

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): Leviticus 25:1-12

In the first week of this series we examined the significance of God's rest on the seventh day for humanity whose first day was not a day to begin to fulfil the purposes of God in the world but a day to delight in Him, the world he had created, and to rest. The whole of human work begins in this gracious invitation to rest.

Last week we explored the way the fourth commandment is used as a symbol for the whole law; to keep the Sabbath is to keep the whole law; to be faithful to the covenant. The command to rest is grounded on God's provision of "daily bread" for his people (Exodus 16:21-30) and was to be for everyone in Israelite society; foreigners and animals included! And though we are under a new covenant in Christ it is worth remembering that Jesus did not come to abolish but to fulfill the law and that he calls his followers to a higher, more radical obedience. He calls us to be faithful to more than the letter of the law but to the spirit of the law.

And it is more of the spirit of the Sabbath that we want to uncover this week, for it is only as we truly understand what the Sabbath is meant to do that we will be able to identify what we might fill our Sabbath observance with.

For the people of Israel, the weekly Sabbath practice was not the only Sabbath. They were also to observe a Sabbath year. Every seventh year, the land was to lie fallow; they were to neither sow, nor prune, nor reap. Whatever the land produced was for the poor (Ex. 23:10-11) and the land was to enjoy its sabbath (Lev. 25:1-7). Furthermore, the seventh year was the year for cancelling debts and setting slaves free (Deut. 15:1-11, 12-15) with a special emphasis on one's fellow Israelites who may have sold themselves into service. The underlying principle of these laws is generosity; they were not to take advantage of each other, nor be hardhearted or tightfisted towards each other.

The weekly trust in God's provision, the weekly reminder of God's generosity in creation, is to overflow into a year-long demonstration of deep trust. And this every-seven-year demonstration was to bloom into the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55). After seven sabbath years, the fiftieth year was to be consecrated and, on the Day of Atonement no less (Lev. 16), the Jubilee was to be proclaimed throughout the land and everyone was to return to their ancestral land. Land was to be bought and sold with reference to the Jubilee – if the Jubilee was next year, the land was sold at 1/50th its value, if it was last year, the land was sold at full price. The principle is that the land is the Lord's and his people live in his land as strangers – the land must not be permanently sold.

Sabbath year and Jubilee represent a radical social dynamic to Sabbath that would have had tremendous implications for Israelite society; debts cancelled, inheritance restored, equality before the Lord reinforced. And if this is what a weekly Sabbath was meant to build to, then some of these practices of generosity, freedom, restoration are surely meant to be part of our rest!

And this is made all the more clearer in the example of Jesus. In Luke 4:14-21 Jesus begins his public ministry in Nazareth. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue, as was his custom, and read from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." When he finished reading he sat down and began by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Even though the reading doesn't mention the Jubilee or the Sabbath year, the actions associated with the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favour make it clear that these celebrations sit in the background. And here it is...

There is something fundamentally “kingdom” about observing the Sabbath. There is something about a once-in-seven day of remembering of God’s goodness, salvation, and purposes in the world and the principles of generosity, equality, and restoration that aligns in a particularly clear way with the ways of Jesus. To practice keeping the Sabbath prepares us to live “kingdom” lives the other six days a week. And this call is as important now as it has ever been.

There is no evidence that the people of Israel ever observed either the Sabbath year or the Jubilee (See Jeremiah 34:8-16 for an example of almost keeping part of the Sabbath year and the Lord’s response). In fact, there is good reason to suggest they never did. In Leviticus 26:34-35 the ultimate consequence of unfaithfulness would be exile from the land at which point, “the land will enjoy its sabbath years ... the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.” In 2 Chronicles 36:21, after the people have been exiled, the Chronicler reports, “The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”

Their failure to keep the Sabbath and allow it to bloom into the practices of the Sabbath year or Jubilee is seen as a summary of their failure to be faithful to the covenant with the Lord. How much more important ought Sabbath practices be to those of us who follow Jesus – whose entire ministry was framed in Sabbath?

Questions to Ask

1. The Israelites seemingly failed to keep the Sabbath year or Jubilee. What practical reasons do you think contributed to their failure? How do these contribute to our failure to keep Sabbath?
2. What are some ‘Sabbath’ activities that reflect the generosity, freedom, and restoration that we might consider participating in?
3. What further questions do you have (you may want to start a master question list as a group)?
4. How are your attitudes towards Sabbath beginning to change? Is there evidence that the Holy Spirit is breaking up the soil of your hearts? Where is there still resistance to Sabbath?

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 were all referred to in the sermon.

1. Exodus 23:10-13
2. Leviticus 25:1-12, 13-55
3. Deuteronomy 15:1-11, 12-18
4. Jeremiah 34:8-20
5. Isaiah 61:1-11

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.

1. 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.

[Click here to Register for Soundings Day](#)

2. At the end of the sermon and in the E-news last week, Marc mentioned that part of the next steps for us will be to set up a small working group to do some more thinking, reading, investigating, etc. and identify 2-3 Sabbath practices/frameworks that we might use to begin to remember the Sabbath more faithfully. If someone in your group has really been impacted by this series or is interested in the next steps, let them know that this opportunity will be coming!

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.