

Amen

Amen doesn't mean "I agree"; it means "that is solid, and I'm standing on it."

FROM THE BOOK: CHAPTER 2

BEFORE YOU MEET

- Read Chapter 2 of *The Weight of God*. Note that the back-seat story in the book includes some adult detail; the talk below tells it in a version that's fine for any group.
- Read Deuteronomy 27:11–26 and Nehemiah 8:1–6 beforehand so you can set the scene for each in a sentence or two.
- Bring spare Bibles, pens and a copy of the participant sheet for each person.
- Time plan for 75 minutes: 5 min to settle in and check in on last week's list, Open 10, The idea 15, Read together 10, Talk about it 25, This week 5, Pray 5.

OPEN

10 min

Have you ever made a deal on a handshake, or said "yes" to something and really meant it? What made your word count that time?

THE IDEA

15 min

Amen. Most of us have said it thousands of times: at the end of a prayer, at the end of a song, as a signal that someone has finished talking. Ask what it means and most people will say "I agree" or "so be it".

The book starts somewhere you might not expect: the back seat of a car. In the late 2010s the author was driving for Uber in Sydney. One passenger, a club owner, used the ride to cut a deal with his associate as if the driver wasn't there. The details aren't for reading aloud in small group (they're in Chapter 2 if you're curious), but the gist was this: the owner would pay for a big night out, and in return his friend had to get a local councillor to drop her opposition to the club's renovation. The friend's answer was one word: "Amen!"

He wasn't finishing a prayer. And he wasn't just saying "sounds good". He was saying: done, I'm in, I'll deliver my end. His Amen had weight behind it, and probably consequences if he didn't follow through. The author's point is that this man understood something about the word that a lot of us in church have forgotten.

Amen comes from the Hebrew root *aman*. It describes something structurally sound, something you can put

your full weight on without it giving way: a load-bearing wall, or a parent holding a child firmly. So the book suggests, "A better translation of Amen would be 'I am placing my weight there.'"

That's a long way from "I agree". You can agree that exercise is important and never get off the couch. In the book's words, "Agreement costs nothing." An Amen puts you on the line. If the thing you said Amen to turns out to be unreliable, you go down with it.

The Israelites knew this. In Deuteronomy 27, Moses had the tribes stand on two mountains while the Levites read out a list of curses for breaking God's covenant. After each one, the whole nation answered "Amen". Twelve times. They weren't nodding along. They were binding themselves to it.

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the Law aloud and the people lift their hands and shout "Amen! Amen!", then bow down with their faces to the ground. You don't put your face in the dirt over an opinion.

And in Revelation 3:14, Jesus himself is called "the Amen". Not the one who agrees. The one who holds.

So here's the question for tonight. When you say Amen, are you commenting, or are you standing on it?

READ TOGETHER

10 min

Deuteronomy 27:11–26; Nehemiah 8:1–6; Revelation 3:14. In each passage, notice what saying Amen costs or commits the people saying it, and in Revelation, notice who the word now describes.

TALK ABOUT IT

25 min

- 1 Before tonight, what did you think Amen meant? When do you most often find yourself saying it?

LEADER NOTE Expect "I agree", "the end", "so be it". There are no wrong answers here; most people have simply never been told.

- 2 The man in the back seat meant his Amen more seriously than many of us do in church. What's the difference between "I agree" and "I'm committed"?

LEADER NOTE Listen for the idea that agreement costs nothing while commitment has skin in the game. Wedding vows, signing a contract or a handshake deal are good everyday examples.

- 3 In Deuteronomy 27 the whole nation says Amen twelve times, out loud, to a list of curses. What would that be like? How would it change the way you listened?

LEADER NOTE *Most people say it would slow them down and make them listen harder. That's the point: Amen was a serious, binding word, not a reflex.*

- 4 Revelation 3:14 calls Jesus “the Amen”. What difference does it make to think of Jesus not as someone who agrees with things, but as someone solid you can stand on?

LEADER NOTE *Let people put it in their own words. Some will find it comforting; others may find it raises the question of whether they've actually stood on him. Both are good responses.*

- 5 Is there anything you've been saying Amen to (in prayers, songs, sermons) without really putting your weight on it?

LEADER NOTE *Keep this gentle and honest; it isn't a guilt exercise. "I'm not sure I could say Amen to that yet" is a valid and useful answer, and worth making room for.*

THIS WEEK

5 min

Say Amen only when you mean “I’m standing on that.” When you pray, sing or hear the Bible read this week, pause for a second before you say it. If you can mean it, say it and mean it. If you can’t yet, notice what made you hesitate, and bring that honestly to God (and to the group next week, if you like).

PRAY

5 min

Thank God that Jesus is the Amen, the one who holds. Give people space to be honest about the Amens they’ve said on autopilot, without turning it into a guilt trip. You might close by inviting the group to say “Amen” together at the end, and only if they mean it.