

## Breakthrough!

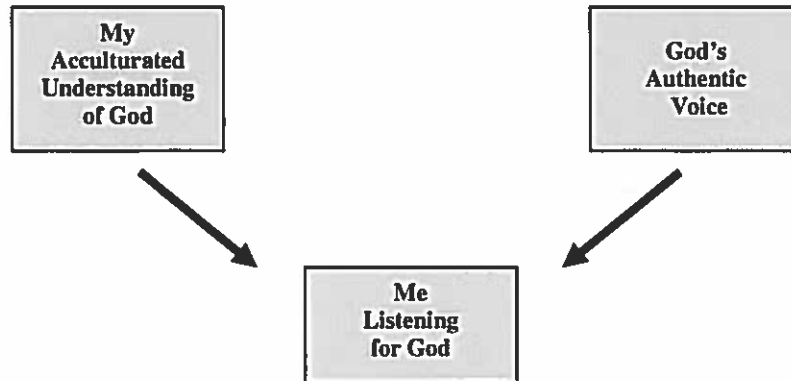
On Sunday, we continued our series called “Voices of Angels” by exploring a simple one-sentence message that the angel of the Lord delivered to Abraham at a critical juncture in his life.

1. Warm-up Question: What’s something good and positive that you are confessing by faith will happen for you in this New Year?
2. On Sunday, Jeff shared a simple sentence: “I never said you stole money.” He pointed out that the sentence can mean at least six different things depending on which word is emphasized.
  - a. Take turns reading the sentence aloud, each time emphasizing a different word. With each reading, explain how the meaning differs.
  - b. From this simple exercise, what can we learn about reading and interpreting the Bible?
3. Abraham and Sarah had long longed for a child. To say they were desperate for a child would be an understatement. But then Sarah gave birth to a son named Isaac. He was the child of promise – the most important thing in the world to them. Completely cherished. Then came that fateful day when Abraham heard the voice of God asking him to do the unthinkable. Read Genesis 22:1-14.
  - a. What do you think Abraham was feeling throughout this story?
  - b. What do you think Isaac was feeling?
4. The traditional interpretation of Genesis 22 places emphasis on the first line of verse 1 and the last line of verse 12. Keying off those words, the traditional interpretation sees this story as a test to see if Abraham still loved God more than Isaac and would be willing to sacrifice him if God said so. In this interpretation, God knew all along that the experiment would be interrupted before Isaac was killed.
  - a. In her book “Pure,” Linda Kay Klein tells how, as a teenager, she felt God calling her to break up with her beloved boyfriend, not because he was bad for her, but because she felt guilty for loving him so much. To her, this was a test of whether she loved God more. So she broke up with him. Do you feel God ever tests us like that? Have you ever felt tested like that? What happened?
  - b. Jeff said, “I do believe there are times when living a life of devotion to God calls for us to sacrifice so as to advance some very important purpose in the world. But I struggle to believe that God asks us to make sacrifices that serve no purpose other than to test us.” What do you think? If you think God does test us like that, why? If you think God doesn’t, why not?
  - c. Overall, how do you feel about the traditional interpretation?

5. When challenging us to summon the courage to rethink traditional interpretations that trouble us, Jeff shared the following quotes. Say what you think each quote means.
  - a. Walter Wangerin: “Sometimes faith looks like doubt.”
  - b. Paul Tillich: “Doubt isn’t the opposite of faith; it’s an element of faith.”
  - c. Paul Tillich: “Sometimes I think it is my mission to bring faith to the faithless, and doubt to the faithful.”
  
6. In his book “Flipped,” Doug Padgitt challenges the traditional interpretation of Genesis 22 by placing emphasis on how the names of God are used in this story and throughout the story of Abraham’s life. In the English Old Testament, when you see the name “God,” the underlying Hebrew word is “Elohim,” which is the plural for “god” and means “gods.” It was the term ancient people used to refer to their gods, who were often ruthless and sometimes demanded child sacrifice. Abraham and the Hebrew people adopted that word “Elohim” to refer to their one true God. But Abraham and the Hebrew people also used a new name “Yahweh” to refer to their one true God. Whenever you see the name “LORD” in the English Old Testament, the underlying Hebrew word is “Yahweh.” Padgitt points out that Elohim was a name that carried all the baggage of Abraham’s childhood understanding of God. It is Elohim who calls him to sacrifice Isaac, whereas the angel of the LORD, i.e., Yahweh, interrupts the sacrifice. In Padgitt’s view, that’s the point of the story. Abraham is being called to make a spiritual breakthrough in his understanding of God. He’s being called to let go of old, harsh understandings of God and replace them with new, loving understandings.
  - a. How do you feel about Padgitt’s interpretation? What do you like or dislike?
  - b. Padgitt cites Hosea 6:6 and Micah 6:7-8 as consistent with his interpretation. What do you think these verses mean?
  - c. What false ideas about God, and how God works, did you absorb growing up that you have felt called to let go as you’ve matured in faith?
  
7. Jeff used the graph on the next page to help us visualize how easy it is for us, like Abraham, to confuse the voice of a false god (as taught to us by our culture) with the authentic voice of God in our lives. To avoid that kind of confusion, he suggested four guidelines – see next page.
  
8. Right now in your life is there something about your faith that you are feeling called to re-evaluate. If so, what is it – and why are you re-evaluating?

***If you haven’t already done so, take some time this week to prepare a personal Soul Care Plan for 2018. Paper copies are available at church or go to [www.LifeJourney.church/soulcare](http://www.LifeJourney.church/soulcare)***

## How can I tell if that voice in my head is authentically from God or a reflection of possible misconceptions about God?



### Four Key Guidelines:

1. Don't be afraid of doubt. If you find yourself doubting something you've always been taught, don't be afraid to explore the question.
2. Always go back to first principles: God is love (I John 4:8). God is never going to call you to do something contrary to love.
3. Run everything through the teachings of Jesus. Any interpretation contrary to the teachings of Jesus is a bad interpretation.
4. Like Abraham, listen to the angel of the Lord – that still small voice of God's Spirit inside you. Trust your gut, as Abraham did.