

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: A Brief Introduction

This is our theme for 2024 and we will be returning to it several times over the course of the year. The theme is grounded in our strategic priority of Belonging and seeks to focus our hearts and minds on how our ordinary lives are made extraordinary by our shared purpose; to 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.

Part of our exploration of this theme will include reflection on our place in the church universal; those with whom we share this extraordinary purpose. To do so we will, from time to time, be drawing attention to the church calendar (e.g., Lent and Advent) and other common Christian practices (e.g., the Lord's prayer, the Apostles' Creed). These will be reflected in some of the potential activities you might want to try as a Life Group.

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Acts 2:1-12.

As part of our extraordinary life together we are paying a little more attention than we normally do to the church calendar. On Sunday the season of Easter concluded with Pentecost Sunday, when Christians around the world remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the gathered disciples and the beginning of the church.

Pentecost is another example of a Jewish festival that finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Just as Jesus had filled the Passover meal with new meaning that expanded on the salvation that meal commemorated, Pentecost was transformed by the sending of the Holy Spirit. Celebrated fifty days after Passover, Pentecost was a harvest festival that also celebrated the giving of the law to Moses. Many Jews, who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, would have stayed in the city until Pentecost, which may explain the many languages represented in the text.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon the believers with a rushing wind, tongues of fire, and the proclamation of the good news in the languages of all who were in Jerusalem, the crowd asks themselves, "What does this mean?"

Peter, filled with the Spirit, addresses the crowd, seeking to answer that very question. Even before he begins though, the attentive reader will have perhaps noticed some parallels with other passages of Scripture that shed some light on what these events meant.

In the Old Testament the presence and activity of the Lord was commonly associated with wind and fire. (As an interesting aside, the Hebrew term for "spirit" – ruah – can be translated as spirit, breath, or wind.) Whether we consider the ruah of God hovering over the waters in creation (Gen. 1:2), or the wind that began to dry out the earth (Gen. 8:1), or the wind that parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21), or the wind that filled the dry bones with breath (Ezekiel 37:9-10), we find God's presence and activity linked with wind. The same can be said about fire.

Moses encounters the Lord in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), Israel is led out of Egypt by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22), and when the Law was given the Lord descended on Mount Sinai in fire (Exodus 19:18). These stories and more may have echoed in the hearts and minds of those hearing Luke's account and they might have suspected that, whatever else this might mean, it points to the presence and activity of God.

Another echo from Scripture – before Peter points to Joel and Psalms – is found in the multiplicity of languages. This is reminiscent of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) where the Lord confused the language of the world in response to the idolatrous desire of the people to make a great name for themselves, to build a tower to the heavens (which, as we've seen in Chronicles, is more than just a tall tower, but symbolic of a claim to represent heaven and the divine), and to remain in one place (rather than filling the earth). The Lord confuses their languages and scatters them over all the earth.

The outpouring of the Spirit and the proclamation of the good news in all the languages spoken in Jerusalem is a kind-of-reversal of Babel, unifying those who are gathered in the activity of God.

However, the last story in the prologue of Genesis also sets the scene for the Lord's call of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) in which the Lord promises to make Abraham's name great, to bless him (bringing heaven to earth), and to fill the earth with that blessing. These promises not only reflect the desires of the Babelites, but also reflect the Lord's purposes.

All this (and more) may have been stirring in people's hearts as Peter began to speak about the one who had sent the Spirit – Jesus. The one who fulfilled all the promises and the purposes of God and who had now empowered his followers to do the same. It is not an accident that Pentecost is seen as the birth of the church!

And the Spirit continues to empower and enable God's people – and that includes us! The enabling presence of the Spirit is the very presence of God, given to demonstrate his activity and empower participation in his purposes. Sometimes this includes a demonstration of supernatural power – like at Pentecost – but more often than not it is the quiet nudge of the Spirit, the slow maturation of the fruit of the Spirit, and the sense that an opportunity to participate lies before us.

We can all too easily believe that, since we don't do what Peter does – powerfully proclaim Jesus to crowds of people – or experience supernatural empowerment – to speak the gospel in a language we haven't learned – that we are somehow excluded from the purposes of God. In reality, however, we are – all of us – invited to join in the work of God in the enabling presence of the Spirit!

Questions to Ask

1. Are there other echoes from Scripture that you are reminded of when you read Acts 21-12?
2. What are the indicators of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives according to Acts 2:1-12? According to the wider scope of Scripture?
3. How have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
4. How does the wider perspective of God's purposes change your understanding of the Spirit's activity in the world and in your life?
5. What are some other reasons we exclude ourselves from the work of God in the world?

A Prayer to Pray

Pray for the courage to participate in God's plans and purposes and that the Spirit would clearly lead you.

A Practice to Try

Listen to worship music that is sung in another language or to the Bible being read in another language. As you do, reflect on God's plans to bring together people from every nation, tribe, and language (Revelation 7:9).

Readings to Read This Week

The readings this week reflect on some of the echoes and texts referred to in Acts 2.

1. Genesis 11:1-9
2. Joel 2:28-32
3. Psalm 16
4. Psalm 110
5. Psalm 104:1-4

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).

We believe that our participation in God's plans and purposes is through the enabling presence of the Spirit. It's God's plan and his power enables it!

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. It's May Mission Month! Encourage your group to pray for the various projects (there is a Thursday night Zoom prayer, hosted by the elders, from 7:30-8:00 that will focus on these projects). One of our success criteria for May is that we have more people contributing year on year. Encourage your group to prayerfully consider how they might participate this year.

Link to join the zoom Prayer Group – Every Thursday 7:30pm:

[Meeting ID: 919 1693 5880 Passcode: f603j2](#)

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.