

GBC LIFE GROUP RESOURCES 2024

Series: 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.



Our Extra Ordinary Life Together

Next Sunday is another stand-alone sermon that shares a few common themes with the past few weeks' sermons. Most notably, how we experience the faithfulness of God through the faithfulness of others with the requisite invitation to be an expression of God's faithfulness to others.

The theme for next week:

- December 1: A 2024 retrospective – An opportunity to reflect on how we have experienced the ongoing transformative work of Jesus in our lives.

This will be the final Life Group Resource for 2024

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): John 20:19-23; Exodus 34:6-7

"Great is thy faithfulness!" This is one of the central declarations of God's people throughout Scripture and the history of the Church down to our own day. It expresses a key attribute of God's character and nature.

We encounter it in one of the most significant descriptions of God in all of Scripture: Exodus 34:6-7. Its significance lies, in part, because it is not a human description of God, but the self-description of God. The first section is reflected upon in other sections of Scripture: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." (See Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

This self-description, however, is also significant due to its context. Exodus 34:4 notes that Moses "chiselled out two stone tablets like the first ones" before he went up the mountain. This refers to the second set of tablets upon which the Lord would inscribe the ten commandments; an executive summary of sorts for the law which itself serves as the "terms and conditions" of the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel. The first tablets had been destroyed by Moses after the Israelites had made the golden calf idol.

The second tablets indicate the Lord's commitment to the relationship – faithfulness – and to renew/reestablish the covenant (See 34:10-26 in which the Lord restates some of the "terms and conditions" of the covenant). And it is this faithfulness-in-relationship that points to something very important about God's faithfulness and that is that it is nestled within his faithfulness to his purposes.

The faithfulness of God to his people is to enable them to participate in his plans and purposes in the world. The Israelites were to be a living, breathing display home of what it meant to live in relationship with the one, true God and to be a conduit of God's blessing to the nations. As the golden calf incident makes clear, Israel was only going to be able to do this if God was faithful to them, his character, and his purposes. It was only his compassion, grace, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness that would enable them to do his will in the world.

Fast forward, then, to John 20:19-23 where we see the same dynamic at work. The disciples – whose last interaction with Jesus had been to desert him and deny him – are gathered together with the doors locked when Jesus appears in their midst. "Peace be with you!" he says. A gracious greeting that hints at what is to come.

It is noteworthy that Jesus' identity is demonstrated, not by his miraculous appearance, but by the scars of his suffering – a reminder of forgiveness and faithfulness to them. After he repeats his greeting, he declares his faithfulness to his purposes as well. "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Their forgiveness is not only for their personal benefit but to enable them to participate in God's plans and purposes in sending Jesus – to reveal the Father, to do the will of the Father, to reconcile people to the Father, to bring light into darkness, and life in place of death. This is the work that Jesus had been sent to do, and now, that he sends his disciples to do.

And the only way they – or we – would be able to do so, would be if Jesus was faithful to his promises to secure forgiveness! This is the thing about God's faithfulness: it is a faithfulness to us in light of his faithfulness to his purposes in the world. Any reflection on God's faithfulness to us is incomplete if we don't also consider what his faithfulness invite us to do in his plans and purposes.

In one sense, this verse – "As the Father sent me, I am sending you" – sits at the very heart of who we hope to be as a community of faith. In recognition of God's faithfulness to us, we seek to participate in the plans and purposes he has for us!

Questions to Ask

1. On Sunday we invited people to write down the names of those through whom they had experienced the faithfulness of God. Invite those who weren't there on Sunday to do the same; and then ask if anyone would like to share one or two people from their list and the role they have played in their lives.
2. God's faithfulness to us enables us to participate in his plans and purposes (themselves an example of his faithfulness to his plans to restore everything). Discuss what this means for you.
3. What stood out to you about the reflections on Exodus 34 and John 20?

A Prayer to Pray

1. Give thanks for those through whom you have experienced God's faithfulness and pray that you might see the opportunities you have to do the same for others in your life.

A Practice to Try

1. If you are able, reach out to one or more of the people you identified as those through whom God has demonstrated his faithfulness to you and let them know!

Readings to Read This Week

These readings are key examples of Israel reflecting on Gods' self-description.

1. Nehemiah 9:5b-37
2. Psalm 86
3. Psalm 145
4. Joel 2:12-17
5. Jonah 3-4

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).

All of our mission commitments stem from John 20:21b (see Additional Resources on page 4).

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. This year, as a way to engage our community at Christmas, we are hosting what we are calling "A Festival of Christmas". This includes the Christmas lights and window boxes which will be lit up by this coming weekend as well as a three-day period – December 20, 21, 22 – in which we will be opening our buildings up with a live-nativity walk-through, craft activity for kids, live music, and, of course, the lights. All of this leads up to our Christmas Eve Carols Service and the Christmas Day services.

To do this well and safely, we need you to do two things: 1) invite somebody to it and 2) volunteer to help on one of the nights. You can look at the volunteer needs by following the link on [Link Tree](#).

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.