

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): Luke 6:1-11

In our final week of this series on Sabbath we want to turn to Jesus' declaration that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. In Luke's account this occurs at the end of a series of interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees and teachers of the law that become increasingly antagonistic. It is noteworthy that it is a disagreement over the Sabbath that proves to be the last straw for the religious leaders. It is also not all that surprising.

Sabbath observance, along with dietary restrictions and male circumcision, were the central identity markers of the Jews; setting them apart from the wider world. After careful study of Scripture the rabbis had identified thirty-nine prohibited activities on the Sabbath to provide a sense of uniformity to the Jewish practice of Sabbath keeping. When Jesus seemingly disregards the Sabbath practices it is not some minor point of the law but a central practice!

On a certain Sabbath Jesus, his disciples, some religious leaders, and possibly others, are walking. It was permissible to walk a certain distance on Sabbath – a Sabbath's day journey – and it may be that the small crowd was returning from synagogue. Regardless of where they were going we are told they were walking through the grainfields. As allowed in the law (Deuteronomy 23:24-25) the disciples were picking some grain kernels, rubbing them to separate the husks from the grain and eating the grain. This was a prohibited activity on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21, "even during the ploughing season and harvest you must rest") so the Pharisees ask the disciples why they are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.

It is Jesus, however, who answers their question with a parallel from Scripture (1 Samuel 21:1-6). It is the story of David, anointed but not yet king, who has been forced to flee because king Saul is intent on killing him. As he begins his flight David stops at the tabernacle and asks Ahimelek, the high priest, for some food. The priest answers that he has no ordinary food, only the consecrated loaves (these twelve loaves, representing the tribes of Israel, were placed before the Lord on every Sabbath with the replaced loaves – still consecrated – to be eaten by the priests). The priest offers these loaves to David on the condition that David and his men have kept themselves from women (the separation of sexual activity from worship was a critical point of difference from the surrounding nations, while sexual activity was not sinful it did make one ritually unclean). When David assures Ahimelek that he and his men are "clean", the high priest gave him the consecrated loaves.

Jesus sees a parallel between this story and the current moment in the grainfields. The point of comparison seems to be between Jesus and Ahimelek rather than David. It was the high priest who had the authority to permit what was usually not permissible on the basis of who it was who asked (the anointed one of God), the need (food for a flight into exile), and, most importantly, on the basis of a higher order concern: ritual cleanliness. It suggests that Jesus is the one who gave his disciples permission to "harvest" some grain on the Sabbath.

This is confirmed by Jesus' final statement, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." The first term provides further definition to the second. It comes from Daniel 7:13-14 where Daniel sees a disturbing vision of a future kingdom that would oppress the people of Israel. Just as the vision reaches its darkest moment the Ancient of Days appears and the heavenly court is called to order and "one like a son of man" is brought before the throne and is given authority, glory, and sovereign power along with an everlasting dominion and kingdom. It is a scene of investiture, when the one like a son of man is given everything he needs to be the agent of the Ancient of Days, to bring about the Ancient of Days' plans and purposes.

This is the title Jesus chooses for himself; he is the agent of God to fulfil his plans in the world. It is the Son of Man – the agent of God – who is the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is not simply saying he has authority to make decisions about what is and is not permissible on the Sabbath, but saying that he also has the interests of God himself about the Sabbath. Jesus is *the* Sabbath-keeper because the Father was a Sabbath-keeping God.

The heart of the conflict was that the Pharisees had allowed the “how” to become more important than the “why”. Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, had the “why” front and centre as well as the authority to determine the “how”. The next story illustrates this quite clearly as Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath (emergency medical attention was permitted, but a shrivelled hand was not life-threatening and could have waited), declaring that this action was in-line with the “why” of the Sabbath.

We must keep the “why” of Sabbath front and centre. Sabbath was never meant to be an identity marker for Jews, but was meant to be an identity marker of the God they worshipped. Their practices were meant to reflect God’s concerns and plans in the world; rest, grace, freedom from debts and enslavement, etc. The “how” is important. Jesus excoriates the religious leaders for their detailed and minute practices, but doesn’t suggest they stop them, only that they keep the higher order “why” in mind (see Luke 11:42).

We are left with a call to keep the Sabbath in real terms, but to allow the “why” to determine the “how”.

Questions to Ask

1. What stood out to you in these two interactions between Jesus and the religious leaders?
2. How does understanding the title “Son of Man” help you understand Jesus’ mission?
3. How would you describe the “why” of the Sabbath?
4. What sorts of “hows” does the “why” of the previous question point to?
5. What further questions do you have (you may want to start a master question list as a group)? If you have a master list of questions, review them and identify the top two or three questions that you still have.
6. Marc gave four potential next steps:
 - a. To ask a question about Sabbath on the Big Ill
 - b. To complete a survey on this sermon series. It would be appreciated if you allowed your group time to complete this short, nine question survey during your group time. The link is: <https://forms.gle/tMiFENDs8GNEH6ep6> and you can also access it through GBC Link Tree.
 - c. To consider being part of a small working group on prayer and sabbath to identify a few practices we can begin to do together. There is an expression of interest on Link Tree.
 - d. To begin somewhere; find some time and fill it with rest. Where might you begin?

A Prayer to Pray

1. Continue to pray that the Holy Spirit would 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 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 reflect the principle that we become like what we worship.

1. Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15
2. Leviticus 25
3. Isaiah 56:1-8
4. Luke 13:10-17
5. Luke 14:1-6
6. Exodus 31:12-17

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.

In September we focus on the work of Hopefield and seek to raise funds to support Sue Chin who works with DV clients. As with May Mission Month, we encourage people to prayerfully consider what the Lord may be inviting them to give to this project over and above their regular giving. The size of the donation is not nearly as significant as the faithful response to God's invitation and the desire to be Big-Hearted.

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.