



EVEN IF

**TRUSTING GOD WHEN LIFE
DISAPPOINTS, OVERWHELMS, OR
JUST DOESN'T MAKE SENSE**

THE STUDY GUIDE

By Mitchel Lee & Segun Daramola • Nov 2021

Hi! If you're reading this, you are curious about how to worship God in an authentic and resolute way when life goes sideways. You're tired of trite clichés or easy self-help fixes. You've come to this little resource because you want to live out a faith that not only endures, but grows in the midst of hardship. You're a doer of the Word, not just a hearer, and we want to say, "Welcome to the ranks of the **#evenifwarriors.**"

This guide is intended to be used as a supplemental study for *Even If: Trusting God When Life Disappoints, Overwhelms, or Just Doesn't Make Sense* by Mitchel Lee. While you are certainly welcome to study the passages and work through the material on your own, when we wrote this, we envisioned small bands of believers coming around each other, encouraging one another to remember the goodness of God and strengthening the collective resolve to worship Him.

You'll find summary bullet points at the beginning of each discussion, corresponding to a chapter in the book, followed by questions and exercises to help you think through the material a little more.

The questions were designed for reflection and discussion all in the hopes that you will raise your unique *Even If* declaration in the company of, and even for the sake of, others. Some of the questions might be irrelevant. Some of the exercises might seem redundant to what you've already processed. Feel free to skip and reorder any of this.

The most important thing is to take your time. Don't just work through content. Let the content work through you. Say what is so. Give thanks. Lament. Remember. Praise. Cry.

Then after God has revealed his heart to you, take the next step *even if...*

Mitchel & Segun

DISCUSSION 1

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

(Corresponds to chapters 1-2)

Summary:

- The *even if* declaration begins with confidence in God's goodness, no matter what life might look like.
- God's goodness means he has both the ability and the intent to work for his people—for their benefit. God's goodness doesn't mean that he will always do what we want.
- We must remember the goodness of God in our lives prior to the storm we are facing.
- Even beyond our experience, God's goodness is ultimately demonstrated by his love for us on the cross.

Opening Question:

Think about a storm you have faced in your life. If you could step back in time to a point right before the storm, what is the most important truth about God you would tell yourself to remember?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Daniel 3:8-23.** What gave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego the courage to stand up to the king?
2. **Read 2 Chronicles 36:5-20** to understand how these three young men got to Babylon. Given their stories, what new insights (or questions) do you have about their courage?

Reflect

1. When facing a storm or furnace, where are you prone to put your confidence?
2. How can you trust in God's goodness when it doesn't feel like God is being good?
3. What difference does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection make in your understanding of God's goodness to you?

Build Your Even If Declaration

Recall God's goodness in your own life. Write down specific memories and the qualities of God that you experienced through them.

It may be helpful to think through the various seasons of your life if you're having trouble.

Childhood years | Teenage years | Young Adulthood | Adulthood

Even If Declaration

"I am confident in your goodness, God, because..."

DISCUSSION 2

BUILDING RESOLVE

(Corresponds to chapters 3)

Summary:

- The second part of the *even if* declaration is the resolve to worship God *even if* he doesn't do what we know he could or think he should.
- Genuine resolve is different from triumphant optimism. Resolve comes from facing the real pain of the fire, and choosing to trust God because he is good.
- We build the resolve to worship God by "preaching to ourselves" - reminding ourselves of God's goodness both in his character (objective) and in the ways he has helped us (subjective).

Opening Question:

Think of a time in your life when you needed to show resolve, a 'stick-with-it-ness,' but didn't. What regrets do you have? Now, think of a time when you didn't give up. What gave you the resolve you needed? What kept you going?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Psalms 42-43.** There are three repeating choruses (42:5, 42:11, 43:5). Why could these be repeated?
2. Look at the section preceding each chorus. What would be the theme of each section?
3. Imagine what the psalmist could be feeling—what is the state of his soul?

Reflect

1. When facing hardship or confusion, we all have a “go-to” narrative that we rehearse in our heads, some explanation or story we give for what we’re experiencing. Think about a recent hardship. What are the elements of your narrative? What do they reveal about your expectations of life? Of God?
2. How could you preach the choruses of Ps 42-43 to your narrative?
3. How can you build the resolve to worship God even before the trouble comes?

Build Your Even If Declaration

When faced with discouragement, confusion, or disappointment, I will preach this chorus to myself...

DISCUSSION 3

CONDITIONS

(Corresponds to chapters 4)

Summary:

- *Counter ifs* are ways we think and live in order to manage the gap between what we desired/expected and the reality of what actually occurs.
- Conditions arise from desires that harden into expectations. They start out as sincere desires for happiness, self-worth, or whatever we would envision as “paradise.”
- Conditions distort our relationship with God either by: 1) holding our demands over God; or 2) believing that the hardships we face are the result of not meeting God’s conditions over us.
- We can speak *even if* over our “only ifs” by holding our desires with an open hand, boldly making our requests known to Him while declaring our trust in his good ways.

Opening Question:

Have you ever had a desire or need you felt God had to meet because you deserved it or God owed it to you? What effects did that desire or need have on other areas of your life?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read John 9:1-7.** What assumptions do the disciples make about how the world works and how God works?
2. How does Jesus refute those assumptions?
3. How do you see these assumptions expressed today?

Reflect

1. Have you ever tried to negotiate with God into something (ie., “God, I’ll do this if you’ll do that.”)? If so, what were you believing about God? about yourself?
2. What unmet desire or need could possibly cause you to develop conditions or formulas in an effort to have things go your way?
3. As you think about that unmet desire or need, consider what else God could be doing. Are you open to God doing something different than giving you your own way? Be candid. Why or why not?

Build Your Even If Declaration

Are there any conditions ruling your heart? Any conditions you believe God is holding over you? Lay them down before your Heavenly Father.

Handwriting lines for the declaration.

Even If Declaration

"Even if things are not lining up the way I think they should, it does not mean that..."

DISCUSSION 4

REGRETS

(Corresponds to chapters 5)

Summary:

- Everyone has regrets in life, arising from the thought, “if only” some event in our lives had been different.
- Broken Past regrets deceive us into thinking that because of our past mistakes, we must somehow make it up to God. In that case, we can face our current troubles with passivity—God is punishing me for the past and so I deserve it; or with a conditioned vow— “only if I can make it up to him by living a certain way.”
- Golden Past regrets deceive us into believing that God will only bless us if we can somehow be as we were in the “golden years.” We miss out on what God is doing in our lives now because we keep comparing ourselves to the nostalgic version of our lives.
- Fantasy regrets condemn us to constantly compare the reality of where we are with the imaginary version of our life. We believe that God is disapproving of us because we should have achieved, matured, etc. by now.

Opening Question:

Have you ever wondered how your life would be different if you had made a different choice? Share one choice and what you imagine would be different.

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Phil 3:13-16.**
2. In the context, Paul talks about forgetting his past achievements and status—all those things which tempt him to seek approval apart from Christ. What are the past things that you have trouble forgetting, those past regrets (both nostalgic and painful) that you might be holding onto?
3. Paul turns his eyes towards the goal of the prize of Jesus. How does that goal give us motivation to forget the past and to live in the reality of where we are?

Reflect

1. Of the three types of regrets (broken past, golden past, fantasy present)—which burdens you the most? Why?
2. Describe the impostor version of you—the one that you compare yourself to often. Then, speak the truth of God's Word from Phil 3:13-14 (or other passages if the Lord brings some to mind) over your real life.

Build Your Even If Declaration

In the Event row, write a situation, decision or action that you feel has brought about an unfavorable result in your life. In the My Regret row, write what you regret about that situation and how you feel this experience has affected your life. In the God's view row, what does God say about that situation and how you are feeling?

Is there a common theme in God's responses to all the things you have listed?

Event	
My Regret	
God's View	
Event	
My Regret	
God's View	
Event	
My Regret	
God's View	
Event	
My Regret	
God's View	
Event	
My Regret	
God's View	

Even If Declaration

“Even if the enemy tries to use my past to condemn me, I will...”

DISCUSSION 5

CONTROL

(Corresponds to chapters 6)

Summary:

- Contingency plans are the result of a need to be in control, to ensure that situations and outcomes go the way we desire. We form them by trying to know more or by tightly controlling our environments (and the people in them).
- Our “what ifs” arise from our imagined future. They are inevitable, but what we do with them can lead us to faith or fearful anxiousness.
- When we trust God in his goodness, we can make our plans while being flexible and open to the inevitable unpredictabilities. By declaring *even if*, we can face our disappointments not by doubling down on our attempts to be godly, but by resolving to surrender to God’s plans.

Opening Question:

Think about the various environments in which you live; how do you respond when things deviate from what you want?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Matt 6:24-32.** Worrying can either lead to inactivity (not taking risks), or the wrong activity (contingencies). What do you think is the common root cause at the core of these two responses?

2. Note the two phrases, “and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them...” and “each day has enough trouble of its own.” What does this tell you about God and the ways he invites you to approach life?

Reflect

1. If you ponder on Psalm 25:3, Isaiah 40:31 and Isaiah 49:23, there is a common theme in all three. Can you locate it? How could these scriptures lessen your need for control and to create contingencies against God’s plans?

2. Think about a time when you believed you were following God’s will. Did you find yourself creating contingencies when things didn’t go the way you thought they should? At what point did you feel you needed to do that? What was the state of your mind at the time? (For example, were you at peace, was your patience running out, were you confused, etc.)?

3. Fear and uncertainty can drive us to attempt to control our environment. But imagine if the same fear and uncertainty became the fuel for our desire to get closer to God and spend more time in his presence. Are there areas in your life where you feel afraid and uncertain? How can those emotions fuel your intimacy and fellowship with God?

Build Your Even If Declaration

Using your favorite bible app or search engine, search for scriptures that tell you something about God's plan for his children. (Scriptures like Psalm 37:37, Proverbs 4:18 and Jeremiah 29:11 can serve as a guide.)

Create a list from the scriptures you find by using a word or phrase to describe God's plan in those scriptures. (For example, Romans 12:2 describes God's plan as good, pleasing and perfect. For this scripture, you will have three words.)

Take a moment to reflect on the list you have created. Which of these descriptions prove the most difficult to hold on to when you are going through hard or uncertain times?

Write out those verses and a short prayer to speak God's promises over your life.

DISCUSSION 6

GRATITUDE & CONTENTMENT

(Corresponds to chapters 7)

Summary:

- Gratitude weakens the power of our “counter ifs” by helping us to remember God’s goodness every moment. When you give thanks, don’t just give thanks for things, but for people and experiences, and take a moment to remember what they tell you about God.
- Gratitude leads to contentment in the goodness of God. Contentment is the backbone of *even if* resolve.

Opening Question:

Think back to a recent time when you felt intense gratitude to God. What was the driving force of that experience?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Psalm 103:1-5.** David commands his soul to bless the Lord by remembering all his benefits. What are some of God's benefits to you?

2. Verses 3-5 list several categories that describe God's goodness. Which one(s) stand out to you?

Reflect

1. Who is the most grateful person you know? How did they get that way?

2. Why does it take such intentional effort to be grateful?

3. What is the relationship between gratitude and contentment?

4. How could contentment build an *even if* resolve in those times when life doesn't go the way you want?

Build Your Even If Declaration

List 10 people/experiences that you are grateful for. Then, practice theological gratitude: what do each of those people/experiences tell you about God's goodness towards you?

Even If Declaration

"Even if your blessings were to run dry now, I will worship you because..."

DISCUSSION 7

SAYING WHAT IS SO

(Corresponds to chapters 8)

Summary:

- The *even if* declaration is not a one-time event. As we face disappointments, doubts, or fears in difficult moments, we can learn to say *even if* with confidence and resolve.
- The second practice to form an *even if* life is to authentically speak out our disappointments and hurts to God, to name them. The Bible calls this lament.
- By “speaking what is so,” we actually demonstrate faith in God, bringing our hurts and disappointments before the only God who can meet us with comfort and grace.

Opening Question:

At some point in life, we all learn the lesson, “if you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all.” Think of a time when you could have or should have given feedback or critique, but didn’t. What kept you from sharing?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Lamentations 3:17-23.** Observe Jeremiah's condition in v. 17-20 (you might start from the beginning of chapter 3 to get an even more detailed picture).
2. Would you be comfortable speaking this way to the Lord? Why or why not?

Reflect

1. What is your level of candor with the Lord? In other words, what kinds of things are you comfortable talking about and what sorts of things do you feel are "off limits?" (One way to think about this is to consider the things you pray about and how you pray about them.)
2. How did you come to distinguish what is acceptable and what is not?
3. Is there a situation in your life that you need to be real about? How could speaking what is so enable you to worship God authentically?

Build Your Even If Declaration

Look at the *Even If* prayer on p. 189, “An Even If Prayer for When You are Disappointed.” (If you’re not facing a disappointment, feel free to choose another prayer.)

Using the prayer as a template, write out some of your own confusions, disappointments, or longings. Be candid before the Lord and give voice to your feelings.

Even If Declaration

“Even if this hard situation continues on, I will worship you because...”

DISCUSSION 8

RISK / TAKING THE NEXT STEP

(Corresponds to chapters 9–10)

Summary:

- The *even if* life frees us to take risks for the kingdom of God. Risk is not an excuse for recklessness, but stepping out in faith for the sake of some intended good.
- Our desire for success and fear of failure can keep us from taking the risks that God calls us to.
- When we take the next step, we will find ourselves counted among the *even if* witnesses who trusted God even when their faith didn't grant them everything they desired.
- We can take the next steps of faith-filled risk and remember that oftentimes the Good Shepherd leads his flock from the rear.

Opening Question:

What would you consider to be a win: Attempting and failing, but learning? Or making sure you succeed in a pursuit? What do you feel your answer reveals about how comfortable you are taking risks?

Dive Deeper

1. **Read Matt 25:14-29.** Ponder on these two phrases from verses 14 and 15: “entrusted his wealth to them” and “each according to his ability.” The master’s trust in his servants could have been based on their abilities as he assessed them. Even the servant who buried his talent was once productive and faithful over a few things. Do you think one’s perception of one’s abilities is a driving force for one’s appetite for risk or the lack thereof?
2. Think about the servant who was given a talent but he buried it and refused to do anything with it out of fear. Apart from the excuse he gave, what other reasons could have possibly held him back, especially if you pictured that servant to be you?
3. Verses 14-15 serve as a backdrop to understanding the Master’s mindset and vs. 24-25 open a window into the servant’s mindset. We see an obvious disparity. What is the difference? Do you ever sense this difference in your relationship with God?

Reflect

1. What was the most recent risk you stepped toward? Why did you do so? Did things turn out as you had hoped?
2. What is the most recent opportunity you could have taken but did not. Why didn't you take it? Do you wish you had?
3. The servant who gained 5 more talents and the one who gained 2 more talents both received the same reward: the affirmation of “well done” and then being set over much. With this in mind, do you feel you need to change your definition of success? How would this different definition help you be more bold in taking risks?

Build Your Even If Declaration

Think about the things that are keeping you from taking a risk. What is the smallest next step you can take? Imagine the possible outcomes (both positive and negative).

My Even If Declaration

Look back at all of your work in the “Build Your Even If Declaration” sections.

Prayerfully consider if there is a common theme or an emphasis that grabs your attention.

What is the *even if* declaration that is arising? What situation is God calling you to speak your *even if* declaration over?

What next step will you take with it?

Who will you share it with?



