

Justice

# BLAY

Bible Lessons for Youth

Mercy

Righteousness

Kindness

Injustice

Faithfulness

Blessings

Confession

Repentance

Restoration

Redemption

Summer 15

Leader's Guide

U:1

Amos Rails Against Injustice

U:2

Micah Calls for Justice Among Unjust People

U:3

Advocates of Justice for All



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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



JASON SANSBURY

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS:

### God's Word on Justice and Injustice

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR YOUTH is designed to help youth understand and apply the Bible to their lives, using a “Bible-to-life” approach. Each quarterly volume contains 12–14 lessons.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR YOUTH is written using the outlines from the International Lesson Series, developed by the ecumenical Committee on the Uniform Series. These outlines for children, youth, and adult studies are also used in The United Methodist Church in the creation of Adult Bible Studies. Each six-year cycle provides an overview of the entire Bible.

Ever heard this: “That is not fair!!”?

Recently, after declaring someone “out” in a game of youth group dodgeball, the exiled player screamed loudly and with great emphasis: “That is not fair!” From that person’s perspective, justice definitely had not been handed down.

This quarter we are delving into the issues of justice and injustice in the world. Through the eyes of the Old Testament prophets Micah, Amos, and Isaiah, we will be looking at the gap between how God sees the world and how we as God’s people live in the world. It can be challenging stuff for sure, both for us as adults and for our students.

However, research indicates that one of the shifts in the landscape of adolescence is the growing importance placed on issues of justice by young people. They not only want to talk about it but also want to *do* something about it. In my own youth ministries experience, over the past five years, there has been a shift in the participation of events. The times we have been focused on and intentional in serving others are the times we’ve drawn the most attendance. Activities such as lock-ins have taken a backseat to service. I know of one youth who turned down a paying summer youth-ministry intern position to work with the homeless in an unpaid capacity. Our students recognize the inequality and injustice in our world and are willing to step up and help bring about change.

So, this month be willing to talk about not only what *you see* as the injustices of the world but also the injustices that the *youth see*. Their perspectives are different from ours, and they may well be leading the church into a different—and deeper—involvement in righting the injustices of the world!

# QUICK START GUIDE

## TAKE-AWAY

Here is the basic point of the lesson, summed up in a short sentence. It's the big idea you want your youth to absorb during your class time.

## STUDENT BOOK

There's no need for you to hold two books! The student book is reprinted here, with the activity instructions near the related portions of the student book.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Short bits of information that help youth to be better interpreters of the biblical text are included each week. Use them to give some extra depth to the weekly lessons.

## LESSON LAUNCH

BIBLE LESSONS FOR YOUTH follows the format of "The Word Was," "The Word Is," and "The Word Will Be." This is an intentional teaching technique to help read the Bible text and understand the original context. Then you explore how the "Bible Lesson" speaks to the lives of your youth. Finally, the activities lead you to life-application, or how "The Word Will Be" lived out in your community.

Also, the Younger and Older Youth Options are created with developmental differences in mind.

## BIBLE LESSON

The text your class will explore this week is all here, in both *The New Revised Standard (NRSV)* and *the Common English Bible (CEB)* versions. Read either one or both with your class.

## KEY VERSE

If you emphasize Scripture memorization in your class, here's an ideal verse for the youth to remember.

COMMENTS?

SUGGESTIONS?

E-mail  
curricuphone@cokebury.com  
or call  
Curric-U-Phone  
1-800-251-8591

## TAKE-AWAY

Sharing God's wisdom with others is a great way to help you remember the lessons.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

• A major theme in these verses reminds us that people will benefit greatly if they give the best of their lives and money to God first. The author of Proverbs believes that everything belongs to God in the first place. So, if someone shows God that he or she is willing to sacrifice and take care of others, God will reward him or her. However, Proverbs also says that there are no promises of wealth and that poverty will also strike the rich (see 22:16; 28:22).

• Wisdom is embodied as a female in Proverbs. Some scholars believe that Lady Wisdom was once seen as Yahweh's consort. Wisdom was with God in the beginning when God created the universe.

• While Americans often place a lot of emphasis on being independent and self-reliant, Proverbs teaches that the more we rely on God the more independent we will feel.

The promise that God will "make straight [our] paths" (verse 6, NRSV) is not about having an easy, stress-free life, but rather a life focused in a particular direction. Note the actor: It is God who makes our paths straight when we trust in and are devoted to God, and acknowledge God's role in our lives.

## S:1 LIVING RIGHT

### ORANGE YOU GONNA GET THAT?

◦ What was the most challenging part of this game for you?

◦ HOW DID YOU FEEL ONCE YOU ACCOMPLISHED THE GOALS?

## THE WORD WAS ...

### Proverbs 3:1-12 (NRSV)

My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

1 So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people.  
2 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.  
3 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.  
4 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.  
5 It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR YOUTH

### ORANGE YOU GONNA GET THAT? (6-9 minutes)

Before the class session: This game requires an object that can be held under the neck then passed to another person who retrieves the object also using his or her neck. Ideally this game is meant to be played using

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 5 for a list of supplies for this session.

## THE WORD WAS ...

Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce;  
then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.  
My child, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof,  
for the LORD reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

1 Don't reject the instruction of the LORD, my son; don't despise his correction.  
2 The LORD loves those he corrects, just like a father who treats his son with favor.

### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT ...

You memorize song lyrics and take to heart their concepts and wisdom. Why not do the same with some of your favorite proverbs and "write them on the tablet of your heart" (verse 3)?

### KEY VERSE

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight."  
—Proverbs 3:5 (NRSV)

2. When you have completed both rounds, ask the questions in the student book. Explain that this unit focuses on passing wisdom from one person to another.

### STEP BY STEP (10-15 minutes)

Note: Unlike reading a Scripture passage with a narrative story line, Proverbs is like reading a collection of sound bites with no news story attached. This unit may seem very disjointed unless you continuously remind students of the greater theme: Living according to God's wisdom brings great rewards in life.

Before the class session: If possible, take some time to dissect personally each of these verses. Consider how you would say them using modern words and think of current-day examples that you can relate to the youth.

1. Read each verse aloud, carefully and slowly, to the students. Allow ten seconds (count it out—it may seem like a long time) for the students to absorb each nugget of wisdom.

2. Divide the students into two or three groups and assign the verses so that each is covered by at least one of the groups. Point out the activity in the student book on page 8. Ask the students to dissect each verse, rewrite it in modern language, and then rewrite it again using texting language. (If possible, hand out large sheets of paper and markers. Instruct each group to draw three columns, then write the verse in the first column, the modern rephrasing in the second column, and the texting language in the third column.) Or, use the space in the student book.

3. As the groups work, walk around the room and listen. Offer

SI 09/04/11

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fruit; an orange and a banana work nicely, but play using oranges if possible. Consider using two oranges and bananas for larger groups and allow two groups to compete simultaneously.

1. Divide students into two groups and ask them to form two lines. Explain the rules of the game: The piece of fruit

begins at one end of the line, is passed to every member in the line, and then is reversed, returning through the line to the starting person. Players may not use their hands and must use only their necks and chins. If someone drops the fruit, it must be returned to the start of the line. The winner is the first team to move its fruit through the line and back.

# MORE ABOUT

# BL4Y

Bible Lessons for Youth

## Additional Tools:

Each unit contains a **devotional** that will be used in one of the sessions. You can read the devotion aloud to the class, or use it as a quiet reflection/journaling exercise.

An **article** designed especially to help you grow as a teacher is included at the end of each issue. This article will expand upon the quarter's Bible theme or help you learn or improve important teaching and classroom skills.

The **out-and-about** article/activity (also at the end of each issue) can be used to help the youth explore a unit's Bible theme outside of the classroom and church building. Usually these activities will require more time than you likely have available during your regular class, so consider using them in other youth settings.

**Additional relevant resources**—will be noted if they directly relate to the lesson. You are never required to use these resources, nor are they necessary to lead the session, but they can help continue the exploration of a theme at a later time or enhance your weekly class.

## Coming Next Quarter:

**U1: "Seeds of New Growth"** includes four sessions. These sessions explore the Book of Acts and focus on how the followers of Christ found the strength to speak God's Word with boldness, sacrifice for the good of others, obey God's call over earthly authority, and remember God's faithfulness.

**U2: "Giving Bold Testimony"** also has four sessions and is based on the Book of Acts. This unit takes a look at spiritual power that resulted in Jesus' followers taking risks to tell the good news and an increase in believers.

**U3: "Spreading the Gospel"** is a five-session unit and continues in the Book of Acts. This unit tells how the fervent prayer of the church and an angel delivered Peter and how Paul's preaching resulted in the good news being spread into new regions.

NOTE: At the time of publication, all websites were correct and operational.

# U = 1 Amos Rails Against Injustice

## Overview

God called Amos, a herdsman and tree trimmer in Judah, to speak out against the injustices throughout Israel. Believed to be the earliest of the prophets, Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel, approximately between the years of 785 and 742 B.C. Scholars consider the Book of Amos to be one of the best written of the Bible, full of vibrant imagery. His proclamations against the people were poetic for undeserving ears. Amos spared

no one in Israel the prophecies regarding their oppressions of others—those who oppressed the poor by manipulating the marketplace, taking advantage of positions of power, and wasting resources. God’s anger at the people was unparalleled; after all, how difficult is it to “seek good and not evil” (Amos 14:a)? Amos’ focus was not a plea for change. His task was to announce God’s judgment during that time; today, we can consider it as a call to action.

06/07/15

## S1//: Judgment on Israel and Judah

**Key Verse:** “Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked.” —Amos 2:4 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** We are accountable to seek justice, even in situations where we did not create the injustice.

### Bible Background:

Biblical prophets were called to remind the people to follow God’s commandments, but some focused on other less-significant issues as well. Amos’ focus revealed the injustices of his time, including the injustice of a man and son using a slave girl for intercourse (even though this was not specifically a forbidden act). Amos’ prophecies contained similar word structure to other prophets but, in Hebrew, his word choice distinguishes him among scholars as a masterful writer.

Amos reminds the reader that God often calls individuals to fulfill roles that require them to live apart from others; Chapter 2 mentions two such roles: prophet and nazirite. While these roles are antiquated, students may be encouraged by their purpose while they seek God’s plan for their lives. Since their peers may have less-restrictive moral compasses, youth may feel separated at times. Beginning with **Session 1** students will be challenged to identify, empathize, and work to correct the injustices they see in the world.

06/14/15

## S2//: God Is Not Fooled

**Key Verse:** “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” —Amos 5:24 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** God provides justice for the righteous and punishment for the deceivers.

### Bible Background:

Amos’ admonition in the Bible Lesson for **Session 2** clarifies that God was not asking for miracles from the people—just for them to seek good and resist evil. How difficult could that be? Apparently it was challenging for the Israelites and, admittedly, it’s not an easy task for us today either. Since God’s people refused to seek justice and righteousness, they would be punished by God’s distance from them and their land being opened to neighboring invaders.

While the word *justice* appears only four times in the Book of Amos, it is a major theme. Amos knows that God’s wrath and the future destruction of Israel is because the people continue to oppress the poor and the weak. Despite their constant worship, this oppression is unacceptable to God. Jesus later stated that the only two laws vital to God are loving God and loving other people; Amos most certainly agreed.

While the name *Amos* means “brave” in Hebrew, it means “weighty” in English.  
This is accurate since *Amos* is a book containing such heavy content!

06/21/15

### S3//: Rebuked for Selfishness

**Key Verse:** “You have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.” —Amos 6:12b (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** Greed and materialism are temptations today, just as they were during Amos’ time.

#### Bible Background:

Amos probably didn’t receive many party invitations. He wanted the people to focus on compassion and action for the poor and downtrodden, while the rest of the nation wanted to throw lavish parties. They bought expensive furniture, while the poor slept on straw; they ate red meat, though the poor could barely afford bread. They wasted time and money with their late-night revelries. Amos promised they would be the first to receive God’s punishment and the first to go into exile.

Many youth are unaware of their position on the economic spectrum, and the Bible Lesson for Session 3 may be difficult both for those who can afford luxuries and for those who are barely surviving. Regardless of income, youth can learn to help those less fortunate as a way of being obedient to God.

### S4//: God Will Never Forget

06/28/15

**Key Verse:** “Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land.” —Amos 8:4 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** Caring for the needy is so important to God that those who fail to do so will be punished.

#### Bible Background:

In today’s Bible Lesson Amos continues his tirade against the people for their treatment of the poor, focusing on the injustices within commerce trade. Merchants were selling less grain for a higher price, causing even greater hardship for people who were already in need. Wealthy people issued loans to the poor, knowing they could never be repaid; thus, the poor were sold into slavery to pay their debts.

**Session 4** reveals that it was a miserable time for the poor in Israel. Since everyone else was working to make life even more difficult for them, Amos’ anger and God’s judgment were unleashed. Just as the people made life difficult for the poor, God intended to make life difficult for those taking advantage of the poor. God would turn nature against them, force them into mourning, and remove all traces of happiness from their lives.

.....

### Something to Think About . . .

Amos did not reserve judgment for a specific group of people—  
all of Israel was to blame for injustice. Even the poor  
took advantage of the poor.

## Supplies

All Sessions: Bibles, student books, pens or pencils

#### S1//:

- \_\_\_ three opaque cups and item to hide under one cup
- \_\_\_ Bible study references
- \_\_\_ large sheets of paper
- \_\_\_ markers
- \_\_\_ two suit jackets (optional)
- \_\_\_ yarn
- \_\_\_ half sheets of paper
- \_\_\_ tape

#### S2//:

- \_\_\_ hymnals
- \_\_\_ large sheets of paper
- \_\_\_ markers
- \_\_\_ long banner-size paper

#### S3//:

- \_\_\_ one-inch-wide strips of construction paper in five different colors
- \_\_\_ large sheets of paper
- \_\_\_ markers
- \_\_\_ Bible study references
- \_\_\_ writing paper
- \_\_\_ celebrity magazines
- \_\_\_ scissors
- \_\_\_ glue or tape

#### S4//:

- \_\_\_ blindfold
- \_\_\_ large sheets of paper
- \_\_\_ markers
- \_\_\_ coloring book page (see “Productivity at Its Finest”)
- \_\_\_ timer

## TAKE-AWAY

We are accountable to seek justice, even in situations where we did not create the injustice.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **Amos is one** of the few prophets for whom we have some, albeit little, information about his life. The only biographical information directly from Scripture is in Chapter 1:1 and Chapter 7 of the Book of Amos.
- **For students who** have studied other biblical prophets, the “For three transgressions . . . and for four, I will not revoke the punishment” (2:4, NRSV) language will sound familiar. Amos’ prophesy in this Bible Lesson is a change, focusing on injustice and social behavior instead of war, treatment of prisoners, and breaking God’s laws.
- **Amos’ condemnation of** the sexual act in Amos 2:7 is not found elsewhere in Scripture. His judgment of this act shows he is a true prophet, inspired by God to remind the people of God’s will—not just a preacher of already established laws.
- **Verse 8 is** significant because the wine was purchased with “fines they imposed,” which suggests they were meaningless laws meant to gain wealth for those in charge.

## S:1 Judgment on Israel and Judah

### Reading Minds

In the space below, follow your leader’s instructions to solve the math problem.

## The Word Was . . .

### Amos 2:4-8 (NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> Thus says the LORD:  
For three transgressions of Judah,  
and for four, I will not revoke  
the punishment;

because they have rejected the  
law of the LORD,  
and have not kept his statutes,  
but they have been led astray  
by the same lies  
after which their ancestors walked.

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**Bible Lessons for Youth**

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 5 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Reading Minds (5–10 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* three opaque cups and an item to hide under one cup

1. On a table easily seen by all students, line up three upside-down, opaque cups. Hide a small item under one cup, then move around the cups. Call for a student to guess under which

<sup>5</sup> So I will send a fire on Judah,  
and it shall devour the strongholds  
of Jerusalem.  
<sup>6</sup> Thus says the LORD:  
For three transgressions of Israel,  
and for four, I will not revoke  
the punishment;  
because they sell the righteous for silver,  
and the needy for a pair of sandals—  
<sup>7</sup> they who trample the head of  
the poor into the dust of  
the earth,  
and push the afflicted out of the way;  
father and son go in to the same girl,  
so that my holy name is profaned;  
<sup>8</sup> they lay themselves down beside  
every altar  
on garments taken in pledge;  
and in the house of their God  
they drink  
wine bought with fines they imposed.

<sup>7</sup> They crush the head of the poor  
into the dust of the earth,  
and push the afflicted  
out of the way.  
Father and son have intercourse  
with the same young woman,  
degrading my holy name.  
<sup>8</sup> They stretch out beside every altar  
on garments taken in loan;  
in the house of their god they drink  
wine bought with fines they imposed.

God calls us to  
actively work to make  
the world a more  
just place.

**Amos 2:4-8**  
**(Common English Bible)**

<sup>4</sup> The LORD proclaims:  
For three crimes of Judah,  
and for four,  
I won't hold back the punishment,  
because they have rejected the  
Instruction of the LORD,  
and haven't kept his laws.  
They have been led off the right path by  
the same lies  
after which their ancestors walked.  
<sup>5</sup> So I will send a fire on Judah,  
and it will devour the palaces  
of Jerusalem.  
<sup>6</sup> The LORD proclaims:  
For three crimes of Israel,  
and for four,  
I won't hold back the punishment,  
because they have sold the innocent  
for silver,  
and those in need  
for a pair of sandals.

**Key Verse**

**"Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked."  
— Amos 2:4 (NRSV)**

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- Think of an animal that begins with that letter.

Say, "I didn't know there were elephants in Denmark!"

**3.** Poll the students on their answers. Share any answers other than *elephant*.

**4.** Ask, "What is a prophet?" After a few responses, say: "A prophet is not a mind reader, a predictor, or a musician. A prophet is an inspired proclaimer of God's will."

**Biography B.C.**  
**(10-15 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* Bible study reference materials, pens or pencils

**1.** Divide students into groups of two or three, and provide Bible study reference materials and pens or pencils.

**2.** Ask groups to research Amos, the person. Each group should create a biography of Amos using the space provided on page 8 in the student book. If your class is made up of younger youth, allow them to compile a group-written biography of Amos. If your class is mostly older youth, encourage each student to write a biography and merely share research. Students may include humor, but they should still provide an accurate biography.

Explain that youth may discover conflicting information in different sources. Remind them that different scholars offer different interpretations.

**3.** Based on how they think Amos would look after completing their research, also invite students to sketch in the student book an imagined picture of Amos.

**4.** Call on groups to report biographies and show pictures. If there are discrepancies in information, ask students to substantiate their bios by showing

cup the item is hidden. Repeat the guessing process twice.

**2.** Using the space provided in the student book, ask each student to quickly follow these directions:

- Write a number between 1 and 10. This is your **original** number.
- Multiply this number by 2.
- Add 8 to this new number.
- Divide the newest number by 2.
- Subtract your **original** number from this newest number.
- Convert your number to a corresponding letter of the alphabet. A = 1, B = 2, and so on.
- Think of a European country that begins with your letter. N could be Norway.
- Think of the letter that follows your letter in the alphabet.



# The Word Will Be . . .

\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_  
 (verb)                      people involved                      items

\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_  
 (verb)                      people involved                      items

## KISR—TV Israel at Nine

**Reflect:** Everyone unintentionally contributes to injustice, but God calls us to be aware of our contributions and to actively work to make the world more just.

◇ Which injustice do you contribute to most?

◇ How is God calling you to actively change an unjust situation?

◇ Who can you ask for help?

## Closing Reflection

Forgiving God: Just as Amos called on the Israelites to right the injustices in their land, so you call us to change the world around us for the better. Help us to see the injustice and challenge us to influence others in righting the wrongs we see. Remind us of the injustice of \_\_\_\_\_, so that we are reminded of your call in our lives. We seek your will always. In Jesus' name. Amen.

S1: 06/07/15

behind a table and creating and adding other typical newsroom visuals.

4. As youth work, plan an order to the newscast and, when pairs are ready, call on each to present its news report (wearing the jackets, if available). After each segment, discuss accountability, considering

government, community members, and so on. Talk about how the students might be actively or passively contributing to the situation.

5. After all news reports, suggest students think about their personal contributions to these injustices using the questions in the student book.

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* yarn (stretched from one side of the ceiling to the other in the meeting space), half sheets of paper, markers, tape

1. Explain that, throughout this unit of study, youth will create and expand weekly on a prayer for injustices. Hand out half sheets of paper and ask each youth to label one paper with one injustice. Attach the papers to the yarn, with the same sides facing out.

2. Close by asking youth to read the devotion on page 3 and to look up when finished. When most youth are looking up, lead them in saying the prayer printed in the student book, filling in the blank.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- Gather newspaper articles about crime and justice. Ask youth to read the articles and report on the crime stories. As facts are presented, ask youth to discern the appropriate punishment for each crime. Ask: "Who will be affected by this punishment (victim, victim's family, reporters, executioner, the public)? How, do you think, would Jesus judge this situation?"

### Older Youth

- This Bible Lesson mentions inappropriate sexual activity as an injustice in Israel. Ask: "Are there unjust sexual practices today? What are the consequences for individuals? for the community? How do we, as Christians, show love for those engaged in unjust sexual practices?" Invite a medical professional to speak to your class in a safe location.

## TAKE-AWAY

God provides justice for the righteous and punishment for the deceivers.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **Amos calls the** people to action, commanding them to “hate evil and love good” (verse 15a, NRSV). The Hebrew verbs used are meant to direct thoughts and actions. Amos does not promise God’s favor, suggesting instead that it *might* happen, but there are no guarantees. God is incredibly angry about the injustices in the land.

- **Unlike its usage** in the New Testament, the “day of the LORD” (verse 20) likely refers to the hope of Israel conquering other nations in battle, not a future day of judgment.

- **Amos’ warnings to** the people surely were frightening. During that time Israel was actually two countries: Israel and Judah. Amos warned that they did not have God’s protection, would be overrun by a larger country, and that this was God’s will.

- **Israel, like most** countries, had several different waterways. Most of the water was supplied by wadis, riverbeds that were dry most of the time, and when it rained, they often flooded. Amos clarified that God wanted the people’s focus on justice to be like an “everflowing stream” and rolling waters, constantly seeking righteousness in Israel.

## S:2 God Is Not Fooled

### Simon’s Backward Twin

☉ Have you ever been hurt by someone who spoke one way but acted another? What happened? (No names, just in case someone else sees this!)

☉ When was the last time you may have acted in a way that was opposite of what you said or believed? What was the result?

## The Word Was . . .

### Amos 5:14-15, 18-27 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> Seek good and not evil,  
that you may live;  
and so the LORD, the God of  
hosts, will be with you,  
just as you have said.

<sup>15</sup> Hate evil and love good,  
and establish justice in the gate;  
it may be that the LORD, the God  
of hosts,  
will be gracious to the  
remnant of Joseph.

10

.....  
<sup>18</sup> Alas for you who desire the day  
of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of  
the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

<sup>19</sup> as if someone fled from a lion,  
and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and  
rested a hand against the  
wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

**Bible Lessons for Youth**

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 5 for a list of  
supplies for this session.

### Simon’s Backward Twin (10–15 minutes)

**1.** In an open area play a game of Simon Says. Begin with yourself as Simon, since the instructions for the game will be slightly different.

**2.** Explain to students that instead of waiting for the words, “Simon says,” they must perform the opposite action

<sup>20</sup> Is not the day of the LORD  
darkness, not light,  
and gloom with no brightness  
in it?  
<sup>21</sup> I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your  
solemn assemblies.  
<sup>22</sup> Even though you offer me your  
burnt offerings and grain  
offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the offerings of well-being  
of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.  
<sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of  
your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody  
of your harps.  
<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like  
waters,  
and righteousness like an  
everflowing stream.  
<sup>25</sup> Did you bring to me sacrifices and  
offerings the forty years in the wilderness,  
O house of Israel? <sup>26</sup> You shall take up  
Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your  
star-god, your images, which you made for  
yourselves; <sup>27</sup> therefore I will take you into  
exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD,  
whose name is the God of hosts.

**Amos 5:14-15, 18-27**  
**(Common English Bible)**

<sup>14</sup> 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.  
<sup>15</sup> Hate evil, love good,  
and establish justice at the city gate.  
Perhaps the LORD God of heavenly  
forces will be gracious  
to what is left of Joseph.  
.....

<sup>18</sup> Doom to those who desire  
the day of the LORD!  
Why do you want the day of the  
LORD?  
It is darkness, not light;  
<sup>19</sup> as if someone fled from a lion,  
and was met by a bear;  
or sought refuge in a house,  
rested a hand against the wall,  
and was bitten by a snake.  
<sup>20</sup> Isn't the day of the LORD darkness,  
not light;  
all dark with no brightness in it?  
<sup>21</sup> I hate, I reject your festivals;  
I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.  
<sup>22</sup> If you bring me your entirely burned  
offerings and gifts of food—  
I won't be pleased;  
I won't even look at your offerings  
of well-fed animals.  
<sup>23</sup> Take away the noise of your songs;  
I won't listen to the melody  
of your harps.  
<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness  
like an ever-flowing stream.  
<sup>25</sup> Did you bring me sacrifices and  
offerings during the forty years in  
the wilderness, house of Israel?  
<sup>26</sup> You will take up Sakkuth your king,  
and Kaiwan your star-god,  
your images,  
which you made for yourselves.  
<sup>27</sup> Therefore, I will take you away  
beyond Damascus, says the LORD,  
whose name is  
the God of heavenly forces.

**Key Verse**

**"Let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an  
everflowing stream."  
—Amos 5:24 (NRSV)**

from your command. For example, if you say, "Run around the room," the students stand still. Follow your own command (not the opposite), as it will be confusing and emphasize the point of the game.

**3.** Lead two or three test rounds and then begin to eliminate students who followed commands instead of carrying out opposite actions. When

only one student remains, allow that student to play Simon or to choose the next Simon.

**4.** Discuss the difficulty of this version of the game versus the usual game. Ask: "Is it challenging to follow someone who says one thing but does another? Is it difficult to communicate with someone whose behavior is hypocritical?"

**5.** Allow students three or four minutes to complete the questions in the student book. Call on any who wish to tell about the experiences described in the second question.

**Singing Songs of Justice**

**(10-15 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* hymnals

**1.** Read aloud the Bible Lesson in unison. Then, read the passage again, but this time slowly, and ask students to label the verses as God's commands, God's promises, and actions that God considers unholy.

**2.** When you are finished reading the Bible Lesson the second time, discuss the various themes within the passage. Point out that God commanded the people to seek goodness and justice and threatened punishment for those who worshipped without action.

**3.** Hand out hymnals, sharing if necessary. Using the index, table of contents, and the hymns, instruct students to find as many songs as possible that have justice as a theme. Remind them also to look for songs that may not contain the word *justice* in the title but still follow the theme, such as "We Shall Overcome." After a few minutes, allow youth to call out song titles. If possible, read aloud some verses.

**4.** Allow a few minutes for youth to create, in the space provided on page 12 in the student book, an original song linking the themes of worship and justice.

**Emoticon Match**

**(10-15 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* large sheets of paper and markers

# THE WORD IS...

*Note to Leader:* Students are constantly communicating via emoticons or emoji, visual representations of emotions on phones and electronic media. Use this medium to help students delve deeper into the Bible Lesson.

**1.** Say: "Our Bible Lesson begins on a positive note, with God's reminder to the people to seek good and hate evil. The passage then morphs to God's rebuke for people who wish for the "day of the LORD" and worship without working to make their current world a better place."

**2.** Ask students to complete the activity in the student book using their Bibles. Encourage them to use emoticons other than the typical smiley and sad faces.

**3.** When most everyone is finished, call on youth to show their symbols and compile all the emoticons on a large sheet of paper.

**4.** Continue discussion by asking youth to identify worship practices and observances that neglect or conceal injustice. List responses on another large sheet of paper, then discuss some ways that youth can help the church recognize and deal with these injustices in its worship practices.

## Rolling Out Justice

(15–20 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* large sheets of paper and colored markers, one long sheet of banner-size paper, drawing paper

**1.** Divide the class into small groups of two or three. Ask groups to brainstorm a list of words representing justice and righteousness using the acrostic in the student book. After three to four minutes, talk about each acrostic.

# The Word Is...

In the space below, write a song linking worship and justice.

## Singing Songs of Justice



### Emoticon Match

Draw emoticons in the boxes to represent the following emotions expressed in the Bible Lesson.

- ❖ How people who seek good feel:
- ❖ How God feels about people who hate evil and seek good:
- ❖ People who want the Day of the Lord:
- ❖ God's feelings toward worship without action:
- ❖ People who instill justice and righteousness in their community:

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**2.** As students call out their words, write all unique words on a large sheet of paper posted where everyone can see it. Encourage youth to refer to it in the next portion of the activity.

**3.** Explain that students will create a banner highlighting Amos 5:24.

Divide students into three groups, and instruct each group to create one segment of the banner. Suggest groups move to different areas of the room and allow five minutes for them to talk about and plan the design for their segment of the banner.

# The Word Will Be...

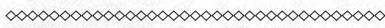
## Rolling Out Justice

Fill in the following acronym with words associated with *justice* and *righteousness*. Words can begin, end, or contain the letters listed below.

_____	J	_____	R	_____
_____	U	_____	I	_____
_____	S	_____	G	_____
_____	T	_____	H	_____
_____	I	_____	T	_____
_____	C	_____	E	_____
_____	E	_____	O	_____
		_____	U	_____
		_____	S	_____
		_____	N	_____
		_____	E	_____
		_____	S	_____
		_____	S	_____

## Closing Reflection

Reflect on ways you have participated in injustice. Have you turned away from opportunities to help those in need? Have you focused on storing up "things" for yourself instead of looking for ways to love others? Ask for God's help and for a reminder to alert you to ways you can change the world.



Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. —Amos 5:14 (NRSV)

## Closing Reflection

(3–5 minutes)

1. Invite youth to reflect, using the questions in the student book, about the injustices observed this week. Add those injustices to the hanging prayer banner you began last week.

2. Lead a round-robin prayer asking for God's guidance in these situations.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

1. Host a viewing of Martin Luther King Jr.'s entire "I Have A Dream" speech (see [bit.ly/BL4YMLKSpeech](http://bit.ly/BL4YMLKSpeech)). While students may have seen the famous clip, few have likely seen the entire speech.

2. After viewing, discuss with students the ways Dr. King's dream has been realized and ways in which injustices still thrive. List groups of people in your community who still are not considered equal participants. Finally, ask youth to write a group speech, calling on others to help right an injustice.

### Older Youth

• Ahead of time ask youth to bring magazines they read or to collect a few old issues of popular magazines. In class, peruse the magazines with students, asking them to look only at the advertisements. Discuss whether products actually deliver on the advertisements' claims. Consider these questions: "Do social-media websites better connect you with friends? Is this car really going to impress anyone?" Also, talk about reasons people have brand loyalty, or if they should have brand loyalty.

4. Now assign each group a section of the paper banner. Remind groups to decorate only their third of the banner.

5. When all three groups have finished their sections, ask students to evaluate the whole banner. Encourage them to add unifying symbols and words. Talk about the similar themes

reflected in the banner, despite groups working separately. Finally, hang the banner in a prominent location.

6. Ask youth to think about ways they will personally work toward justice and righteousness in their lives and in their communities.

## TAKE-AWAY

Greed and materialism are temptations today, just as they were during Amos' time.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- Although many Christians argue for a non-luxurious lifestyle, people living in Old Testament times had no problem enjoying luxuries. David and Solomon, two of God's favorite people, enjoyed immeasurable wealth! The Old Testament claims that luxury is a problem only if it is at someone else's expense.
- Amos is not decrying luxury in this Scripture, but he is concerned with how these parties facilitate shortsighted thinking. Songs are not an issue, except for how they are used to prevent discussions about the state of society. Wine is drunk from bowls likely used in cult rituals, and while this upsets Amos, it is the apathy from the people drinking the wine that most concerns him.
- Students may not realize the significance of eating red meat in this passage. Remind them that many people did not eat red meat because they could not afford it. If they did eat meat, it was usually fowl or fish. Red meat was a luxury in Amos' day, as it is in many parts of today's world.

## S:3 Rebuked for Selfishness

### Born This Way

⊖ How much money did you have at the start of the game?

⊖ How much at the end?

⊖ Did you start with an advantage or disadvantage? How did that make you feel?

## The Word Was...

### Amos 6:4-8; 11-14 (NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,  
and lounge on their couches,  
and eat lambs from the flock,  
and calves from the stall;

<sup>5</sup> who sing idle songs to the sound  
of the harp,  
and like David improvise on  
instruments of music;

<sup>6</sup> who drink wine from bowls,  
and anoint themselves with the  
finest oils,  
but are not grieved over the  
ruin of Joseph!

<sup>7</sup> Therefore they shall now be the  
first to go into exile,  
and the revelry of the loungers  
shall pass away.

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 5 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Born This Way (12-15 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* One-inch-wide strips of construction paper in five different colors, large sheets of paper, markers

*Ahead of time:* Cut five different colors of construction paper into one-inch-wide strips, enough for five strips per each student you expect to attend.

<sup>8</sup> The Lord God has sworn by himself  
 (says the LORD, the God of hosts):  
 I abhor the pride of Jacob  
 and hate his strongholds;  
 and I will deliver up the city  
 and all that is in it.  
 .....

<sup>11</sup> See, the LORD commands,  
 and the great house shall be  
 shattered to bits,  
 and the little house to pieces.  
<sup>12</sup> Do horses run on rocks?  
 Does one plow the sea with oxen?  
 But you have turned justice into  
 poison  
 and the fruit of righteousness  
 into wormwood—  
<sup>13</sup> you who rejoice in Lo-debar,  
 who say, "Have we not by our  
 own strength  
 taken Karnaim for ourselves?"  
<sup>14</sup> Indeed, I am raising up against  
 you a nation,  
 O house of Israel, says the  
 LORD, the God of hosts,  
 and they shall oppress you from  
 Lebo-hamath  
 to the Wadi Arabah.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, they will now  
 be the first to be taken away,  
 and the feast of those who lounged  
 at the table will pass away.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD God has solemnly sworn,  
 says the LORD,  
 the God of heavenly forces:  
 I reject the pride of Jacob.  
 I hate his fortresses.  
 I will hand over the city  
 and all that is in it.  
 .....

<sup>11</sup> Look, the LORD is giving an order;  
 he will shatter the great house into  
 bits and the little house into pieces.  
<sup>12</sup> Do horses run on rocks?  
 Does one plow the sea with oxen?  
 But you have turned justice  
 into poison  
 and the fruit of righteousness  
 into bitterness—  
<sup>13</sup> you who rejoice in Lo-debar,  
 who say, "Haven't we by our own  
 strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?"  
<sup>14</sup> Indeed, I will raise up against you  
 a nation, house of Israel,  
 says the LORD God of heavenly forces,  
 and they will oppress you from  
 Lebo-hamath to the desert ravine.

**Amos 6:4-8: 11-14**  
**(Common English Bible)**

<sup>4</sup> who lie on beds of ivory,  
 stretch out on their couches,  
 eat lambs from the flock,  
 and bull calves from the stall;  
<sup>5</sup> who sing idle songs  
 to the sound of the harp,  
 and, like David, compose tunes  
 on musical instruments;  
<sup>6</sup> who drink bowls of wine,  
 put the best of oils on themselves,  
 but who aren't grieved  
 over the ruin of Joseph!

**S3: 06/21/15**

**Key Verse**

**"You have turned justice  
 into poison and the fruit of  
 righteousness into wormwood."  
 — Amos 6:12b (NRSV)**

**15**

On a large sheet of paper list a value for each color strip, without students' input. For example, blue = \$5, purple = \$100, yellow = \$1000, and so on. Do not display this chart until the activity instructions indicate.

*Note to Leader:* If you have The Game of Life or Monopoly, substitute a quick game for this activity. To speed up the game, hand out uneven amounts

of money and other resources so that some students begin play with excess and others with barely enough.

**1.** As students arrive, direct them to pick up five strips of paper. They may choose all of one color or a mixture of colored strips.

**2.** When most everyone has arrived, encourage students to mingle

while trading, bargaining, and performing small tasks (such as standing on one leg, saying the alphabet, singing a silly song) in exchange for strips. After five minutes, call time.

**3.** Display the chart you prepared earlier listing the amount for each color and instruct students to tally their "currency."

**4.** Discuss students general feelings about starting a game with an advantage or a disadvantage from others. Further compare the similarities and differences by talking about how people are born into the real world with advantages or disadvantages. Now give students time to respond from a personal perspective to the questions in the student book. If there is time, talk about the last question.

**Give Me Some  
 Old-Time Shiny Stuff**  
**(10-12 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* a variety of Bible study references and resources, writing paper, pens or pencils

**1.** Allow students to pair up. Hand out available Bible study resources and instruct students to read aloud the Bible Lesson to their partners.

**2.** Ask students to pick seven of the luxuries mentioned in the Bible Lesson and list on the chart on page 16 in the student book. In the second column youth should describe the luxuries using the research materials, then choose a modern equivalent. (For example, the first luxury mentioned could be beds of ivory; described as beds made with real ivory or white linens, symbols of wealth; and then memory-foam bed as the modern equivalent in the third column.)

**3.** Say, "Amos is clearly condemning the behaviors

## THE WORD IS...

mentioned in the Bible Lesson." Talk about each luxury identified. For example:

- What would displease God about idle songs or improvised music? *(People were starving, yet they did not give food or money to the community.)*
- What is the error in drinking wine from bowls? *(drunkenness)*

**4.** Finally, talk about the examples of modern luxuries and ways they can be used to please God.

### Bling Bling

**(10–15 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* copies of magazines with celebrity pictures and a variety of advertisements, scissors, large sheet of paper, glue or tape

**1.** Divide the class into small groups of three and give each group an equal share of the magazines you collected ahead of time.

**2.** Ask students to peruse the magazines for ads that relate to personal pleasure or luxury. If possible, ask youth to tear or cut out the ads and create a large collage using the images. If not, suggest students bookmark the various ads and talk about as a group.

**3.** As a class, allocate the various items into groups, such as jewelry, technology, transportation, and so on. Add tally marks to indicate which category is represented most.

**4.** Ask: "What about these products appeal to people? Do the products fulfill needs or wants? What might be God's opinion about these products? Do any of these products make the world a better place?"

**5.** Point out the questions in the student book and ask youth to spend a few minutes answering them. Talk

## The Word Is...

### Give Me Some Old-Time Shiny Stuff

Luxury Mentioned	Description	Modern Equivalent

### Bling Bling

Think back to how much money you had during the opening game. What was that amount?

If you had that amount of money in real life, what would you do with it; why?

How would you honor God with the money?

about ways youth would honor God with their money.

### SWBS

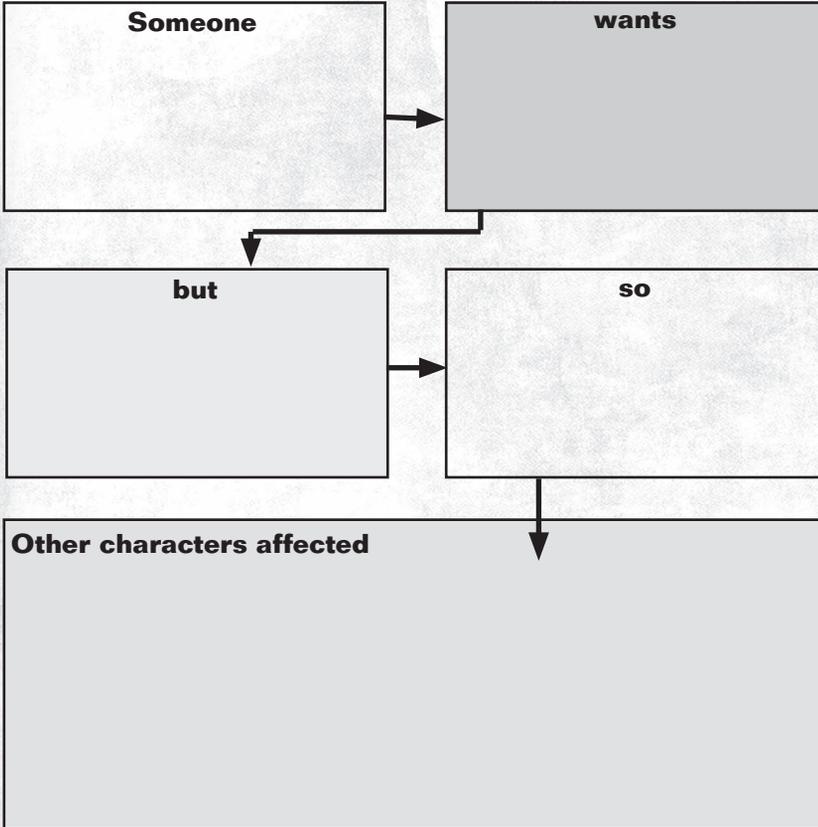
**(15–20 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of paper, markers, pens or pencils

**1.** Ask students to complete the Someone Wants But So (SWBS) chart with examples involving the inequality of wealth. For example: *A millionaire wants to build a resort but an animal sanctuary is in the way, so he will use his wealth to influence the city council.* Or: *A starving child in Africa wants*

# The Word Will Be...

## SWBS



## Closing Reflection

Gracious God: We are tempted by so many wonderful inventions and luxuries; it is often hard to resist, especially when our friends have those luxuries. Help us to focus beyond our possessions and to help others as much as possible. Please give us strength to make right choices and remind us to be compassionate toward others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

S3: 06/21/15

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a meal but warlords prevent her or him from eating, so international aid organizations intervene and provide food to eat. Discuss responses and pay close attention, as you will discover issues important to the youth.

2. On a large sheet of paper, draw a pyramid and divide into five sections.

Ask students to call out people's needs, listing the most vital needs at the bottom and the least vital (but still a need) at the top. Ask: "Is this pyramid of needs different for Christians? How is the pyramid different for children?"

3. Say: "Children in the United States have fewer rights than adults, but still

have more protection than children in other countries. If possible, research child labor, and together, brainstorm ways youth can increase awareness or make a difference.

## Closing Reflection

(3-5 minutes)

1. Take up a collection for a cause decided on by your students. Even if the amount is small, the exercise of giving is helpful for students to practice, especially while studying the oppression of others.

2. Lead youth in praying together the prayer in the student book.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- On a stack of index cards, write items (one per card) students may have purchased or own. Include both "wanted" items (phones, technology, music) and "needs" (food items, shelter, water). Scatter the cards upside down on one end of the meeting space. Label four more cards, two as *Want* and two as *Need*. Divide students into two relay teams and on the other end of the space lay a set of *Want/Need* cards for each team. At your signal, teams should begin choosing cards and placing in the appropriate pile.

### Older Youth

- Gather in a place with Internet access, if possible. Ask students to research the concept of *corporate social responsibility* ([www.thecro.com](http://www.thecro.com)). Once they can define CSR, ask them to look at companies on both the "Best Of" list and the "Black List." Ask: "What do good companies have in common? Which companies are considered 'bad citizens'? What role do Christians have in supporting/boycotting businesses with unjust practices?"

## TAKE-AWAY

Caring for the needy is so important to God that those who fail to do so will be punished.

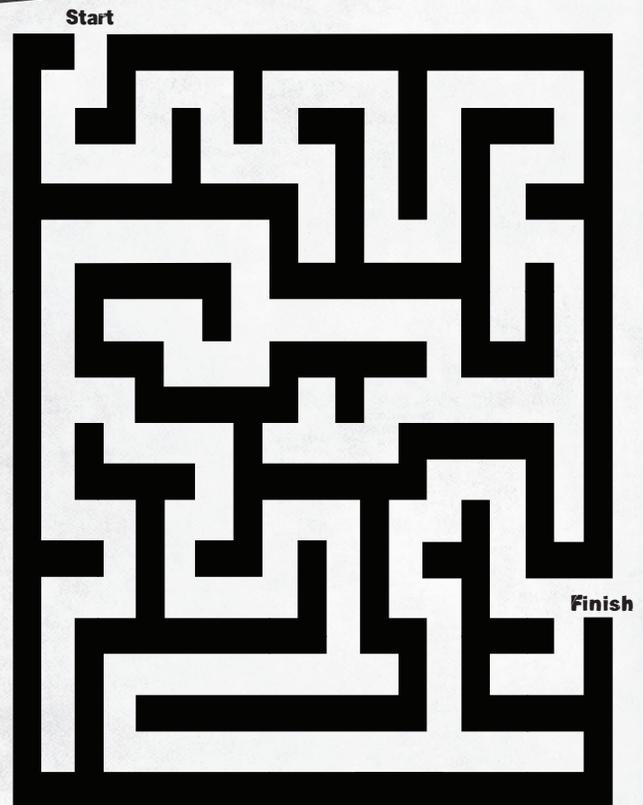
## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- In a **patriarchy** society such as Israel's, the death of an only son would be devastating to the family, not only emotionally but also financially. A family's name would disappear without a son to carry it on. While women could inherit property under certain circumstances, the lack of sons required the matriarch to remarry and provided less protection for the daughters.
- An **ephah** was a standard dry measure in Old Testament times. The shekel was a coin in ancient Israel. Amos' judgment refers to the practice of skimping on the grain in an ephah while raising the price. Merchants also sold "sweepings of the wheat," or the chaff, making the grain less valuable and less nutritious.
- The **new moon** was considered the start of a new month and was a day of rest, similar to the sabbath. Amos' people were so greedy they wanted the days of rest to pass quickly so they could return to their lives of debauchery and continue swindling the poor.
- During the time of Amos' writing, in 784 B.C., Israel experienced a total solar eclipse. The people understood God's power to cover the sun and darken the land.

## S:4 God Will Never Forget

### Leading the Blind

Place your pencil on the starting point of the maze, close your eyes, and follow your leader's instructions.



## The Word Was . . .

### Amos 8:1-6, 9-10 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit. <sup>2</sup> He said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A

basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me,

The end has come upon my people Israel;

I will never again pass them by.

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 5 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Leading the Blind (10–15 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* blindfold, pens or pencils

1. Choose a student and send her or him out to wait in a hallway. With the rest of the class, set up an obstacle course in your meeting space, or another space suited for this purpose. If possible, move furniture so that a

<sup>3</sup> The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," says the Lord God; "the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!"

<sup>4</sup> Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land,

<sup>5</sup> saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances,

<sup>6</sup> buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat."

.....

<sup>9</sup> On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight.

<sup>10</sup> I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.

"there will be many corpses, thrown about everywhere. Silence."

<sup>4</sup> Hear this, you who trample on the needy and destroy the poor of the land, <sup>5</sup> saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath so that we may offer wheat for sale, make the ephah smaller, enlarge the shekel, and deceive with false balances, <sup>6</sup> in order to buy the needy for silver and the helpless for sandals, and sell garbage as grain?"

.....

<sup>9</sup> On that day, says the LORD God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight.

<sup>10</sup> I will turn your feasts into sad affairs and all your singing into a funeral song; I will make people wear mourning clothes and shave their heads; I will make it like the loss of an only child, and the end of it like a bitter day.

**Amos 8:1-6, 9-10**  
**(Common English Bible)**

<sup>1</sup> This is what the LORD God showed me: a basket of summer fruit. <sup>2</sup> He said, "Amos, what do you see?"

I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again forgive them.

<sup>3</sup> On that day, the people will wail the temple songs," says the LORD God;

**Key Verse**

**"Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land."**  
**—Amos 8:4 (NRSV)**

**S4: 06/28/15**

**19**

student familiar with the room cannot easily navigate the space. If moving furniture is not an option, place markers on the floor to forge a path.

**2.** Blindfold the student in the hallway and lead him or her back into the room. Inform the class they will be guiding the student verbally through the obstacle course. (Watch for safety concerns as students talk their friend

through the obstacle course; intervene if necessary.)

**3.** Once the first student has completed the course, invite others to attempt the challenge. Before each blindfolded student begins, direct other youth to change the course in some way and/or add an element, such as walking the course backward, hopping on one leg, and so on.

- 4.** When everyone has participated (who wanted to), discuss the obstacle course with students. Ask: "How was it to navigate for another person? How difficult was it to walk the course? Did the students who walked the course after the first person have an advantage, since they knew the objective?"
- 5.** Ask students to place a pencil on the starting point of the maze on page 18 in the student book and then close their eyes. Give youth verbal instructions only to complete the maze.
- 6.** Ask: "What would have happened if you hadn't listened to the verbal instructions for getting through the obstacle course or maze? Allow a few responses. Say: "Instructions *and* prophecies are worthless if no one listens to them. In today's Bible Lesson Amos reminds the people to listen to his prophecies in order to know the will of God."

**Stepping on the Poor**  
**(10-15 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of paper or markerboard, markers

- 1.** Ask students to read the Bible Lesson silently. As they read, instruct them to circle any unfamiliar words or phrases or that they don't understand.
- 2.** On a large sheet of paper or markerboard, list the words or phrases identified by the students. If students are hesitant to speak out, be sure to explain *ephah*, *shekel*, *lamentation*, and *sackcloth*. Use a Bible study resource if you need further clarification.
- 3.** Talk about today's Key Verse with students. Allow time for youth to illustrate the verse using a pencil, in the space provided in the student book. Once their

## THE WORD IS...

sketches are complete, suggest they change/revise the drawings to reflect compassion for the poor. Allow those who wish to show and talk about their drawings.

**4.** Ask, "What are examples of places in your community and in the world today of where the needy are trampled and the poor are ruined?"

### Productivity at Its Finest

(10–15 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* thirty copies of a blank, coloring-book page (perhaps an image related to the Bible Lesson; check online for free printable images), divided into three stacks of ten; a timer

**1.** Divide students into three teams, giving each a stack of pages and a different colored crayon for each person.

**2.** Explain that each group will complete the assignment in a different way:

- Group 1 will divide its pages among group members and color individually, sharing crayons.
- Group 2 will use an assembly line method, with each student using only one color throughout the process.
- Group 3 (best for oldest youth) may decide its own process using the supplies provided, but planning time will be included after the clock has started.

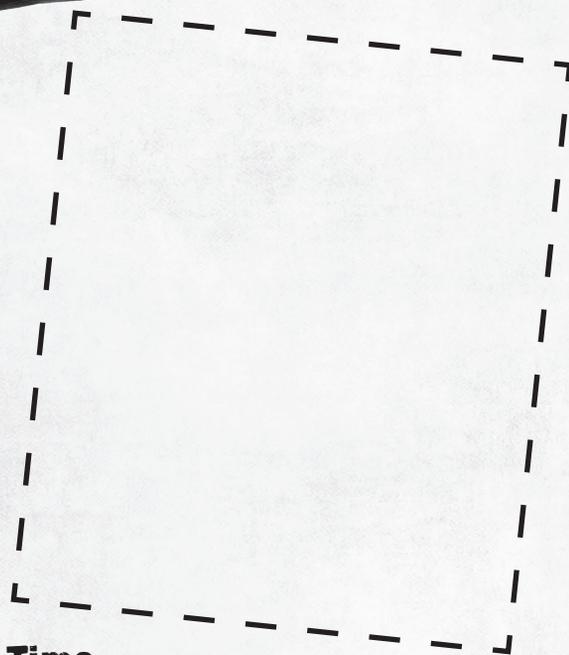
**3.** Inform the youth that this exercise is a race and groups will have seven minutes to color. Only finished pages will count when time is up.

**4.** Call time and observe which group was the most successful. Ask, "To what do you attribute your success?"

## The Word Is...

### Stepping on the Poor

Use a pencil to illustrate verse 4 of the Bible Lesson.



### Dividing Our Time

One of God's threats to the people of Israel, if they did not change their ways, was that the sun would go down at noon. In a farming community, this would be a major problem, both for crops and for workers. What would happen to your life if darkness fell at noon? List below all the tasks you do from noon until midnight.

Noon	_____
1:00 P.M.	_____
2:00 P.M.	_____
3:00 P.M.	_____
4:00 P.M.	_____
5:00 P.M.	_____

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Bible Lessons for Youth

### Dividing Our Time (15–20 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of paper or markerboard, markers, pens or pencils

**1.** Ask, "What are some products that you would like to own?" Brainstorm

with your youth and list products on a large sheet of paper or markerboard. Include technology, designer clothing, athletic equipment, and collectables.

**2.** When you have a substantial list, discuss how these products are produced. Use these questions to generate discussion: "What is the

# The Word Will Be...

- 6:00 P.M. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7:00 P.M. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8:00 P.M. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9:00 P.M. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10:00 P.M. \_\_\_\_\_
- 11:00 P.M. \_\_\_\_\_
- Midnight \_\_\_\_\_

☉ How many of these activities would be affected by darkness?

☉ How would this darkness affect your mood, eating patterns, or sleep?

## Closing Reflection

*God of justice: We know there is much wrong with the world. We do not love our neighbor as we should. We forget to take care of the earth you charged us to manage. We allow injustice to continue or ignore it in hopes that someone else will fix it. Empower us, we pray, and remind us that we are your children and are gifted by you to be an agent of change in the world. In your holy name. Amen.*

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production process? Where are the components made? assembled? Are workers treated fairly?"

**3.** Say: "Amos was upset by the people's obsession with gaining wealth—'mak[ing] the ephah small and the shekel great' and 'practic[ing] deceit with false balances' (verse 5,

NRSV). So, what do these phrases mean?" (They were cooking the books to benefit the wealthy.) Continue: "The people who benefited from these actions considered this 'smart business.' What smart business practices today further injustice?" (For example, the business will make more money if workers are paid less, but is

THE WORD WILL BE ...

that just?) Ask, "What consequences do we as a country and world face for making these decisions?"

**4.** Say: "Amos was also troubled by the people's lack of concern for time set aside for God and for others. The references to time in verse 5 suggest that the people wanted the sabbath and holy holidays to be over so they could continue selling their wares."

**5.** Point out the timeline in the student book. Ask youth to consider which activities they could shorten or omit in order to devote time to helping others. If there is time, talk about the last two questions.

## Closing Reflection

(3–5 minutes)

**1.** Say: "All month we've identified injustices in our community and world. God calls us to change the world, but God does not expect one person to do everything. Focus on issues that are meaningful and contribute in the best way possible."

**2.** Lead youth in saying together the prayer printed in the student book.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- Plan to visit a local homeless shelter, food pantry, or meal service for the poor. If possible, arrange for students to participate in the ministry by cleaning, serving a meal, or organizing food. Remind students to speak with kindness to all they meet. Debrief the students' experiences.

### Older Youth

- Encourage youth to plan and organize a food, clothing, or funds drive. Be sure each student participates and enlist church support.

# U:2 Micah Calls for Justice Among Unjust People

## Overview

The Old Testament contains stories about many prophets who were chosen to deliver God's messages to the people. Prophets were often chosen for a specific purpose or for a certain place and time. God chose Micah to speak to the Israelite people in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) following the fall of the

Northern Kingdom (Israel) to the Assyrians. Micah's job was to warn the people of Judah that unless they changed their ways, they faced a fate similar to Israel's. Amidst the gloom of his message, Micah interjected hope by assuring them that God would remain faithful to the people.

## S1//: No Rest for the Wicked

07/05/15

**Key Verse:** "Arise and go; for this is no place to rest, because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction." —Micah 2:10 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** As God's people, we are called to act justly.

### Bible Background:

**Session 1** explores Micah's message to the people of Judah that God was angry about their unjust actions. Micah reminded God's people of the Northern Kingdom's fall and foretold that the fall of Judah would be God's punishment for disobedience. How is a God of punishment compatible with a God of mercy and forgiveness? God is merciful and forgiving (as Micah reminded God's people in later chapters), but that does not mean that people can behave badly toward others and expect God to turn a blind eye. Disobedience has negative consequences. The message of a just God is a hopeful message for those who are suffering abuse caused by others. Although Micah described a punishing God, we must not interpret this to mean that all bad things that happen are by God's design. Micah explained that sometimes people suffer as a result of others' actions—not because of God's actions.

## S2//: No Tolerance

07/12/15

**Key Verse:** "[T]he seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God." —Micah 3:7 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** Even leaders must follow the rules.

### Bible Background:

In **Session 2** the focus is on the third chapter of Micah in which the prophet condemned the actions of certain leaders and then delivered warnings about God's response. Micah first addressed the political and judicial rulers of Judah. These leaders were appointed to make sure that all citizens were treated fairly and equally. Micah used harsh language, comparing them to cannibals, to describe how they had become deaf to the people's cries. Micah described a fitting punishment: Someday God will be silent in response to their cries for help. Next, Micah addressed the prophets who had begun delivering only words the people wanted to hear instead of delivering God's true message. Since these prophets were ignoring God's words, Micah predicted they would fall into darkness and no longer receive God's message. Finally, Micah addressed priests, rulers, and prophets, accusing them of taking bribes and hiding behind the promise of God's covenant. Micah warned them that since Jerusalem had been built upon wrongdoing, the city would be destroyed.

Is Micah speaking to the people of his time, or is he speaking to us? Corrupt leaders, those in power taking bribes, people suffering as a result of others' abuse of power—it almost sounds like Micah had been reading today's newspapers. Micah called on his listeners to stand up to injustice. Are we listening today?

07/19/15

### S3//: Justice, Love, and Humility

**Key Verse:** "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"  
—Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** Living in obedience to God is the best offering we can give.

#### Bible Background:

Chapter 6 of Micah repeats the warning messages delivered in Chapters 1—3, evoking courtroom images. God is bringing a lawsuit against God's people and serves as prosecutor and judge, reciting the charges brought against the people and ultimately delivering their sentence. The mountains and hills serve as the jury witnessing the drama. There is precedence for the use of these jurors in biblical texts such as Psalm 50:4 when God "calls to the heavens above and to the earth" (NRSV) to listen to charges against God's people. **Session 3** reminds us that God's accusations against Israel are not new. Once again God's people had failed to keep their part of the covenant. Just as God had reminded their ancestors, God reminded the Israelites that they had forgotten all that God had done for them.

### S4//: God Shows Clemency

07/26/15

**Key Verse:** "He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." —Micah 7:19 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** God is merciful, forgiving, and loving.

#### Bible Background:

Looking only at the Scriptures we have explored thus far, one might think that Micah delivered nothing but harsh words to God's people. However, in **Session 4**, Micah spoke words of hope for the future. There is a tension in the Book of Micah between justice and mercy. On the one hand, God has judged God's people and they have fallen short. A God of justice cannot ignore the transgressions of God's people. On the other hand, God is saddened by the wrongdoing of the people. God's merciful nature longs for the people to repent, longs to offer forgiveness and move forward in covenant relationship. Micah ended on a hopeful note, describing a God of compassion, forgiveness, mercy, faithfulness, loyalty, and love.

## Supplies

**All Sessions: Bibles, student books, pens or pencils**

#### S1//:

- \_\_\_ large sheet of mural paper
- \_\_\_ markers
- \_\_\_ local and world news stories from recent newspapers
- \_\_\_ markerboard

**S2//:** no additional supplies needed

**S3//:** no additional supplies needed

**S4//:** no additional supplies needed

#### Notes:

## Something to Think About . . .

Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God. These instructions are reassuring and challenging at the same time. There is reassurance in knowing that there is not a single thing that must be done to win God's approval—no need to worry about making the correct sacrifice. The challenge is that these words describe a way of life. Obedience to God is not a one-time action; obedience requires commitment each day of our lives.

## TAKE-AWAY

As God's people, we are called to act justly.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

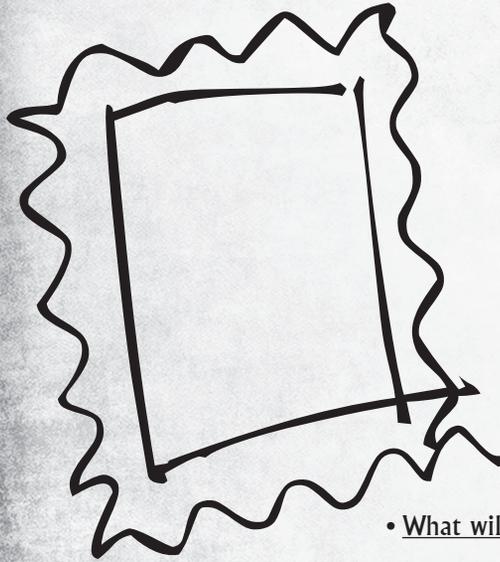
- **Prophets were not** fortune tellers. Their job was not to foretell specific events but instead to spell out the future consequences of continuing disobedience. True prophets delivered God's messages in an attempt to call people back to a life of following and worshipping God.

- **Micah witnessed the** fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C. Micah's prophecies were aimed at convincing the people of Judah to repent so that the Southern Kingdom would not also fall to Assyria.

- **During the time** Micah lived, some of God's people were becoming wealthy. However, instead of using their wealth to help those who were less fortunate, they were concentrating their efforts on becoming even wealthier. Sadly, their plans for doing so included seizing land that belonged to others.

- **According to Israel's** tradition, land ownership was handed down from generation to generation, but true ownership of the land belonged to God. There were special laws that prohibited seizure of someone else's property. Land-grabbing strategies were considered an affront to God.

## S:1 No Rest for the Wicked



### Imagine Justice

You have inherited a valuable painting from your grandparents. Until you received it the painting hung in your grandparents' house for as long as you can remember. Today you discovered that your grandfather stole the painting from someone else.

- Inside the frame, describe your feelings about the painting.

- What will you do with the painting now?

## The Word Was...

### Micah 2:4-11 (NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> On that day they shall take up a taunt song against you, and wail with bitter lamentation, and say, "We are utterly ruined;

the LORD alters the inheritance of my people; how he removes it from me! Among our captors he parcels out our fields."

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 23 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Imagine Justice

(5-10 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of mural paper, markers

*Before the class session:* In the center of a large sheet of mural paper, draw an oval and write the word *Justice* inside it. Next, draw several lines extending from the oval, then draw an oval at the end of each of those

5 Therefore you will have no one to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the LORD.

6 "Do not preach"—thus they preach—"one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us."

7 Should this be said, O house of Jacob? Is the LORD's patience exhausted? Are these his doings? Do not my words do good to one who walks uprightly?

8 But you rise up against my people as an enemy; you strip the robe from the peaceful, from those who pass by trustingly with no thought of war.

9 The women of my people you drive out from their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away my glory forever.

10 Arise and go; for this is no place to rest, because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction.

11 If someone were to go about uttering empty falsehoods, saying, "I will preach to you of wine and strong drink," such a one would be the preacher for this people!

6 "They mustn't preach!" so they preach. "They mustn't preach of such things! Disgrace won't overtake us."

7 (Should this be said, house of Jacob?) "Is the LORD's patience cut short? Are these his deeds?" Don't my words help the one who behaves righteously?

8 But yesterday, my people, the LORD rose up as an enemy. You strip off the glorious clothes from trusting passersby, those who reject war.

9 You drive out the women of my people, each from her cherished house; from their young children you take away my splendor forever.

10 Rise up and go! This can't be the resting place; because of its uncleanness, it destroys and the destruction is horrific.

11 If someone were to go about inspired and say deceitfully: "I will preach to you for wine and liquor," such a one would be the preacher for this people!

**Micah 2:4-11**  
**(Common English Bible)**

4 On that day, a taunt will be raised against you; someone will wail bitterly: "We are utterly destroyed! He exchanges the portion of my people; he removes what belongs to me; he gives away our fields to a rebel."

5 Therefore, you will have no one to set boundary lines by lot in the LORD's assembly.

**Key Verse**

**"Arise and go; for this is no place to rest, because of uncleanness that destroys with a grievous destruction."**  
—Micah 2:10 (NRSV)

lines. Finally, draw two or three lines extending from each of the new ovals and an oval at the end of each.

1. Invite the youth to write, in the ovals extending from the center, the first words that come to mind when they hear the word *justice*. For each of the new words, encourage the youth to write, in the adjoining ovals, words that come to mind when they hear those words.

2. When they are finished, say: "You have created a word web. Word webs can be useful when considering a word's meaning. Are there any words on this word web that you are surprised to see associated with the word *justice*?"

3. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the scenario in the student book before youth answer the related questions.

4. When most everyone is finished, encourage youth to tell and talk about their responses with one another.

Note: If possible, display the students' word web during the entire month of study.

**Micah the Prophet**  
**(10 minutes)**

1. Say: "This month we will study the teachings of the prophet Micah. Micah lived approximately 2700 years ago in Judah. Judah was the name for the southern portion of the area the Israelites settled after escaping from Egypt."

2. Ask youth to turn to the Book of Micah in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read aloud Micah 2:1-3.

3. Say: "This is the introduction to today's Bible Lesson. Micah is delivering a message from God to people who are acting unjustly."

4. Now ask a youth to read aloud either the NRSV or the CEB version of the Bible Lesson printed in the student book. Then say: "During the time Micah lived, the Northern Kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians. Micah warned the people of Judah that a similar fate awaited them if they didn't change their ways."

**Micah's Message**  
**(10-15 minutes)**

1. Say: "Sometimes it can be difficult to figure out who is speaking when reading the Book of Micah. At various times the prophet speaks as himself, sometimes he delivers messages from God, and other times he puts words in the mouths of the people of Judah."

## THE WORD IS...

**2.** Point out the script in the student book. Enlist volunteers to read aloud the parts of Micah and God's Word. Remaining youth will read aloud the part of the people of Judah.

**3.** Ask: "If you had been among Micah's original listeners, hearing him tell you that God was going to punish you for doing wrong, what would have been your reaction? Would you have believed Micah's message?"

**4.** Ask youth to use the Bible Lesson and the script to identify the actions of the people of Judah as described by Micah and list them in the appropriate box at the bottom of the page in the student book. (Possible answers are: *seizing land that belonged to others, bullying, oppressing women and children, and treating people unfairly.*) Then ask youth to summarize God's message through Micah and write it in the second box. Ask, "What do you think God's message is to the people who behave in similar unjust ways today?"

### A Plan of Action

(10–15 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* world and local news sections of recent newspapers, markerboard, markers

**1.** Say: "As you can see from the previous activity, the people of Judah had acted unjustly. Micah pointed out that the wealthy people were focusing on acquiring more wealth rather than on helping people who were less fortunate."

**2.** Discuss the following questions:

- What criteria would you use to decide if an action is just or unjust?
- Does everyone define *justice* the same way?
- Is it always clear whether a particular action is just or unjust?

## The Word Is...

### Micah's Message

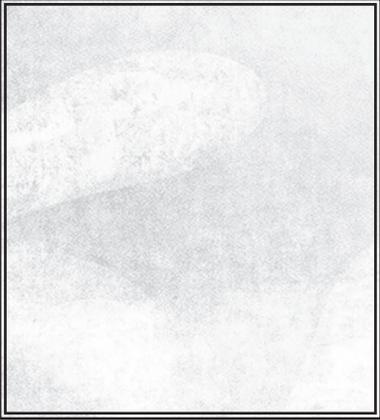
**MICAH** (*to the people of Judah*): I feel sorry for you people who lie in bed and dream up new ways to get rich. You get up in the morning, bully your neighbor, and take property that isn't yours. You treat people unfairly. God has a message for you.

**GOD'S WORD** (*as spoken through Micah*): I am planning a punishment for you—one from which you cannot escape. On that day others will mock you and you will cry and say, "Our lives are ruined!" No one will speak up for you.

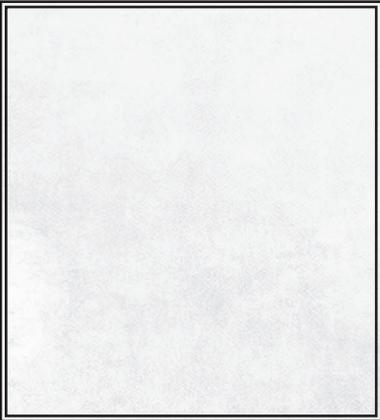
**PEOPLE OF JUDAH** (*to Micah*): Don't talk like that! God will not destroy us. We are God's covenant people. God is on the side of good people.

**GOD'S WORD** (*as spoken through Micah*): Who are you calling good people? You are not following my ways. You are hurting women and children and those who want to live in peace. Leave this place! It is no longer the land I promised because you have ruined it. You want to follow the false prophets who tell you to do whatever you want.

#### UNJUST ACTIONS



#### GOD'S MESSAGE



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**3.** Hand out the newspapers and encourage youth to search for examples of people acting justly and unjustly. Ask each student to choose a news article to present to the group.

**4.** For each article presented, allow time for youth to decide the

appropriate justice for the situation described.

**5.** When all the articles have been presented, say: "It is one thing to identify examples of injustice in the world but, as God's people, we are called to work towards justice for all people." Brainstorm and list on a

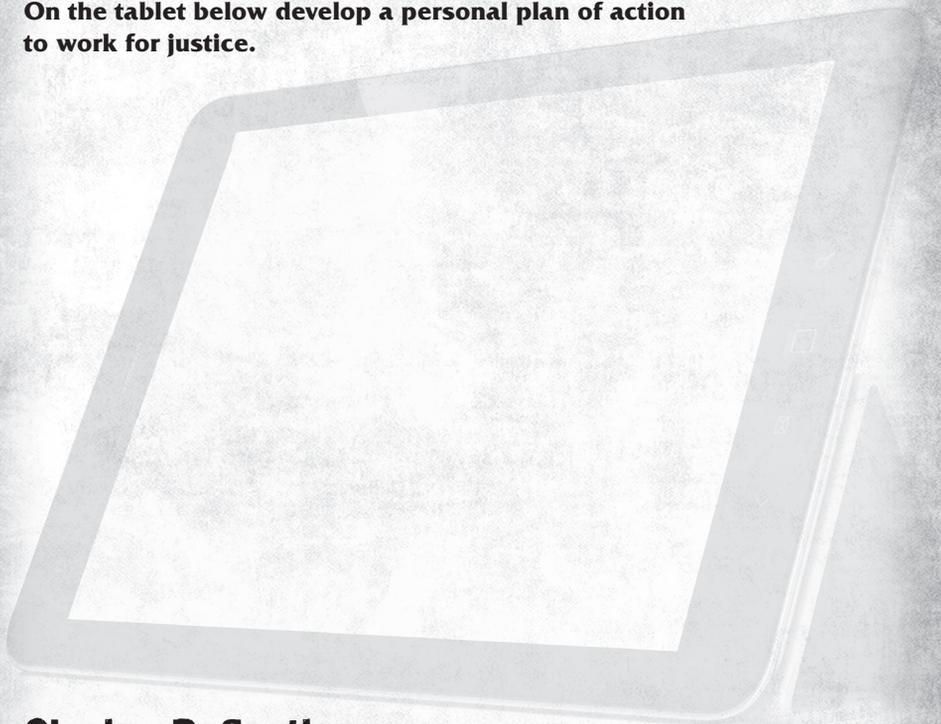
# The Word Will Be...

## A Plan of Action

Situation:

What would be justice in this situation:

On the tablet below develop a personal plan of action to work for justice.



## Closing Reflection

Loving God, there is so much injustice in the world that we sometimes become discouraged and feel like giving up. Help us remember that you call us to continue to work toward justice in your world. Amen.

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markerboard situations of injustice that youth can address, as well as actions they could take to work towards justice in each situation.

6. After compiling a substantial list, say, "Working for justice in these situations will take time." Ask each youth to choose one of the situations

on the list and use the space in the student book to develop a personal plan of action to work for justice.

## Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

1. Invite each youth to tell the situation of injustice he or she has

THE WORD WILL BE ...

decided to address. Then say: "As we close with prayer today, let's lift up all of the situations we have named, as well as other areas of injustice that we have not specifically named."

2. Pray together the prayer in the student book. Encourage youth to carry out their plans of action.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- Instruct students to write the word *justice* down the left side of a piece of paper. Encourage them to think of a word or phrase related to justice that begins with each letter of the word. After a few minutes, call on youth to show their acrostics. Here's a sample:

**J**oyful outcomes  
**U**nconditional love  
**S**haring resources  
**T**reating others as equals  
**I** can help  
**C**reating opportunities  
**E**rasing inequalities

### Older Youth

1. Say, "Micah had some strong words, even calling people to leave where they were as a protest of the injustice around them." Ask the following:

- What are some of the ways that we can "leave" our culture and live differently?
- What issues do you think followers of Jesus are known to care about?
- What issues of justice are important to you? How do those issues shape how you live your life?

2. Now spend a few minutes identifying some followers of Jesus who can be role models for us in how they dealt with injustice.

## TAKE-AWAY

Even leaders have to follow the rules.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **The prophets' job** was to remind people how God wanted them to live, and they were allowed to receive money or goods for performing their duties. Unfortunately, some of their messages were influenced by the source of their payment instead of God's Spirit.
- **The prophets and** priests who received Micah's words of warning used God's covenant promise to claim protection from retribution. Although God had repeatedly promised Israel that they would be God's covenant people, they conveniently neglected the second part of the covenant—their responsibility to worship only God and obey God's laws.
- **Did Micah's predictions** come true? The prophet Jeremiah claimed that God turned aside the disaster Micah had promised because King Hezekiah heeded Micah's words and repented. Micah's prophecy was effective in achieving the desired result—the people turned back to God. However, the Temple in Jerusalem was eventually destroyed, so one could say that Micah's prophecy did come true, although later than he had expected.
- **At this point** in time, the city of Jerusalem has never been completely destroyed. Though it has a long history of conflicts, a city has existed there since biblical times.

## S:2 No Tolerance

### Break the Code

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</CODE>  
</CODE>



Decode the following words to discover who the prophet Micah called out for not following God's ways. A=1, B=2, C=3, and so on.

18 - 21 - 12 - 5 - 19 \_\_\_\_\_

10 - 21 - 4 - 7 - 5 - 19 \_\_\_\_\_

16 - 18 - 15 - 16 - 8 - 5 - 20 - 19 \_\_\_\_\_

16 - 18 - 9 - 5 - 19 - 20 - 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have decoded the words, write the letters corresponding to the boxed numbers in order on the blanks below to discover the common link between these groups of people.

\_\_\_\_\_ A \_\_\_\_\_

## The Word Was...

### Micah 3:5-12 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat,

but declare war against those who put nothing into their mouths.  
<sup>6</sup> Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without revelation.

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 23 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Break the Code (5-10 minutes)

1. Say, "Today we will read more of Micah's prophecies that were directed at specific groups of people."
2. Allow time for youth to decode the words in the student book, following the instructions. (Answers: *rules, judges, prophets, priests, leaders.*)

## Micah's Matchup

(10 minutes)

1. Say: "Last week's Bible Lesson described the prophet Micah telling the people that God was unhappy with their unjust ways. In today's Bible Lesson, Micah directs his message to the unjust leaders of those people."

2. Invite each youth to read silently the NRSV or CEB version of the Bible Lesson in the student book. When everyone is ready, tell youth to partner up and complete the activity on page 30 in the student book. Review answers as a group. (Answers: verse 4, verses 6-7, verse 12)

3. Say, "In verse 8, Micah changes the focus of his message and talks about himself." Ask: "What does Micah say about himself?" (*He is filled with the Spirit and speaks for God.*) "How does this contrast with the false prophets Micah describes?" (*Micah does not change God's message to make his listeners happy.*)

4. Say: "Being a prophet in biblical times was often a lonely task. How do you think Micah was regarded by the following groups of people: rulers, other prophets, priests, and those who were poor as a result of injustice?"

## Crime and Punishment

(10-15 minutes)

1. Say: "Chapter 3 of Micah is divided into three sections. In each section Micah targets a group of leaders, explains how they have been corrupted, and then describes God's punishment."

2. Assign youth to small groups or pairs to complete the chart on page 30 in the student book. Encourage students to refer to the Bible Lesson as they work.

The sun shall go down upon the prophets,  
and the day shall be black over them;  
7 The seers shall be disgraced,  
and the diviners put to shame;  
they shall all cover their lips,  
for there is no answer from God.  
8 But as for me, I am filled with power,  
with the spirit of the LORD,  
and with justice and might,  
to declare to Jacob his transgression  
and to Israel his sin.  
9 Hear this, you rulers of the  
house of Jacob  
and chiefs of the house of Israel,  
who abhor justice  
and pervert all equity,  
10 who build Zion with blood  
and Jerusalem with wrong!  
11 Its rulers give judgment for a bribe,  
its priests teach for a price,  
its prophets give oracles for money;  
yet they lean upon the LORD and say,  
"Surely the LORD is with us!  
No harm shall come upon us."  
12 Therefore because of you  
Zion shall be plowed as a field;  
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,  
and the mountain of the house  
a wooded height.

The sun will set on the prophets;  
the day will be dark upon them.  
7 Those seeing visions will be ashamed,  
and the diviners disgraced;  
they will all cover their upper lips,  
for there will be no answer from God.  
8 But me! I am filled with power,  
with the spirit of the Lord,  
with justice and might,  
to declare to Jacob his wrongdoing  
and to Israel his sin!  
9 Hear this, leaders of the house of Jacob,  
rulers of the house of Israel,  
you who reject justice  
and make crooked all that is straight,  
10 who build Zion with bloodshed  
and Jerusalem with injustice!  
11 Her officials give justice for a bribe,  
and her priests teach for hire.  
Her prophets offer divination for silver,  
yet they rely on the LORD, saying,  
"Isn't the LORD in our midst?  
Evil won't come upon us!"  
12 Therefore, because of you,  
Zion will be plowed like a field,  
Jerusalem will become piles of rubble,  
and the temple mount will become  
an overgrown mound.

### Micah 3:5-12 (Common English Bible)

5 The LORD proclaims  
concerning the prophets,  
those who lead my people astray,  
those who chew with their teeth  
and then proclaim "Peace!"  
but stir up war against the one  
who puts nothing in their mouths:  
6 Therefore, it will become night for you,  
without vision, only darkness  
without divination!

## Key Verse

"[T]he seers shall be disgraced  
and the diviners put to  
shame; they shall all cover  
their lips, for there is no  
answer from God."  
—Micah 3:7 (NRSV)

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3. When most everyone is finished, say, "Micah spoke to the leaders of the day." Ask:

- Who are our leaders today?
- What occupation in our society corresponds to each of these groups? (*rulers=elected officials, military leaders; judges=judges; prophets=our society doesn't have a specific occupation that corresponds to prophet, though*

there are those who attempt to tell people how to live their lives; *priests=ministers, pastors*)

- If you wanted to deliver a message to the people we have named, how would you do that?

## THE WORD IS...

**3.** Review the answers as a group. Then say: "One of the primary responsibilities of a prophet in biblical times was to remind the people to obey God and follow God's laws." Ask: "How does each crime listed in the chart show disobedience to God? How does each punishment Micah describes fit the crime attributed to each group of leaders?" (See answers below.)

TARGET AUDIENCE	CRIME	PUNISHMENT
3:1 political leaders and judges	3:2-3 treating people unfairly and ignoring cries for help	3:2-3 God will stop answering their prayers.
3:5 prophets	3:2-3 telling people what they want to hear instead of delivering God's message	3:2-3 God will no longer send them revelations.
3:9, 11 rulers, priests, prophets	3:9-11 acting unjustly and violently, accepting bribes	3:12 Jerusalem will be destroyed.

## Not Only in Bible Times (15 minutes)

**1.** Say: "Micah spoke of God's punishment for unjust actions. The God described by Micah in this chapter could be described as a 'God of wrath,' a God who is angry with the people's disobedience."

**2.** Ask students to review the last half of verse 11 and ask, "What was the leaders' response to Micah's accusations?" (*Nothing will hurt us because God is with us!*)

**3.** Say: "Essentially the leaders said, 'God is too merciful to punish us.'" Lead a discussion around the following questions:

- Which image of God is more popular today: God of mercy or God of wrath?
- Does belief in a merciful and forgiving God mean behavior doesn't matter?
- Are the ideas of a merciful God and a wrathful God compatible?

## The Word Is...

### Micah's Matchup

Micah's elaborate and descriptive language is sometimes difficult to understand. Micah predicted the punishments listed below for the leaders who were not following God's ways. Match each punishment with the verse(s) in Micah 3 (NRSV) that predicts this result.

▲ God will stop answering their prayers.—Verse \_\_\_\_\_

▲ God will no longer send them revelations.—Verse \_\_\_\_\_

▲ Jerusalem will be destroyed.—Verse \_\_\_\_\_

### Crime and Punishment

Complete the chart using Chapter 3 in Micah.

Target Audience	Crime	Punishment
3:1 political leaders and judges	3:2-3 treating people unfairly and ignoring their cries for help	

Can God display both mercy and wrath?

- In what situations might people need the message of a merciful God?
- Are there situations in which people might need to hear the message of a wrathful God?

**4.** Say, "Unfortunately, corrupt leaders were not unique to the time in which Micah lived." Divide youth into four groups and assign each one of the people profiled in the student book. Ask each group to use the information provided, along with any personal knowledge about the person assigned, to write, in the space provided, a

# The Word Will Be...

## Not Only in Bible Times

### Spiro Agnew (1918-1996)

- 39th Vice-President of the United States
- Charged with extortion, tax fraud, bribery, and conspiracy
- Resigned from the vice-presidency and pleaded no contest

### Bernard Madoff (1938- )

- Former stockbroker, investment adviser, chairman of NASDAQ
- Admitted to operating a Ponzi scheme that is considered to be the largest financial fraud in U.S. history
- Convicted of fraud

### Jerry Falwell (1933-2007)

- Pastor and televangelist
- Church investigated and charged with fraud and deceit for issuance of unsecured church bonds
- Court ruled that laws had been broken; no proof the wrongdoing was intentional

### Ferdinand Marcos (1917-1989)

- President of the Philippines, 1965-1986
- Indicted in a racketeering case for embezzling more than \$100 million from the Philippines
- Stole an estimated \$10 billion from the Filipino treasury

Write a message Micah might have delivered to your assigned person. Follow Micah's format of naming the target audience, listing the misdeeds, and describing God's response. (If you need more room, use page 64.)

## Closing Reflection

Together, let us pray for the world, its people and its leaders . . . the church and its leaders . . . and modern-day prophets, as well as those who hear their messages. Amen.

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message Micah might have delivered to that person. Encourage groups to follow Micah's format of naming the target audience, listing the misdeeds, and describing God's response.

5. When groups are ready, call on each to read aloud and talk about the messages they have written.

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

1. Say: "Thinking about corruption among our leaders can lead to a sense of helplessness. It took courage on Micah's part to speak out against those in power."

THE WORD WILL BE . . .

2. Ask, "What are some ways that you could speak out against corruption?" Wait for answers, then say: "Prayer is something we can always do. We can pray for God to be at work in the words and actions of the church and our world leaders."

3. Lead youth in saying the prayer printed in the student book, pausing for a few moments of silent prayer as each category is mentioned.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

1. Assign youth to small groups and hand out paper. Instruct each group to compile a list of qualities of good leaders. Allow only one minute for work.
2. Call time and invite groups to take turns calling out qualities on their lists. Instruct groups to cross off any quality on their lists that also appears on another group's list.
3. After all groups have shared, ask each group to count the number of unique items remaining on its list. Say, "This is your group's score."
4. Repeat the activity but this time instruct groups to list qualities of corrupt leaders. Follow the same process.

### Older Youth

1. Lead the youth in brainstorming the kinds of disasters people blame on the following: church leaders, political leaders, victims, personal choices, and God.
2. Ask, "What would you say to someone who claims that every bad thing that happens is a punishment from God?"

## TAKE-AWAY

Living in obedience to God is the best offering we can give.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **Offering sacrifices to** the gods was a common practice in the ancient world. Sacrifices were made to express thanks, to ask for something, or to keep the gods from becoming angry.
- **The laws God** gave to Moses required specific kinds of offerings. The actual sacrifice depended on the reason for the offering and the socioeconomic status of the giver.
- **The Israelites assumed** that whatever they had done wrong, the appropriate sacrifice would make it right with God. The amounts suggested for sacrifice in Micah 6:7 are ridiculously extravagant. Even a wealthy person at the time would not have offered thousands of rams. Also, Mosaic law forbade human sacrifice (see Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5).
- **In Micah 6:4-5**, God reminds the Israelites of a few times they were rescued by God. The mention of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam refers to God bringing the Israelites safely out of Egypt. King Balak from Moab hired the prophet Balaam to place a curse on the Israelites. God intervened and Balaam refused to curse them. The phrase, "What happened from Shittim to Gilgal" (verse 5c, NRSV) is a reminder of God bringing the Israelites across the Jordan River to the Promised Land.

## S:3 Justice, Love, and Humility

### Attitude of Gratitude

# Thank You

## The Word Was...

### Micah 6:3-8 (NRSV)

<sup>3</sup> "O my people, what have I done to you?"

In what have I wearied you?

Answer me!

<sup>4</sup> For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

and redeemed you from the house of slavery;

and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

<sup>5</sup> O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him,

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 23 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Attitude of Gratitude (5-10 minutes)

1. Say: "Think about everything you have done in the past week. Consider everyone who has helped you in any way, big or small, or has done something for you this week—from the person who sold you a movie ticket to the person who cooked supper for you last night."

and what happened from  
Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving  
acts of the Lord.”

<sup>6</sup> “With what shall I come before  
the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with  
burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with  
thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my  
transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin  
of my soul?”

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

### **Micah 6:3-8** **(Common English Bible)**

<sup>3</sup> “My people, what did I ever do to you?  
How have I wearied you? Answer me!

<sup>4</sup> I brought you up out of the land of Egypt;  
I redeemed you  
from the house of slavery.  
I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam  
before you.

<sup>5</sup> My people, remember what  
Moab’s King Balak had planned,  
and how Balaam, Beor’s son,  
answered him!  
Remember everything  
from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you might learn to recognize  
the righteous acts of the LORD!

<sup>6</sup> With what should I approach the LORD  
and bow down before God on high?  
Should I come before him  
with entirely burned offerings,  
with year-old calves?

<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased  
with thousands of rams,  
with many torrents of oil?  
Should I give my oldest child  
for my crime;  
the fruit of my body  
for the sin of my spirit?

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, human one,  
what is good and  
what the LORD requires from you:  
to do justice, embrace faithful love,  
and walk humbly with your God.”

❖  
**Do you believe  
God is a  
just God?**  
❖

### **Key Verse**

“He has told you, O mortal,  
what is good;  
and what does the LORD  
require of you  
but to do justice, and to  
love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with  
your God?”

—Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

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Now ask youth to write the names of  
these people inside, over, and around  
the letters of the words *thank you* in  
the student book.

**2.** Ask and discuss the following  
questions:

- Did you include God in your list?  
Why or Why not?

- How many of these people did  
you thank for the things they did  
for you?
- How does it make you feel when  
you do something for someone  
and the person isn’t grateful?
- How do you feel when someone  
expresses gratitude for something  
you’ve done?
- What does a sense of gratitude  
do for the person expressing

**THE WORD WAS...**

gratitude? for the person  
receiving thanks?

### **Micah’s Courtroom Drama**

**(10 minutes)**

**1.** Make sure everyone has  
access to a Bible, then ask youth  
to turn to Micah 6. Say: “Micah’s  
message in this chapter is similar  
to the messages he delivered  
in previous chapters. Micah  
reminds the people that they are  
not following God’s laws. In this  
chapter the message is delivered as  
a courtroom drama.”

**2.** Point out the list of cast  
members (in order of appearance)  
on page 34 in the student book.  
Say: “As we read today’s Bible  
Lesson, try to determine which cast  
member is speaking in each verse.”  
Call on youth to read aloud Micah  
6, one verse at a time.

**3.** After the Bible reading, work  
together to assign verses to each  
cast member in the courtroom  
drama (*prosecutor: 1-5, 9-12; jury:  
silent; defendant: 6-7; prophet: 8;  
judge: 13-16*). When all speaking  
parts have been determined and  
assigned, allow each cast member  
to read aloud the appropriate  
verses for his or her part.

### **God’s Courtroom**

**(10-15 minutes)**

**1.** Ask youth to identify the  
charge(s) God is bringing against  
the people of Judah by looking at  
verses 1-5 and 9-12, then writing  
the answers on page 34 in the  
student book.

**2.** Say: “Essentially God is suing  
the people for breach of covenant.  
The people have ignored the many  
times God rescued them in the  
past and have turned away from  
following God’s laws.”

# THE WORD IS...

3. Talk with the youth about sacrificial offerings using the "Bible Background" information. Then say: "God's people realized that God was upset with them and that they had no adequate defense. So, instead, they asked questions."

4. Now ask youth to review verses 6-7 and determine the defense offered by the people and write that answer in the student book.

5. Say: "The people of Judah are under the impression that whatever they did to make God mad, they can make it right if they offer the appropriate sacrifice."

6. Finally, ask youth to look over verses 13-16 and determine God's sentence against the people and write the answer in the student book.

7. Allow a few minutes for youth to answer the question in the student book. Talk about whether they believe God is a just God, and why.

## What God Wants

(15 minutes)

1. Say: "Amid the drama of the courtroom scene, Micah speaks. The people have asked what sacrifice they must make to appease God. Micah explains that God prefers their obedience to God's laws over any sacrifice."

2. Invite a volunteer to read aloud the Key Verse on page 33 in the student book. Then divide youth into three groups and assign each one of the following instructions: *Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God.* Each group should discuss its assigned sentence, considering its meaning and what it would look like for someone to follow that instruction. Suggest youth make notes around the statements in the student book, then call on each group to report.

# The Word Is...

## Micah's Courtroom Drama

Cast (in order of appearance):

Prosecutor..... God  
Jury..... Mountains and Hills  
Defendant..... People of Judah  
Prophet..... Micah  
Judge..... God

## God's Courtroom

Charge(s):

Defense:

Sentence:

◆ Prior to delivering the sentence, God explains in Micah 6:9-12 why the sentence is justified. Is God a just judge?

3. Ask youth to turn to page 3 in the student book. Allow time for youth to quietly read and reflect on the devotion.

4. When most youth look to be finished reading, lead a discussion using the following questions:

- God accused the people of forgetting God's past blessings. How important is remembering God's goodness when we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?
- You may have heard the saying, "It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission." What does this

# The Word Will Be...

## What God Wants

Consider the meaning of your assigned statement and what it would look like for someone to follow that instruction. Make notes around the statements.



# LOVE KINDNESS.

Walk humbly with your God.

## Closing Reflection

Choose one specific way you can live out the task of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God in the upcoming week.

Write your idea using 140 characters or less along with the hashtag #whatGodwants.

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mean? How does this statement agree or conflict with Micah's message of what God wants?

- Micah's summary of what God wants is simple and straightforward. What circumstances or realities make it challenging to do what God wants?

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

1. Say, "Think about one specific way you can live out the task of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God in the upcoming week." Invite youth to write their ideas in the student book using 140

THE WORD WILL BE ...

characters or less, along with the hashtag #whatGodwants.

2. Ask youth to stand in a circle, then step forward and place their closed student books in the center. Lead youth in saying the following prayer, one phrase at a time: "God, we realize that you prefer our obedience to offerings of sacrifice. Today we offer to you our ideas about how we can live as you desire. We know what you want. Help us to carry through on our intentions to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Amen."

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- Gather copies of old magazines and the following art supplies: posterboard, markers, scissors, and glue sticks or tape. Ask youth to look through the magazines and cut out the following words or letters to spell: *Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God.* Use the cutouts to design a poster.

### Older Youth

1. Say: "We do not have prophets like Micah today, but we do have people and organizations who try to tell us how we should live our lives. Even during Micah's time, not all prophets spoke for God; some were false prophets." Ask, "Who are the true and false 'prophets' in our society?"

2. As a class, write on a markerboard a three-point summary of society's messages about how we should live our lives. Compare and contrast the summary with Micah's message in verse 8.

## TAKE-AWAY

God is merciful,  
forgiving, and loving.

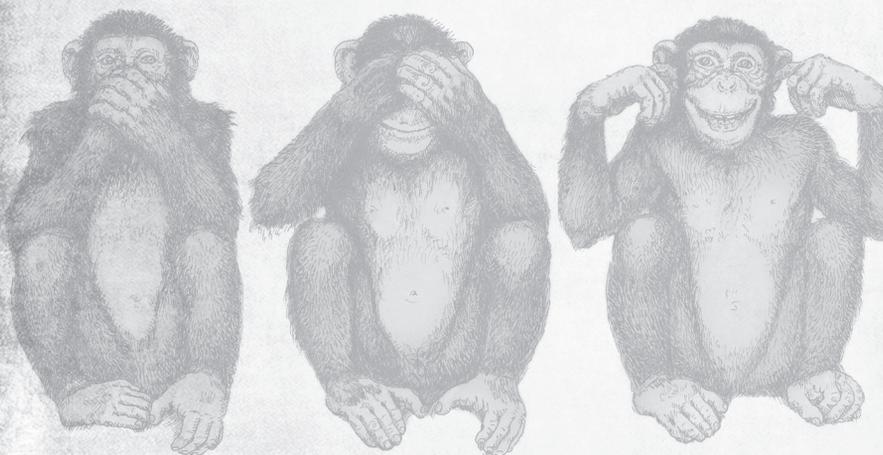
## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **The passage Micah 7:8-17** is part of a section that has been identified as a worship liturgy, in particular a liturgy of atonement.
- **Micah, Chapter 7** was probably written after 586 B.C., during the time of Babylonian exile. Verses 11-12 promise that someday the exiled people will return to Judah.
- **As Jesus did** after him, Micah referred to God as the shepherd who would take care of the flock. See Micah 2:12, 5:4, and 7:14.
- **Micah 7:17 provides** two analogies to a lengthy biblical list describing ways God deals with sin. In this text God is said to “tread our iniquities under foot,” and “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (verse 19b-c, NRSV). Elsewhere in the Bible God “blots out your transgressions” (Isaiah 43:25, NRSV), has “swept away your transgressions like a cloud,” (Isaiah 44:22, NRSV), and hides God’s face from our sins (see Psalm 51:9).
- **Micah predicts that** the return of the exiles to Judah will be like a second exodus, similar to the first Exodus when God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. As happened then, when Israel’s enemies realized God’s power, their response at this time will be fear and trembling.

## S:4 God Shows Clemency

### Action or Inaction

- Do you see yourself in any of these monkeys?
- How do these monkeys illustrate the way some people react to injustice?



## The Word Was . . .

### Micah 7:14-20 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> Shepherd your people with your staff,  
the flock that belongs to you,  
which lives alone in a forest  
in the midst of a garden land;

let them feed in Bashan and Gilead  
as in the days of old.

<sup>15</sup> As in the days when you came  
out of the land of Egypt,  
show us marvelous things.

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 23 for a list of  
supplies for this session.

### Action or Inaction (5-10 minutes)

1. Ask youth to form a circle and select one person to stand in the middle. Explain the following rules of the game, “Elephant, Palm Tree, Monkey”: The person in the middle of the circle points to someone in the circle and says, “elephant,” or “palm tree,” or “monkey,” before counting

16 The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf;

17 they shall lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their fortresses; they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God, and they shall stand in fear of you.

18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency.

19 He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

20 You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

17 They will lick dust like the snake, like things that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling from their strongholds to the LORD our God; they will dread and fear you!

18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity, overlooking the sin of the few remaining for his inheritance? He doesn't hold on to his anger forever; he delights in faithful love.

19 He will once again have compassion on us; he will tread down our iniquities. You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea.

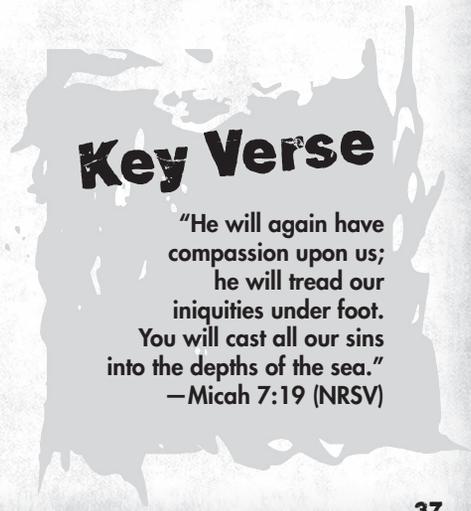
20 You will provide faithfulness to Jacob, faithful love to Abraham, as you swore to our ancestors a long time ago.

**Micah 7:14-20**  
**(Common English Bible)**

14 Shepherd your people with your staff, the sheep of your inheritance, those dwelling alone in a forest in the midst of Carmel. Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead, as a long time ago.

15 As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show Israel wonderful things.

16 Nations will see and be ashamed of all their strength; they will cover their mouths; their ears will be deaf.



to 10. The person pointed at and the two people on either side of that person have until the count of 10 to strike the appropriate pose, following these instructions.

- Elephant—The center person uses his/her arms to portray an elephant's trunk. The two people on either side of the center person form half circles with their arms to depict ears.

- Palm tree—All three players raise their arms straight up in the air. The two players on the sides lean slightly outward.
- Monkey—The person on the right of the center person places hands over eyes. The center person places hands on ears. The person on the left of the center person places hands on mouth.

**2.** Point out the picture of the monkeys in the student book. Say: "These three monkeys are like the monkeys in our game that portray the saying, 'See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.'"

**3.** Allow a few minutes for youth to answer the questions in the student book, then talk about the second question: *How do these monkeys describe the way some people react to injustice?*

**Message of Hope**  
**(10 minutes)**

**1.** Say: "So far Micah's messages have been words of warning. Micah warned the people that God would punish them if they did not change their ways. But not all of Micah's messages were gloomy. Today we will read a message of hope from Micah."

**2.** Explain that there may be some unfamiliar words in today's Bible Lesson. Ask for volunteers to read aloud the definitions of *clemency*, *compassion*, *iniquity*, and *mercy* on page 38 in the student book.

**3.** Allow youth to choose partners. Encourage partners to read aloud to each other the NRSV or the CEB version of the Bible Lesson, taking turns reading alternate verses. As one person reads, instruct the other to circle words or phrases in the passage that imply hope.

**4.** When partners have finished reading and marking the Bible Lesson, ask youth to call out the hopeful words and phrases they identified.

**Hope for the Future**  
**(10-15 minutes)**

**1.** Say: "Micah had warned the people of Judah that downfall was imminent if they continued to

## THE WORD IS...

disobey God. Judah was invaded by Babylon in 598 B.C. Over the next fifteen years, many of Jerusalem's leaders and skilled workers were taken to Babylon. This particular chapter of Micah may have been written after that period of time."

**2.** Divide youth into seven or fewer small groups or pairs. Assign each group one or two verses of the Bible Lesson. Say: "In verses 14-17, Micah asks God to lead the people and then describes what the future will be like when God brings the exiles back to Judah. In verses 18-20, Micah praises God."

**3.** Ask each group or pair to paraphrase its assigned verses, rewriting them on page 64 in the student book. When groups are ready, invite them to read aloud their paraphrased verses in order.

**4.** Ask the following questions:

- What is hopeful about these verses? (*They indicate that God will not abandon the people and will forgive them.*)
- What imagery is used in verse 19 to describe God's forgiveness of sin? (*God will stomp on our sins and throw them into the sea.*)

**5.** Brainstorm with youth additional images to illustrate God's treatment of our sin. Then ask each student to draw, in the space provided in the student book, a picture that represents God dealing with sin.

## Mercy Me

(15 minutes)

**1.** Lead the youth in a discussion using the following questions:

- What would the world be like if there were no justice and if wrongdoings were never punished?

## The Word Is...

### Message of Hope

**cleme**ncy – kind or merciful treatment of someone who deserves harsh punishment

**comp**assion – sympathetic awareness of others' distress accompanied by a desire to lessen it

**ini**quity – a wicked act or thing

**mer**cy – kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly, especially by someone with power

### Hope for the Future

In the space below draw a picture of one way God deals with sin.



- Would you want to live in such a world? Why or why not?
- 2.** Say: "Mercy is sometimes described as 'not getting what you deserve.'" Invite youth to reflect silently on a time when they "did not get what they deserved." Then ask, "How does it feel to be the recipient of mercy?"

**3.** Say: "Earlier Micah described God as demanding justice. Now Micah says that God's merciful nature ultimately prevails. We can be assured that God will never abandon us and will always forgive us." Point out the picture of the scale in the student book and allow time for youth to answer the questions.

# The Word Will Be...

## Mercy Me

- ? In what situations is the image of God as justice reassuring?
- ? In what situations is the image of God as justice unsettling?
- ? In what situations is the image of God as mercy reassuring?
- ? Are there any situations in which the image of God as mercy is unsettling?

## Closing Reflection

What message would you share with someone who is in need of hope? Write this message of hope in the space below.

# HOPE

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4. When most youth are ready, talk about how justice and mercy are balanced in God. Say, "As recipients of God's mercy we are called to extend that mercy and compassion to others." Ask: "Is showing mercy to others easy or challenging? What makes it so?" Invite youth to reflect silently for a few moments on ways

they can respond to God's mercy by extending it to others.

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

1. Say, "Micah's message of hope is that ultimately God is merciful,

THE WORD WILL BE...

forgiving, and loving." Ask, "What message would you share with someone who is in need of hope?"

2. Ask youth to write a message of hope in the student book. After a minute or so, call on volunteers to read aloud their messages before leading in a closing prayer.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- 1. Ask youth to reread Micah 7:18-20 silently and to look up when finished.
- 2. When everyone has looked up, say, "These verses praise God by describing God's merciful and forgiving character." Encourage youth to work together to write sentences praising God and describing God's character. Allow those who wish to read aloud their sentences.

### Older Youth

- 1. Ask youth to call out characteristics and qualities of a good shepherd as you list them on a markerboard.
- 2. Call on volunteers to find and read aloud the following verses: Micah 2:12; 5:4; 7:14; and Psalm 23:1. Talk about how the image of God as a shepherd influences their view of God.

3. Say, "If Micah were alive now, he might choose another image for God, one that is more familiar to people today." Brainstorm present-day occupations that might be used as images for God. For each idea, talk about what characteristics and qualities of a person in that occupation represent God.

# U=3 Advocates of Justice for All

## Overview

Justice for all begins with us and the way we live. Justice also has to do with the way we treat others. It's important to and expected by God that we take care of other people.

This unit reminds us that God is the ultimate judge and justice-bearer. The justice we seek for all people begins and ends with God.

08/02/15

### S1//: Our Redeemer Comes

**Key Verse:** "He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle." —Isaiah 59:16-17 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** As a Christ follower, you have what you need to make a difference.

#### Bible Background:

Isaiah is bringing God's response to God's people. The language used is very similar to language used when God brings wrath upon foreign nations. In this Bible Lesson God's wrath is falling upon the guilty among Israelites, along with the evildoers from other nations. **Session 1** also explores what we refer to as the "Armor of God." This terminology is picked up again in Ephesians 6. In this reference, the armor is *for* God. In Ephesians, this armor is *from* God. God's plan is salvation for all. It is God's people who choose to distance themselves from God by their choice to reject God's law in their lives.

08/09/15

### S2//: Choosing the Ten

**Key Verse:** "If you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever." —Jeremiah 7:6-7 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** We live out our faith as we follow God's commandments.

#### Bible Background:

Shortly after Jeremiah delivered this word from God, he was arrested and put on trial. Luckily Jeremiah had a high-ranking official who spoke up for him. He was released and went right back to prophesying on God's behalf. He mentioned a place called Shiloh, which was the site of an important temple during the time of Samuel. From archeologists we know this temple was destroyed around 1050 B.C.

During this time the people most likely had fallen into the old way of worshiping other gods, pursuing other faith practices and completely rejecting God's commandments. God placed Jeremiah in the Temple on that specific day because there would be a great number of people who would hear his sermon. **Session 2** points out that Jeremiah's task was to prophesy to these people and, from the start, it was an extremely tough task.

**S3//: Turn . . .**

**Key Verse:** "Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"  
—Ezekiel 18:30-31 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** We all need to repent from sin and pursue a new heart and spirit.

**Bible Background:**

The main focus of Session 3 is that a person cannot fully turn toward God without actively turning away from sin. In many cultures of that day it was normal for pagan practices to be followed by everyone, making it extremely difficult to focus on the one true God. People would literally have to turn away from their normal society to pursue God. The benefit to turning, then *and* now, is that when a person turns toward God that person receives life.

It was a normal practice for Jews, and later for Christians as well, to set aside a time of introspection and repentance. Most notably for Christians, that time is Lent. In Lent we prepare ourselves for the Resurrection, but along the way we work through our need for repentance. In this Bible Lesson we are reminded that God's desire is for all people to turn from their selfish ways and pursue God.

08/23/15

**S4//: God's Expectations**

**Key Verse:** "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another." —Zechariah 7:9-10 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** Our decisions can make a difference in other people's lives.

**Bible Background:**

Session 4 highlights the prophet Zechariah. He, like Ezekiel, was most likely a prophet from a priestly family, and the Book of Zechariah is believed to have been written by two different people, with the change occurring between chapters 8 and 9. Zechariah reminded the people of the past and the need to learn from mistakes, as opposed to repeating them. The Israelites constantly acted as though they knew better than God, even though this did not work out well for them.

08/30/15

**S5//: Justice Is Coming**

**Key Verse:** "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts." —Malachi 3:5 (NRSV)

**Take-Away:** Judgment is from God and God alone.

**Bible Background:**

In Hebrew the name *Malachi* means "my messenger." It was most likely not the actual name of the author but could have been taken from a verse in Malachi 3:1. Maybe he, or people around him, thought this name best described this prophet. Also, the "messenger" could be a reference to Jesus and the coming of a priestly messiah. During the time this book was written, the economics of the land were deplorable. In fact, they were so bad that people sold themselves and their children into slavery to pay off debt and taxes. Also, the people were not tithing, so this forced priests to find other ways to earn a living. **Session 5** emphasizes that Malachi warned the people that justice was coming.

**Supplies**

**All Sessions: Bibles, student books, pens or pencils**

**S1//:**

- \_\_\_ markerboard
- \_\_\_ markers
- \_\_\_ index cards

**S2//:**

- \_\_\_ individually wrapped candy pieces
- \_\_\_ large sheet of paper
- \_\_\_ markerboard
- \_\_\_ markers

**S3//: no additional supplies needed**

**S4//: no additional supplies needed**

**S5//:**

- \_\_\_ large sheets of paper or markerboard
- \_\_\_ markers

**Notes:**

## TAKE-AWAY

As a Christ follower, you have what you need to make a difference.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **In today's Bible Lesson**, God puts on the armor mentioned because God is unable to find people who will help stand against the injustices of the world.
- **The fact that** God waits and waits for the nation of Israel to turn back to God is a testimony to the patience and mercy of God. Even in a passage where the wrath of God is evident, we are reminded of God's great patience.
- **The armor mentioned** here is echoed in Ephesians 6, a passage where God is again looking for people to do the work of God in the world. We often see this passage used to teach about the individual pieces of armor, but it is important to remember the call is to put on the "whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11, NRSV).
- **God's role as Redeemer** is explored in this passage as well. After coming in fury and wrath, Isaiah 59:20 reminds us that, when we turn from our sin, God is there to redeem us through Jesus.
- **Isaiah 59:21** reminds us that God desires for us to pass on the message of God's love to each new generation. It is how our faith continues!

## S:1 Our Redeemer Comes

### What Would You Do?

SCENARIO	YOUR RESPONSE
If you see someone drop something out of her or his bag without realizing it . . .	
If you notice your neighbor's front door is open and you know he isn't home . . .	
If you see someone being bullied in the school hallway . . .	
If you notice someone in class cheating off a neighbor's test . . .	
If one of your friends tells a dirty joke that makes you feel uncomfortable . . .	
If you see someone shoplifting in the grocery store . . .	

## The Word Was . . .

### Isaiah 59:15-21 (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.

<sup>16</sup> He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him.

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 41 for a list of supplies for this session.

### What Would You Do? (10–15 minutes)

1. Say: "We make choices every day. Sometimes these choices are made with little thought and, instead, with emotional responses. For instance, when we order food at a restaurant, we make a choice based on what we "feel" like eating. When we decide on clothes to wear each day, we make

17 He put on righteousness like a breastplate,  
and a helmet of salvation on his head;  
he put on garments of vengeance  
for clothing,  
and wrapped himself in fury  
as in a mantle.

18 According to their deeds, so will he repay;  
wrath to his adversaries,  
requit to his enemies;  
to the coastlands he will render requital.

19 So those in the west shall fear the name of the LORD,  
and those in the east, his glory;  
for he will come like a pent-up stream  
that the wind of the LORD drives on.

20 And he will come to Zion as Redeemer,  
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD.

21 And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the LORD, from now on and forever.

wrath to his foes,  
retribution to enemies,  
retribution to the coastlands,  
19 so those in the west will fear the LORD's name,  
and those in the east will fear God's glory.

It will come like a rushing river that the LORD's wind drives on.

20 A redeemer will come to Zion and to those in Jacob who stop rebelling, says the LORD.

21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD. My spirit, which is upon you, and my words, which I have placed in your mouth won't depart from your mouth, nor from the mouths of your descendants, nor from the mouths of your descendants' children, says the LORD, forever and always.

**Isaiah 59:15-21**  
**(Common English Bible)**

15 The LORD looked and was upset at the absence of justice.

16 Seeing that there was no one, and astonished that no one would intervene, God's arm brought victory, upheld by righteousness,

17 putting on righteousness as armor and a helmet of salvation on his head, putting on garments of vengeance, and wrapping himself in a cloak of zeal.

18 God will repay according to their actions:

**Key Verse**

"He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle."  
—Isaiah 59:16-17 (NRSV)

a choice based on how the outfit makes us feel (or we just wear what's clean!)."

2. Continue: "As we think about choices, look at the activity in the student book. Read each of the scenarios and choose an ending. Think about it, but give a true response of what you would do."

3. After a few minutes, call on students to tell their individual responses. If you have varying responses, spend some time talking about each situation and what might be the best response in light of being a faithful follower of Christ.

4. After talking about the scenarios, ask and discuss:

- Why did you respond the way you did to these scenarios?
- How do you choose responses to real-life scenarios?
- Have you encountered any of these scenarios or similar ones? Explain.

**The Redeemer Is . . .**  
**(10-15 minutes)**

1. Ask youth to read the Bible Lesson silently from either version in the student book. Then ask youth to answer the questions in the first paragraph on page 44 in the student book.

2. After a minute or two, explain that God also gets upset about things happening in the world. Now ask youth to answer the second question in the student book, then talk about their answers.

3. Point out the rectangle and ask youth to write the answer to the third question in that space.

4. Finally, talk about all answers, then summarize by saying: "God's arm brings victory with justice to the oppressed. God suits up and prepares for the restoration of the world. God has made a covenant with God's people to send a Redeemer. That Redeemer is Jesus."

**The Word**  
**(10-15 minutes)**

Supplies Needed: markerboard, markers

1. Ask: "Have you ever been caught in a moment when you had nothing to say, as if the words had totally left your brain? Maybe it was when you were called on by a teacher—or maybe it was when we have asked for volunteers to pray aloud in youth group."

## THE WORD IS...

**2.** Call on someone to read aloud verse 21 of the Bible Lesson (either version). Say: "Inevitably there will be times in our lives when we don't know what to say. In these moments we can depend on God to provide the words."

**3.** Draw a huge conversation bubble on a markerboard or large sheet of paper. Ask, "In what moments of your life would you want God's words in your mouth?" Allow youth to come forward and write examples inside the conversation bubble. (Some examples are: You don't handle conflict well and need God's words during confrontation; a friend is sad and you want to speak comfort to him or her.)

**4.** After a few minutes, allow youth who wish to talk about their examples. Remind youth that they only have to ask God to give them the right words for any situation.

## Suit Up!

(15-20 minutes)

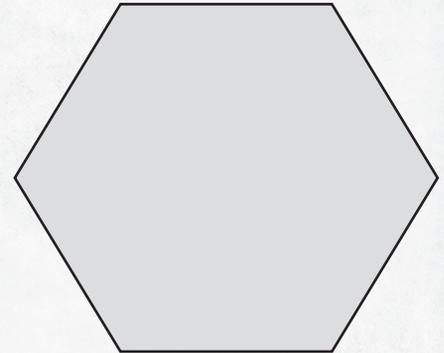
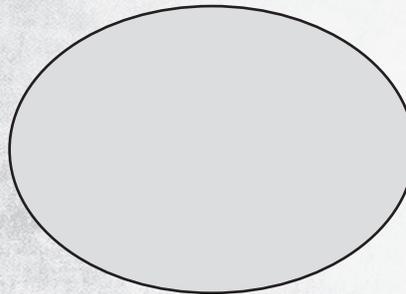
**1.** Ask: "Has someone said to you, 'Walk it off,' or 'Pick yourself up by your bootstraps,' or 'Work harder'? These sayings suggest that, if we rely on our own skill, we will be successful. These comments make us the center of all we do. So when we fail or are hurt, it's our fault. This sort of mind-set also forces us to experience self-doubt and believe we are not good enough or are less-than. Have you ever felt this way?"

**2.** Explain that this way of thinking is not what we believe as the church. We believe that God is the focal point, that all things come into being because of God and that, in the end, all things return to God. We believe that God is the great Redeemer. We believe God intervenes when we are in need and that God delivers us from oppression and self-doubt. When we are lacking, God is not.

## The Word Is...

### The Redeemer Is . . .

What are some things happening in the world that upset you?  
What about these events upsets you?



What upsets God, do you think?

In today's Bible Lesson, what is God's response to injustice?

## Suit Up!

As you read the following Scripture passage, circle the piece of armor you believe you need most.

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. <sup>11</sup> Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. <sup>12</sup> We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can

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Bible Lessons for Youth

When we doubt, God is sure. God knows we have what we need because God is the provider.

**3.** Ask for a volunteer to reread Isaiah 59:16-17 aloud from today's Bible Lesson. Then ask for a second volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 6:10-20 from the student book. As this passage is

read, ask students to listen for and circle the pieces of God's armor they believe they need most.

**4.** Now ask youth to tell what piece(s) they chose and why. Give space to students who cannot or are unwilling to share. Remind youth that when we are in need and overcome by whatever

# The Word Will Be...

stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. <sup>14</sup> So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, <sup>15</sup> and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. <sup>16</sup> Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word. <sup>18</sup> Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers. <sup>19</sup> As for me, pray that when I open my mouth, I'll get a message that confidently makes this secret plan of the gospel known. <sup>20</sup> I'm an ambassador in chains for the sake of the gospel. Pray so that the Lord will give me the confidence to say what I have to say.

—Ephesians 6:10-20 (CEB)

## Closing Reflection

Think about areas in which you think you are lacking, maybe in confidence, a good relationship with parents or friends, or boldness to share your faith. List anything you want or need in the space below. Use this as a reminder to continually lift up these areas in prayer.

Now choose one of these areas and write it on the index card your teacher gives you and then give it back to him or her. Also remember to pray for your fellow class members in the week ahead. As a reminder, post the following Scripture where you can see it.

**"Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers." —Ephesians 6:18 (CEB)**

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trial we are experiencing, God suits up and is ready to fight for us.

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* index cards, pens or pencils

**1.** Say, "Ephesians 6:18 tells us to be in prayer for one another." Ask your students to write, in the box in the student book, any area in which they think they are lacking, such as confidence or boldness to share their faith.

THE WORD WILL BE...

**2.** After a minute or so, hand out the index cards and pens or pencils and ask youth to choose one of those areas in which they think they are lacking and write it on a note card. Collect the cards and pray for each need in a closing prayer.

**Option:** Shuffle the cards and redistribute so that each youth can pray for someone else.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

- Place two sets of really big clothes (pants, shirt, hat, and shoes) on one side of the room and instruct students to form two lines on the other side of the room. Explain that youth should go, one by one, to the pile of clothes on the other side of the room, putting them on as quickly as possible over the clothes they are wearing. Once they are clothed, they must run over and give you a high five. After the high five, they must run back to where the clothes were piled and take them off. The first team to finish this relay race wins. Compare these actions to the many pieces of the armor of God that we need to "put on."

### Older Youth

**1.** Talk about injustices that occur in the following three areas and list on a markerboard:

- What are some injustices that you or people in your school face?
- What are some injustices that people face in America or in your community or city?
- What are some injustices that people face around the world?

**2.** Ask: "What is our reaction when we think about these injustices? What can we do about them?"

## TAKE-AWAY

We live out our faith as we follow God's commandments.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **Jeremiah the prophet** was the son of a priest, living in Judah (the southern country) during a siege that eventually ended with the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the ransacking of Israel.
- **The Book of Jeremiah** was written in late 7th and early 6th century B.C., and roughly at the same time as the Book of Daniel, the Book of Lamentations and the books of 1 and 2 Kings.
- **Jeremiah served as** a prophet for over forty years. God's people repeatedly ignored his message and, because of that, there is a sadness to sections of the Book of Jeremiah, as he laments the people's refusal to listen to God's message despite his best attempts.
- **This week's Bible Lesson** is from Jeremiah 7, which is commonly referred to as The Temple Sermon. Jeremiah openly wonders why people would go to the Temple for sacrifice yet not allow their faith to reach into the rest of their lives.
- **Jeremiah's sermon is** a call and reminder for God's people to honor the covenant and return to the one true God, both through their worship and how they treat others.

## S:2 Choosing the Ten

### Make Your Choice!

Spend a few moments reflecting on which you choose in your life: GOD OR EMPTINESS. Write a sentence prayer related to your choice.

## The Word Was...

### Jeremiah 7:1-15 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and

let me dwell with you in this place. <sup>4</sup> Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD."

<sup>5</sup> For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, <sup>6</sup> if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own

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## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 41 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Make Your Choice! (10-15 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* individually wrapped candy (a selection the youth will really want and like), enough for everyone

1. Explain that youth will play a game of choice and their choices will yield either a piece of candy or nothing.

hurt, <sup>7</sup> then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

<sup>8</sup> Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. <sup>9</sup> Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, <sup>10</sup> and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!"—only to go on doing all these abominations? <sup>11</sup> Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD. <sup>12</sup> Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. <sup>13</sup> And now, because you have done all these things, says the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, <sup>14</sup> therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. <sup>15</sup> And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim.

**Jeremiah 7:1-15**  
**(Common English Bible)**

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah received the LORD's word:  
<sup>2</sup> Stand near the gate of the LORD's temple and proclaim there this message: Listen to the LORD's word, all you of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD.  
<sup>3</sup> This is what the LORD of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, says: Improve your conduct and your actions, and I will dwell with you in this place. <sup>4</sup> Don't trust in lies: "This is the LORD's temple! The LORD's temple! The LORD's temple!" <sup>5</sup> No, if you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; <sup>6</sup> if you

stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, <sup>7</sup> only then will I dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave long ago to your ancestors for all time.

<sup>8</sup> And yet you trust in lies that will only hurt you. <sup>9</sup> Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, sacrifice to Baal and go after other gods that you don't know, <sup>10</sup> and then come and stand before me in this temple that bears my name, and say, "We are safe," only to keep on doing all these detestable things? <sup>11</sup> Do you regard this temple, which bears my name, as a hiding place for criminals? I can see what's going on here, declares the LORD. <sup>12</sup> Just go to my sanctuary in Shiloh, where I let my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. <sup>13</sup> And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, because you haven't listened when I spoke to you again and again or responded when I called you, <sup>14</sup> I will do to this temple that bears my name and on which you rely, the place that I gave to you and your ancestors, just as I did to Shiloh. <sup>15</sup> I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out the rest of your family, all the people of Ephraim.

**Key Verse**

**"If you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever."  
—Jeremiah 7:6-7 (NRSV)**

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Hold a piece of candy in one of your hands and behind your back. One by one, ask youth to choose a side. If they choose the candy side, they receive candy. If they choose the empty side, they receive nothing.

**2.** After each youth has taken a turn, debrief using these questions:

- How did it feel to receive the candy?

- How did it feel to receive nothing?
- Is this fair?

**3.** Now give a piece of candy to anyone who didn't receive one earlier. Explain that, in our lives, we do the same thing. We make a choice to follow God and receive the gift of eternity, or we choose not to follow God and, as a result, don't receive eternal life. We choose to follow God's commandments and live a blessed life,

or we choose to ignore them and come up empty-handed.

**4.** Ask youth to spend a few moments reflecting on their choice: God or emptiness—and to write a sentence prayer in the student book related to their choice.

**The Oppressed**

**(10 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of paper, markerboard, markers

**1.** Read aloud Jeremiah 7:6-7, today's Key Verse, or ask a youth to do so.

**2.** Say, "In this verse Jeremiah mentioned different people who were oppressed in his day and time." In the space provided on page 48 in the student book, ask your students to list these people in the first box. After a minute or two, ask youth to list, in the second box, people or groups who are currently oppressed in our day and time.

**3.** After a few minutes, call on volunteers to tell their responses. As they do, record them on a large sheet of paper or markerboard. On one side list the people mentioned in Jeremiah 7:6-7 and, on the other side, list the people/groups oppressed in today's world.

**4.** When the lists are finished, look for similarities. Point out that some of the types of people who were oppressed in Jeremiah's day are the same types of people who are oppressed today. Ask: "Why do you think that is true? Can this oppression change? What would it take to eliminate this oppression in today's world?"

**Legally**

**(10-15 minutes)**

**1.** Divide the class into four small groups or pairs. Assign each group

## THE WORD IS...

one of the Scriptures listed in the student book. Explain that each group should follow the instructions and/or answer the question(s) provided for each Scripture.

**2.** Give the groups a few minutes to complete their assignments. While they are working, explain that Jeremiah wrote this section of Scripture similar to a legal document that would be presented by a prosecuting attorney.

**3.** When groups are finished, reassemble and call on each group to report its findings.

**4.** After all the reports and discussion, ask: "What do you think about all the information you just heard? How can we use this information?"

## The Ten . . . (15-20 minutes)

**1.** Say: "The Ten Commandments are the centerpiece to our faith and teach us how to conduct ourselves as followers of Christ. There has been much discussion and debate in America about whether the commandments should appear in public places such as courthouses or schools. So, let's see what we think."

**2.** Read aloud Exodus 20:2-17 (or ask several youth to read a few verses at a time) and then ask a youth to read aloud Jeremiah 7:9. Ask, "What commandments are God's people charged with breaking?" (Answer: No's 8, 6, 7, 9, 1, and 2.)

Say: "So, 60 percent of the Jews are charged with breaking 60 percent of the commandments. To put this in perspective, on a test in school, their grade would be a 40. That's not a passing score anywhere!"

## The Word Is...

### The Oppressed

In the appropriate box below, list people who were named as oppressed in Jeremiah 7:6, along with those who are oppressed in our world today.

#### OPPRESSED IN JEREMIAH 7:6-7

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#### OPPRESSED IN TODAY'S WORLD

--

### Legally

Use the space below to make notes about your group's assignment.

**GROUP 1—JEREMIAH 7:3-4:** What is God's case against Judah?

**GROUP 2—JEREMIAH 7:5-7:** Compile a declaration of demands. What are God's expectations of how God's people should behave toward others?

**GROUP 3—JEREMIAH 7:8-11:** What are Israel's sins?

**GROUP 4—JEREMIAH 7:12-15:** What are the punishments that God will bring against God's people?

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**3.** Now, allow a few minutes for youth to answer the questions in the student book.

**4.** When most youth appear to be finished, talk about answers to the individual questions. Then say: "The Ten Commandments are not meant to limit us or to make us afraid of God.

They are meant to keep us connected to God. The Ten Commandments address behaviors that lead us away from God. If you struggle with obeying one of these commandments, then focus on changing your behavior. As long as you engage in actions that result in breaking this commandment, you are moving away from God."

# The Word Will Be...

## The Ten . . .

- How does each one of these violations create a culture of injustice and oppression?

- Which of the Ten Commandments are broken most often in youth culture today? What grade would today's youth receive?

- Which of the Ten Commandments are broken most often by adults today? What grade would today's adults receive?

- Are there differences between broken commandments today and in Jeremiah's day?

## Closing Reflection

If you could stop attending school right now and refocus your life on the fight against one injustice, what would it be? Why?

Lord, use me to fight \_\_\_\_\_ in the world.  
May all I say and do glorify you. Amen.

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## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

1. Say, "Your generation will fight against injustice." Ask youth to answer the question in the student book: *If you could stop attending school and refocus your life on the fight of one injustice, what would it be? Why?*

2. After a few minutes, allow those who wish to tell the injustice they would fight. When everyone has responded who wants to do so, say together the sentence prayer in the student book, with each person saying aloud the injustice he or she wants to fight.

THE WORD WILL BE . . .

What is your choice:  
God or emptiness?

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

1. Compile a Top Ten List for your class. Use the following questions to give youth direction in completing the list:

- What is your group all about and/or what code do you live by?
- If you were on the outside of your group looking in, what would you say the Top Ten List included?

2. Write your list on a large sheet of paper or markerboard and read it aloud. Does it encapsulate who you are as a youth group? Make any changes, then display it in your meeting space throughout the unit.

### Older Youth

1. Ask youth if there are rules in their lives that they refuse or work hard not to break. Allow youth to call out answers. Then write the following sentence on a markerboard:

*I will not \_\_\_\_\_.*

2. Ask youth to copy the sentence somewhere on today's lesson and fill in the blank. (Some examples are: kill people, have sex before marriage, lie, drink alcohol, take drugs, gossip.)

3. After a minute or so, ask, "Does this rule define who you are as a person? For example, if you have a rule not to drink alcohol, do you refrain from doing so at parties and do your peers know that about you? Does that rule define who you are?" Remind youth that following certain rules is a way to live out their faith.

## TAKE-AWAY

We all need to repent from sin and pursue a new heart and spirit.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **Ezekiel the prophet** was in exile and living in Babylon. During this time he shared with God's people seven different visions he had about Israel, the nations, and God's faithfulness.
- **Ezekiel is one** of the few prophets to support the idea that everyone will be held personally responsible for his or her actions. While this isn't a new way of thinking to us today, it was a challenging way of thinking to Ezekiel's exiled Jewish audience. They mainly understood the covenant as being between God and the whole nation of Israel.
- **Ezekiel's call for repentance** and a new heart would have been good news to the people exiled in Babylon. The promise that God would honor their repentance and grant forgiveness reminds us of the coming hope in Jesus.
- **Through the years** it has been difficult to understand Ezekiel's visions, as both individuals and scholars have added their personal interpretations to the meanings of those visions.
- **Ezekiel's overall message** is a reminder to those exiled that God has not abandoned them and that God's presence can be felt anywhere, not just in the city of Jerusalem where they long to return.

## S:3 Turn . . .

### Starting With the Heart . . .

On one side of the heart list situations or actions that break your heart. On the other side of the heart describe why these situations break your heart.

## The Word Was . . .

### Ezekiel 18:1-13, 31-32 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to me:

<sup>2</sup> What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"?

<sup>3</sup> As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

<sup>5</sup> If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right—<sup>6</sup> if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period,

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 41 for a list of supplies for this session.

### Starting With the Heart . . . (5-10 minutes)

1. Say: "Our hearts have a great deal of control in our lives. When our hearts break in the romantic sense, our physical bodies are affected as well. Some people shut down emotionally when their heart is broken. On the

<sup>7</sup> does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, <sup>8</sup> does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, <sup>9</sup> follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully—such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the LORD God.

<sup>10</sup> If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, <sup>11</sup> who does any of these things (though his father does none of them), who eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, <sup>12</sup> oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, <sup>13</sup> takes advance or accrued interest; shall he then live? He shall not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

.....

<sup>31</sup> Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

<sup>32</sup> For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

**Ezekiel 18:1-13, 31-32**  
**(Common English Bible)**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD's word came to me: <sup>2</sup> What do you mean by this proverb of yours about the land of Israel: "When parents eat unripe grapes, the children's teeth suffer"?

<sup>3</sup> As surely as I live, says the LORD God, no longer will you use this proverb in Israel!

<sup>4</sup> All lives are mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child belong to me. Only the one who sins will die.

<sup>5</sup> People are declared innocent when they act justly and responsibly. <sup>6</sup> They

don't eat on the hills or give their attention to the idols of the house of Israel. They don't defile the wives of their neighbors or approach menstruating women. <sup>7</sup> They don't cheat anyone, but fulfill their obligations. They don't rob others, but give food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. <sup>8</sup> They don't impose interest or take profit. They refrain from evil and settle cases between people fairly. <sup>9</sup> They follow my regulations, keep my case laws, and act faithfully. Such people are innocent, and they will live, proclaims the LORD God.

<sup>10</sup> But suppose one of them has a violent child who sheds blood or does any one of these things, <sup>11</sup> even though his parents didn't do any of them. He eats on the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, <sup>12</sup> oppresses the poor and needy, robs others and doesn't fulfill his obligations, pays attention to the idols and does detestable things, <sup>13</sup> and takes interest and profit. Should he live? He should not. He engaged in all these detestable practices. He will surely die, and his blood will be on him.

.....

<sup>31</sup> Abandon all of your repeated sins. Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel? <sup>32</sup> I most certainly don't want anyone to die! This is what the LORD God says. Change your ways, and live!

**Key Verse**

**"Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"**  
—Ezekiel 18:30-31 (NRSV)

other hand, when something breaks our heart that is related to injustice, our hearts move us to action. When we see starving children, we want to provide food. When we see someone hurting, we want to ease the pain. When our hearts feel something in a deep way, we can't help but react."

**2.** Point out the heart in the student book. On one side of the "broken"

heart, ask youth to list situations or actions that break their heart. (Examples might include slavery, starving babies, disaster-torn victims, the homeless, and so on.) On the other side of the heart, ask youth to write beside each example *why* it breaks their heart."

**3.** After a few minutes, call on youth to tell the situations they listed. Spend

some time talking about ways youth might be involved in bringing justice to these injustices.

**4.** Explain that sometimes our hearts can be manipulated. As teens mature, their emotions are erratic and it's difficult for them to discern what their heart is actually feeling. Remind youth that it's important to seek God's wisdom and wise counsel. Say: "If we were to follow every whim of our heart, we could spend all of our time chasing the wind instead of making a real difference in the areas to which God calls us."

**Confession**

**(10-15 minutes)**

**1.** Read aloud Ezekiel 18:30-31, then ask, "What do you think of when you hear the word *confession*?"

**2.** After some discussion, say: "Confession doesn't happen much anymore in the Protestant church. We don't provide opportunity to confess our sins with one another. If confession became a normal practice for your church, would you participate? Why or why not?"

**3.** Allow time for students to answer the questions on page 52 in the student book.

**4.** When everyone is finished, talk about the second question and ways youth think this practice would be beneficial. Then say: "Since the beginning, confession has been a normal practice for followers of God. Confession can be freeing; it's an act of true trust in the person to whom you confess, but it also exhibits complete trust in God as the great Healer and Redeemer. Do you trust God and other people enough to talk about your sins?"

## Repent

(5-10 minutes)

1. Say: "Repentance literally means to turn. When we repent we confess our sin and transgression against God, turn around and go in the opposite direction, and flee from sin! Unfortunately, often confession is not enough motivation for us to repent and flee from our sin. Sin is very captivating; it's attractive, enticing, and can be addictive. We need help to move on." Ask, "What helps you to repent and flee from sin?" Wait for answers. (Some examples are: *avoiding particular environments and destructive people, totally quitting some activity or behavior, spending time with encouraging people, participating in counseling or therapy, and so on.*)

2. Ask, "Are there people in your life whom you trust to help you as you flee some sin?" Point out the space provided in the student book and instruct youth to list people they would seek out when turning away from sin, people who would listen without judgment and ridicule and with whom they can be completely honest. Assure youth they do not have to say the names aloud.

3. After a minute or two, encourage youth to say a silent prayer of thanks for these people.

## Accountability

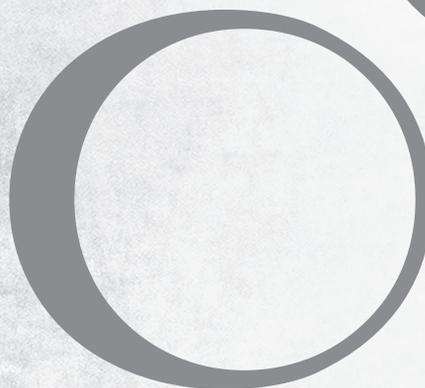
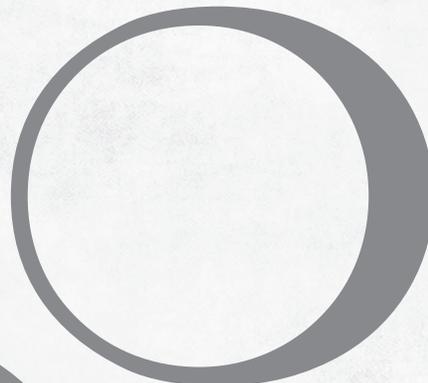
(5-10 minutes)

1. Explain that accountability is essential for followers of Christ. In order to repent and flee from sin, we must be accountable. Accountability is making sure you do what you say you will do. Let's say you want to read more Scripture and you set a goal of reading five days a week, an accountability partner would check in with you regularly and encourage you to focus on your goal. Say: "We all have times when

# The Word Is...

## Confession

✓ Do you practice confession in your life regularly? Why or why not? Write your answers in the circles.



✓ Do you think it would be beneficial for you to confess your sins to another person? Why or why not?

## Repent

Who are some people you can trust and talk with as you flee from sin? Are there people who can listen without judgment and ridicule and with whom you can be completely honest? List their names below.

A large rectangular area with a dotted border for listing names.

it's difficult to focus on following Christ. Accountability helps us stay on track."

2. Say: "Look at your list from the previous activity. Is there someone on that list whom you might trust as an accountability partner?" Ask youth to review the names they wrote in the student book and then choose one to

contact about being an accountability partner. After a minute, ask youth to list areas of their lives in which they need accountability. Suggest they use code words if they want to keep these areas private.

3. Encourage youth to reach out this week to the person they named (after

# The Word Will Be...

## Accountability

- ▶ This week I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ to help me be accountable in my life.
- ▶ I need accountability in the following areas of my life. Use code words if you want to keep these concerns private.

- ▶ Think about what you want to do during your time together (read Scripture, practice confession, and pursue justice toward situations in the world that break your heart) and make a plan.

Our first meeting together will be: \_\_\_\_\_.

## Closing Reflection

List below situations that keep you from God and might keep God from creating a new heart and a new spirit in you. If you wish, share these concerns with your group during closing prayer.

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talking to their parents) and schedule a meeting. Remind youth to include time to read Scripture, practice confession, and talk about ways to pursue justice for the unjust situations in the world. In preparation for that time, ask youth to read the devotion on page 62, then call on a volunteer to read aloud the focal Scripture.

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

1. Say: "Today's Bible Lesson talks about how God can give us a new heart and a new spirit. In your mind, think of the situations, people, or activities that keep you from God.

THE WORD WILL BE...

Also think of the situations and/or activities that can keep God from creating a new heart and a new spirit in you. Write your thoughts in the space provided in the student book.

2. If you have students who are willing, ask them to pray aloud about what they wrote. If not, lead in this, or a similar, closing prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for sending special people to help us flee the sin in our lives. Help me to be accountable and to be obedient to your Word. Amen.*

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

1. Take several ball bats to class and play a game of Dizzy Bat. Ask for volunteers to stand on one side of the meeting space. Ask youth to place their foreheads on a bat while the bat touches the floor and spin around ten times as fast as they can. The objective is to get to the other side of the room. The person who gets there first is the winner.

2. Draw the parallel that even when we want to repent, it's often tough to do and we can easily stumble along the way.

### Older Youth

1. Allow youth to choose partners. Ask the pairs to read Proverbs 21:2-15 together and choose the verses that relate best to today's world.

2. After a few minutes, ask: "Do any of these verses reflect particular struggles we see in the world today? Why? What does it say to us as we follow Christ in our schools and at church?"

## TAKE-AWAY

Our decisions can make a difference in other people's lives.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **Today's Bible Lesson** comes from the Book of Zechariah. The name *Zechariah*, which in Hebrew means "Yahweh has remembered," is a fitting name for the book, since it was written just before the conquest of Israel and during the early part of the Babylonian exile.
- **Most scholars agree** that Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet, due to his interest in the Temple, which is expressed throughout his book.
- **Just as we** read in last week's Bible Lesson from Ezekiel, Zechariah is calling God's people back to full covenant with God, which involves more than just the sacrifices offered in the Temple.
- **Many Christian scholars** see Zechariah 7–14 as being, in part, promises about the coming Messiah that we see fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
- **Zechariah is also** considered to be an Old Testament example of apocalyptic literature, as is the Book of Daniel. Many times these texts are studied alongside the New Testament's apocalyptic literature, the Book of Revelation.
- **The first six** chapters of the Book of Zechariah are a dialogue between Zechariah and an angel. There is a period of silence before the next two chapters, which include this week's Key Verse.

## S:4 God's Expectations

### You Decide

Often our initial reaction to a situation is different from our actual response. In the following scenarios write your initial reaction and then take a minute to think through what would be your thoughtful response.

You notice some young people harassing a homeless person. What do you do?

Initial Reaction

Thoughtful Response

You overhear your boy/girlfriend say he or she likes someone else too. What do you do?

Initial Reaction

Thoughtful Response

continued on next page

## The Word Was . . .

### Zechariah 7:8-14 (NRSV)

<sup>8</sup> The word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying: <sup>9</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another;

<sup>10</sup> do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.

<sup>11</sup> But they refused to listen, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears in order not to hear. <sup>12</sup> They made their

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Bible Lessons for Youth

## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 41 for a list of supplies for this session.

### You Decide (10–15 minutes)

*Note to Leader:* Making decisions can be tough. Teenagers often have emotional responses and make emotional decisions. In this opening activity, encourage youth to think about their responses. Also, consider adding other scenarios customized for your youth group.

hearts adamant in order not to hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. <sup>13</sup> Just as, when I called, they would not hear, so, when they called, I would not hear, says the LORD of hosts, <sup>14</sup> and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and a pleasant land was made desolate.

### **Zechariah 7:8-14** **(Common English Bible)**

<sup>8</sup> The LORD's word came to Zechariah:

<sup>9</sup> The LORD of heavenly forces proclaims:

Make just and faithful decisions; show kindness and compassion to each other!

<sup>10</sup> Don't oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor; don't plan evil against each other! <sup>11</sup> But they refused to pay attention. They turned a cold shoulder and stopped listening.

<sup>12</sup> They steeled their hearts against hearing the Instruction and the words that the LORD of heavenly forces sent by his spirit through the earlier prophets. As a result, the LORD of heavenly forces became enraged.

<sup>13</sup> So just as he called and they didn't listen, when they called, I didn't listen, says the LORD of heavenly forces. <sup>14</sup> I scattered them throughout the nations whom they didn't know. The land was devastated behind them, with no one leaving or returning. They turned a delightful land into a wasteland.

You are passionate about a certain cause, but other people aren't interested. What do you do?

**Initial Reaction**

**Thoughtful Response**

You have a new group of friends. Your other friends say they are a bad influence. What do you do?

**Initial Reaction**

**Thoughtful Response**

## **Key Verse**

**"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another."**

— Zechariah 7:9-10 (NRSV)

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**1.** Point out the scenarios on pages 54–55. Ask youth to read each scenario and write their initial reaction in the appropriate box. Then allow a few more minutes for youth to think about each situation and write a more thoughtful response in the other box.

**2.** When everyone is ready, talk about the following questions:

- Were your answers different or the same when comparing your initial reaction to your thoughtful response?
- Do you think that you make better decisions initially or after thinking about it for a while? Why?
- In life, is it better to make quick decisions or to make decisions after spending time in prayer and discernment?

**THE WORD WAS...**

- Do you think it is easier to simply react in your decision-making or to prayerfully consider your responses?

## **Behavior Matters**

**(10–15 minutes)**

**1.** Say: "Our behavior makes a difference in the lives of other people. Anger, sadness, and mean-spiritedness can spread through a group like wild fire. It takes only one person to start talking about how horrible something is before the whole group begins to listen and agree. Perhaps you have experienced this type of situation at some point in your life."

**2.** Ask, "Did you know that God has expectations for how we should behave?" Ask youth to turn to the activity on page 56 in the student book, read the Scripture references listed, then beside each list the behaviors that God expects. Youth should also note how each behavior can contribute to building a community of justice.

**3.** When most everyone is finished, talk about answers. Then ask, "How have you observed these behaviors being obeyed by the people of God today?"

## **Don't Do It!**

**(5–10 minutes)**

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of paper or markerboard, markers

**1.** Read aloud Zechariah 7:9-10, then ask, "Who are the people we are called to care for? (*widows, orphans, strangers, and poor*). Point out the questions on pages 56–57 in the student book and allow a few minutes for youth to answer.

**2.** When most youth are finished, talk about the answers to the questions. Particularly, spend some

## THE WORD IS...

time talking about what your class can do to help care for the groups mentioned in the second question.

**3.** Explain to youth that it is sometimes difficult to reach out to certain people because it might be unsafe. For example, approaching strangers would be unsafe for a single youth to attempt alone. However, a group of youth and adults might be able to navigate strangers without any problems. The same might be true for approaching those who are homeless and unhoused. It is best for youth to respond to unknown situations with adult help.

**4.** Say, "We all can and should respond to God's call to care for others, but we need to keep safety in mind while making decisions and plans." Brainstorm creative ways that you and your youth can reach out and obey Scripture in your community. List your ideas on a large sheet of paper or markerboard and make follow-up plans.

### You're Evil?

(10-15 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* large sheet of paper or markerboard, markers

**1.** Say: "Today's Bible Lesson doesn't just apply to our actions toward people outside our community of faith; it also gives a mandate for how we should treat one another as believers. Sometimes we treat outsiders better than our family or close friends. Why do you think that is?" Pause for responses.

**2.** If no one volunteered this response, say: "I think it's because we may sometimes take one another for granted. This happens frequently in close groups and is completely unintentional. Our Bible Lesson clearly states that we are not to be evil with one another." Ask: "In what

## The Word Is...

### Behavior Matters

Read each Scripture below and beside it list behaviors that God expects from us. Also note how each behavior contributes to building a community of justice.

**ISAIAH 1:16-17:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**AMOS 5:14:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**MICAH 6:8:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ZECHARIAH 7:9-10; 8:16-17:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Don't Do It!

Answer the following questions and be prepared to talk about your answers with the group.

**1.** Why is it important to take care of these groups of people?

ways can we be evil with one another? What can our group do to make sure we aren't evil to one another? Are there ways for us to intentionally and consistently love one another?"

**3.** Allow a few minutes for youth to think about and, in the student

book, note ways we can be loving toward one another and reject evil in our group. As youth work, give the following examples if they have trouble thinking of ideas: by fully listening to each person as she or he talks; by greeting one another with excitement and joy; by sharing one another's

# The Word Will Be...

2. Do you take care of a widow, orphan, stranger, or the poor? Why or why not?
3. If your answer to the previous question is no, then what are ways we can do this in our lives?

## You're Evil?

USE THE SPACE BELOW TO BRAINSTORM WAYS WE CAN BE LOVING TOWARD ONE ANOTHER AND REJECT EVIL IN OUR GROUP.

## Closing Reflection

JOIN TOGETHER SAYING THIS PRAYER: "Dear Lord: I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

—A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

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burdens; by not criticizing one another; by using words of affirmation and love.

4. As youth work, post a large sheet of paper or markerboard. After a minute or so, ask youth to call out their ideas and list on the chart. Then

compile a group plan for how you will treat one another as followers of Christ. Remind youth that their influence in the world will be greatly strengthened by treating one another in Christlike ways.

THE WORD WILL BE ...

## Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

1. Say, "The prayer we are about to offer reminds us of our need for God's direction in our lives and our call to focus on others."
2. Lead youth in praying together the Wesley Covenant Prayer printed in the student book, then send them forth with a reminder to treat others in a way that shows God's love.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

1. Gather youth to sit in a circle. Hand one person a foam ball, or some other soft item, for throwing. Explain that this person will begin the game by throwing the ball to someone else and that each person who catches the ball, after another person throws it to him or her, must speak an affirming word about yet another person across the circle and then throw the ball to that person.
2. Repeat this process until each person has been affirmed. Play as many rounds as time and interest allows. (This game would be an excellent closer following the "You Evil?" activity.)

### Older Youth

1. Read aloud Zechariah 7:11-12 and ask youth to identify and call out the characteristics of people who refuse to act with God's justice.
2. When all the characteristics have been named, ask the group: "Do you identify with any of these characteristics? What are specific ways that people reveal these characteristics as they fail to pursue the Lord?"

## TAKE-AWAY

Judgment is from God and God alone.

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

- **In the Christian** tradition, the Book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, though there is little historical information in the book itself to help us date it.
- **Much of the** Book of Malachi speaks to the deplorable behavior of the priests, who in a time of economic struggle, were abusive to God's people in a variety of ways.
- **The issue of** justice is a major topic in the Book of Malachi, both in terms of trying to restore it and in assuring the people that God will be faithful to bring about justice. It is a call for patience in the midst of what appears to be a completely unjust world.
- **In today's Key Verse**, God is serving as both the Judge and the witness, a key need in the Hebrew tradition. God upholds the covenant, even as God also brings judgment.
- **In all of** the Bible Lessons for this unit, God reminds the people that the covenant of inward devotion cannot be separated from outward implications. The faith of God's people must reveal itself in how they treat others, especially the less powerful.

## S:5 Justice Is Coming

### You Be the Judge

 In the space below list recent court cases or news stories that you recall concerning people who have acted unjustly.

 Now, look at your list and circle the situations you think lend themselves to making easy judgments against people.

## The Word Was...

### Malachi 3:1-10 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; <sup>3</sup> he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. <sup>4</sup> Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be

pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

<sup>5</sup> Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

<sup>6</sup> For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. <sup>7</sup> Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the

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## LESSON LAUNCH

See page 41 for a list of supplies for this session.

### You Be the Judge (10–15 minutes)

1. Ask youth to list, in the student book, current court cases or news stories about people who have acted unjustly in the world.
2. After a few minutes, encourage youth to read the next question and then circle, from the situations they

LORD of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?"

<sup>8</sup> Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings!

<sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you!

<sup>10</sup> Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

### **Malachi 3:1-10** **(Common English Bible)**

<sup>1</sup> Look, I am sending my messenger who will clear the path before me; suddenly the LORD whom you are seeking will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you take delight is coming, says the LORD of heavenly forces.

<sup>2</sup> Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can withstand his appearance? He is like the refiner's fire or the cleaner's soap.

<sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. They will belong to the LORD, presenting a righteous offering.

<sup>4</sup> The offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in ancient days and in former years.

<sup>5</sup> I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against the sorcerers, the adulterers, those swearing falsely, against those who cheat the day laborers out of their wages as well as oppress the widow and the orphan, and against those who brush aside

the foreigner and do not revere me, says the LORD of heavenly forces.

<sup>6</sup> I am the LORD, and I do not change; and you, children of Jacob, have not perished.

<sup>7</sup> Ever since the time of your ancestors, you have deviated from my laws and have not kept them.

Return to me and I will return to you, says the LORD of heavenly forces.

But you say, "How should we return?"

<sup>8</sup> Should a person deceive God? Yet you deceive me.

But you say, "How have we deceived you?"

With your tenth-part gifts and offerings.

<sup>9</sup> You are being cursed with a curse, and you, the entire nation, are robbing me.

<sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tenth-part to the storage house so there might be food in my house. Please test me in this, says the LORD of heavenly forces.

See whether I do not open all the windows of the heavens for you and empty out a blessing until there is enough.

## Key Verse

**"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts."  
—Malachi 3:5 (NRSV)**

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listed, the ones that lend themselves to making quick and easy judgments against people.

**3.** When most youth appear to be finished, allow those who wish to describe briefly the situations they listed, using the facts they heard from the news. Then allow youth to decide the judgment or outcome they think is appropriate for each situation.

Encourage youth to make their rulings based purely on the facts they know. Also talk about why youth decided on the particular outcome in each case or story. Emphasize that the "why" is important because we all believe we have acceptable reasons for passing judgment on others.

**4.** Now ask and discuss the following questions:

- Is it easy or difficult to pass judgment on people you don't know?
- Related to the cases and stories we talked about today, do you think we knew all the facts? Why or why not?
- Is it better to have all the facts, or is it easier to know just a little information about the people you are judging? Why or why not?
- Do you think that people judge you based on all the facts or only on rumors?

**5.** Say: "In life we judge people on their looks, the way they talk, or even the way they smell. The truth is, we rarely have all the facts when we make judgments about people we encounter in our daily lives. Do you think this is true or false? Why?"

## False!

(5–10 minutes)

**1.** Point out the instructions on page 60 in the student book and allow a few minutes for youth to describe a scene or an episode of a TV show in which one of the characters told a lie about another character in order to make things happen to that person.

**2.** After a few minutes, say: "Falsehood doesn't happen just on TV. Falsehood can happen anywhere. Sometimes people tell lies about other people out of a need for survival—not in terms of life and death but in order to remove the pressure from themselves. Perhaps you know of someone who lied about another person in order to stay out of trouble. Have you ever transferred blame onto someone else?"

**3.** Read aloud Malachi 3:5, then say, "This verse talks about people who bear false witness, people who do not live in the truth, and people who deceive others."

## THE WORD IS...

4. Ask your students to call out other people, or groups of people, they would add to this list of those who deceive and bear false witness about God.

### Oppression in the World

(5-10 minutes)

*Supplies Needed:* markerboard, markers

1. Say: "Last week we talked about how we might be more focused on our personal behavior and decisions as opposed to focusing on others, and specifically those who are oppressed. In our Bible Lesson this week, oppression of others is again mentioned."

2. As a group, work with students to define the word *oppression*. Write their definition on a markerboard. Then read aloud the definition from dictionary.com: "the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner." Ask, "How does our definition compare to the dictionary's definition?"

3. Now direct youth to the student book to answer the questions. After a bit, talk about answers as a class.

### Our Advocate

(5-10 minutes)

1. Say: "In today's society judgments are passed around like the collection plate in church. We often are guilty of judging people we don't even know very well." Ask, "Do you think we meet God's expectations of us?"

2. After a few minutes discussion, say: "The beginning of today's Bible Lesson says: 'Then I will draw near to you for judgment.' All of us will be judged by the Creator of the universe, the Life-giver, the one true

## The Word Is...

### False!

Tell about a television show in which one of the characters lied about another character in order to make things happen to that person.

### Oppression in the World

Where do you see oppression happening in the world?

[ ]

If you could fight one type of oppression. What would it be? Why?

[ ]

God. We are judged out of God's love for us. God loves us enough to care how we live, and our lives should be a reflection of the Creator. Do you live in a way that makes God happy with you, or are there areas in your life where you need God's influence?" Ask youth to complete the activity in the student book.

3. After a few minutes, remind youth that today we still have an opportunity to do something about the areas we circled. We have an opportunity to be redeemed, healed, and forgiven. Jesus' death on the cross created a straight path to God for redemption. Those who have placed their trust in Jesus have an advocate who will stand with

# The Word Will Be...

## Our Advocate

Circle the words below that describe areas in your life where you need God. Add other words/areas if you wish.

SEX websites lack of respect for others addictions  
 pride  
 bad language NOT LISTENING  
 greed PRIDE  
 ANGER language RELATIONSHIPS  
 lying ENVY disrespect  
 friendships lust

## Closing Reflection

What is one way you can show love to a neighbor in the coming week? Now, think of a neighbor to whom you can show this love and follow through with your idea.

**Idea:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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them at judgment. Thanks be to Jesus, we are forgiven and set free.

## Closing Reflection

(5 minutes)

Supplies Needed: copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* or No. 890,

“Prayer of Confession, Assurance, and Pardon” copied on a markerboard

1. Slowly read the prayer in unison, allowing the words to take root in youth’s hearts. Then pause a minute or two for youth to think of one way they can love a neighbor in the coming week and write it in the student book.

THE WORD WILL BE...

2. Ask youth to say a silent prayer committing to this task, then say “amen” to close the prayer time.

## LESSON OPTIONS

### Younger Youth

1. Ask, “What if judgments were made with the flip of a coin?” Holding a coin, ask for three to five volunteers.

2. One by one, call on students to stand up to be judged. When you flip the coin, use heads for not guilty and tails for guilty. Judge each youth using the scenarios below and by flipping the coin. (You can “ham it up,” as it is meant to be funny.)

- He or she is accused of taking money from the collection plate.
- He or she is accused of dressing up as Jesus and turning water into wine.
- He or she is accused of sleeping during the Sunday sermon.
- He or she is accused of singing off-key in the choir.
- He or she is accused of dancing like David down the aisle of the church.

3. Ask, “How does it feel being judged by the flip of a coin?”

### Older Youth

• Ask youth to search the Bible to find judgments by God. (Provide Bible study resources, if possible.) Ask them to research what they believe to be the worst punishment given by God after judgment. (Some examples are: a flood, defeat in battles, death, and so on.) The only wrong answer would be a punishment that isn’t described in the Bible.

# Teacher Tools

## Moral Development Domains for Exploring Justice

Tim Gossett

**S**ara Miles, the author of *Take This Bread* and the director of a food pantry has said, “In my experience as a journalist I once believed that service in feeding the hungry and working to change policies causing hunger are two largely separate things. But it is not possible to do justice in the abstract—you must touch real people. God’s work in the world is for all to have enough to eat and to not be afraid.”

Biblically, justice is a relational concept for Christians, involving our relationship with God, creation, and others. It’s one thing to talk, for example, about the injustice of climate change as it affects “the poor” around the world. It’s an entirely different thing to consider—and even get to know—the real individuals whose lives are impacted by flooding coastlines or drought-stricken fields.

Ever since Lawrence Kohlberg published his highly influential theory of moral reasoning in 1958, there has been extensive work in such fields as psychology, sociology, education, politics, and religious studies to develop better understandings of moral reasoning, moral behavior, and justice. (You may wish to do some reading online if you are unfamiliar with the topics.) When it comes to the moral development of youth, there are three “domains” or dimensions to explore.

- **Reasoning:** how we think about our thoughts and behaviors
- **Behavior:** how we act based on our reasoning
- **Feelings:** how we respond emotionally to our thoughts and actions

**REASONING:** Youth undergo dramatic change in their ability to think abstractly and engage in moral reasoning. Your youngest youth may just be entering what Kohlberg called the “Conventional Level” of moral reasoning. Their understanding of justice will be shaped by social norms, meaning

they will seek to be considered “good people” and will make decisions based on how others will view them. Older youth are more likely to consider social order and how to maintain it, and thus will seek to determine what is best for a majority of people.

**BEHAVIOR:** In youth and adults, there is a gap between thinking and doing; that is, one does not necessarily do the “right” thing even if they know what it is. Altruism, or helping behavior, seems to develop in large part due to reciprocity in personal experiences. If a youth has experienced help, forgiveness, or caring behavior, they are more likely to be able to offer similar assistance to others. Tap into this by asking questions about their previous experiences with being treated justly, fairly, compassionately, and so on.

**FEELINGS:** The feelings of a particular youth about acting to promote justice depend in part on their ability to experience empathy, an emotional response to others dependent on having enough perspective to understand the emotional state of others. As you explore the theme of justice, encourage youth to wrestle with what it would feel like to experience injustice.

All three domains are intricately linked. Research has shown that simply talking with youth about justice and moral reasoning has only a slight effect on them; if youth are to change their thinking, they must be more active and engage the topic with their bodies and emotions. Further, all three are relational in nature; the “our” in each of the descriptions listed previously means not only one’s individual reasoning, behavior, and feelings but also that of others. As you explore this topic with youth, strive to engage all three learning domains together.

# Out and About

## Read, Reflect, Reach, Repeat

Tim Gossett

**M**ost youth are not avid readers of the Bible, let alone other fiction or nonfiction with religious themes. Yet, in recent years—as the popularity of dystopian fiction (such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*) shows—youth do appreciate well-written material about difficult themes such as justice and injustice. What’s more, literature and true-life stories (such as memoirs) provide opportunities for making connections between reasoning, behavior, and feelings. This “Out and About” activity taps the power of good writing to spur youth into taking action and doing justice.

**Read**—Advertise a book group for a few weeks, getting commitments from youth who are interested. Stress that reading is not required but that it will highly enhance the fun and the experience. Order books (if the church budget can pay for them, all the better) and distribute them (see examples at the end of this article; feel free to add your own). Decide together on a reading schedule. Strive to complete the book in a few weeks’ time, and plan to meet together for conversation twice (at the halfway point and at the end), or more if the group is willing.

Hand out the books and encourage the participating youth to mark up their books with highlights, comments, and so on, particularly keeping notes on the following:

1. What questions did this (book, chapter, section) raise for me?
2. What could I relate to or resonate with in the book?
3. What troubles me about what I’ve read?
4. What has inspired me in what I’ve read?
5. What might God be saying to me in the book?

**Reflect**—When you gather together, talk about each of the five questions above with the youth. Allow plenty of free discussion time, asking other

relevant questions as the conversation progresses. Depending on the book you chose, youth may be feeling a variety of emotions: hopelessness, anxiety, eagerness, confusion, and many others. Allow them to express these emotions openly and help them to understand that their feelings are normal and acceptable. Where appropriate, draw parallels to or glean wisdom from Scripture, particularly the focal passages in this issue of BLY.

**Reach**—After everyone has finished reading the book, encourage the group to decide on one or more next steps they can take, both as individuals and as a group. (Any youth who chose not to read the book can especially participate from here on out.) You may decide to do additional research, talk with other groups in the church, participate in a ministry working on a particular justice issue, or any number of other appropriate actions. Encourage the youth to set reasonable yet ambitious goals related to issues that excite them.

**Repeat**—In coming weeks, especially after any actions were started or completed, repeat the process with another book, shorter related articles, or even a series of YouTube videos. The goal is to increase understanding and to continually reflect upon how we can be God’s agents of justice in the world. Your youth need to tap their imaginations as they seek justice, and reading can facilitate possibility thinking!

### **Book List**

- Divergent series by Veronica Roth (*Divergent*, *Insurgent*, *Allegiant*)
- The Giver series by Lois Lowry (*The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, *Messenger*, *Son*)
- A Wrinkle in Time series by Madeleine L’Engle (*A Wrinkle in Time*, *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, *Many Waters*, and *An Acceptable Time*)
- The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins (*Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, *Mockingjay*)

# Meet the Writers



**JULIE CONRADY**  
WRITER, CHAPLAIN

**U:1** Julie Conrady, writer of Unit 1, has written for BLY since 2006. She has taught all ages in churches and in schools, but especially likes working with youth. She currently serves as a Chaplain Intern at a local hospital and enjoys scrapbooking, reading, and playing video games in her spare time. She lives in Norman, Oklahoma, with her husband Josh, son Stark, dog MollyJane, and black cats Seuss and SamIAM.

**U:2** Sally Hoelscher, writer of Unit 2, lives in Iowa City, where she works as a freelance writer, Christian educator, and retreat leader. Someday Sally would like to see the Aurora Borealis, visit Yellowstone Park in the winter, and write a mystery novel. She and her husband are the parents of two college students.



**SALLY HOELSCHER**  
WRITER, CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR



**JACOB FASIG**  
WRITER  
MINISTER OF DISCIPLESHIP

**U:3** Jacob Fasig, writer of Unit 3, has been working in youth ministry since 1997. He is coauthor of *Now What: Next Steps for Your New Life in Christ* and he enjoys playing music and cycling. Jacob is married to Allison, has two daughters named Zoe and Eve, and currently serves as minister of discipleship at Gladeville UMC, on the outskirts of Nashville, TN.

Tim Gossett, writer of articles, is the Director of Discipleship at Collegiate United Methodist Church/Wesley Foundation in Ames, Iowa, and is a stay-at-home dad. An author of several youth ministry books and articles, he also enjoys training for long-distance cycling rides, collecting ancient Jewish coins, and spending ten minutes every day learning a new skill. He can be reached at [tim@differentvoice.com](mailto:tim@differentvoice.com).



**TIM GOSSETT**  
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