

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

The next several Sundays are all stand-alone sermons that share a few common themes. 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.

More specifically, the themes for the next few weeks:

- November 17: "Generosity leading to thanksgiving" (2 Corinthians 9:6-15) – Financial stewardship as an act of worship and its consequences.
- November 24: "Great is thy faithfulness" – GBC's 75th anniversary and a chance to give thanks for God's faithfulness to us through others.
- 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): 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

In this text, Paul is urging the Corinthians to contribute financially to a special offering for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:5). What becomes clear is that Paul's primary concern is not so much with the amount of money raised for this appeal, but what that gift tells him about the state of the Corinthians' hearts.

Paul's focus is on the work of God, beginning with the proverb about generosity – based on observation of the pattern built into the created order by God – if you want a generous harvest, you have to be generous in your planting. The question is what kind of harvest is Paul concerned with?

We are given a clue in Paul's instruction to "give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." The heart is the source of true generosity. An external standard of giving risks becoming either a burden or a substitute for heart transformation. And God loves a cheerful giver – like he loves the faithful or the just! A gift from the heart is pleasing to the Lord, so give from the heart.

Paul then expands the circumstances in which these principles apply – "in all things at all times, having all you need you will abound in every good work." Paul has more on his mind than the appeal for the Jewish believers! He then follows up with a quote from Psalm 112 which describes the generosity of the righteous. Generosity is not just a characteristic of the righteous, it is the characteristic of the righteous!

Paul goes on to describe the end goal of God's provision for them – thanksgiving to God – and describes the harvest their generosity will bring. It's not a financial harvest that Paul is interested in, but a harvest of righteousness!

In the last section he makes a very important connection. Their generosity, in every area of life, is a service by which they prove themselves. More specifically, it is an act of "obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ." In other words, Paul is calling them to put their money where their mouth is! They claim that Jesus is Lord and that in his life, death, and resurrection, God is restoring and renewing all things and has poured out the Holy Spirit into you to renew you and to enable your participation in these plans and purposes – show me!

The generosity of the Corinthians tells Paul something about the state of their hearts – reflecting their understanding and commitment to God's mission. This is why Paul urges generosity from the heart. Which brings us back to the proverbs that Paul started with. If we want an abundant harvest of righteousness we need to sow abundantly – Are our hearts prepared for this?

This is the kind of giving that Paul encourages us to foster, but it's not easy!

Questions to Ask

1. Think of a time you have given cheerfully; without reluctance or compulsion. What did you give to and what contributed to your cheerfulness?
[NOTE: This doesn't need to be a financial gift, but anything we would describe as generosity.]
2. What are the things that keep us from generosity from the heart? How might the Spirit transform/overcome these?
3. Read Psalm 112 and reflect on the generosity that it describes.
4. We often think about generosity in terms of financial generosity, but where else could we be Big-Hearted?
5. Financial generosity from the heart transcends an amount. How would you describe a truly generous gift? What are its characteristics?

A Prayer to Pray

1. Pray for each other (and yourself) that the Holy Spirit would continue to change your heart in order that you might be cheerfully generous as a reflection of your understanding and commitment to the purposes of God.

A Practice to Try

1. Give cheerfully – without reluctance or under compulsion – to something this week. Another way to think about it is to give to the point of willingness. This involves some assessment of our heart connection to that which we are giving. You might want to think about your heart connection to a regular contribution you already make or give to another charity/group/appeal.

Readings to Read This Week

These readings speak of the importance of the heart as the source of our actions.

1. Deuteronomy 10:12-22
2. Jeremiah 31:31-34
3. Ezekiel 11:17-21
4. Mark 7:1-23
5. Hebrews 3:7-19

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.)

One of key values is to be Big-Hearted; generous in every area of life. This is the kind of generosity that flows from our hearts and is, as Paul urges in this section of his epistle, evidence of our "obedience that accompanies our confession of the gospel of Christ."

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 November 24 we will be celebrating seventy-five years as a community of faith! Our theme is "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and we will be giving thanks for those who have come before us – on whose shoulders we stand – and considering how we might be faithful for the generation to come. One of the things we will be doing is taking a special thank offering that will be used to seed an endowment fund. The hope is that, by the time GBC turns a hundred, this fund will be in a position to facilitate ministry. Please prioritise being there on the 24th and prayerfully consider God's invitation to be contributing to the thank offering.

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.