

# **Discernment Paradigm**

Spiritual Formation | Sandals Church

By Dan Crowley

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. ROMANS 12:2 NLT*

**PURPOSE:** To help us to discern God's will; to be in-sync with God, loving what he loves, so we would be in-step with God, joining him in his work in the world around us.

**OVERVIEW:** "Just tell me what to do and I'll do it." Those words have been uttered by many faithful persons when thinking about the will of God. In reality God doesn't want to be our puppet master. His desire for us is that we would partner with him in what he's doing in the world around us.

God gives us tools for discerning his will and joining in with his movements. This can be especially challenging when we're in crisis, facing critical or difficult decisions or simply feel far from him.

Thankfully, God has outlined specific steps we can take. God gives us real events in the life of a real leader, taking us into his journey, allowing us to connect with his story, to shed light on our situation. In Judges 6-7, we learn from Gideon as he seeks to understand God's will and discern his next steps. God's desires for us to be in-sync with him so that we can be in-step with him.

## **DISCERNMENT PARADIGM:**

### **Turn To God For Help**

*So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help. Judges 6:6 NLT*

God cares deeply about the things we care about, whether it's our relationships, vocation, money, ministry or other involvements. Even more so, he wants us to care even more deeply about the things he cares about, to love the things he loves so that we're compelled to join him in his activity in the world around us. Therefore we must make it a point to turn to God for help, to seek him when looking at making important decisions.

The Israelites had turned away from God, giving themselves to worshiping the gods of the Amorites, false gods that led them into ruin. So God gave them over to what they wanted. Until they had an awakening and turned back towards the one true God.

### **Listen For God's Voice**

*I told you, 'I am the Lord your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.' But you have not listened to me. Judges 6:10 NLT*

Choosing between right and wrong is low hanging fruit. Choosing between multiple good decisions can be a huge challenge. Which is why we need to evaluate our choices in light of the concept of good, better, or best. There are good decisions; this decision could work and is often our first instinct. There are better decisions; this is typically an improvement on our initial choice. Then there are our best decisions; this is the decision that brings God the most glory when it's been carried out. The best choice is one that demonstrates our ability to listen to God while allowing those involved to recognize God more fully.

For Israel, the good decision was to continue to hide what they could from the Midianites and not provoke them to greater destruction. The better decision would have been to stop worshiping the god of the Amorites, return to God and try to get more creative about how to preserve their crops or deceive the Midianites. However, the best decision, the decision that God desired most from Israel was to return to God, letting him fight on their behalf in order to show them once again his majesty over his creation, his provision for his people and his loving-kindness to welcome Israel back to himself.

### **Ask God For Confirmation**

*Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. Judges 6:17 NLT*

God understands that we don't always hear him correctly, that we have doubts about what we think he's saying. He knows we're limited in our ability to discern his will. He made us this way on purpose so that we would rely on him, embracing our dependence on him. Therefore, when hearing from God, ask him for confirmation. This not only is a profession of our need for him but also draws us into a place of growing our faith in him.

Even though an angel of the Lord spoke very clearly to Gideon, being physically present to him evoking his sight and in words that his human ears could hear, Gideon still asked for a sign. Then, the Lord speaks to Gideon as well, audibly so he could hear God with his ears. Yet, once more Gideon asks for two separate pieces of confirmation. That's three times in all that Gideon asks the Lord to confirm what he's hearing.

### **Eliminate Barriers To God**

*That night the Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is*

*seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. Then build an altar to the Lord your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down." Judges 6:25-26 NLT*

Listening to God requires that we both hear him and obey him. However, sin gets in the way of our ability to truly listen to God. We must make space to evaluate those things that prevent us from aligning ourselves with God. We must eliminate our barriers to God, to be in-sync with God so that we can move forward with him, and not the other way around.

It gets harder for Gideon before it gets better. God tells him to clean house within his family and tribe. He must not only remove the false gods of the Amorites from his camp but he must completely destroy them, setting up an altar of worship to the one true God of Israel. This is the first step towards Gideon's best choice, bringing forth the glory of God. Under the cover of night he goes to work, eliminating his barriers to God. Then promptly faces his first real challenge, opposition from within his own home, tribe and people. Sound familiar?

### **Take A Next Step**

*So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. Judges 7:1 NLT*

God designed us to be in-step with him; being an active participant in the work he's doing in the world around us. God is always on the move. Therefore, we must see our practice of discernment as active, work that propels us forward to be in-step with God. Inactivity never produces activity.

Take the next step with God. Then, look for God to continue to lead you in taking the next step. God leads Gideon out to fight against the Midianites. These precision-trained warriors are a gross overmatch for Gideon and his meager clan. In human terms he's walking into a slaughter that will take his life and more than likely lead to the extinction of his clan. Dead men walking. Nonetheless, he continues to walk forward with God.

### **Have Bigger Faith In God**

*The Lord told Gideon, "With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home." Judges 7:7 NLT*

God's work doesn't always make sense or seem logical. We often want to add to it, treating God as if he doesn't understand our particular situation, isn't capable of overcoming the depth of our problem, or as if God needs our help in some way, shape or form. Remember, our discernment process is about us making our best decision, the one where God is most glorified, is most fully

seen by those around us. We must embrace God's work knowing that it will require us to have bigger faith in God.

As if Gideon's situation wasn't bad enough, God radically reduces Gideon's army. Once again God is demonstrating to Gideon that this is about what God desires most. That God would be the One that Gideon, his clan, his people turn to, worship and follow fully, regardless of the cost. That God would be made great in their midst. This is the choice that brings God the greatest glory.

### **Let God Lead The Way Forward**

*That night the Lord said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them! But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah. Listen to what the Midianites are saying, and you will be greatly encouraged. Then you will be eager to attack." So Gideon took Purah and went down to the edge of the enemy camp. Judges 7:9-11 NLT*

We must be all in with the work of God in our life. When God says now, we must be ready to go forward with him, trusting he knows the timing and is ready to lead the way. Winning may not come in the way we expect. However, when we move in-step with God, the victory is always certain. Let God lead the way forward, being ready and willing to follow him into the battle. Gideon must have been incredibly discouraged as he watched God pare his army down to just 300 men. To make matters worse, they didn't have conventional weapons. They had a paltry collection of farming tools to use in their battle. Greatly outmatched by the Midianites, Gideon continues to show big faith in God as he positions his men on the front lines. His heart sinks inside his stomach as he draws ever closer to the enemy camp. Suddenly, there's a ray of hope, a crack in the stronghold. It's now or never as Gideon is compelled by God to leap into action. God's actions overtake the enemy stronghold as Gideon and his fighting men begin to participate in the mighty work of God.

### **Praise God For The Win**

*When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship before the Lord . Then he returned to the Israelite camp and shouted, "Get up! For the Lord has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!" Judges 7:15 NLT*

It can be easy to just keep on trucking, moving onto the next thing. Remembering this is about God being most glorified, we must make it a point to praise God for the win. Taking time to celebrate who God is and what he's done is of paramount importance both in this present circumstance as well as in preparing us to deal with what comes next. God is actively at work. We are to be active in joining him in his work, all the while giving him glory for the outcome. Make it a point to pause and praise, pointing to God and what he's accomplished.

Gideon didn't bask in his encouragement or just spring into action. He did something so critical, so

crucial, something that is easy to overlook. He paused and praised God. He took time to point to who God is in order to bring God the greatest glory. The bloody onslaught was still left to unfold before Gideon, his clan and the people of Israel. There was still tremendous work still to be done, a hard fought battle still to fight. And in the midst of it all, there's Gideon returning to a true form of worship. It was a move that God prepared beforehand (v. 6:6, 10, 25-26), and was cemented throughout his discernment process (v. 7:1, 7, 9-11).