

Affluenza

by Ben Barwick

FAITH STORY:

Amos 2

FAITH FOCUS:

Amos 2 is a section of a speech given by the prophet Amos to the people of Israel (Samaria). In it he pronounces judgment on seven nations, then an eighth—Israel. He outlines seven crimes they committed against the Lord. Then he tells the people how God was there for them and how they were expected to act according to God's actions. Finally, Amos proclaims God's judgment in the form of a great war in which the people of Israel will be utterly defeated.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Adaptation of Amos 2:6-8
- Wipe board and markers
- Bible commentaries on Amos—see below
- Preview the movie "Affuenza" and choose several segments to show to the class.
- Equipment to show "Affluenza"
- Copies of the worksheet and pens

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Welcome students, then begin the class by asking them to share something that surprised them this week. Share your own example of something that surprised you.

Ask students to close their eyes and listen as you dramatically read the following adaptation of Amos 2:6-8

Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of North America,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they sell Jesus for paper,
and the needy for a pair of Nikes—
they who trample the poor with sub-prime loans and
health codes,
and keep the afflicted out of their sight;
women are treated as sexual objects of all sorts,
so that my holy name is profaned;
they drive themselves to my altar
with gasoline taken through war;
and in the house of God they drink
coffee bought with the blood and lives of families.

Leave a moment of silence after the reading. Then, discuss the following questions:

- First, does anyone need anything explained to them?
- How did it feel to be accused of these things?
- Do we need to feel guilty about these things?
- Which accusation—if any— made you feel most guilty?
- Did these words surprise you? Do you think God really believes this about us?

CONNECT:

Watch the segments from “Affluenza” that you picked out for the class to view. Discuss them. Do you think they are an accurate depiction of the lifestyle of families in your congregation? Why or why not?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Divide into small groups and have them read Amos 2 in the group and discuss the following:

- What cycles of sin are present in Israel that God is not pleased with?
- What sorts of things did God do for Israel in the past?
- What is God going to do with Israel now?

Record each group's answers on the wipe board.

Do a mini-lecture based on Insights from Scripture

APPLY:

Discuss:

- What cycles of sin can you see presently at work in our world?
- What sorts of things does God do for us today?

Hand out the worksheet, "Your Own Affluenza" and have the students fill them out individually.

RESPOND:

Discuss the students' answers on their worksheet.

Based on the worksheet, the movie, and any other ideas that have been discussed, what do you think a modern-day prophet might say to us? Is there anything that needs to be changed? Are we willing to commit to a change?

If anyone is willing to commit to a change, spend time praying for that person, and also ask if there is anyone willing to be a prayer partner/supportive friend for that person. Ideally, everyone in the group would find at least one small thing to try to change, but don't pressure students to do this if they don't.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

The first two chapters of Amos were a speech that would have been said by the prophet Amos in Samaria. This prophesy was said during a time of moral corruption throughout Samaria and surrounding nations. Religions from Canaan were running rampant throughout Samaria and ritual prostitution, orgies, idolatry, violence, and celebrating the four yearly celebrations of the Canaan cults would have been common practice. Amos stepped in the middle of all this and spewed fiery

words of prophetic woe upon the Samaritans. He begins the book by prophesying the downfall of seven other nations other than Samaria. They consisted of Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah. It is likely that during these pronouncements the audience Amos had gathered would have been overjoyed. However, Amos then throws a curveball. Seven is the number of completeness. The Israelites would have thought him done, but Amos then pronounces the downfall of Israel and gives the righteous followers of God seven accusations of sins: selling slaves into slavery, selling the poor into slavery (slavery was supposed to be the choice of a debtor, but in this case the debt collector was forcing the debtor into slavery), trampling the poor, the afflicted did not get fair treatment in court, young women were sexually abused by both father and son, poor men's coats were being used for blankets (Jewish law required a poor man's cloak to be given back to him over night for a bed), and wine used to pay fines was being indiscriminately drunken with no regard to the poor. The Israelites were shocked. They saw themselves as God's chosen people and thereby immune to this judgment.

For further information refer to:

Believer's Church Bible Commentary: Hosea and Amos

Interpretation: Hosea to Micah

Harper Collins Bible Dictionary

Session Reproducibles

YOUR OWN AFFLUENZA

- 1 How many T-shirts do you own?
- 2 How many do you wear?
- 3 How many jeans do you own?
- 4 How many do you wear?
- 5 Where do you buy your clothes? Are they brand name?
- 6 How many cars does your family own?
- 7 How many television sets?
- 8 How much money do you spend each week?
- 9 Does your family recycle?
- 10 Do any of your family members drink coffee? Is it fair trade?
- 11 Does your family get their groceries at a locally owned store or Walmart?