

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



### 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 18:9-14

This parable is not explicitly about prayer, but the fact that prayer is the practice that Jesus uses to illustrate an essential characteristic of his followers is instructive. Jesus tells a simple parable to address some among his followers who "were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else". He uses two stock figures: a Pharisee and a tax collector. The first, a religious leader and teacher of the Law whom Jesus often criticised for their self-righteousness. The second, a despised member of Jewish society who many saw as turncoats and collaborators with the Roman authorities but who, in Luke's gospel, are often described as far more likely to respond with faith to Jesus (Luke 5:27; 7:29-30; 15:1). And the parable turns out just like one might think.

Both men have come to the temple to pray privately and Jesus puts two different prayers on their lips. The Pharisee's prayer begins with thanks to God – not a bad way to start a prayer – but his gratitude is that he, the Pharisee, is not like other people. In particular, he is not like robbers, evildoers, and adulterers.

While it is possible to defend this part of the prayer on the basis that the people of God were to be separate from wickedness, the Pharisee's motivation is laid bare in his next line – "or even like this tax collector." He passes judgment on the tax collector, seemingly paying little or no attention to what the tax collector is actually doing – standing at a distance, not looking up to heaven, and beating his chest as he prays. As far as the Pharisee is concerned, the tax collector is no better than a mob boss attending Mass; just there for the look of it.

The last part of the Pharisee's prayer brings the two attitudes that Jesus wants to confront right to the fore. While the Pharisee is thankful that he is not like "great" sinners (theft and adultery were prohibited in the Ten Commandments), his description of his own righteousness doesn't match. Fasting twice a week and giving a tenth of all he receives are both admirable practices but are, to be frank, things that were attainable by just about anyone.

What we have illustrated for us in this prayer are the two moves of legalism. First, legalism reduces the obligations of God's righteousness to an attainable list of actions. The Pharisee's prayer brings to mind Jesus' criticism of the religious leaders in Matthew 23:23-24 where he accuses them of giving a tenth of the finest spices while neglecting the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The second move of legalism is to take the attainable reduction of God's law and use it to compare others to ourselves; holding others to "our" righteousness rather than seeing ourselves as accountable to God and God alone.

The tax collector, on the other hand, is seemingly having a "come to Jesus" moment. His prayer and how he prays it suggest that his is a prayer of conversion, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." While he is a sinner – by his own confession – thus justifying the Pharisee's initial judgment, it is clear that there is more going on here!

To those in the crowd of Jesus' followers who were practicing legalism – confident in their own righteousness and looking down on others – Jesus concludes by stating what we might already have expected. "I tell you that [the tax collector], rather than the [Pharisee], went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (18:14)

This brief parable provides us with at least three points of reflection for how we pray. First, that we ought to have a posture of humility; a humility before God and before others. One way that humility before God is expressed is in the specificity of what we confess. While saying we are sinners is generally true, specificity of the ways we have fallen short, missed the mark, acted foolishly, etc. demonstrates a clear-eyed view of ourselves. This is not to beat ourselves up or to make ourselves out to be worse than we are (We should, I think, have a little confidence in our righteousness; confidence that we are becoming a bit more like Jesus, experiencing the transformation of the Holy Spirit!), but to demonstrate a holy self-awareness that keeps us humble. Humility before others is expressed in remembering that we don't know what God is doing in someone else's life.

Second, like all aspects of worship in the Bible, motivation matters. The tax collector's prayer is very brief – one of the shortest in Scripture – but his heart appears to be far more open to God than the Pharisee's.

Third, the point of prayer is to connect with God. The tax collector throws himself on God's character and mercy. The Pharisee only spoke about himself. And his prayer was not answered; for no other reason than that he didn't ask for anything! He only spoke about himself and his own righteousness – there was nothing he needed from God and so he received nothing.

## Questions to Ask

1. Legalism has two moves; reducing God's righteousness to an attainable list and then using that list of "our" righteousness to compare others to ourselves. Discuss.
2. Humility is expressed in specificity about our sins; a holy self-awareness. Discuss.
3. The point of prayer is to connect with God; his purposes and plans. How do we balance bringing our petitions and requests with this reality?
4. How might you "fix" the Pharisee's prayer to make it acceptable?

## A Prayer to Pray

1. Spend some time praying that the righteousness we pursue is God's rather than our own. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any legalism in your lives and confess that.

## A Practice to Try

1. Use the "breath prayer", "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" as your "base" prayer this week. Repeat it whenever you remember to do so.
2. If you used the Lord's prayer as your "base" prayer last week, share your experience of doing that.

## Readings to Read This Week

The readings attack the legalism of God's people; their tendency to reduce righteousness to attainable actions that don't really address the heart.

1. Amos 5:21-24
2. Isaiah 58:1-10
3. Micah 6:1-8
4. Colossians 2:16-23
5. Matthew 23:13-31

## 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

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. 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 the meetings, and the documentation can be found on GBC Links (quick access via Linktree) or request can be made for hard copies. People can attend onsite or via Zoom and the link will be released closer to the date.
2. It would be worth celebrating the May Mission Month total – just over \$200,000 raised for the kingdom work of our partners and frontline missionaries. A great result!

## 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.