

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy
Amos 4:4-5; 5:18-24

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

You will need to decide how much information you will give about the various offerings. Though it may be interesting to some groups, it is not necessary for understanding the Scripture begin studiedCC.

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

Purer in Heart, O God, *The Worship Hymnal* #591; CCLI I#297623 Public Domain

Refiner's Fire, *The Worship Hymnal* #592; CCLI #426298

Sanctuary, *The Worship Hymnal* #588; CCLI #24140

Come into His Presence, *The Worship Hymnal* #584; CCLI # 18819

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Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy

Focal Text

Amos 4:4-5; 5:18-24

Background Text

Amos 4:4-13; 5:18-27

Main Idea

God abhors hypocritical religious ceremonies, calling instead for justice in human relationships.

Question to Explore

Is worship the most important task of the church?

Teaching Aim

To help the church identify ways in which their worship practices may be hypocritical and decide to view them as God does.

Gathering together:

Begin by singing **Purer in Heart, O God**.

First thoughts:

There is no more enduring criticism of the church and of Christianity than the charge that there are hypocrites in the church. It seems that in the minds of the many people all of the positive contributions Christians have made are cancelled out by their acquaintance with or knowledge of a person who professed Christ but had unethical business practices or prejudiced attitudes or sexual immorality.

In the lesson today Amos speaks to the people who maintain a ritual of worship, but have completely lost sight of the standards which God set for his people in Godly living and holy worship.

As we examine this old, old problem may we search our own hearts for attitudes or actions which are not in accord with the teachings of Christ. We will never eliminate the criticism that people have of hypocrites in the church, but we can live as uprightly as possible so that we never contribute to the validity of that charge.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

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Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy

Focal Text

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God abhors hypocritical religious ceremonies, calling instead for justice in human relationships.

Question to Explore

Is worship the most important task of the church?

Teaching Aim

To help the church identify ways in which their worship practices may be hypocritical and decide to view them as God does.

Introduction to your personal study:

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series of Bible Study and Worship sessions (Bible Teaching #.....). The person who downloaded this session should have that material for you, as well.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Amos 4:4-5

**“Go to Bethel and sin;
go to Gilgal and sin yet more.
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three years. (Some versions read three days.)
Burn leavened bread as a thank offering
and bring about your freewill offerings –
boast about them, you Israelites,
for this is what you love to do,”
declares the Sovereign Lord.**

The passage Amos 4:4-13 is a separate message from that of 4:1-3. In 4:1-3, Amos addressed the selfish women who oppress the poor and needy. It was a short message; perhaps Amos spoke to the women as they passed by him on the street. They certainly would not have stayed around for a more lengthy chastisement.

Amos 4: 4-13 begins the serious condemnation of the worship practices of the Israelites. The verbs used here are masculine plural and would not have been spoken to the women of Samaria. The men were the leaders in worship in public places although the wife of the family certainly had a part in family Sabbath worship. These verses, however, refer to the public worship which has become so corrupted and insincere.

In verses four and five Amos probably delivered this message on a day when many people were gathering for worship at Bethel's temple. He spoke God's message – “declares the Sovereign Lord”.

Bethel is mentioned several times in Genesis. It is first mentioned in Genesis 12, but the best-known instance is probably Genesis 28 when Jacob, fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau, falls asleep on a stone and dreams of a ladder stretching between Heaven and Earth and thronged with angels. God stands at the top of the ladder, and promises Jacob the land of Canaan; when Jacob awakes he anoints the stone (baetylus) with oil and names the place Bethel. Another account, from Genesis 35 repeats the covenant with God and the naming of the place (as El-Bethel), and makes this the site of Jacob's own change of name to Israel. Both versions state that the original name of the place was Luz a Canaanite name. Bethel, thus, was a holy place for the Israelites. The people, however, were profaning the place with worship which did not honour God.

The main mention of Gilgal is when the Book of Joshua states that the Israelites first encamped there after having crossed the Jordan River. In the narrative, after setting up camp, Joshua orders the Israelites to take twelve stones from the river, one for each tribe and place them there in memory of the crossing. Gilgal literally means “circle of standing stones.”

These two places – Bethel and Gilgal- have historical significance to the people. They symbolize the guidance and provision of the Lord. In Amos 4: 4-5, the Lord challenges

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Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy – 17-44-03-en

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the Israelites to come worship and multiply their transgressions at the same time. Their worship itself was a sin, because they did it to please themselves, not to please God.

This passage reminds one of Luke 17: 1-3 when Jesus teaches his disciples ***“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.”***

The kind of worship which the Israelites were modeling for their children was false. The great teaching of Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 has apparently been forgotten. ***“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, The Lord is one. Love the Lord with all you soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them upon your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”***

This great heart faith of early Jewish leaders has been changed to an artificial act done only for show. Amos indicates that it has become sinful in and of itself.

In verses 6-13 a number of things are mentioned which God had sent to warn the people to return to Him. These include famine, drought, crop damage through wind and insects, death by epidemic diseases and by war. Destruction, possibly from volcanoes and wildfires, may also have occurred. These things did not cause people to seek God.

Many disasters occur around the world today. Because of modern means of communication, we are quickly aware of these disasters and often seen pictures of the suffering caused. We must be careful to not become desensitized to the pain many suffer. These scenes should call us to prayer for those involved.

We cannot know how to relate these disasters to God’s intervention in human life. We must be careful not to increase the pain people experience by equating this with sin in their lives or in their society. Jesus was quick to indicate that although the Jews understood sin to be punished by suffering in this life, there is no direct connection between a person’s suffering and the sin in his life. (See Luke 13:1-5).

On the other hand, any suffering should lead us to seek God’s comfort and His will for us. Our dependence on Him grows as we live through the difficult circumstances of life.

Furthermore, we must ask ourselves how our selfish behaviour may have led to current environmental disasters. Our part may seem to have been small or unimportant, but as each of us cares for God’s creation change for good can be accomplished.

This passage closes with verse 13 which was the focus in last week’s worship time.

***He who forms the mountains,
creates the wind,
and reveals his thoughts to man,
he who turns dawn to darkness,
and treads the high places of the earth –
the Lord God Almighty is his name.***

Amos described God's power in five revealing statements:

- (1) God formed the mountains, the most massive and immovable objects on earth.
- (2) God created the wind, the mightiest unseen force known to people of that day.
- (3) God declared to people His thoughts. Amos placed God's revealing Himself to people alongside His creating the world as evidence of His mighty power.
- (4) God makes dawn and darkness. He controls day and night and makes each follow the other day after day.
- (5) God also treads on the high places of the earth. His Spirit moves mightily across the world, including the highest and mightiest places in it.

Amos 5:18-24

***Woe to you, who long for the day of the Lord!
Why do you long for the day of the Lord?
That day will be darkness, not light.
It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear,
as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a
snake bite him.
Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light-
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?***

***"I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
I cannot stand your assemblies.
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
But let justice roll on as a river,
righteousness as a never-failing stream."***

All of these aspects emphasize the authority of God. Amos speaks to the people with that authority.

The prophets spoke much about a wonderful day when the Lord will punish the wicked nations of the world and deliver the righteous. Believers in the Lord still place great hope in that deliverance.

Of course, the expectation for that day is that punishment will come for others. Amos speaks to the Israelites to say that for them this day of the Lord will not be a happy experience for they will be counted, not among the righteous, but among the wicked.

The word pictures Amos uses are vivid. The day will be a day of darkness, not light. For those in countries and cultures where light has been available twenty-four hours a day, such a prospect is frightening. When electrical power is shut off for whatever reason, people panic if it is not restored in a few hours.

The Jewish people, of course, were not living in a time when electrical power was available. Candles and lamps would have lit their evening hours and bed time would have been early. The promise of light in the morning would have been expected.

But Amos says there will be no light for these people.

Light symbolizes goodness; darkness symbolizes evil. These people had grown accustomed to doing evil. Yet the prospect of darkness was undoubtedly frightening to those who took Amos seriously.

Amos pictures two powerful animals. One is a lion and the other a bear. Escaping from a lion, the man pictured runs into a bear. The imagery leaves no doubt that both of these animals are able to destroy.

Another vivid picture is the man escaping from harm into the safety of his home only to rest against the wall and be bitten by a snake. Home represents security, but for this man it was a false security.

God told these people the day of the Lord offered them no hope because He refused to accept their meaningless, empty worship. The Lord mentioned six major rituals that the Israelites observed in their worship: festivals or feast days (see Exodus 23:14-17), solemn assemblies or holy convocations (see Leviticus 23: 23-38), burnt offerings (see Leviticus 1:3-17; 6:8-13) grain offerings (see Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-18) peace offerings (see Leviticus 3:1-17, 7:11-34 and music (see 1 Chronicles 6:31-48; 15:16-24; 25:1-31).

The Lord mentioned several types of offerings that He had asked the Israelites to bring to Him: sacrifices or peace offerings (Leviticus 3: 1-17); tithes (Leviticus 27:30-33, Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-15), thank offerings (Leviticus 7:11-18, notice leavened bread in 7:13) and freewill offerings (Leviticus 7:16-18). The Israelites were observing these worship forms, even beyond the basic requirements. Yet these offerings were rejected by God because the hearts of the people were not focused on God. Their offerings were to buy God's favour – a cover up for the sinful acts of injustice in which they participated.

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/qorbanot.html>

Olah: Burnt Offering

Perhaps the best-known class of offerings is the burnt offering. It was the oldest and commonest sacrifice, and represented submission to God's will. The Hebrew word for burnt offering is olah, from the [root](#) Ayin-Lamed-Heh, meaning ascension. It is the same root as the word aliyah, which is used to describe moving to Israel or ascending to the podium to read from a [Torah scroll](#). An olah is completely burnt on the outer altar; no part of it is eaten by anyone. Because the offering represents complete submission to God's will, the entire offering is given to God (i.e., it cannot be used after it is burnt). It expresses a desire to commune with God. An olah could be brought from cattle, sheep, goats, or even doves. Gentiles were allowed to bring an olah in the outer Temple, unlike the rest of the kinds of sacrifices, which were reserved for Jews alone within the Temple itself; it should be remembered, however, that Gentiles are permitted to build their own place for sacrifices, and offer them to God themselves, and are promised reward for this meritorious behavior.

Zebach Sh'lamim: Peace Offering

A peace offering is an offering expressing thanks or gratitude to God for His bounties and mercies. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is zebach sh'lamim (or sometimes just sh'lamim), which is related to the word shalom, meaning peace or wholeness. A representative portion of the offering is burnt on the altar, a portion is given to the priest and the rest is eaten by the offerer and his family; thus, everyone gets a part of this offering. This category of offerings includes thanksgiving-offerings, free will-offerings, and offerings made after fulfillment of a vow. Note that this class of offerings has nothing to do with sin, and could properly be brought by the most righteous of the righteous.

Chatat: Sin Offering

A sin offering is an offering to atone for and purge a sin. It is an expression of sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with God. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is chatat, from the word "chayt", meaning missing the mark. A chatat could only be offered for unintentional sins committed through carelessness or ignorance, not for intentional malicious sins. The size of the offering varied according to the nature of the sin and the financial means of the sinner. Some chatatot are individual and some are communal. Communal offerings represent the interdependence of the community, and the idea that we are all responsible for each other's sins. A few special chatatot could not be eaten, but for the most part, for the average person's personal sin, the chatat was eaten by the priest.

Asham: Guilt Offering

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A guilt offering is an offering to atone for sins of stealing things from the altar, for when you are not sure whether you have committed a sin or what sin you have committed, or for breach of trust. The Hebrew word for a guilt offering is asham. When there was doubt as to whether a person committed a sin, the person would bring an asham, rather than a [chatat](#), because bringing a chatat would constitute admission of the sin, and the person would have to be punished for it. If a person brought an asham and later discovered that he had in fact committed the sin, he would have to bring a chatat at that time. An asham was eaten by the priest.

Food and Drink Offerings

A meal offering (minchah) represented the devotion of the fruits of man's work to God, because it was not a natural product, but something created through man's effort. A representative piece of the offering was burnt on the fire of the altar, but the rest was eaten by the priest.

There are also offerings of undiluted wine, referred to as nesekh.

God rejected all aspects of the religious observances—even their music!

***“Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.”*** (Amos 5:23)

We may not identify with the offerings which were mentioned and unacceptable to the Lord, but we can certainly identify when Amos tell us that the music they used was unacceptable. One of the most divisive things in the church today has been the different choices of worship music and styles. How can that be? Do we not need to examine how our attitudes toward music may have become unacceptable to the Lord?

God uses strong language to express his rejection ***“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.”***

Instead God desires and demands justice:

***“But let justice roll on as a river,
righteousness as a never-failing stream.”***

These are powerful, stirring words. We can hardly imagine what it would be like to live in a world where justice was available to all. Some who participate in this study have never known justice – from government, from employers, from landlords. Others live in cultures where justice is more prominent, but are still aware of businesses which charge unfair prices or employers who hire employees with limitations which allow them to avoid paying benefits.

A drug war in Mexico has taken the lives of thousands of innocent people this year and involved many young people in its cruel and unjust dealings. Yet only a few live on the profits of this decades old conflict. Similar unjust and evil circumstances exist around the world.

We may despair as did the writer Henry W. Longfellow who wrote the poem which has become a well-known Christmas song called **I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day**. The third verse says, “And in despair, I bowed my head: ‘There is no peace on earth, I said. For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.’”

However, Longfellow continues and affirms “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep; ‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men.’”

We wait yet for the fulfillment of the requirement of the Lord that justice roll on as a river and righteousness as an ever-lasting stream.

But we must never lose sight of the fact that worship and service which is true and pure and acceptable to the Lord demands that one live desiring justice and righteousness and does all in his/her power to bring it about within the realm of influence in which he/she lives.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

As participants reflect on the attitudes and actions of the Israelites which Amos condemns as a messenger and prophet of God, we must examine our own lives. What unjust acts have invalidated our own worship this week? How can we be sure that our worship is acceptable to the Lord?

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Amos 4:4-5; 5:18-24

Background Text

Amos 4:4-13; 5:18-27

Main Idea

God abhors hypocritical religious ceremonies, calling instead for justice in human relationships.

Question to Explore

Is worship the most important task of the church?

Teaching Aim

To help the church identify ways in which their worship practices may be hypocritical and decide to view them as God does.

Connect with Life:

The question to explore “Is worship the most important task of the church? is an intriguing one. Certainly worship is the heart of the Christian faith. But worship as a duty, mere ritual or routine is never real worship. Worship may begin in a corporate body, but it must continue in individual hearts. It must express itself in just and kind acts.

Guide the Study:

Ask a participant to read Amos 4: 4-13.

From the background information explain that Bethel and Gilgal were places of significance in Jewish history and worship. They have become worship centers where people go for show and pretence rather than true worship.

Have someone reread Amos 4: 4-5.

Discuss how the people could be actually participating in worship at sacred places and still the Lord says they are sinning.

Pause for answers to the question: “What have become unacceptable to the Lord?” (sacrifices, offerings, tithes)

Continue by reading Verses 6-11.

Identify what disasters have come upon the people. (These include drought, famine, crop failures due to blight and insects, plagues and wars.)

Have someone read verse 11.

Question the participants: What was the purpose which God had for these disasters? (to lead the people to return to Him)

Encourage the group to discuss this: How we can interpret difficult things which happen in the world today. (Avoid assigning blame, but pray that tragedy will bring people to seek God).

Have a participant read Amos 5:21-24.

Important notice for the leader:

As leader of your group, you will want to decide how much emphasis to place on learning about the various offerings of the Israelite people. Some groups will find this very interesting and important. Other groups may prefer to deal with the meaning of the passage rather than the Old Testament aspects of sacrifice.

Should you decide to explore more fully the meaning of the sacrifices, have each individual sacrifice and its reference written on individual cards. Ask different people to look up the passage, read it and explain what the sacrifice involved and when it was practiced.

The Lord mentioned several types of offerings that He had asked the Israelites to bring to Him: sacrifices or peace offerings (Leviticus 3:1-17); tithes (Leviticus 27:30-33, Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-15), thank offerings (Leviticus 7:11-18, notice leavened bread in 7:13) and freewill offerings (Leviticus 7:16-18).

If you, as leader, chose to have a fuller discussion of the sacrifices, you may want to consult various internet sources for additional information to the link that is given.

Encourage the group to dialogue on these verses. How do you feel when you read these verses?

Seek a brief discussion on this: How do these apply to us today – even to our own worship service?

Have someone read Amos 5:23.

Comment: We may not identify with the offerings which were mentioned and unacceptable to the Lord, but we can certainly identify when Amos tell us that the music they used was unacceptable. One of the most divisive things in the church today has been the different choices of worship music and styles.

Ask: How can that be? Do we not need to examine how our attitudes toward music may hinder our own worship and the worship of the others in our congregation?

Ask someone with a strong verse to read 5:24.

Now ask: Is this a familiar verse? Where might you have seen or heard it? (It is sometimes inscribed on judicial buildings).

Continue with these questions:

How does it make you feel?

Can we hope that this might happen in our day?

What can we do in our sphere of influence to bring justice and righteousness?

Ask someone to read Amos 5:24 again.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Encourage the group to reflect on the teachings of today's lessons. Ask for members to mention one instance of injustice of which they are aware. Pray together for solutions to these injustices to be accomplished. Specifically ask that we may search our own hearts for insincere worship and unjust attitudes and actions.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy

Amos 4:4-5; 5:18-24

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Hypocrites!! (Other People, Obviously)

Define hypocrisy. It is easy for youth to identify hypocrisy in adults. But today's lesson encourages us to focus on our own attitudes and actions. The Jewish people felt that they were ok with God. They participated in a lot of worship and gave sacrifices.

Why was that not enough?

What does the lesson say to you personally?

Is there a sin in your life that you need to deal with and stop lying about?

What are you going to do about it?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Judgment on Religious Hypocrisy***
Amos 4:4-5; 5:18-24**Beginning the Service:**

Choose one or more of the following to sing:

Refiner's Fire, *The Worship Hymnal* #592; CCLI #426298

Sanctuary, *The Worship Hymnal* #588; CCLI #24140

Come into His Presence, *The Worship Hymnal* #584; CCLI # 18819

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Historically, ethnic Serbians identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox and protectors of Christianity due to the many years they defied the Islamic Turkish invaders of the Ottoman Empire. Despite this fact, most do not understand what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ or the need to be a part of a local body of believers. Out of the approximately 10 million people who inhabit the country, only one in 5,000 is born again, and many of these encounter ridicule on a daily basis. A definite need for the love of Christ rips through this war-torn country. Only the Healer can bring hope to the divisions separating this land and its people.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Psalm 19:7-14

***The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul,
The statutes of the lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart,
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The ordinances of the Lord are sure
and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey in the comb.
By them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.***

***Who can discern his errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant from wilful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.***

***May the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.***

How well the psalmist captures our feelings after studying the words of Amos to the hypocritical and sinful Israelites.

How can we avoid such actions as they had done? Their very worship of God had become unacceptable to the Lord because of the heart attitudes as well as their evil deeds.

In those teachings of Jesus that we call the Beatitudes he said, ***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*** (Matthew 5:8)

We long for the purity of heart that promises that we will see and know God intimately.

Psalm 19 gives us good precepts for keeping us pure before God.

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We are advised to know the law of the Lord for it revives the soul. The statutes are trustworthy and make us wise; the precepts are right and bring joy to the heart; the commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes. All of these concepts – law, statutes, precepts and commands – refer to God’s teachings. The law of the Old Testament and the two great commandments of Jesus to love the Lord with heart, mind and soul and your neighbour as yourself as well as other New Testament truths are included in these teachings. Daily Bible study and group Bible study and learning the word through preaching are all to be desirable to us for they make us wise, bring joy, give light to us. They revive us – keep us going when life is hard. They are radiant.

Later, the ordinances are again mentioned. They are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold – than much pure gold and sweeter than honey.

Gold has signified the greatest wealth in most every culture. Today people rush to invest in gold as other investment opportunities are less sure. Gold retains its beauty; a piece of gold jewelry may become a family heirloom – passed from generation to generation.

The psalmist/poet is using the most descriptive language to tell us the importance of loving and studying God’s word. In another Psalm he says ***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*** (Psalm 119:105) and ***I have hidden thy word in my heart that I might not sin against thee*** (Psalm 119:11). There really is no way to do those things that are pleasing to God unless we study what His expectations and desires are.

Psalm 19 continues its description of how we may have acceptable worship because we have a pure heart. ***The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever*** (verse 9). Fear here refers to a holy awe, a reverence, respect beyond any human relationship. This kind of fear keeps us accountable. We do not take lightly either our responsibilities to God or to others. It makes us want to do our best to honour Him.

Call to Commitment:

As we know and keep the teachings of Scripture and live in a holy reverence toward God, we ask for forgiveness for even hidden sin and ask that we may be blameless before the Lord.

The Psalmist ends with the triumphant prayer ***May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*** May that be our prayer as we go about our life. May all we say to family, to friends, to the clerk at the grocery store, to students and business associates be pleasing to God. May the thoughts we have as we drive to work, wash dishes, work on the computer, sell products, shovel the sidewalk or take a walk be pleasing in God’s sight.

May it be so, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Concluding the Service:

Conclude by having the congregation repeat Psalms 19:14.

You may need to say it to the group first—slowly and distinctly. Or, you may need to say it line by line:

***May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.***