

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): Deuteronomy 5:12-15

This week we return to the fourth commandment but this time in its second iteration in Deuteronomy. Israel is on the verge of entering the promised land and Moses makes an extended appeal to them to remain faithful to the Lord – to remember who they are and who they are to become. It should not be surprising then that Moses reiterates some of the Law, nor that when he does, he often does so with a little “spin” that aligns with his purpose. We see one of these adaptations in his account of the ten commandments.

As in Exodus, the commandments are preceded by a preamble: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” This phrase, used throughout the Old Testament, was a summary of all that God had done for his people – a bit like how we might summarise all that Jesus did by reference to “the cross”.

There are two aspects of this preamble that are important to what follows. The first is clear to us: the salvation of God; he rescued them from slavery! This act of grace (salvation prior to invitation into covenant), like the grace we have received in Jesus, is worthy of celebration and also forms a central motivation to be faithful to the Lord.

The second aspect is more difficult for us to recognise because it reflects a worldview that is largely foreign to us. In the ancient near east the presence and activity of the gods in every area of life was assumed, even when it was not explicitly stated. This assumed knowledge lies behind this preamble. The Lord had not only saved Israel from slavery, but had saved them from the gods of Egypt who had legitimated their enslavement.

In Exodus 1:8-14, 22 we are told that a new pharaoh has come to power, “to whom Joseph meant nothing”. His response to the vastly multiplied Israelites is to cast them as a threat and as potential enemies who, in order that they do not become what he fears, orders their enslavement. The people of Egypt come to dread and fear them and make their lives bitter with harsh, ruthless labour; making bricks to house Pharaoh's excess grain seven days a week. Eventually this leads to violence against the Israelites; the execution of all newborn male babies!

These actions were not those of a duly elected official, nor those of a despotic dictator, but the actions of the one who ruled Egypt by the will of the gods and on their behalf. His actions against the people of Israel were legitimated by the gods of Egypt!

The Lord had rescued Israel from slavery and from the gods who had justified their enslavement. The first command is that the Israelites are to have no other gods before the Lord. While “other gods” refers to any other gods, the gods of Egypt must surely have been front of mind.

The covenant – with its commands and its regulations – was meant to demonstrate life in relationship with the Lord who stood opposed to the “other gods”. In Deuteronomy 6:20-25 the meaning of the laws is related to the fact that they were slaves in Egypt, but the Lord rescued them.

So, it is worth noting that when Moses comes to the fourth commandment, he does not refer to creation as the motivation, but their rescue from slavery. The Sabbath (which was utterly unique in the ancient near east) was, of all the laws, the one that most clearly demonstrated the difference between following the Lord and the gods of Egypt. Instead of working seven days a week, Israel was to rest. Instead of seeing foreigners as threats and enemies they were to be allowed to rest “as you do”.

It is understanding this “divine” background to the fourth command that explains why Sabbath is so necessary and so difficult – it is ultimately about who we worship. This is of critical importance because we become what we worship.

Worship is the alignment of our lives – our values, priorities, behaviours, and actions – to that which we believe controls our destinies or which we believe will provide us with the good life.

This is the real danger of idolatry in Scripture! Nothing draws out the wrath of God like idolatry, not because his feelings are hurt, but because if his people worship other gods, they will become like them. And if they are like them, they will not be like God. And if they are not like God, they will not be an example to the world of the restoration available!

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann draws a parallel between the enslaving gods of Egypt and the enslaving gods of our day. Our motors, he says, “are set to brick-making speed” and we are, through capitalism, consumerism, and technology, led into an anxious, restless, endless production; encouraged to see people as objects whose value is linked to production and as rivals, threats, and enemies.

Sabbath is necessary because it is a practice that reflects who God is – who Jesus is! – and it is so difficult because it is a matter of worship! If it were only a matter of time management it would be difficult enough, but as it is, it is a matter of our hearts first and foremost.

Jesus stated the same principle in Matthew 6:24 when he says, “No one can serve two masters.” The reason is that we will become like God, or we will become like money. Sabbath rest is a spiritual discipline that leads away from our world and towards the gracious, rescuing, and restoring God. This is why it is so very necessary and so very difficult.

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” (Deuteronomy 5:6-7)

Questions to Ask

1. We become what we worship by aligning our values, priorities, behaviours and actions to that which we believe controls our destinies and will give us the good life. Discuss.
[This might include a discussion of what we are told controls our destinies, how we are to attain the good life (or even what the good life is), where our security is to be found; what values, priorities, behaviours, and actions align with these; how we may have begun to align our lives to these idolatrous claims; and how Sabbath counters these claims.]
2. What further questions do you have (you may want to start a master question list as a group)?
3. 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 reflect the principle that we become like what we worship.

1. Deuteronomy 8:10-20
2. Isaiah 44:6-23
3. Joshua 24:14-24
4. Matthew 6:24-34
5. Romans 1:18-32

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.