

# GBC LIFE GROUP RESOURCES 2024

## Series: 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](mailto:office@gymeabaptist.org.au).



### Our Extra Ordinary Life Together: A Brief Introduction

This is our theme for 2024 and we will be returning to it several times over the course of the year. The theme is grounded in our strategic priority of Belonging and seeks to focus our hearts and minds on how our ordinary lives are made extraordinary by our shared purpose; to 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.

Part of our exploration of this theme will include reflection on our place in the church universal; those with whom we share this extraordinary purpose. To do so we will, from time to time, be drawing attention to the church calendar (e.g., Lent and Advent) and other common Christian practices (e.g., the Lord's prayer, the Apostles' Creed). These will be reflected in some of the potential activities you might want to try as a Life Group.

## A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Acts 9:1-19a

As part of National Baptism week (an initiative of Crossover Australia, part of the Baptist movement) we set aside this past Sunday to focus on baptism. In particular, the commitments that baptismal candidates make when they are baptised. While the actual wording may differ across different denominations and church traditions, the general idea is remarkably consistent and linked with the symbolism of baptism.

There are three aspects of the Christian life that are symbolised in the act of baptism. The first is the act of washing in which we recognise that, in Jesus, we have been washed clean from all our sins. This cleansing does not take place when we are baptised but took place in Christ's death and resurrection. We enter into this forgiveness by faith.

The second is a companion to the first; we enact our new birth. Paul the apostle describes this as being buried with Christ in our baptism (especially evident in immersion) and are raised again with him. There is a sense that as we enter the water we are dying to our old self and rising to our new self.

Baptismal candidates are asked to affirm their belief in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and to commit to leave their old life behind and seek to follow Jesus. In general, these commitments are front and centre for those who are being baptised. They are the two that are most personal and impact us most directly.

There is, however, another aspect of the Christian life that baptism symbolises. We see it most clearly in Jesus' baptism. He was not baptised for the forgiveness of sin or to express a commitment to leave his old, sinful life behind. His baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry and represents a readiness to do the will of the Father. Those who are baptised are asked to commit to follow Jesus in the community of faith. And the church is part of the Father's plan for the restoration of the world.

This last commitment tends to be a bit more ambiguous for us. What does it mean to make this commitment? Surely, it's more than attending a church, giving to the work of the church, joining a life group, and getting on a roster? These are important ways to participate in the body of Christ, but there is more to it – it is a readiness to join in the restoring and renewing work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

This purpose can feel beyond us; reserved for the special few whom God calls to be involved. People like Saul (better known by his Greek name, Paul); a life radically changed with a clear mission from Jesus himself. We can read Acts 9:1-19a and be amazed at God's plans, but we can let ourselves off the hook when we consider Paul's experience.

There is, however, another character in the story whose experience is perhaps more like our own: Ananias. A disciple of Jesus who was living in Damascus, Ananias is sent by Jesus to be a spiritual middleman for the Lord. We know, from Acts 22:12, that he was a devout Jew who was respected by the Jewish community and church tradition suggests that he was one of the seventy-two disciples who followed Jesus (see Luke 10:1). This seems plausible given who Paul was – a Pharisee and devout Jew himself (Phil. 3:4b-6). Ananias is cut from the same cloth and would have been the ideal person to baptise Paul and demonstrate to him from Scripture that Jesus was the Messiah. It is particularly striking that Ananias doesn't ask who it is who addresses him in his vision, but immediately recognises it as the Lord.

It is also striking that Jesus chooses to use a spiritual middleman at all. Why not just commission Paul himself? Why include Ananias at all? We are, of course, not told the answer to this, but it is a remarkably common occurrence in Scripture. One of the ways we are invited to participate in the community of faith is to encourage one another to say Yes to the invitation of Jesus in their lives. This

is essentially what Ananias does. He brings confirmation of God's call to Paul, plays a role in equipping him for what's next, and then essentially disappears from history.

The commitment to the community of faith that we make in baptism is simpler and more important than we sometimes imagine!

## Questions to Ask

Note: You may want to have a conversation about who has been baptised and who has not as part of your group discussion.

1. Which of the three aspects of the Christian life symbolised by baptism and reflected in the commitments is most meaningful to you and why?
2. Think back over your spiritual journey. Who has been an Ananias for you? How did they help you say Yes to Jesus' invitation?
3. What does it mean to you to be committed to the community of faith? How is this commitment expressed?
4. Have you ever had the opportunity to be Ananias for someone else? What happened?

## A Prayer to Pray

Pray for the other people in your Life Group, that they might say Yes to Jesus' invitation this week.

## A Practice to Try

If you have been baptised, spend time this week reflecting on the baptism commitments you made. How are you going? If you have not been baptised, consider these same commitments and commit yourself to prayerfully thinking about being baptised.

## Readings to Read This Week

The readings are related to baptism.

1. Matthew 3:13-4:17
2. Matthew 28:16-20
3. Acts 2:36-41
4. Romans 6:1-12
5. Ephesians 4:3-6

## 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.).

Our purpose is to encourage one another to courageously take up the invitation of God the Father to participate in his plans to restore and renew everything in Christ through the enabling presence of the Holy Spirit. That's the whole of this week's reflection!

## 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.

1. The Fair Trade Market is this Saturday. It's an event that is easy to invite others to attend!

## 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.