

Think about all of the times in our lives that required us to make decisions. We choose our friends; we choose our food. We make decisions about schools and jobs. We choose our clothes. We choose to be a follower or a leader. We choose to be a hindrance or a help. And might I suggest that we even choose our attitude?

Each day presents us with opportunities where we have to choose how we are going to respond when we face situations at work, at home and even in church. One more thing holds true. We are never without the choice to give God space in our decision-making. But that leads to another question or choice. Will we listen.

Over the next 8 weeks we're going to look back into the Old Testament at the Minor and Major Prophets. We'll look at the minor prophets Amos and Hosea. And we'll look at the Major Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. All address issues. No matter how minor the prophet, you can bet that every issue they discuss is major with the potential for drastic changes in the lives of their intended audience.

So today we start with Amos. Amos is a shepherd from Tekoa, which is a harsh wilderness area from south Judah. He is called to speak God's prophetic word to the people of northern Israel. Amos is an average guy being asked to go to an elite society. Amos was used to getting down and dirty. Going to northern Israel was going to be a challenge. During this time the people of Israel were way outta line. They lived under the rule of King Jeroboam who made a name for himself. **2 Kings tells us that he** "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord..."

Jeroboam sought to build his kingdom and he was quite successful. Under his 41-year reign, northern Israel expanded and brought major prosperity to Israel, particularly to the major cities. A new class of wealthy people arose out of the boom in agriculture and the trade that took place.

But as the rich got richer, the poor got poorer. Social and economic abuses prevailed, along with a continuation of worshipping the Canaanite god Baal, provoked sharp judgment from the prophet Amos. Yes, Israel was prosperous, but Israel was also out of order.

God showed Amos the ills of Israel. God tells of the judgment of the people who do not turn from their sin. In chapter 5, Amos delivers a message to Israel from God, “seek me and live; do not seek Bethel...for Bethel will be reduced to nothing”.

Bethel was a prominent place of Baal worship with people praying to a golden calf. It was Jeroboam who set up Bethel as a national shrine so people from the North Kingdoms wouldn't have to make that insufferable trip to Jerusalem for festivals and temple rituals. Jeroboam acted like he wanted to appease his people, but that wasn't his full intent. Baal worship became popular. And it allowed for perverse acts and arrogance of nature. People didn't have to be accountable to anyone but themselves. By any means necessary without consciousness was the rule of the land. No conviction necessary. Why wouldn't this be a popular choice.

The Israelites chose to forget about God and create their own standards for living. They chose their own measure of what success was and how to attain it.

This is the situation that God calls Amos into. All he had to do was deliver a convicting message. To call them out for being conceited and proud. For being pompous. To call them out for setting their own measure of righteousness. To call them out for setting their own plumb line.

By whose line do you measure yourself today? Is it the world's plumb line or God's plumb line? A plumb line is a cord tied onto a weight. Ancient builders used this to build truly vertical walls.

In Amos we have God holding His plumb line next to the spiritual condition of Israel. Without a plumb line you would have crooked walls. Without God's plumb line our spiritual journey will not be straight.

But what is God's plumb line? It is nothing less than God's holiness. Anytime we stand next to the holiness of God, we fall short. As Isaiah says in chapter 6, "Woe to me!" I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Isaiah came in to contact with God, and that showed him his weaknesses, his sins, all the broken and crooked places in his life. Isaiah experienced something that few men or women ever had during their time on earth; he was ushered into the presence of God. What he saw was something so awesome that it could never be adequately described in words. While he saw a vision of the holiness of God, he saw himself as a measure against that holiness. He was close to the presence of God, close to God's plumb line!

God's plumb line just might bring discomfort. Definitely easier to avoid than face. How do we avoid God's plumb line?

don't make time for worship.

don't make time for bible study.

don't make time for personal devotional...too risky to spend time with God by ourselves

won't forgive

won't apologize for our mistakes

won't give up that Bethel life.

won't get on our knees and pray to God

won't open our mouths and worship God

won't acknowledge our calling

won't face our prejudices

Coming to God requires coming into the light. When Isaiah met God, he realized his sin and confessed it, and then God met Isaiah right where he was.

You don't have to be at a certain place before you step to God. God knows we have crooked walls.

God knows who drinks too much, lies, steals, and covets,

God knows who's afraid to accept the vision that was given them.

God knows...sometimes it feels like we can't see our way to tonight let alone tomorrow. Like ...when the doctor gave you the report and you just crawled up into a ball and cried.

...when you want to go to school and god knows that the road is tough and that there are times when you want just to give up.

...when you're tired.

...that you are breaking your back to provide for your family.

...that on the outside you are trying to keep it all together, but on the inside you are not only crooked, you are crumbling and cracking, ready to fall over.

But then there's verse 7? Even while God is holding the plumb line he is "standing right beside us". Even as the songwriter Charles Tindley wrote...

...When the storms of life are raging stand by me; when the storms of life are raging, stand by me. When the world is tossing me, like a ship upon the sea, Thou who rulest wind and water stand by me.

...In the midst of tribulations, stand by me (2x). When the hosts of hell assails, and my strength begins to fail thou who never lost a battle stand by me.

...In the midst of faults and failures stand by me (2x)...When I do the best I can and my friends misunderstand, thou who knowest all about me, stand by me.

...When I'm growing old and feeble, stand by me (2x). When my life becomes a burden, and I'm nearing chilly Jordan, O thou Lily of the Valley, stand by me.

One of the most complex structures ever built was completed in 1350. It stands 179 feet tall, but it leans out about 16 ½ feet. The Leaning tower of Pisa—was built using a plumb line. Talk about a perpetual puzzle for architects and historians. It seems the builders did not build the foundation of the tower deep enough in relation to the height of the building. As the Tower got higher and higher, it began to lean more and more. Still, after 675 years, the structure is standing and millions of people travel hundreds of miles to see it every year.

Reaching God's plumb line is a process, a life-long process. Brick by brick, every day we get higher. Every day we seek to grow closer to God; we also get closer to the plumb line. The closer we get to the plumb line, the higher we go. Then the storms of life can make us lean. But good news church family. Good news. The more we lean the more we see that we are built God tough. We are built God tough. Say that with me.

Jeremiah heard these words as a very young boy, "Before God formed you in the womb God knew you, And before you were born God consecrated you; appointed you a prophet to the nations". Church family, don't you see? Our foundations were established long before we had anything to do with it. From the day we are born, God begins molding us. moving us and building us brick by brick. Laying mortar, placing bricks in just the right places. Every day we go higher and every day our foundation is tested. But unlike the Tower of Pisa, we were built by the Master Builder. God knows us and we find a God shaping and molding us, forming us into the people we are to be. People that glorify Him.

In 1904 in a church service in Wales, a young man named Evan Roberts cried out, "Bend me! Bend me! Bend us!" Evan didn't just hope God would change him he was desperate for God to change him! He was on his knees, tears flowing, crying out desperately for God to change his heart. This wasn't an unbeliever's prayer, this was the prayer of a follower of Jesus!

What happens when Christians get desperate for God to change them? Revitalization happens! So perhaps we shouldn't be satisfied with just a desire for God to change our lives.

Revitalization will happen when we get desperate! Do you desire revitalization in your life, in your church? (repeat)

How desperate are you?

God heard Roberts' prayer. God used this young man to send a sweeping revival throughout Wales. Evan went back to his home church and started a youth service. Meetings that started around seven lasted until midnight with young people crying out for the presence of God. Meetings eventually lasted until 3 a.m. with people crying out for revival.

People started flooding the prayer meetings. Revival broke out throughout Wales. It was such an awesome revival that the donkeys stopped working in the Welsh mines. These animals were so used to being ordered by cursing miners that they didn't know what to do when many of these miners were saved. The revival even spread to many churches in England.

The revival started with the cry of one young man: "Bend me!" Roberts said, "Bend the church and save the world". Say that with me. Bend me! Bend the church and save the world."

There is something about being desperate. People who are desperate give priority to that for which they are desperate.

Whose plumb line are you desperate to live up to...the worlds or Gods? How desperate are you to measure up to God's plumb line? How willing are you to take the crumbles from your cracked, crumbling, and cooked walls to God so that God can keep adding and making you even stronger? How high do you want to go? When are you going to put God to the test and see just how high He can take you?

We are built God tough. We are built on a firm foundation and Jesus is that foundation.

Bend me, bend the church and save the world. That sounds plumb awesome! Let us pray