

*Read also Hebrews 12:1-16. Check out the service, which is recorded on [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

Ellen Dittman last week talked to you about the “Shema,” which every good Jew recited before leaving the house each day. It goes like this (Deut. 6:4-5):

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength."

There is a second one, equally important from Leviticus:

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD" (19:18).

When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment He said this:

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commands" (Mt 22:37-40).

Perhaps you think of it as the Golden Rule:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Lk 6:31).

So what does God require of you in His relationship with Him?

What does God require of you in relationship with your neighbor?

Do you love God? Do you love your neighbor?

God did checkups every so often. God held random tests. God sent people to ask them these basic questions. God checked out and pointed out their reality.

Amos was the test giver.

Sometimes tests are necessary because they expose things.

- ~ Bad drivers need to know what's expected. We all hate bad drivers.
- ~ Cancers need to be uncovered so you can take the medicine to get well.
- ~ Students need tests so they can go to the next level of learning.

Tests are never pleasant. I don't know many who want to take them.

A prophet forces you to take a spiritual examination. That's why no one liked them in Bible times, and no one likes them now.

I hope you realize I'm not originating this test. I'm just passing along what's here!

Amos had begun with Israel's neighbors: “These nations haven't treated you right; they are in trouble with God.” But then, like the parent who lines up the children when they've done wrong, you know your turn is coming. Read AMOS 3:1-3, 6-7

Let's interpret that. If you get a bill with big read letters saying PAST DUE on the front, you

know something is awry; the bill collector is serious; and you better take note. If you receive a call from the doctor's office and he leaves a message, "Call immediately." Would he have done that without cause? So the prophet's call hinges on something God sees in people and desires to address.

Were you ever left home alone as children and given chores to do before your parents returned? If you lived in my house you better have them done or everything stops. No allowance. No night out. No car. NO blessing. Let's continue reading Amos. READ 3:9b-11

"Line up," God says. "You haven't lived up. You are not doing right. Here's your punishment, and it fits the crime." Wealth had been amassed through force. People in power were using their power for their own gain and ignoring the needs of those who had no power. The result was injustice. So now they would receive injustice from an enemy.

Nobody likes the hour of accountability. I remember being in seventh grade, the first year of final exams. And worse, the exam grade was put on your report card. I didn't even know there was going to be an exam. I was shocked to hear of it the morning of the test.

The test was comprehensive – a whole year's worth of history. I trembled. I cried. I couldn't recall a thing about American history.

I glanced over at my neighbor's paper. He covered it up. Everyone was working. I just sat there. Finally everyone left the room and I took the nearly blank paper to my teacher, thinking as I went about taking that report card home to my parents. I wondered if I could put myself up for adoption with a nicer family.

Israel hated Amos, who brought this news. But he pressed on. READ Amos 4:1-2

I think my teacher had read Amos.

*Tearfully I told her – I didn't know we were going to have a test. I don't know any of this. My parents are going to kill me.*

She replied, "You had your book. You read your lessons all year, didn't you? I gave you tests all year. You had a study sheet. We reviewed in class for two weeks. Every day I was here after school to tutor you. Why didn't you pay attention?"

God said to His children: (Amos 4)

- ~ Bread was scarce; yet you did not return to me.
- ~ I withheld rain; yet you did not return to me.
- ~ Drought diminished your crops; yet you did not return to me.
- ~ I sent a couple of hurricanes; yet . . .
- ~ I sent pestilence; your young men died; I overthrew some of you.

**Yet you did not return to me!**

God does not quickly jump to judgment but He tried, again and again, to help them repent by sending minor judgments. Israel simply did not respond. God's warnings had not worked. So

God says,

“Therefore, I will bring upon you all the disasters I have announced. Prepare to meet your God in judgment, you people of Israel!”

He told them exactly what they had been doing wrong. READ Amos 5:12, 14-15:

For I know the vast number of your sins and the depth of your rebellions. You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Then the LORD will be your helper, just as you have claimed. Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice. Perhaps even yet the LORD will have mercy on the remnant of his people.

I did not study history all year. Guess what I got to do all summer? I got to study. The punishment fit the crime. God’s judgment was not arbitrary.

Secondly, God was pretty irritated with them because they were worshipping Him but then going out and living how they wanted. READ Amos 5:21-24.

God hated their worship because worship involves more than Sunday morning. **Every part of your life is worship.** They had elaborate worship, but then went out and ignored the poor. God said:

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

How does water roll? Energy comes from hydropower and it can be used for unlimited purposes. When you use your wealth and power only for yourself, then injustice happens. But to use it generously throughout your daily life brings justice to others.

For example, you have a car and someone else doesn’t. They would like to come to church. If you use your car (wealth/power) to bring them to church, you bring justice to them. If you don’t, they can’t come – a terrible injustice in my view.

You are doing just that. Last Wednesday evening LOTS of children were here to practice for the Children’s Christmas musical because many of you used your time and your power on their behalf.

God blesses you for that. When you use your wealth and power and time only for yourself, then injustice happens. But to use it generously throughout your daily life brings justice to others.

Hebrews explains. We are sinful and selfish, but we must shake off the sin which “so easily trips us up.” We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus. He’s at work in you – perfecting your faith; **for you are God’s child.**

When discipline comes, when the prophet speaks, He said,

"My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child" (Heb 12:5-6).

What does God require of you in His relationship with Him? What does God require of you in your relationship with your neighbor?

Privilege bears responsibility. God's blessing flows to you when you use your power and wealth as an ever-flowing action of loving good not evil, taking care of the needy; and being just.

Would you consider these words of the prophet this week?

Then perhaps – no, surely – God will bless you and FPCD, and we will become strong.

AMEN