volunteer pray, the following prayer:

May the light remind us that God sent us prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos to prepare the way of justice for all people. Help us, O God, to bring about a world of love and peace for all. Amen.

Say the following blessing:

Let us go now, living our lives with God, letting justice flow like an ever-flowing stream. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Turn off the candle.



God Calls for Justice

—based on Amos 5

I know how many are your crimes, and how many sins you have committed.

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

Bothering the people who act in God's ways, taking money on the side, turning away the poor who seek help.

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

So God will be with you just as you have said. Hate evil, love good, and do justice.

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

God will be gracious to you!

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

I don't like it when you worship with unnecessary fuss.

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

I don't like it when you pay more attention to how something looks or sounds.

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

But let justice roll down like waters . . .

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

All: Seek good and not evil, that you may live.

What's Wrong with This Picture?

This is a picture of life around the time of Amos the shepherd. Can you find some things that don't belong in this picture? Amos told people about things that needed to change. Learn more about what he had to say by reading Amos 1:1; 5:6-8, 10-15, 21-24.



