

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 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.



While We Wait–Studies in Chronicles

While We Wait is our Old Testament series for 2024 and we will be dipping in and out of Chronicles over the course of the year. This is the third block and will run through to early November.

Chronicles was written to provide God's people with a model for how to live while they were waiting, with increasing desperation, for the promises of God to be fulfilled. Part of our extra ordinary life together is to encourage one another while we wait for the promises of God to restore and renew all things in Christ Jesus to be fulfilled. I believe that there are important and timely lessons for us to learn in Chronicles and look forward to diving more deeply into this text over the course of the year.

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): 2 Chronicles 17:1-9, 10-19; 18:1-19:3

The Chronicler is writing to encourage his readers (and, by extension, us) to live faithfully while they waited for the promises of God to be fulfilled. The models – good and bad – are provided in the lives of the kings of Judah.

King Jehoshaphat, the fifth generation from David, begins his reign as faithfully as anyone since his famous forebear! He followed the ways of David, did not consult with idols, sought the Lord, and followed his commands (17:3-4). His heart was fully devoted to the LORD and he removed the high places (localised shrines, usually on hills – thus 'high' places – which were prone to syncretistic practices [due to a lack of regulation]; the worship of the LORD and other gods). Furthermore, Jehoshaphat sent officials, priests, and Levites to teach the people the law of the LORD. This is a king who is not only personally committed to the LORD, but is committed to his people knowing and trusting the LORD too.

We should not be at all surprised when Jehoshaphat experiences the blessing of God. He strengthens his kingdom, fortifying various towns, receives tribute from his own people and from the surrounding nations, experiences peace, and has a large standing army.

What should surprise, nay, stun us, is what the Chronicler narrates next. Jehoshaphat "allied himself with Ahab by marriage." (18:1) Ahab is described as the most wicked king of Israel (1 Kings 16:29-33) who, along with his wife Jezebel, made the worship of Baal and Asherah the official state religion in Israel and sought to eradicate the worship of the LORD. When Elijah, the prophet of the LORD, confronts Ahab and all Israel at Mount Carmel, he has to repair the altar of the LORD because it had been torn down (1 Kings 18:30), and when he meets the LORD at Mount Horeb he can state, with very little exaggeration, that he is the only prophet left (1 Kings 19:10, 14; see also 18:3-4). This is the one with whom Jehoshaphat enters into an alliance with! An absolute stunner for someone whose heart is devoted to the LORD.

The story the Chronicler tells paints Jehoshaphat in a very dim light. He appears gullible, weak-willed, and a bit of a rube.

The drama centres around Ahab's desire to retake Ramoth-Gilead, a fortified city on the border of Israel and Aram (their neighbours to the north). When Jehoshaphat arrives in Samaria Ahab puts on a massive banquet for him – though the term used to describe the slaughter of the animals is nearly always translated "sacrifice" or "offer" – and urges him to join him in the battle – though the term "urged" is elsewhere translated as "incited" (see 1 Chronicles 21:1 where Satan "urged" David to count the fighting men). Despite the pseudo-religious banquet and the negative connotation of the request Jehoshaphat seemingly needs little persuading and readily agrees to go into battle with Ahab.

The shock of his swift acquiescence is moderated by his request to at least inquire of the LORD. Ahab, somewhat surprisingly, agrees and the two kings are soon surrounded by four hundred prophets, most likely prophets of Baal and Asherah, who all urge the kings to attack Ramoth-Gilead as God will give it into the king's hand. Jehoshaphat asks if there isn't a prophet of the LORD whom they can inquire of.

Ahab's response is telling. There is one such prophet, but Ahab hates him because he never prophesies anything good about him, but only bad (18:7). If it wasn't bad enough that Ahab hates the word of the LORD, he also evaluates the word of the LORD on whether it's good or bad for him rather than whether it is true, and, of course, when the LORD speaks to him it has never been good because he was so wicked.

How will Jehoshaphat respond to this hard-hearted declaration? With an indirect and most gentle rebuke – "The king should not say such a thing." Thus endeth Jehoshaphat's resistance to the plans of Ahab.

Micaiah, the prophet of the LORD that Ahab hates so much, arrives and predicts Ahab's death. He describes a vision of the heavenly council where the topic of discussion was how to entice Ahab to attack Ramoth-Gilead and go to his death. The proposed solution was to be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of Ahab's prophets. The deceit is exposed, the plot is revealed, the cards are shown, it's all in the open.

So we ought to be stunned when Jehoshaphat – after hearing all this – still goes into battle! He nearly loses his own life, but Ahab dies, according to the word of the LORD.

When Jehoshaphat returns home, he is confronted by a prophet who asks, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?" (19:2) This is the divine assessment of Jehoshaphat's actions.

The question we are left with is “why”? Why would Jehoshaphat go along with Ahab’s plans, especially when they were in contradiction to the word of the LORD?

There is one possible answer that can be drawn from extrabiblical sources; documents from the ancient near east that speak about people and events recorded in the Bible. There are references to Ahab and to his father Omri that suggest that, while they were disastrous for the spiritual faithfulness of Israel, they were perhaps some of the most powerful and influential political figures in the region at the time. This provides a possible reason for Jehoshaphat’s actions: Ahab was a powerful figure who Jehoshaphat simply could not say “No” to. He was probably able to justify his actions on political, military, economic, and even ethnic grounds; it probably made good sense to go along with Ahab’s plans!

The prophetic denunciation makes it clear, however, that this compromise, however justifiable, was “loving those who hate the LORD”. This black and white assessment of what appear to be gentle compromise is a consistent theme in Scripture. For the Chronicler’s purposes it challenges us to consider who we cannot say “No” to and to a greater commitment to a radical faithfulness to the LORD while we wait.

Questions to Ask

1. What stood out to you about the first part of Jehoshaphat’s story?
2. Thinking politically, how might Jehoshaphat’s alliance have been justified? How do we justify the gentle compromises that we enter into?
3. Who, or what, do you have trouble saying “No” to? How is our faithfulness challenged by these gentle compromises?
4. What might radical faithfulness while we wait look like? Why is it so difficult to maintain?

A Prayer to Pray

1. Pray for discernment for one another, that the Holy Spirit might reveal to us those gentle compromises and that he might grant to us the courage to be more faithful.

A Practice to Try

1. Jehoshaphat’s good example included teaching others about faithfulness to the commands of the LORD. This week, commit yourself to reading the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7) as a way of refreshing your own understanding of what we are called to, and look for an opportunity to encourage others to be faithful too.

Readings to Read This Week

The readings this week reflect on compromise.

1. Deuteronomy 7:1-6
2. Joshua 24:14-24
3. Judges 2:1-5
4. Psalm 106
5. Revelation 18:1-20

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 a community of faith that wants to respond to the invitation of God, learning to seek him is a central practice. As we seek him, we will be found by him.

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. During September we focus on the work of [Hopfield](#) and seek to raise the finances necessary to fund a DV counsellor two days a week (\$32,000). Please encourage your group to consider how they might support the work of Hopfield financially and/or in prayer! Every little bit counts towards making a huge impact in the lives of those who have been impacted by DV.

[Donate to HopeTember](#)

[Request Hopfield Prayer List](#)

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 to 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.