

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.



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 22:31-34

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you Simon, that your faith may not fail". This shocking statement of Jesus gives us a glimpse of the spiritual realm. Similar to the book of Job, we see Satan (The Accuser – Rev 12:10) at work, petitioning to shake and sift the disciples. Sifting separated wheat from impurities was, agriculturally speaking, a good thing, but also violent and harsh. We are about to see what the disciples are made of and if their faith stands up to scrutiny.

Jesus, in the midst of the trials, fear and looming horror of the cross, prays for Simon and commands his disciples to pray as well (Luke 22:40; 22:46). Rather than pray for an out or an escape, Christ's prayer is for faith that will not fail. These events happen at a crucial time, where God's salvific plans are about to be accomplished at the cross.

Jesus is no stranger to temptation; withstanding the attacks of the devil in the wilderness at the beginning of his public ministry (Luke 4:1-13). He knows that trusting in God and a strong faith is the way through times of temptation, trial and sifting.

Faith is commended and remarked upon by Jesus multiple times in Luke. Jesus knows if we have faith and remain connected to God we remain spiritually alive, bearing fruit (John 15:1-8). Similarly, our faith keeps us connected to Jesus the Way, Truth and Life (John 14:6) and without this faith we are Lost, Deceived and Spiritually Dead.

Faith is crucial to Jesus, not only because he wants to have a relationship with us, but also because we are a part of God's plans and purposes to save, renew and restore the world in Christ. There's a lot at stake. Jesus therefore prays for Simon, and by extension us. He interceded then and continues that intercessory work today at the right hand of the Father. Hebrews 7:25 says He always lives to intercede for us.

What a privilege and comfort to know Jesus is on our side, doing what only He can do, speaking for us, defending and providing and praying.

As those apprenticed to Jesus and doing what he does, we too take up the intercessory work of prayer. Oswald Chambers says "Jesus Christ carries on intercession FOR us in heaven. The Holy Spirit carries on intercession IN us on earth. And we the saints have to carry on intercession for all men and women on earth".

We can pray about all manner of things, like health and jobs and exams (and even parking spots!) but let's take faith as seriously as Jesus and intercede for the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ. For we know that we can endure much tempting, testing, difficulties and sifting if our faith connects us to the Vine and the Way, Truth and Life. This is true for our own relationship with God, but it's also because we too are part of the glorious Kingdom work of salvation and are partnering with God to renew and restore all things in Christ.

It was a priority for Jesus, who saw through into the spiritual realm. Let's make it our priority as we know through Ephesians that our "struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities ... against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12)

Questions to Ask

1. Roxane linked Jesus instructing the disciples to pray so they don't fall into temptation (Luke 22:40; 22:46) with Jesus temptation in the wilderness prior to the start of his public ministry (Luke 4:1-13). We often think of temptation as something we do or don't do, but in what other ways might we be tempted to centre ourselves and our desires instead of putting God first?
2. Is it Simon or is it Peter? Jesus refers to Simon using both his name and nickname/title. (Similar to Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah, God sees our potential and our destiny). Jesus knows and loves this disciple in his "before" potential as Simon the ordinary Fisherman, as well as his "after" destiny and purpose as Peter (meaning Rock) the Apostle. Peter was named this because of his confession and recognition of faith in Jesus as Messiah. (Matt 16:15-18) What does it mean for you that Jesus sees you in your before/after or your potential/destiny? Where have you seen others in your life group stepping into their calling or destiny and growing in faith hope and love?
3. Jesus lives to intercede for us and appears for us in God's presence (Heb 7:25; 9:24) What difference does it make for you to know that Jesus is praying and interceding on your behalf? How might that change the way you pray?
4. What are some times you've seen answers to prayers? How did it affect your faith and relationship with God?

A Prayer to Pray

1. Consider those in your life who don't have faith. Bring them before the Lord this week and ask that he might give them the gift of his grace. (Eph 2:8-9)
2. Spend time praying for one another, that our 'faith may not fail' when we are sifted and tempted and we might be proved to be faithful.

A Practice to Try

1. This week, pay attention to your language in prayer. Do your prayers focus on yourself more than others? Do you find yourself repeating "Lord I just need..." or coming to God with a shopping list? If you notice that your prayers are more self-centred than others-focussed, acknowledge this to God and try and change the focus of your prayers to centre others and in particular, their faith.
2. Worrier or Warrior? Write a list of the things you are worried or anxious about, people you are concerned about, situations where you feel powerless, fears that you don't even want to admit to yourself. Bring them before Jesus, who lives to intercede for us and hand them over to Him in prayer. Pray in faith, acknowledging that God sees the bigger picture and can be trusted. Ask God to help you put on His Armour (Eph 6:13-17) and move from worrier to warrior.

Readings to Read This Week

1. Romans 8:33-34
2. Hebrews 9:24
3. Hebrews 12:2
4. James 5:13-20
5. Romans 5:3-5

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

1. Intercession in prayer is one way we bless the world around us. Another way we stand in the gap, and do for others what they cannot do for themselves is with initiatives such as Hopedrive. The current cost of living crisis has put pressure on everyone, but particularly those for whom even basic groceries have become unobtainable. Hopefield supports those sleeping rough, in difficult circumstances and those fleeing abusive relationships. Having tinned food or long-life milk provided goes a long way to helping and caring for those on the margins. Even though it may cost as little as \$1 for us, for those receiving the help, it's the difference between a full stomach and health or being hungry and getting sicker. Consider how your life group might band together to intercede in this way each month.

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.