

Are You Sure God Said That?

There is a story in the book of Genesis that is remarkable for many reasons. Firstly, it is the story of a man taking the most precious thing he had (his son) and offering him up as a sacrifice to God in faith. Secondly, it is a story of redemption as God provides a substitute for the sacrifice and in doing so gave us a picture of what was to come when Jesus became the substitute for us. But in the midst of the story, there is also a remarkable realization about the way that God speaks to His people.

“After this the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward’ He brought him outside and said, ‘Look up toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So will your descendants be.’ Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:1, 5-6).

God speaks to Abram.

God’s word was clear and precise. God told Abram that his children that would outnumber the stars. To a man who had no children, this was a big deal. This was a grand promise toward Abram. So, Abram believes God. Sarai, who was not as sure about having a baby, doesn’t initially believe God, but God tells her it will happen in spite of her unbelief. God changes both of their names—Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah—resetting their identity before answering the prayer for a child. Sarah becomes pregnant and once the child is born, they name their son Isaac because he is the delight of their lives.

Then God does something that Abraham does not expect.

“After these things God tested Abraham and said to him,

‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’ So Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place that God had told him” (Gen. 22:1-3).

You have to remember the context for this story. Imagine you have been waiting for a son for years. You have been waiting so long that your body was beyond childbearing. And even though you thought there was no possible way for things to change, you continued to believe God. Then everything changes. The answer comes. Your son is born. Then God tells you to do something that seems the opposite of everything you think is right.

Take your son and offer Him as a burnt offering.

You heard God say it. This is a clear word. This is not vague, not a maybe—this is clear.

I’m not sure how I would have reacted, but Abraham continued to believe God. He obeys, and with his son in tow, they head up the mountain to the place of sacrifice.

“Then they came to the place that God had told him. So Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on the wood. Then Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, Do not lay your hands on the boy or do anything to him, because now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your only son from Me.’ Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. So Abraham went and took

the ram and offered him up as a burnt offering in the place of his son" (Gen. 22:9-13).

Here is where things get tricky. You see, God had clearly spoken to Abraham. He was to go up the mountain and sacrifice his son. But when Abraham was about to plunge the knife into his son, God speaks again. And again, the word is clear, but it is the exact opposite of the previous word. This creates a bit of a problem.

What if Abraham had said to himself something like this: "I know what God told me before and I am going to follow through on what He said even if I feel something different now. This new word must not be God because it doesn't align with what God said in the past. I have to be faithful to what I originally heard from God."

The knife would not have stopped and Isaac would have died. In fact, Abraham heeding the original word from God would have actually been in direct disobedience to the present will of God. He would have killed the very thing that God was trying to save. Sometimes the will of God is a progressive will. It might begin with "go sacrifice Isaac," but end with "do not touch the boy." Each step in the journey is part of God's plan to teach us about who He is, enable us to stay in the present journey with Him and remain dependent upon Him.

At the ripe old age of 14, I read a book about a man named Keith Green. He was a Christian musician who challenged the status quo, spoke the truth and impacted millions of lives. I wanted to be just like him. I felt like I had heard the word of the Lord and began to pursue a career in music. I traveled all over the world as a musician and singer to some modest success. But year after year, my career did not take off like I thought it would. I kept forging ahead, believing things would change. But it didn't. I started to feel like a failure. In my mid-30s, I hit a point of crisis in my life. All of a

sudden, I didn't know how to reconcile my current situation with what I thought my life should look like.

God, I thought you told me to become a great musician and singer and prophetic voice to my generation? I thought my destiny was to be the next Keith Green? What happened? Did I miss it somewhere?

I knew who God was, but I was struggling to hear His voice. I realized that I had become so attached to what I had heard in the past that it had become an idol in my life. In fact, I was scared to listen to what He was saying because it would probably mean I had to lay down the dreams I had spent 20 years of my life chasing.

I had made the dream of being a world-changing musician an idol. In doing so, I had stopped asking the Lord what he was currently saying. God may have spoken to me all those years ago, but now He was speaking again and I needed to hear his present voice. God may have used the dream of being a rock star to get me moving up the mountain, but now he wanted to give me a new word for a new season.

I wonder how many times we have missed what God was doing in the present because we got so attached to what He had said in the past. How many times have we actually made an idol out of an idea that was only ever meant to get us moving in a particular direction?

Often, the word of the Lord comes to us to get us moving in a certain direction. But, if we are not careful, we will attach ourselves to the previous word and not the present voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us. When that happens, we are in danger of doing something that could be damaging to our future.

Am I actually present enough in the moment to ask the question—what are you saying now? Do I have spiritual ears to

hear His voice in the present or is my life so full of noise that I can't hear anything?

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