

Date : 7 January 2024
Theme : Looking forward to 2024
Topic : Being a productive disciple for Jesus in 2024
Key verse : *For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:8 (NIV)*

Introduction

How shall I think of BC or myself in 2024? A fruitful garden is a good metaphor to think about yourself, your cell and BC as a church, for 2024.

2 Peter 1:8 says we will not be ineffective or unproductive in our knowledge of Jesus Christ if we sow to our faith certain ingredients. How picturesque to visualise every BCer aspiring to be a fruitful and productive garden this year.

God has promised ...*How blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream...* Isaiah 32:20

1. To have a rich harvest, follow the laws of harvest.

a) We must sow and keep on sowing.

Farmers tend to stop sowing where they have bad experiences before. (Maybe their crop was hit by drought or flooding that destroyed everything). But they must not stop sowing otherwise there will be no future harvest.

b) Sow to the size of the next harvest.

The harvest size is a choice we have to make. Those who want a bigger harvest, sow more.

c) Sow the right seeds.

Sowing works of kindness will reap kind responses; sowing the seeds of the gospel will reap a harvest of souls.

- To cultivate godly character so as to produce men and woman of godly character, 2 Peter 1:8 lists 7 character seeds that will yield a harvest of good quality fruit.

To your faith, add:

① Virtue (goodness NIV) moral excellence

(The 10 commandments is a God's moral template for human behaviour).

Virtue is a quality of God; we pursue the excellencies of God's nature to praise Him and to be like Him.

② Knowledge (not facts)

It is knowing and understanding God's heart and His desires.

③ Self-control (= take a grip of oneself, opposite of self-indulgence).

Live a life of obedience to master the promptings of the flesh, like laziness, unwillingly to speak up for Christ, lack of faith for a friend's salvation.

④ Perseverance (= pursuit of godly character, even when we have to suffer for doing so).

Self-control has to do with our pleasures, perseverance has to do with suffering.

The gospel calls us to identify with Christ, His sufferings and death. There is a rich welcome for those who suffer for Jesus and for the gospel.

⑤ Godliness (= moral excellence)

This quality arises out of a fear of God.

⑥ Brotherly kindness (= love for fellow believers).

Extending kindness and consideration to fellow believers. While God has removed the barrier between fellow believers, we must strive to preserve it. Take every opportunity to do good to those of the household of faith.

⑦ Love (=agape God's kind of love)

God desires the highest good for the ones He has loved with sacrificial

action. The Spirit of God has empowered us to reproduce this same love to others.

2. What are the signs of deterioration in the garden of my life / church life?

Stagnation, fruitlessness, decreasing fruitfulness are signs of deterioration for both garden and spiritual growth. How do we identify unhealthy plants, pests and predators to deal with threats and respond appropriately?

- problem of no fruit
Many people claim to be Christians but there is nothing in their life to support their claim, thus many unbelievers have difficulty understanding Christianity because we manifest no fruit (no attractiveness). The Lord Jesus said...*You will know them by their fruits...* Matthew 7:16
- problem of periodic fruit
For many, these qualities (see 1 ① to ⑦) are seen periodically, once in a long while. 2 Peter 1:8 says they should continually (= continuous action), superabound in us. To keep growing these qualities, we must practise and apply all diligence as this is a serious issue for our spiritual health.
- problem of *It's all about grace, so relax*
The lie in this option is that since we can do nothing to deserve our salvation, any effort we put into our work of faith is *works* = to earn something.

3. Cultivating a flourishing garden of my life / church life.

In 2 Peter 1 says out of His grace, God has provided all that we need for a godly life, and to make it effective. It is our part to make every effort to keep from being unproductive and ineffective. Peter is writing to those who are saved about their sanctification, and not to the unsaved about their salvation. Faith is not for the Christian to supply. Faith is what we have received, because faith is a gift from God.

Application

1. What kind of harvest do I look forward to in 2024?

a) Character: Personal development (how will it look like?)

- ① Virtue _____
- ② Knowledge _____
- ③ Self-control _____
- ④ Perseverance _____
- ⑤ Godliness _____
- ⑥ Brotherly kindness _____
- ⑦ Love _____

b) People to influence for Jesus (names) _____

c) Baptizees (names) _____

d) Disciple makers (names) _____

2. What harvest size have I determined for myself for 2024?

1 - 2 (names) _____

3 - 4 (names) _____