

GBC LIFE GROUP RESOURCES 2025

Series: Lives Changed by Jesus

Introduction to GBC Life Group Resources

Life Groups are a critical ministry of our life together at GyMEA Baptist Church where we want everyone to find their place in God's family and in God's mission. 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!

We also include additional things that we are encouraging our Life Group leaders, as leaders of GBC, to be sharing with your groups. 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 contact Nicole Jones at LifeGroups@gymeabaptist.org.au.



Lives Changed by Jesus: A Brief Introduction

This is our theme for 2025 and we will be returning to it several times over the course of the year. The theme is grounded in our strategic priorities of Community Engagement and Spiritual Journey and seeks to focus on the ongoing conversion we experience as followers of Jesus.

In this first sermon series, we will be focusing on characteristics that demonstrate a life changed by Jesus.

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Isaiah 30:1-18

The practice we are exploring this week is an increasing restfulness. Of all the practices we have examined so far this is the one that we are least familiar with. Part of the reason we have chosen to tackle it is because Sabbath is one of the two spiritual practices we have identified as practices to grow in as a community of faith. In this week's sermon Marc didn't say much about Sabbath, instead focusing on the kind of rest that we are invited to enter into and within which we practice Sabbath. To do so, we looked at the invitation to rest that is found in Isaiah 30:15 – "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength." However, to understand this invitation we need to understand the wider context.

As a prophet, Isaiah spoke into the most significant issues of the day and Isaiah 30 represents one of those. The context is a brewing military conflict, most likely King Hezekiah's confrontation with the Assyrian king Sennacherib (see Isaiah 36-37). It appears that one of the options that was being debated and pursued was a potential alliance with Egypt. This is condemned categorically by the prophet. Egypt, he declares, will be useless to Judah in the conflict to come and they are wasting their time and resources pursuing it. The rationale, however, is not about Egyptian military might or strategy or influence, but about the spiritual consequences of such an alliance.

Alliances always involve concessions and compromises; conditions that must be met for the alliance to hold. In the ancient near east one of the conditions was religious loyalty. Put simply, if Judah was to enter an alliance with Egypt, they would be expected to include the veneration of the Egyptian gods and goddesses (including Pharaoh). This is unacceptable to the Lord.

And the reason is that the religious practices of Egypt were fundamentally different from those in Judah. To begin with, Judah had only one God – the LORD – while the Egyptians had hundreds of gods and goddesses. The LORD was consistent – the same yesterday, today, and forever – while the Egyptian gods and goddesses were capricious – you never knew what you were going to get or how they might respond!

Much more significant, however, was the relationship between the people and their gods. In Egypt there were hundreds of temples, but they were not for personal worship. Rather, they were for the ongoing rituals that the Egyptians believed, sustained the gods in their work of maintaining the universe. In Judah, a ritualistic approach to the LORD was rejected on two fronts. First, the LORD needed no help or aid from his people to do his work and second, ritual replaced relationship, and it was the relationship with the LORD that formed the essential difference with the nations. In Egypt, folk religion included magic – a practice that was rejected in Judah – in which the people sought to manipulate the gods into doing their will (which was why it was rejected in Judah).

An alliance with Egypt would force the Judeans to choose between two very different gods! And, as Jesus famously said, centuries later, you can't serve two masters. Furthermore, to chase after the Egyptian gods was exhausting! Constantly performing rituals and magical incantations in order to maybe get a response or, and this is the heart of the oracle in Isaiah 30, to rest in the LORD.

The alliance is described as folly and rebellion, as a sin that will collapse on them if they choose to trust in it. The LORD calls them to trust him and to rest in relationship with him. And this gets at the heart of the problem with an alliance – it pursues a false vision of the good life along a path that is doomed to failure.

The people of Judah were tempted by the blasphemous claims of Egypt – for blasphemy is claiming to do or provide what only God can do or provide. Egypt promises military strength, political salvation, a return to comfort, luxury, and wealth. The prophet calls Judah to see through these false claims and rest in God. And not to get those things – as if the good life were to be found apart from God! – but to experience the good life in relationship with God.

Instead of their frantic scheming and chasing after the good life, making alliances with whoever promises them the illusions they seek, Judah is called to rest in God.

Nothing has changed. We are still tempted to chase the so-called good life and to make alliances that draw us away from God with those who make blasphemous claims. We too, are called to rest in relationship with the LORD and, out of that context, begin to practice Sabbath as an expression of that rest.

As Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:18-30)

Questions to Ask

1. What stood out to you in this sermon?
2. If blasphemy is claiming to do or provide what only God can do or provide, what blasphemous claims does our society make (e.g., the claims of security, success, fulfillment)?
3. How does God’s rest contrast to the pace of our society? Or, How does following Jesus differ from alliances with the world?
4. Have you ever tried practicing Sabbath? What has kept you from doing so? What is a first step you might take to make some space and fill it with rest?

A Prayer to Pray

Continue to pray for each other that the Holy Spirit would identify an area of our lives that He wants to align more closely over the course of 2025.

A Practice to Try

Have a conversation about one “restful” (Sabbath) practice you could implement in your life this week and do it!

Readings to Read This Week

The following passages reflect on the rest that God offers. Note the references to other gods/idolatry.

Leviticus 26:1-13

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Hosea 14:1-9

Colossian 1:15-23

Revelation 21:1-8

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

Our theme – Lives Changed by Jesus – is also our vision as a community of faith and has two areas of focus. First, that we might see lives changed for the first time by placing their faith in Jesus. Second, that we might see change in our lives as we continue to follow Jesus. We hope to keep both of these in view over the course of the year.

There may be opportunity to identify those in our lives who are becoming more open to faith or who are exploring faith in Jesus who we might more prayerfully support and encourage this year.

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.

On Sunday Marc foreshadowed that we will be launching an emphasis on Sabbath in Term 3 (July-September). On our [link tree there is an expression of interest to be part of this experiment](#) – encourage your group members to express their interest (if they’re interested!).

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.