

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 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.



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): Exodus 20:8-11

After God's gracious invitation to rest on the seventh day is introduced in Genesis 2:1-3, we hear almost nothing about Sabbath until Exodus. At Mount Sinai the Lord formalises his relationship with Israel; he would be their god (providing and doing all the things that gods should do) and they would be his people (living in a way that glorified him and that would advance his purposes on the earth). Like any relationship that is formalised (think contracts) the obligations of both parties were clarified. For Israel, their relational obligations were contained in the Law and the ten commandments functions a bit like an executive summary. And the fourth command relates to the Sabbath.

It is the longest of the commands and contains an introduction – Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy – the command itself – on the seventh day no work is to be done by anyone in your household (including your animals) and your towns (including foreigners) – and a motivation – because the Lord created the world in six days and then rested and made the seventh day holy.

Now, the simple fact that the Sabbath is in the executive summary of the Law should be enough to get us to rethink the way we might seek to remember and observe it, but there are other indicators in Exodus that point to the significance of Sabbath.

The first is found in Exodus 16:21-26 – two weeks before the Law is given – when the Sabbath is established for Israel in the context of the Lord's provision of manna which would fall each day except the Sabbath. The people were to gather just enough for one day each day, keeping none of their daily bread for the morrow, except on the sixth day when they were to collect enough for two days. Unlike the other days of the week, manna kept overnight would not spoil, and enabled the Israelites to rest. Sabbath – in the context of trust – precedes the Law.

After the Law is given to Moses he is called to the mountain top to receive additional instructions. The last word of the Lord to Moses on the mountain is to keep the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-17). Here, Sabbath is described as a "sign" between the Lord and Israel. The rite of circumcision, given to Abraham in Genesis 17, was another "sign" between the Lord and Abraham's descendants. Unlike circumcision, which was a private sign, the Sabbath was to be a public one; an indicator that they were the Lord's holy people.

It is this function of the Sabbath that explains why desecrating the Sabbath was a capital offence. To work on the Sabbath, rejecting God's rest and refusing to demonstrate one's commitment to the covenant, was tantamount to turning one's back on the relationship with the Lord!

Moses descends Sinai and finds the people engaged in idolatry, resulting in the breaking of the covenant. Moses intercedes with the Lord and the covenant is graciously restored. To indicate that the restored covenant is the same as the previous the narrator reiterates some of the laws again. Once again, the last word is Sabbath (Exodus 35:1-3).

The observance of the Sabbath appears to function a bit like a summary of the entire Law (see Isaiah 56:1-8 where this connection is made explicit). Many authors have drawn attention to the fact that the fourth command functions a bit like a bridge from the commands focused on our love of God to the commands focused on our love of neighbour; the very summary of the Law according to Jesus!

So, what explains our ambivalence toward the Sabbath?

One common rationalisation is that we, as Christians, are under a new covenant in Jesus. This is true and lies behind Paul's arguments that circumcision, for instance, is no longer necessary. However, Jesus himself says that he has come to fulfil the Law, rather than abolish it (Matthew 5:17-20) and goes on to demonstrate what he means when he declares that righteousness is not found, for example, in not murdering, but in not allowing anger, resentment, and desire for vengeance take root

in our hearts. Righteousness is not found simply in not committing adultery but in avoiding lustful, impure thoughts. We are called to a higher, more radical obedience and faithfulness in relation to these commands, but when it comes to the Sabbath, we tend to ignore both the letter and the spirit of law!

And we often lack any real sense of conviction that we have been unfaithful in not observing the Sabbath. The aim of this sermon series is to allow the Holy Spirit to break up the soil of our hearts so that when we plant some Sabbath practices they might flourish as a genuine heart response to the Lord. This may very well begin with confession and repentance for how we have largely ignored the Sabbath.

As new covenant people our failures to live faithfully are covered, overwhelmingly so, by Jesus – before we did anything to deserve it – enabling us to face our failures and seek to live up the radical standard of faithfulness and obedience!

Questions to Ask

1. What is your initial reaction to the significance of the Sabbath in the Law?
2. What are some of the reasons – theological and practical – that keep us from observing the Sabbath?
3. What further questions do you have (you may want to start a master question list as a group)?
4. 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 second reflection on Sabbath increased your hunger and thirst to know more?

A Prayer to Pray

1. Pray again 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. Include confession of our failure to observe Sabbath as part of your prayers.

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:
 - Sabbath as Resistance by Walter Brueggemann
 - Subversive Sabbath by A. J. Swoboda
 - 24/6 by Matthew Sleeth
 - Keeping the Sabbath Wholly by Marva Dawn

Readings to Read This Week

The readings this week were all referred to in the sermon.

1. Exodus 31:12-17
2. Exodus 35:1-3
3. Numbers 15:22-36
4. Isaiah 56:1-8
5. Matthew 5:17-30

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.

On Sunday August 25 we are holding our second Soundings event from 11:30-1:00. This is a chance for our community of faith to have a say in a strategic area as part of our overall planning cycle. We will be digging more deeply into outreach and more information will be available in the weeks to come. Please encourage your group to register to participate. In 2023 we have just over seventy people join in and their feedback and insights were really helpful for the leadership.

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.