

What If? – Eph 4:11-16

Eph 4:11-16; As we gear up for another ministry year, we're at the end of a mini-series called *What If*; Asking questions like . . .

What if we really believed in *prayer*? And what if we prayed like God *wants*?

That was last week; And a special time it was; And I trust your prayer life is different b/c of it

This week, is discipleship; An aspect of our walk with Christ, that's *critical* for a full, God-honoring *life*; and a vibrant, God-honoring *church*; Discipleship is critical Jesus said – *I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly*. (Jn 10:10)

And the *means* to that full, abundant life, is discipleship

Referring to the process by which you learn from, and follow, Jesus

The means by which you grow in your knowledge, and devotion, and love for the Lord

And the fact is, far too many Christians do nothing about it; Far too many people are born again, and remain an infant; Maybe even you

➤ But what if that wasn't the case? What if you made a change that way?

What if this was the year you took discipleship seriously?

Seriously; What if? What if this was the year you *accelerated* in your walk with Christ, instead of coasted? Pressed on, instead of slid back

B/c that's what God *wants*; That's what he expects; Eph 4

Having just said that God gives all kinds of gifts; Paul says in v11 . . .

[11] And he [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers [pastors], [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love [which is what Paul is doing], we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

What if, this was the year, you took v15 seriously? Growing up, *in every way, into him who is the head*; Jesus

IOW what if this was the year you got serious about . . .

Growing in Christ

What if? What if this was the year you became more and more like him in the way you think, and talk, and act?

Actually *growing* in your Christlikeness, instead of staying the same? Or slipping backwards? Or making excuses?

What if you were *different*, this time next year?

What if the lens through which you saw the world was more *his* and less yours?

So that instead of seeing just the *cultural* implications of current events, you saw the *spiritual* ones; Instead of just seeing effects, you discerned causes; What if?

What if your thinking reflected more the mind of *Christ*, and less a mind of your own this year? So that your perspective was more biblical, and less worldly

More other-oriented and less selfish; What if this was the year? The year you got serious about *growing* in Christ; Conforming more and more into his image

2nd, what if this was the year you got serious about . . .

Studying God's Word

Not just reading it, but studying it – to understand; Plumbing its depths and applying its truth; What if this was the year? The year you *studied* God's Word

B/c that's the only way as v13 says, that we're going to . . .

All attain to the unity of the faith and [the unity] of the knowledge of the Son of God

The only way we're going to be on the same page when it comes to matters of life and godliness, is to study the same *book* that talks about it; God's book

And the same is true of reaching *mature manhood* (13); Wise and discerning instead of foolish and deceived; You have to study God's Word; There's no substitute Which is why some of the smartest people in the world make some of the dumbest decisions around; God's Word is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path . . . Only if you know it (Ps 119:105)

➤ And check out the *last* phrase there in v13; God has given us various leaders to teach us and equip us, until we all attain *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* That is, until *our* maturity, reflects his; In every respect; According to his *fullness*; His character; His attributes; His work

What if? What if we studied God's Word with that as our *goal*? B/c that's the only way we're going to get there

Show me somebody mature in Christ, and I'll show you a student of the Word; Without exception

It's the only way to sharpen your powers of discernment, and know truth from error

➤ *So that* [as Paul goes on to say in v14] *we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

You can't possibly discern the subtleties of deceit and the nuances of evil, if you're not sharpened by the insight of God's Word

You can't possibly know a *false* doctrine if you don't know the true ones; The ones found in this book; And that only comes by studying it; There are no shortcuts

➤ Which is one of the reasons we have Discipleship Groups around here – like Small Groups, and Men's Ministry, and Women's Ministry, and Alive and Free (Insert) So that you can study God's Word *together*, and be spurred on to do so *alone* What if? What if this was the year?

3rd, what if this was the year you got serious about . . .

Serving God's people

[11] He [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints [the believers, the church] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

The *work of ministry* referring to the labor, of loving, serving, and discipling God's people; That's it

And one of our roles as a staff according to this verse, is to equip you, the saints, to do it;
To *do* the work of ministry; To serve one another and minister to one another
And make the most of your time, talent, and treasure
All for the purpose of building up *the body of Christ* as it says
That's our primary role as a staff

➤ And I want to introduce them to you, with the hope that you'll take full advantage of them this year (Staff come forward)

There are 51 total of us; 33 full time, and 18 part time
And I want you to know that our heart is to serve you
Whether that's by teaching you the Word, leading you in ministry, coming alongside of you in difficulty, or some combination thereof – we exist to serve and equip you
And I also want you to know, that we love it; We *love* serving you; And count it a privilege

And while I don't have time to introduce every single one of them, I do want to highlight each *ministry* they represent; Starting with my support . . .

Senior Pastor Support – Rachel Vickers; A blessing to all of us, and a joy to our staff

Harvest Kids – led Grady Adkins; Including our Sports Ministry led by Robbie Isley

Harvest Students – led by Eric Aho in JH, Jordan Eccles in HS, and Zach Klundt at our West Campus

Adult Ministries – Douglas Humphrey; Responsible for Small Groups, Discipleship Classes, and Service Teams

Harvest Men – Mike Nafziger; Who I look forward to introducing to you in a few weeks

Harvest Women – Jeni Schafrath; In high gear with the launch of women's Bible studies

Outreach Ministries – Doug Rowland (Sunday – preaching at HBC Monmouth)

Congregational Care – Jason Taylor; Who I will also introduce to you next month

Worship & Production – Mark Zuiderveen; With Jesse Slinkman and Becky Busher as Worship Leaders; And soon to be joined by Cody Rodgers

Cody comes to us from HBC Clear Lake, and will start Sept 1st

Café and Graphic Design – Anna Isley and Jeni Wilford leading the charge respectively

Facilities – Eric Pearson; Doing so much behind the scenes

Finances/Human Resources – Meri Vickery, our Office Manager; Overseeing everything from accounting to IT

West Campus – Dean Sternik (West on Sunday)

Family Pastor – Garth Glenn; Who oversees a large portion of our staff; Really an Associate Pastor type of role

Executive Pastor – John Cochran; Who holds it all together and keeps us on the same page

And supporting all these pastors and directors are the unsung heroes of our staff – the administrative assistants and coordinators; Without whom we'd be far less effective

That's our staff; And you can be proud of each and every one of them*****

They love the Lord, they love you, they're gifted, and they take their role of serving and equipping you very seriously; So that you can serve and equip others

Let's praise God for them

➤ What if this was the year that you took full advantage of them, and got serious about serving God's people *yourself*? Whether on a service team, or in a ministry
Like you see on this **insert**; What if? What if you signed up and followed through? For the entire year*****

4th, what if this was the year you got serious about . . .

Connecting with others

V15 – *Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together [connected] by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Paul's using the human body as a metaphor, to say that just like *it* has been equipped with certain parts, so too has the church; It's comprised of certain *people*
And just like the parts of our *body* are connected, so too should *we* connect; In fellowship; And partnership; B/c that's how a church grows and flourishes
Each part connected, and working properly
So that it builds itself up in the sweet fellowship of love

➤ What if we did that? What if we connected with one another like we should?
Instead of walking in a minute *before* the service, and *leaving* the second it's over – what if we lingered? What if we all came early for prayer?
And what if we met together in our homes? Sometimes for discipleship, other times for fellowship, and often times for both

What if this was the year you got serious about that? About *connecting* with others?
B/c a church that *connects* in healthy ways, *grows* in healthy ways

And last, what if this was the year you got serious about . . .

Reaching out

Asking God every day, to give you a burden for those around you

And looking for someone to invite to church, every week; What if you did that?

What if you created situations in your home or neighborhood to get to *know* people?
And took advantage of the slightest opportunity to talk to them?

What if you set a goal to reach someone for Christ this year? To do *something* that leads to their salvation
Like praying for them daily; Or inviting them frequently; Or sharing with them openly?
Or loving them tangibly? Or enduring them patiently? What if you did that?

I'll tell you what; Things like this would happen; Take a look
(**God @ Work–Chuck Freeland/John Herman**)

➤ What if this was the year? (**Summary**) The year that you took discipleship seriously, and reached out?

In addition to connecting with others, serving God's people, studying God's word, and growing in Christ; What if?

Prayer – Lord, would you spur us on to greater and greater love and good deeds? Would you increase our hunger for you and your Word? Would you knit us together like never before? And burden our hearts with those who are lost? For your glory and your church

The same reasons we give now, of our tithes and offerings