

Introduction to GBC Life Group Resources

Life Groups are a critical ministry of our extra ordinary life together at Gymea Baptist Church. These resources are produced each Monday as a companion to the sermon series. Choosing to use these resources facilitates our sense of community as we share together around common themes and passages.

Each week's resource includes a brief overview of the sermon series and of the sermon (which can be accessed on GBC's YouTube channel or via your favourite podcast platform), along with a series of activities to do together. Don't forget that The Big Ill podcast comes out mid-week as another companion to the sermon.

These range from questions to ask, prayers to pray, practices to try, and biblical passages to read (usually in the time between Life Group meetings). Feel free to pick and choose what will work well for your group – you don't have to do everything!

In 2024 we have also begun to include some additional information that we are encouraging our Life Group leaders, as leaders of GBC, to be sharing with your group. These include reflecting on a particular mission commitment of GBC, promoting and praying for GBC initiatives, and celebrating what God is doing in and through our community of faith.

If you have feedback on these resources, please email Nicole Jones: office@gymeabaptist.org.au.

LEARNING TO

Looking in



Luke's Gospel

PRAY WITH JESUS

Learning to Pray with Jesus: A Brief Introduction

One of our goals in 2024 is to identify and begin to develop one or two spiritual practices as a community of faith that align with our purpose as a church: to help each other respond to God's invitation to join in his mission. One of the practices we have identified is prayer and, given our DNA as a church, we felt that a good place to start our exploration of this practice was through a sermon series!

Luke's gospel is again our focus, as it has been all year, in part due to the simple fact that Luke's gospel mentions prayer more often than the other gospels and, when you include Acts (also written by Luke), there is a very clear connection between the practice of prayer and the practice of the church on mission.

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Luke 9:28-36

At first glance this text only appears to be incidentally about prayer – the focus is clearly on the transfiguration of Jesus before his disciples. As Jesus was praying at the top of a mountain with Peter, James, and John his glory was briefly revealed to them. The glory that was his before the creation of the world, the glory that will be revealed when he returns, the glory that was assumed when he had completed the work the Father had given him – the curtain was pulled back and the disciples saw, not a rabbi or a prophet or a carpenter, but the Messiah!

As if that wasn't enough, Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah (themselves associated with mountains and revelation) with whom he spoke of his upcoming departure, literally his "exodus", a foreshadowing of the great deliverance that Jesus would bring about in his death and resurrection.

On top of all that, a cloud – like that which led Israel in the wilderness, like that which descended on Mount Sinai, or that filled the tabernacle and temple – the very presence of God covered the mountain and the voice of the Father spoke, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

Wow. By the time we have heard the voice we have almost forgotten that this revelation took place in the context of prayer. And this is the principle. Prayer is not only an opportunity to speak to God but a chance to hear from him and our practice of prayer ought to include some space or at least a willingness to be interrupted by God!

This is, of course, often our experience. While God can speak at any time, in my experience it is when I am turned to God in prayer, in the Word, or in worship that I am most likely to hear from him.

The context of prayer, however, is not just the context in which revelation takes place. In this text it seems plausible to see the transfiguration as the Father's answer to Jesus' prayer. If this is the case, what might Jesus have been praying about? Or, rather, whom?

The voice that speaks at the end of the transfiguration scene indicates that all that happened was not primarily for Jesus' benefit but for the disciples'. They are the ones who are to "listen to him" and the immediate context suggests why.

Just before this – eight days before – Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah. It is at this point that Jesus began to teach them that the Messiah must suffer, die, and be raised to life and that to follow him meant taking up their own crosses. This seeming paradox lies at the very heart of the disciples' inability to understand fully who Jesus was (see Mark 8:31-33).

In this context – of grappling with who Jesus was and what it meant to follow him – one can imagine that the disciples were in need of reassurance that what Jesus had told them was, indeed, the will of the Father. The transfiguration would have done just this!

And this was Jesus' prayer for his followers; it was as he was praying that this revelation was given. Hebrews 7:25 states that Jesus continues his intercession for us; prayer isn't something that he only did while he was on earth, but continues to this day! And what does Jesus pray for us? I can think of few better prayers than that I and we would understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, even if it means denying ourselves.

If the transfiguration was an answer to Jesus' prayer – a prayer for his followers – it is worth pausing to consider the disciples' prayer practice here. They are asleep and, when they finally wake up, Peter babbles the first thing that pops into his head. Does this sometimes sound like our own prayer life?! Ultimately, it is not about how faith-filled our prayers are or how focused we are in intercession or anything else. For we have a high priest who lives forever to intercede for us.

Questions to Ask

1. Marc suggested that the disciples were in need of reassurance. When have you needed reassurance? Where did you find it?
2. The disciples had a hard time reconciling Jesus' identity as Messiah and his suffering. What aspects of following Jesus do you find particularly difficult to reconcile (e.g., turning the other cheek, forgiving seventy times seven, going the extra mile, denying yourself)?
3. Share a time when you experienced God's presence or revelation. What was the context of that experience?
4. Have you ever practiced hearing from God? What practices have helped attune you to listening?
5. We are considering the spiritual practice of prayer as one that aligns with our purpose as a community of faith – to help each other respond to God's invitation to join in his work – how does prayer align with and support that?

A Prayer to Pray

Commit to pray for each other this week that each of us might receive a revelation of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

A Practice to Try

When you pray this week be On-Purpose and leave some space to be interrupted by God. You may want to keep a prayer journal – jotting down the things you pray for as well as anything that you sensed God might be saying to you. The value of a prayer journal is that it helps us reflect over time on the themes that may be coming to the surface.

Readings to Read This Week

1. Exodus 24:13-18; 34:29-35
2. 1 Kings 19:11-28
3. Matthew 16:13-28
4. Hebrews 7:23-28
5. Romans 8:26-27

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

We hope that our Life Groups help people feel connected to one another and committed to our mission together as a community of faith. To that end we encourage Life Group leaders to remind your group about our mission commitments. Each week we'll draw attention to one or more of those commitments that fits neatly with the topic or theme. (See "GBC Mission Commitments" document for an overview of our commitments.)

As we reflect on prayer we are looking for where it aligns with and supports our engagement with our purpose: to help each other find our place in God's mission.

A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

On Sunday June 23 (11:30-1:00) we will be holding our mid-year member's meeting as well as an extraordinary meeting immediately following it. The mid-year meeting is a chance to report on how the year is going and the extraordinary meeting has been called for the purpose of adopting a new constitution. While only members will be able to vote, all are welcome to attend, and the documentation can be found on GBC Links, LinkTree, or request for hard copies. People can attend onsite or via Zoom and the zoom link will be released closer to the date.

Additional Resources:

The mission commitments of GBC

We have made several references to the mission commitments of GBC. This is the title we have given to our vision, purpose, and values. These will no doubt be familiar to you, but we thought it might be helpful to provide a clear overview of them.

Our mission commitments begin with John 20:21, “As the Father sent me, I am sending you.”

These words contain a central belief about what we are called to as a community of faith: that we are to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus to restore and renew everything according to the will of the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we reflected on this commission, we formulated a mission statement to attempt to summarise what we wanted to do. While we don't refer to it very often, it is helpful to see the progression of our thought. The mission we formulated was:

Everywhere we go and in everything we do, we will invite everyone to follow Jesus.

Taking the pattern we find in the Gospels we affirm that anyone can begin to follow Jesus; regardless of what they believe about him, what they know about him, and without changing their lives. When Jesus called his first disciples, he demanded none of these things; only inviting them to follow him. Over time they learned about him which challenged their beliefs about him and raised the implications for their lives, but initially, they only needed to be willing to follow.

The individual transformation that comes as people place their trust in Jesus and the commission that he has sent us to participate in led to a simple vision statement; what we want to see. We want to see lives changed by Jesus.

All of this took shape in our purpose as a community of faith – our “why”. To be a community of faith who courageously take up the invitation of God the Father to participate in His grand plan to restore and renew all things in Christ Jesus through the enabling presence of the Holy Spirit.

It was only as we gained clarity on our purpose that we identified a set of values that we believed were aligned with these mission commitments. The five values we identified are:

- To be On-Purpose. Intentional to create margins in our lives to participate in God's mission.
- To be Big-Hearted. Generosity in all our resources as a reflection of God's own generosity to us is a central value.
- To be Whole-Life Learners. As followers of Jesus we are called to ongoing transformation of our lives; learning to be more like Jesus. This also invites humility as we recognise our ongoing need of change.
- To be Others-Focused. To demonstrate love and care to others, over and above ourselves is a key characteristic of followers of Jesus.
- To be Trust-Worthy. We don't want to get in the way as people begin to follow Jesus. We want to reflect this value in our commitment to being a Safe Church.

These are the mission commitments that we hope will serve to give us some common language that reminds us of our unity together as followers of Jesus and the community of faith here at GBC.