

GBC LIFE GROUP RESOURCES 2024

Our Extra Ordinary Life Together

Introduction to GBC Life Group Resources

Life Groups are a critical ministry of our extra ordinary life together at Gynea 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.



Sabbath: Learning to Rest 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. The second practice we are going to explore is Sabbath; the weekly rest of God's people.

Unlike prayer, Sabbath feels like a more foreign concept and so our five-week series is going to focus on developing our understanding of what Scripture has to say about Sabbath before we turn our attention to the "how tos" of Sabbath. It will be useful, when you are facilitating discussion, to gently resist the temptation to jump to solutions or to allow the practicalities to short-circuit our discussion.

Our hope and prayer for this series is that the Holy Spirit might prepare the ground of our hearts to receive Sabbath practices that might flourish in our lives and community.

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Genesis 2:1-3

The rest of God on the seventh day of creation is where we begin our study of Sabbath. In six glorious days God has given form to that which was formless and filled that which was empty (Genesis 1:2) culminating in the creation of humanity. There is a sense that the whole of God's creative work has been leading to this point! Humanity, male and female, are created in the image of God and given the extraordinary task of having dominion over everything God had created. As becomes clear in the "second tablet" of creation (Genesis 2:4-25) this involves filling the earth with the garden of God until the whole earth is filled with his glory! And God saw all he had made and saw that it was very good!

While God's purposes for humanity and the world are frustrated that which was "very good" was marred and tarnished by human arrogance, folly, and disobedience, the rest of Scripture demonstrates God's commitment to restoring and renewing all things so that his creation purpose for humanity might be fulfilled. This commitment explains the call of Abraham, the covenant with Israel, the anointing of David, the coming of Jesus, the establishment of the church and, by extension, the purpose we have been given!

The creation of humanity and the revelation of God's creation purpose are certainly the pinnacle of the creation account, but not the climax. There is still one more day and God is not done creating! For on the seventh day God rests. And that seventh day is not described as good, or very good, but as holy. The first reference to holiness is not a description of moral or ethical purity or spiritual transcendence, but as stopping and resting!

But why did God rest? It was obviously not because he was tired! Perhaps the simplest explanation is that God is providing another example about what it meant to be image-bearers and how humanity was to have dominion over the created order. Just as God gave form to that which was formless and filled up that which was empty, so humanity is to do the same. And we are to do so with the same kind of ridiculous generosity, blessing and provision for those under our care. The rest of God is an example, but it is also an invitation.

As one author puts it, the very first day of human history was not a day of working the garden, but a day of rest. An act of grace in which they were invited to delight in all that God had made, to trust in his provision, and to rest with him. This act of grace is the basis for all the important work God had ordained; we work from a place of rest not as a reward for our work!

This is a Sabbath rest.

And yet, we are too often swept along with our 24/7 world, seeking balance rather than wisdom and never resting. In doing so we are implicitly declaring that we are wiser, stronger, more proficient, and more capable than God himself! Not only would we benefit from a Sabbath rest, but our world will too!

Questions to Ask

1. What stood out to you as we revisited the creation account?
2. How does our 24/7 world work against observing a Sabbath?
3. We've been encouraged to not jump to solutions, but rather, to allow the Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts for Sabbath practices. To what degree has this first reflection on Sabbath increased your hunger and thirst to know more?
4. Marc described the heresy of balance which seeks to fit everything into our lives rather than the wisdom to know which things to do and which not to. Discuss.

A Prayer to Pray

1. Pray for each other and for our community of faith that the Holy Spirit might indeed break up the soil of our hearts so that we are ready to receive Sabbath practices as a heart response to God rather than just another thing to do.

A Practice to Try

Even though we are trying to avoid jumping to solutions too early, there is still some room to do some things that might help break up the soil of our hearts!

1. Begin to read about Sabbath. The following books might be a good place to start:
 - a. Sabbath as Resistance by Walter Brueggemann
 - b. Subversive Sabbath by A. J. Swoboda
 - c. 24/6 by Matthew Sleeth
 - d. Keeping the Sabbath Wholly by Marva Dawn

Readings to Read This Week

The readings this week all reflect on the grace of Sabbath.

1. Genesis 1:1-2:3
2. Exodus 16:11-30
3. Psalm 92
4. Mark 2:23-28
5. Hebrews 4:1-11

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.)

Sabbath is most clearly related to our value of being On-Purpose; intentionally making space in our lives for God and others.

A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

The response to HopeDrive was fantastic and worth celebrating – the pantries received a great boost! Give thanks for all who responded to the call and remind your group that donations for Hopefield can be brought on any Sunday.

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.