

Part 7

Becoming a Prophetic Church

Inspire
CHRISTIAN FORMATION

The point of this study

The goal of every Inspire study is to draw closer to Jesus Christ. In this series, we will explore the role of the prophets through the ministry of Amos. Though each prophet has a unique voice and message, Amos gives us a powerful glimpse into the prophetic tradition and its call to justice, faithfulness, and readiness to encounter God. As we listen to his challenge to "Prepare to meet your God," we will discover what the prophets still have to teach us today.

This study draws on the Four Ancient Lenses of Interpretation, which are introduced in the Inspire video series **How to Read the Bible (Part 2)**. These lenses help us engage Scripture more deeply, exploring its literary, theological, kingdom, and ethical dimensions.

The check-in & opening prayer

We know that what we bring to the study can impact what we take from the study. So, let's take a moment to check in with ourselves and to ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate our hearts. You can do this through personal journaling or by sharing with the group. If sharing in a group, try to keep your reflections brief so that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.



I wonder what was a highlight of your week.

I wonder where you may have needed prayer or support this week.

I wonder where you noticed God at work this week.

I wonder what you are bringing to this study.
*(questions, concerns, distractions, hopes, fears, learnings...)***.**

I wonder what you hope to receive from God through this study.

Holy God,
open our eyes to see the world as you see it, open our ears to hear your voice through the prophets, and open our hearts to be transformed by your truth. Give us courage to seek your justice, hope to trust your kingdom, and faithfulness to follow your call; through Jesus Christ, your living Word, our friend and helper. Amen.

Context *(read and reflect)*

*Reading Scripture through the **Literary Lens**. There is a little more context on page 5, following the Scripture. Read that first, then return here to mark and note the Scripture.*

Throughout this study, we have listened to Amos challenge God's people to live with justice, faithfulness, and compassion. But Amos's words did not stop speaking when his own generation passed away. Centuries later, the early Church would turn to his prophecy as it wrestled with a question about the future of God's people.

In Acts 15, the early Church faces a difficult question: Who belongs in God's family, and how must new family members behave? More and more Gentiles—people who were not Jewish—are becoming followers of Jesus. But some believers insist that these newcomers must be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses in order to belong fully to God's people. The disagreement is serious enough that Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders. The Church must now decide whether these new believers must adopt the religious practices of Israel in order to belong to God's family.

I wonder why questions about who belongs, and what is expected of them, can become so difficult for communities of faith.



When the Church gathers in Jerusalem, there is much debate. Peter reminds the assembly that God has already given the Holy Spirit to Gentile believers (Acts 10:44-48), while Paul and Barnabas tell of the signs and wonders God has worked among them. Rather than beginning with a decision, the Church listens to what people have experienced and what God appears to be doing. Only then does James turn to the words of the prophets to help the community understand what it has heard. The Church is learning to discern God's will by listening to one another, attending to God's activity, and returning to Scripture.

I wonder how listening to one another's experiences might help us recognize what God is doing in the world.



Scripture *(mark and note)*

Scripture invites us to slow down and listen. Read the passage aloud three times, perhaps with a different reader each time, allowing a moment of silence between readings. As you listen, underline or make notes about what catches your attention. ***First Reading — What catches your attention?*** *I wonder what words, images, or ideas stand out to you.* ***Second Reading — What challenges you?*** *I wonder what troubles you or raises questions.* ***Third Reading — What connections do you notice?*** *I wonder where this passage echoes other parts of Scripture, reminds you of Jesus, or speaks to your own life.*

Underline the things God has done. Circle the ways the Church listens and responds. What do you notice?

Acts 15:6-21

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us, and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

The whole assembly kept silence and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

Compare James's quotation in Acts 15:16–18 with Amos 9:11–12 from Part 6. What differences do you notice? How might they shape James's understanding of God's promise?

‘After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David,
which has fallen;
from its ruins I will rebuild it,
and I will set it up,
so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—
even all the gentiles
over whom my name has been called.
Thus says the Lord,
who has been making these things known
from long ago.’

“Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

A Note on the Text: *James's quotation of Amos 9:11–12 differs from the version we read in the Hebrew Scriptures. James draws on the ancient Greek translation of Amos* (the Septuagint), *which speaks of the remnant of humanity seeking the Lord, while the Hebrew text speaks of Israel possessing the remnant of Edom. This difference reflects how the Hebrew text was understood and translated in antiquity. For James, the Greek wording helps illuminate God's promise that people from all nations will be welcomed among God's people.*

More Context *(read and reflect)*

*Reading Scripture through the **Literary Lens**.*

After listening to Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, James turns to the words of the prophet Amos. Near the end of his prophecy, Amos promised that God would rebuild David's fallen dwelling and restore God's people. But James draws attention to something remarkable in that promise: people from other nations will also be called by God's name. If God has already welcomed Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, and Amos promised that people from the nations would be called by God's name, then perhaps these new believers do not need to become Jewish first. James recognizes that what the Church is experiencing may be the very thing Amos had promised. The ancient words of a prophet help the Church understand that God is building a family larger than they had imagined.

I wonder how an ancient passage of Scripture can help us recognize something new that God is doing.



James then proposes a way forward. Gentile believers should not be required to become Jewish in order to follow Jesus, but they are asked to observe certain practices that will help them live faithfully alongside Jewish believers. The Church's decision does not mean that every question has been answered or every disagreement has disappeared. Instead, the community has listened to one another, considered the Scriptures, and found a way to move forward together. The words of an ancient prophet have helped the Church imagine a future it might not otherwise have recognized.

I wonder what it takes for a community of faith to change its understanding of what God is calling it to do



Becoming a prophetic church

*Reading Scripture through the **Theological Lens**.*

A prophetic Church begins by **listening**. Throughout our study of Amos, we have discovered that prophets are not simply people who speak for God. They are people who have learned to listen: to God's word, to the cries of God's people, and to what is happening in the world around them. In Acts 15, the Church listens to one another, hears what God has been doing, and turns to Scripture for understanding. Before we can speak prophetically, we must learn to listen faithfully.

I wonder what we might hear if we listened more carefully to God, to one another, and to the world.



A prophetic Church also **learns to recognize how God's ancient word speaks into new situations**. James does not simply repeat Amos's words. He brings them into conversation with what the Church is experiencing and discovers that God's promise of restoration is unfolding in ways they had not expected. Faithfulness to Scripture does not always mean doing things as they have always been done. Sometimes it means allowing God's word to challenge our assumptions and open us to something new.

I wonder how we can discern when God is calling the Church to change.



Finally, a prophetic Church **stands up for people**, not against them. Amos spoke against injustice because God cared for those who were being harmed. Yet Amos also prayed for the very people whose actions he challenged. In Acts 15, the Church seeks a way to welcome Gentile believers rather than placing unnecessary burdens upon them. Prophetic ministry is not about winning arguments or condemning others. It is about loving God's people enough to speak truth, challenge injustice, and work toward the restoration God desires for the world.

I wonder how our words and actions might change if we understood prophetic ministry as standing up for people rather than standing against them.



Sharing

*Reading Scripture through the **Kingdom of God Lens**.*

I wonder what God's kingdom would look like if everyone were welcomed as someone who belongs.

I wonder what place listening to one another has in God's kingdom.

I wonder how God's kingdom challenges the boundaries we create between ourselves and others.

*Reading the Scripture through the **Ethical Lens**.*

I wonder whose voices we need to listen to more carefully.

I wonder where God might be calling us to reconsider something we have always believed or practised.

I wonder how we can stand up for people, especially those with whom we disagree.

You may close in prayer.