

CHAPTER 1

“If”

My fourth grade teacher, who was all of 4'11", was fond of saying, “Dynamite comes in small packages.” Nothing could be more descriptive of this concept than the little two-letter word *if*.

I never gave much thought to this word until our team at The FAMiLY LEADER decided to dissect each word and phrase of 2 Chronicles 7:14. We believe this verse, although not strictly directed at the United States of America, provides a glimpse into God’s heart and, thus, a template for a nation’s revival.

I’ve heard and used the word *if* on many occasions and in a variety of circumstances. It may just be the most challenging word in the English language. Its very utterance prompts one to make a decision. The receiver of the word has a choice to make. The voice of the word is looking for action.

In the New International Version of the Holy Bible, the word *if* is used over fifteen hundred times. The word *if* either follows a promise or is a predicate to a promise.

However, the promise or the result or the consequence is predicated on a choice. This promise or consequence is defined by *then*.

To illustrate this point and the power of *if*, let's pick up the infamous story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18, beginning at verse 22 and ending at verse 33:

The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Wow, this little word *if* turned into a major bargaining chip. Abraham negotiates the number of righteous in the sinful city from 50 to 45 to 40 to 30 to 20 to 10. Abraham includes repeated *ifs* in his questions to God, and God recites the repeated *ifs* in His answers. The net sum is, “If you find Me a small and committed core of righteous people, then I will spare the land.”

That message in and of itself should be encouragement enough for America. In high stakes negotiations, we are offered great insight regarding the character of God. He doesn't need the whole city to be found righteous, not even a majority. He is just asking for a small core to work with and to build from who earnestly are seeking and living out righteousness. Maybe we need to take a lesson from Abraham

and pray that God will find a small core of righteous men and women to spare our nation from rightful judgment and commence a modern-day revival.

Now, back to the word *if*. I've been a teacher, a coach, a parent, and a leader in business, politics, and ministry. As I contemplate this two-letter gem, I am fascinated by its usage. Follow along with these examples as you consider the importance of the intentional beginning of this revival verse.

As a parent, I'm sure you recognize the power of *if*. "If you eat all your vegetables, I will give you two scoops of ice cream." I realize there is a great dichotomy in this challenge, but I know many parents who have reached for much greater and much more despicable vegetable eating techniques than two scoops of ice cream. We've all heard, "If you clean your plate, you can have dessert."

Why the *if*? It is a motivational technique used on children to get them to eat what is healthy and good for them. The hope of the *if* is that when children begin the habit of eating their greens and their carrots, they will grow a liking for them and, thus, make healthy eating decisions as they mature.

As a matter of fact, the power of *if* is a parenting staple. See if you have heard of this one. "If you take a bath and put on your pajamas without a fuss, then I will read you a bedtime story." Or how about, "If you sit still throughout the whole church service, then I will give you a dollar"? The *if* is the behavior we desire, and bedtime stories and cash are the promises of reward.

Parenting is about creating an environment and a desire to make right choices, and this little word is the prompter for results.

My friends have given me a bad time for not giving my boys a choice when it comes to playing basketball. They believe I have forced this game upon them. I am steadfast in my defense. I most certainly give them a choice. *If* they want to eat, they'll practice. *If* they don't want to eat, they don't have to practice. For those who know me, you're smiling now. The choice is theirs, and it's all precipitated with the word *if*.

Teachers, coaches, and leaders of all disciplines and strategy resort to the word *if* frequently to obtain desired results. Leaders of business tell their sales forces routinely that *if* they exceed their quotas, substantial bonuses await them at the end of each quarter and fiscal year.

Coaches tell their players that *if* they hit the weights, *if* they put in the shots, and *if* they adhere to scheduled conditioning, they will maximize their ability and the team's performance.

Teachers instruct their pupils to study, to read, and to prepare. And *if* the pupils put in the time and fundamentals of learning, they will succeed in any given curriculum offering.

If also represents a tipping point. *If* you do as the parent, as the teacher, as the coach, and as the leader recommends, then you are going to experience fulfillment. However, *if* you choose to ignore or to defy, then you will experience the consequences of obesity, of not making the

grade or the team, or of being unemployed. The irony of the *if* is that it is up to you, to me, and to us to make the appropriate decision.

If can be a clear warning that outlines devastating consequences. Take Matthew 18:6 as an example: “*If* anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” Wow, God’s *if* demonstrates His love for and value of our children.

Our teaching and instruction are paramount in His eyes as we are given the mantle of parenting and nurturing. The *if* gets our attention, and what follows the *if* is a clarion warning of the high stakes of leadership and parenting.

And of all the *ifs* ever uttered, there is none more sincere and ultimately transformative than Christ’s *if* in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion. Luke recounts these words in chapter 22:42: “Father, *if* you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

Jesus’ *if* is directed toward God, His Father in heaven. Notice how He states His desire yet submits to the Father’s ultimate will. How many times have we prayed for God to take our sickness, our financial circumstance, our disability, or our doubt from us? Jesus’ prayer models permission to seek God for relief *if* our prayer is humbly and authentically predicated on our submission to God’s will.

Of all the words God could have chosen to spur us on to revival, there is none greater than *if*. The *if* transfers the

weight of responsibility. It encourages personal and corporate responsibility. It demands action, authenticity, and sincerity.

And God, just like the parent, the teacher, the coach, and the leader, is hoping we will make the right decision. As He states in Isaiah 48:18, "*If* only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea."

My prayer is that we, as His people, pay attention.

"If only . . ."

If 7:14

dig deeper

1. “If”—this two-letter word exemplifies the concept that dynamite comes in small packages. Would you agree? And if so, why is this so pivotal in our prayer for revival?
2. Jesus packed a powerful “If” punch in this verse: “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory IF you believe?” (John 11:40 NLT). “Glory” is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. It’s the very reflection of the face of God. Have you experienced God’s glory? Share a time when God’s glory has been revealed to you.
3. “If” became a major bargaining chip in Genesis 18:22–33. Talk about the plea from Abraham and how the “If” prompted the actions of a loving God.

“In the same way, even though God has the right to show His anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction” (Romans 9:22 NLT).

4. The word “If” is a choice:

“If” is a prompt for results—good or bad.

“If” represents a tipping point toward consequences or fulfillment.

How is this possible? When have you experienced the choice of an “If” in your life? Give a personal example of consequences that you faced by ignoring or defying the “If.”

5. The most sincere and transformative “If” happened in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Who modeled submission over desire to us? How does this prayer give us permission to seek God for relief?
6. God’s Word is filled with “if you will . . . then I will” statements. His promises can seem as though they are conditional. If God’s love is unconditional, explain the parameters He sets by using this conditional blessing.