

Chapter One

Living God's Divine Perspective



*When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said,
"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."*

Judges 6:12

JUDGES 6–7

Some people may feel like their life doesn't amount to much. They may think they are insignificant. They may feel like their life consists only of existing day to day. They feel helpless when it comes to their struggles in life. They feel hopeless, wondering if their life will ever change.

No matter who you are, where you've been, or what you've done, God has a purpose for you. Just because you may not be popular, have a certain grade point average, athletic ability, or education doesn't mean God can't use you or doesn't have a purpose for your life. On the contrary, he has instilled in you specific gifts to fulfill his purpose in your life.

Many years ago, while I was studying for the ministry, I had in mind what I wanted that ministry to look like. I had my position picked out, and I had a vision for my life. When I got the opportunity to step into that position, I knew it was for me. But it didn't take the Lord long to show me this was not his plan.

My disappointment ran deep. I'd been sure this was God's will. It was the desire of my heart. It made perfect sense. I was already doing volunteer ministry at Valley Assembly of God in Spokane, Washington, where I had attended most of my life. Now they offered me a full-time position as children's pastor.

I had longed for the day when the Lord would open a door for me to enter full-time ministry. In my mind, this was it. But my wife, Teresa, didn't feel right about it. Believe me, I pleaded my case with her, but she stood her ground. I knew I couldn't move forward if she didn't believe this was God's will.

As I sat in my truck before work one day, expressing my disappointment to God, he spoke clearly to me. "If I were to tell you the plans I have for you, you wouldn't believe it."

So I broke the news to my pastor, Al Hulten, who then told me about another church, Suncrest Family Worship Center, that was looking for a children's pastor and thought I should consider it.

I met with the pastor of Suncrest Family Worship Center in Nine Mile Falls, Washington, (a community outside of Spokane) and knew that this was where God was leading us. God used my wife and Pastor Al Hulten to show my family and me that this is where he would have us go. I knew at that time that his plans for my life were much greater than I had planned for myself, but I still didn't know what they were. I was excited to see what God had in store for me.

Living through God's divine perspective on your life through a relationship with Jesus Christ will bring you fulfillment. The things

of this world will never fulfill you like a personal relationship with Jesus.

In Judges chapter 6, the Midianites had overtaken and oppressed God's people, the Israelites. At this time in Israel's history, they possessed the land God had promised them. But they didn't live in true possession of the land because they weren't living for God, and this led to their oppression. This enemy nation had impoverished the Israelites, so they cried out to the Lord for help. God answered their cry by raising up Gideon to save them from the hands of the Midianites.

God Longs to Be in Your Life

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

"But sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

"But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." (Judg. 6:12–15)

The first thing the angel of the Lord says to Gideon is, "The Lord is with you (v. 12). Gideon then responds, "If the Lord is with us, then why has all of this happened to us?" (v. 13). Maybe you have asked yourself a similar question: "If God is with me, if

God loves me, if there is a God, why has he allowed bad things to happen to me?”

I remember a season when everything went from bad to worse with my job. One day, I came home distraught, beside myself. I couldn't go on another day. I was working as a bus driver for over three years at this point, and after a series of events and frustrations, a fender bender that day was the breaking point for me.

That evening, I received another job offer.

It was the greatest relief I'd felt in a long time. The Lord used all the horrible aspects of my job to move me into a new career. If I'd been satisfied with my job, I probably wouldn't have considered the new position. My present job paid well and had great benefits. It would have made perfect sense to stay where I was, even though I didn't like the position. But God had other plans and used those circumstances to lead me to something better. God will use your difficulties, pain, and suffering for his greater purposes for your life. The positive side of that position was that the Lord used it to lead me into a ministry to underprivileged people that I am still involved in to this day.

God has seen everything that has happened to you, good and bad, whether you brought them on yourself or not. He knows all the wrong choices you've made, and he still loves you. He has been by your side. He has seen your tears. He has felt your pain. Nothing has been hidden from his sight. He has been there, even though you haven't seen him or felt his presence. If you are a Christian, God works in your life even if you don't see or feel him working. If you are not in a right relationship with God, he's been trying to get your attention. But you keep him out by going your own way.

The Lord has always been aware of every aspect of your life, yet he longs to be in it. When you invite Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, you open your life to him, allowing him to work. He

wants to forgive your sins. He wants to heal your hurt. He wants to comfort you in your pain. He even works through your difficult circumstances to draw you to him.

Even if you are not a Christian, God is aware of everything that has taken place in your life. He longs for you to repent of your sins and turn to him. He wants to work in your life.

Jesus loves you so much, and he wants to have a personal relationship with you. He died on the cross to make that relationship possible. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). His death on the cross was a demonstration of his love for you. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). The Bible says we have all sinned, and that sin has separated us from God. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). That death is not just a physical death, but a spiritual one. Sin brought death, and death results in separation.

If you've ever been to an open-casket funeral, you have seen the body of the deceased person. Their body is there, but you can no longer have a relationship with that person. You can't have a conversation with them. Why? Because their death resulted in separation from you. That's what happened because of our sin. We died spiritually, which resulted in our separation from God.

The good news is that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again to bring you back into a right relationship with him. Our sin had to be paid for, but we couldn't pay it ourselves. So Jesus paid it for us, through his death on the cross.

But Jesus's death on the cross doesn't automatically save us. He provided for the forgiveness of our sins. He provided for our

salvation. It's up to us to turn to him in faith. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." The way we receive him is by personal invitation. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). At that point, you become what the Bible calls "born again" (Jn. 3:3). This means your spirit, dead because of sin, is made alive again by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Jesus died on the cross to make it possible for you to have a relationship with him. If you open your life to him by confessing that you are a sinner and want him to be your Lord and Savior, he will forgive all your sins and give you a brand-new start in life. When we make Jesus our Lord, we commit to living for him rather than our own sinful, selfish desires. It's not a matter of working for your salvation but walking out your salvation. You are saved from your sins when you turn to faith in Jesus. You walk out that salvation by living in obedience to his Word and his will for your life. Some people just want Jesus to be their Savior, but not their Lord. They want the forgiveness of their sins and to be assured of heaven, but they continue to live a life of sin. Jesus needs to be your Lord and Savior. It's a package deal. Eternal life is a gift of God, but it's through Jesus Christ our LORD (Rom. 6:23).

If you want to make Jesus the Lord and Savior of your life, then commit your life to him by praying this prayer to him. "Jesus, I am a sinner in need of your forgiveness. I believe you died on the cross for my sins and you rose again and are alive today. Come into my life. Be my Lord and Savior. I dedicate my life to following you by living according to your Word and your will for my life. Thank you for dying for me, for forgiving me, and for saving me. Amen."

If you just prayed that prayer, you have become a child of God and have a new life. One way God speaks to us is through his Word,

the Bible. Begin reading the Bible every day. The book of John is a good place to start. Choose a translation you can understand.

Begin talking to God on a regular basis. Talk to him as you would talk to a friend. Ask him for his help in the big and small things in your life, in the challenges you face. Find a good church that teaches the Bible. There you can make Christian friends and grow in your walk with the Lord. And tell someone about your decision for Jesus. Perhaps a Christian you know has been praying for you. If so, let them know what you've done. They can help you get started in your new relationship with Jesus.

Whether you have been a Christian for many years or just now committed your life to Christ, begin living through God's divine perspective on your life.

God Has a Greater Call on Your Life

The second thing the angel of the Lord said to Gideon was that he was a "mighty warrior" (Judg. 6:12). Gideon probably looked around to make sure the angel wasn't talking to someone else and said, "You've got to be kidding? Me? I'm just a local boy working on the family farm, threshing wheat. Mighty warrior? You have the wrong person."

God saw Gideon in light of who he was to become, in light of God's plans for his life. God saw Gideon as a mighty warrior because that is what God had planned for his life, to be a mighty warrior and save Israel out of the Midianites' hands. Gideon underestimated God's purpose for his life. He did not see himself as God saw him.

I'm sure King David never imagined himself as someday becoming the king of all Israel. As a shepherd boy, he'd learned to fight off lions and bears, which prepared him to take down Goli-

ath. Then, in time, God moved him into the kingship. Joseph also went through some long and difficult years as God prepared him to become governor of Egypt.

You may think you're a nobody and your life amounts to nothing. But God has a plan and purpose for you. He sees who he wants you to become and what he has planned for your life. Don't underestimate his purposes. Whatever you have planned for your life, God's plans are even better.

The Lord may call you to a position in the secular world, or he may call you to the ministry as a vocation. If you're not sure of your calling, ask God to begin stirring your heart in the direction he wants you to move. He will give you desires that fall in line with his plans for you. Having a desire to do something doesn't always mean God is calling you to that place or position. Test the desire by giving it to God and asking him either to take away the desire or make it grow. As with Gideon, your weakness or insecurity might be where God is calling you. It was for me.

When I was a teenager, I never thought I would someday be a pastor or evangelist, preaching his Word. I kept to myself. I never went out for sports after the seventh grade. I worked in my dad's business. I hated speaking in a group setting. I never dreamed of the things God had planned for my life. The Lord made my purpose evident to me years ago: to revitalize the church and evangelize the lost by preaching God's Word and through the power of the Holy Spirit. You can become anything God has planned for you. You were born for a purpose, and he will fulfill that purpose as you walk in obedience and relationship with him.

Take Steps of Faith

In verse 15 Gideon asks, "But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family." In

other words, Gideon says, "I have no credentials. I have no degree. I come from a family of nobodies, and I am the biggest nobody of them all. How can I save Israel?" The Lord says, "Go in the strength you have. I will be with you." Gideon was to go in faith that the Lord would enable him to do what he called him to do.

God has given you a call and commission beyond your capabilities. You need his grace, wisdom, power, and presence to live out his purpose. Without him, you cannot become who he wants you to be.

Begin by taking steps of faith. If you do not have Jesus Christ in your life, the first step of faith is offering your life totally and completely to him and inviting him to be your Lord and Savior. Then whatever God calls you to do, take steps of faith toward that call. By the stirring in your heart and the confirmation of his Word, you'll know what God is calling you to do. If you feel God may be calling to do something, ask him to confirm it to you. When you know he is leading you to do something specific, to take that step of faith, go in the strength you have. He will be with you. He will empower you and give you the ability to do whatever he calls you to do.

Whatever God calls you to do will be a step of faith because you don't know the outcome. Some steps of faith are greater than others, depending on the consequences. Leaving a job, for example, would have greater consequences than talking to someone about Jesus. The one could leave you unemployed, the other one less friend. But if God is in it, the outcome will be what he wants it to be. Leave the results to him. He will honor your step of faith.

Reach Others Who Need Jesus

God called Gideon to save Israel out of the enemy's hand. When you come to faith in Christ, the Lord saves you out of the

grasp of Satan, who has been holding you captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). When Jesus saves you, it isn't just so you can live a better life. Jesus saves us to live in relationship with him and to reach others who need him.

I've heard people say that God has not called us to save people, just to love them. Yes, loving them is central to reaching them, but love alone will not save them if that love doesn't point them to Jesus. Ultimately, we can't save anyone. Only God can. But we sometimes use that mindset to release ourselves from our responsibility to reach the lost, which God has called us to do. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and save the lost" (Jn. 4:10). Jesus also told his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn. 20:21).

The Lord told the apostle Paul, "I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). It's also what he told Gideon: "Am I not sending you?" And Jesus commissioned us all to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19–20).

When we come to faith in Christ, he commissions and sends us to reach others who are lost and held captive by the devil. God's call to you is to come and follow him as your Lord and Savior. God's commission to you is to reach others who need Jesus in their life. Yes, that requires loving them, but loving them is only one element to saving and discipling them.

Evangelism is necessary if we are to reach people for Christ. Discipleship is necessary to grow people in Christ. As disciples ourselves, we need to grow in our relationship with Christ as well as evangelize the lost and help them grow in their relationship with Christ. Evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand. As followers of Christ, we evangelize and disciple others. That's the Great Commission.

Who in your sphere of influence needs Jesus? What can you do

to influence them for Christ? Those are the people God has placed in your life so you could reach them for him. Build a bridge of relationship with them and prayerfully consider ways to show and share Christ with them.

Expect God to Empower You

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them. (Judg. 6:34–36)

When Gideon went in the strength he had, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon” (6:34). It was after he took a step of faith, God empowered him to do what he’d called and commissioned him to do. That was one confirmation to Gideon that God was with him and would see him through.

When you take a step of faith by turning your life over to Jesus, by his Spirit, God will enable you to live for him and carry out his call and commission. Turning your life over to Jesus is only the first of many steps of faith you will take in your Christian walk. If you think the Christian life is boring, it’s because you haven’t taken steps of faith. On the contrary, the Christian life is the most exciting and exhilarating life. You’ll discover this truth when you begin taking steps of faith that require risk.

Satan is going to do everything in his power to keep you from turning to faith in Christ and from taking steps of faith. He doesn’t want you to experience all that God has planned for you, so he’ll use doubt, fear, unbelief, temptation, and distractions to try to stop you. If you haven’t made Jesus your Lord and Savior, Satan will use

all those and more to keep you from making that decision. If you are a Christian, he will use all those things and more to keep you from experiencing all God has for you.

Without Jesus, you live under the control of the devil. But it doesn't have to be that way. God has the power to break the devil's hold on you. Jesus came to set the captive free (Lk. 4:18). Your freedom is found in Jesus Christ. When you invite Jesus into your life, he sets you free from the devil's hold on your life. If you have not surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, the devil has been holding you captive to do his will, whether you realize it or not. But Jesus wants to set you free.

Expect God to Use You

Gideon started out with 32,000 men in his army to fight the Midianites (7:3). God told him he had too many. After sifting through the troops, Gideon ended up with only 300 men (7:7). And with those 300 men, Gideon defeated the Midianites with God's help.

When God empowers you to do what he calls you to do, you can expect him to use you to do amazing things in and through you. Gideon had minimal resources. He and his small army had trumpets, jars, and torches. They didn't have anything you would expect an army to have, like spears and shields. And yet, that's all God needed.

No matter how limited your resources are or how ill equipped you feel, God will use what you have to do amazing things in and through your life. Expect great things from God. He will do amazing things in your family, your friends, your school or workplace, and your community through your influence. Our God is an amazing God. Everything he does is amazing. He will amaze you by the

work he will do. He is calling you to live out his divine perspective on your life. Gideon did and so can you.

Reflection

1. Have you been born again, inviting Jesus into your life to be your Lord and Savior? If so, tell someone what led you to open your life to Christ.
2. Is God calling you to do something you've had on your heart to accomplish for him?
3. What do you think could be the "greater call" God has placed on your life?
4. What next step of faith can you take toward experiencing "more?"
5. Identify one person in your life who needs Jesus. What can you do to influence them for him?
6. What "little" do you have that God could use (gifts, talents, money, etc.)?

Encouragement: If you have decided to follow Jesus and make him your Lord and Savior, you are now a child of God. If you've decided to take evangelism and discipleship to the next level, he will be with you and help you. He is your strength.

Challenge: The next time you feel discouraged, disheartened, or defeated, give those negative feelings to Jesus and keep moving forward. God created you for a purpose, and like Gideon, you can live out God's divine perspective on your life as you continue to walk with Him.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus*, thank you for your love for me and the life you

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have given me. Help me to have your perspective on my life and to live my life through your eyes. I believe your plans for me are much greater than my own. Please stir my heart with your plans for me. Show me the steps of faith you're calling me to take. Place on my heart that one person I can begin to reach for you. Help me to love them and ultimately lead them to you. Use my "little" to accomplish a lot for your glory. Amen.