

Small Group Leaders Notes

Context

As he comes to the end of his letter John takes many of the key threads and weaves them together. Throughout the letter John has highlighted three marks of a believer and these are all found in 5:1-5. A genuine Christian 'believes that Jesus is the Christ' (v1), they love God's children (v1) and they obey God's commands (v2.)

In the final chapter we also found John explicitly telling us his reason for writing in 5:13 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.' John has written this letter to reassure believers that in spite of what other people might be saying they really do have eternal life. This theme of Eternal Life is not new. John began the letter by describing Jesus as the one who was 'from the beginning... the Word of Life... The life [who] appeared.' (1:1-2). When we come to the end of the letter we find John describing Jesus in similar terms, 'He is the true God and eternal life' (5:20.) Jesus is not just the one who can give us eternal life, he IS eternal life and so John wants to reassure the believers that because they have the real Jesus they have eternal life!

Big Idea

There are many different threads in this chapter and if we try and follow each of them it might get quite confusing and take a long time. I think that the best approach is to focus on the big idea that is central to the chapter which is the theme of eternal life in v11-13. Many of the other threads in this chapter are actually attached to this central theme.

Areas of Application

As group leaders we need to be clear in our minds about application. If we go into the study with some vague ideas about application then our groups will have little chance of coming to any meaningful application. With this in mind let me suggest that you focus your application in two specific areas;

Contentment - As a society we are never content. We are all wanting more. We're always looking for different things (work, relationships, family, friends, home etc) to give us life! As Christians we are often no different to everyone else. We often seem to be just as discontented as everyone else. Yet God says that he has given us eternal life in Jesus!!! If we really believed this then wouldn't it dramatically change our attitude to our careers, relationships, families, and possessions?

Compassion - We can often be secretly envious of our non-christian friends, neighbours and colleagues. They look to be having a great time and really enjoying life and in comparison the Christian life can look pretty life-less. Yet God says that 'whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.' Again if we really believed this then it would dramatically change our attitude to the non-Christians we know. Instead of envying them we would have deep compassion for them. They are life-less without Jesus!

Questions

Starter - "Life is..." How would different people finish that sentence?

Use this question to get the group talking. Try and come up with as many different ways that different people finish the sentence. Tell people these don't have to be their own answers, we're just looking for all the different ways that people today would answer the question. Imagine stopping random people on the street, what would they say?

1. Look at 5:11-13, what does God say about life?

To help unpack this question you can use the 3 supplementary questions to help the group dig into these verses. In addition you could look up some of the following references from John's gospel to help - see John 5:20-30, 6:53-57, 10:10, 11:23-27, 17:1-3.

1. What is eternal life?
2. Who has it?
3. How do we get it?

Make sure that the group see that eternal life is not just about life after you die. Eternal life starts now when we become Christians because eternal life is to believe in Jesus and to know God the Father and the Son. The problem is so often that our definition of life (even as Christians) is so vastly different to God's definition.

2. If you were being honest, what things other than Jesus do you think will give you life?

I many ways this question is returning to the starter question but in a more personal way. This time we're not interested in what other people think, we're talking about us. As we look at our lives, how we use our time and money and priorities what do we really believe will make us alive? To help people be a bit more honest you could split the groups into 2s and 3s to discuss this question.

3. If we really believed v11-13 then how would it change our attitude to...

1. Non-Christians we know?
2. Work and Career?
3. Relationships and Family?
4. Homes and Possessions?

Take the time to work through each of these areas. Take the central truth of v11-13 and work out how it should change us. Before you get to the study make sure that you have your own personal answers to all these questions.