

Sunday 7 January 2024

Life Group Leaders' Notes

Series: New Year

Title: How To Make The Most Of 2024

Key Text: Revelation 22:1-2

Every day is a gift. Time is temporary. Both ourselves, and the world we live in, are not here forever. Only God and His kingdom is eternal. That's why at the start of every day and every year we should remember the opening words of the Bible 'in the beginning God.'

And that's why we should always seek FIRST the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We each have one life and we must be careful not to waste our days and years. Jesus was very clear about the importance investing our lives in what really matters in life.

To maximise our time on earth we should live with a constant perspective of heaven as well as praying for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. That, of course, requires that we have some idea of what heaven is like. Thankfully, the Bible tells us a lot about heaven.

For example, in the last book of the Bible the apostle John describes a remarkable vision of heaven. It is an amazing world that is the destiny of everyone who gains access through the blood of Jesus.

Revelation 22:1-2 says: *'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.'*

We see in these verses some lessons that will help us maximise every day and help us live more effectively on earth this year and every year we have:

1. Stay filled with the life of God (Revelation 22:1-2; John 14:6; John 7:37-38 NLT)

2. Stay fruitful (Revelation 22:2; Genesis 1:28; Genesis 9:1; John 15:5,8; Ezekiel 47:2-12)
3. Stay focussed (Revelation 2:22; Ezekiel 47:12; Matthew 28:19; Psalm 147:3)

Apply

1. Stay filled with the life of God. The images here are all about life (Revelation 22:1-2). A river of the water of life flowing from God's throne and the Lamb. A tree of life. In other words, all life finds its source in God. God is the giver of life. He is the sustainer of life. He is the re-creator of life. In every way God is totally pro-life. With the description of the tree of life, the Bible comes full circle. Human history started out with the tree of life in the centre of the Garden of Eden. But when Adam and Eve sinned, they and their descendants were barred from accessing that tree. They were doomed to death both naturally and spiritually. Then Christ came to save sinners so that those who trust in Him will be granted full access to the tree of life once again. Today people are looking for life in all kinds of places and in all kinds of ways but without God you will not discover what you are looking for. And the basic reason that you can't know what it is to be truly alive, is because without God you are what the Bible calls 'dead in your transgressions and sins.' Only Christ can make us spiritually alive (John 14:6). Becoming a Christian is much more than simply repenting of our sins, it involves receiving new life from God, what the Bible calls being 'born again' or 'born from above.' Many people may be religious, even regular churchgoers, but they can still be spiritually dead. If you are not lit up by the word of God or have no impulse to worship, maybe here's is the basic reason. You need to be born again, and you can be today. But coming to Christ is only a beginning. For God wants you to overflow with His life (John 7:37-38 NLT). Here's these pictures of rivers of flowing water that are essential to life. Without water we dry up and could soon die. God doesn't want that to happen to you. There's only one way to avoid that. Stay full of the Holy Spirit. Get into the river of God and stay there. This river, as John saw, is always a life-giving river, a river that is totally pure, clear as crystal and it comes only from God. At the start of this year and every day be sure to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

2. Stay fruitful (Revelation 22:2). From the beginning God wanted everything to be alive and to multiply (Genesis 1:28; Genesis 9:1). Jesus told His disciples that if they stayed close to Him,

they would have very fruitful lives and experience great growth (John 15:5,8). And that's what happened as the first century church rapidly accelerated in numbers both on and after the Day of Pentecost. In the book of Ezekiel there is a very similar picture of fruitfulness to what John described in Revelation (Ezekiel 47:2-12). We too need to believe for many churches in many nations teeming with many thousands of people enjoying the life of God. This is a year for us both as churches and individuals to see overflowing growth and blessing. Also we see that Ezekiel and John's visions both emphasise monthly fruitfulness, in other words a continual harvest. As Ezekiel observed the banks of the river, he saw many fruitful trees (Ezekiel 47:12). Again, we too should expect to continually grow in the quality of our characters - what the Bible calls the fruit of the Spirit - but also in our influence and in winning people to Christ. And we would be wise to check our progress every month. Every month should be a month of harvest in our lives, our groups, and throughout the church.

3. Stay focussed. To maximise our time on earth we must not just focus on ourselves, our families, our church but on the peoples and nations of the world that God so loves (Revelation 2:22; Ezekiel 47:12; Matthew 28:19). That requires that we Christians become agents of God's healing in the world. Healing is central to the gospel. Jesus healed many sick people, and He sent His disciples out to heal as well as preach. The good news is that people can still be healed in their bodies. And people can be healed in their hearts (Psalm 147:3). Broken families can also be healed and so can divided communities and nations. Our job as Christians is not to analyse the sorry state of the world, but to be full of the life of God and bring the healing mercies of Jesus to our generation. Call on the Lord now to fill you up with His Holy Spirit so that you can come to a new level of fruitfulness and focus. Pray for new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And receive a new anointing of fresh life that will overflow to others.