

# Exercising Faith

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 January 2025

Preacher: Rev. Iain Macritchie

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, for a short time, we're going to turn back to Genesis chapter 22, but we're also going to think about words that we have in Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 and verse 17.

By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son.

Well, friends, it's good to be with you, as I said earlier, as we find ourselves today at the beginning of 2025, the first Lord's Day of this new year.

And as we look forward to a new year, I'm sure that for all of us gathered here, without exception, we hope and we pray at least that looking forward, we'll have a year that's a good year, a positive year, a year individually and as a congregation that will be characterized by much and abundant blessing.

We may even try and make sure that 2025 goes as well as possible for ourselves and for others by resolving that our own actions will make this new year better for us.

[ 1 : 33 ] But let's be honest. Most New Year's resolutions fail to stand the test of time. We can begin, can we not, with good intentions, but more often than not, we find ourselves giving up.

As we gather here this January morning, friends, I'd like to suggest that there's one way that all of us, without exception, gathered here today, one way that we can ensure that 2025 is perhaps the best year of our lives.

Not in terms of exactly what happens, but in terms of how we deal with what happens. And that, friends, is often the difference, isn't it?

We can have times that are full of joy or ought to be full of joy in our lives, and yet we don't appreciate them. We're not thankful for them.

We don't even enjoy them in the moment as much as we ought. And at times as well, we can have difficulties. We can have sorrows.

[ 2 : 43 ] We can have trials, and many of them. And we find ourselves finding it so difficult to navigate our way through them. But yet a response to how God deals with us makes all the difference.

And how can we respond in a way, friends, as we look forward that's going to make this year better than 2024? Well, quite simply, yet quite profoundly, by exercising faith.

I wonder what 2025 will be like for you and for me. None of us know, but one thing we do know is this, that if we go into this year in our own strength, as myself included, we often find ourselves doing, if we go into this new year headfirst in our own strength, we won't get very far.

But yet if we go forward, if we look ahead, and we do so putting our faith, putting our trust in the Lord, come what may, we will find ourselves navigating our way through whatever lies ahead.

God doesn't promise us an easy year, but He does promise to be with us every step of the way if we want Him to be.

[ 4 : 12 ] I wonder, do you want the Lord Jesus to be there by your side? Or would you rather be submerged by your trials and temptations?

You know, it's been said, excuse me, it's been said that our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, to do what seems unreasonable, and to expect what seems impossible.

I'll say that again, that our faith isn't really, because faith, it's not an abstract concept. Faith is something that can be seen in action. Faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible.

It's easy for any of us friends today to say, yes, I have faith in God. Yes, I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, I believe in His Word.

I know that He is Lord of my life, and I trust Him going into 2025. And of course, it's easy to say that when all is going well.

[ 5 : 32 ] But what about when it's not? What about when things take a turn for the worst, as no doubt they will for some of us gathered here in this year that lies ahead?

What then? Well, friends, the reality is that a characteristic of genuine faith, it will be tested, it will be tried, its validity will be verified through our response to whatever our circumstances in life may be. The reality is that genuine faith is faith that by the grace of God, and this is empowering. You know, it seems so simple to be talking about something that perhaps we think we know about, but we need reminded.

Faith is so empowering when we exercise it as we ought, not in a cold legalistic way, do this and don't do that, but rather believing God at His Word, trusting that what He says He can do, He can and He will do.

And in doing that, what's so empowering, what's so emboldening, what's so encouraging for us in that faith that can be ours is that it gives us the ability to withstand.

[ 6 : 59 ] In our reading this morning, in Genesis 22, we see perhaps one of the most trying tests of faith that has ever been recorded.

It's a test of faith that none of us here would like to have to undergo or to go through. And yet it's a test of faith that I'd like us to look at for a short time this morning because the Lord never asks us to do something that He hasn't shown in the life of someone else.

That's what the Bible is. It really shows us a collection of God working in the lives of others, really bringing His whole story to life.

These aren't just textbook ideas as to how we should live our lives, cold clinical instructions, but rather what we have before us in God's Word is His design for mankind coming alive in the lives of others.

And that doesn't gloss over things that are difficult or things that make us feel uneasy. It walks through them all, every single step.

[ 8 : 10 ] But what we see, especially in the example before us here, is that as this particular person is walking through this difficulty, he's not doing so alone.

And so here we have Abraham, and we're going to ask three simple questions. What was Abraham's test of faith? Why did God test him in this way?

And how can you and I today have such a faith? What was Abraham's test of faith? Why did God test him in such a way?

And how can you and I have such a faith today? Let's look at verse 1 of chapter 22 of Genesis.

After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here I am.

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 shall tell you.

[ 9 : 22 ] Now friends, this really is quite something. As I said, this is a test of faith that none of us, I'm not a parent myself, but I, of course, have family members. None of us would like to be told that we're to sacrifice a son or a daughter.

None of us would like to be told by God, to show that you believe in me, you need to kill someone that you love dearly, someone who's close to you.

And I'm sure that for all of us, without exception, if God asked us to do that, we would find ourselves saying, No, I'm not doing it. We see here that Abraham's asked to sacrifice his son, his only son, we read here.

We know that Isaac wasn't Abraham's only son. He had Ishmael to Hagar. But the Hebrew word, only, it really has that sense of something being unique or a one-off.

And so, Isaac wasn't numerically the only son, but he was the only son in terms of what he stood for, in terms of why he was born, in terms of his relation, and we'll come to this shortly, his relation to the covenant, the promise of God.

[ 10 : 36 ] And so, God is asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, to have him killed, his own flesh and blood. And what was it I said a moment ago? Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, or to do what seems unreasonable.

Now, to kill your son in such a way as this seems both unbearable and unreasonable. And let's just flesh this out in terms of a bit of context before we go on, because this son was his only son.

He was his unique son, because Abraham had waited 25 years or so for this child. This was a child that he and Sarah had longed after.

The child that God had promised to give, yet the child that Abraham and Sarah, as they got on in years, as they became older, and as Sarah grew out with the childbearing years, if you like, it seemed a complete and utter impossibility that they would ever have this child.

But remember Romans 4.20. No unbelief made him, that is Abraham, no unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God.

[12:01] Or in one of the other versions, he staggered not at the promise of God. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

So this wasn't the first time that Abraham's been tested or tried. It's not the first time that Abraham's had to show, okay, you say you put your trust in the God of Israel.

Show me. Show me that you really trust me. Show me that you trust me by putting your faith not in your circumstance or your situation, but in my word, in what I've told you.

And he did. He staggered not at the promise through unbelief. No unbelief made him waver. And yet now, after God having given them this child, it would appear at least that God wants to take him away.

Now, of course, aside from the paternal grief that this would undoubtedly, invariably cause, what God is asking Abraham to do, it has much wider implications than the household of Abraham.

[13:17] Because God had given Abraham a promise, and this is what makes him a one-off, if you like. God had given Abraham a promise regarding Isaac.

Genesis 17, 19, God says to Abraham, Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him.

This is why he was referred to as the only son, a son that is special. There's something about this son that would be different to your other children. Yet how, we might ask, and no doubt, Isaac, Abraham at times, being human, would have asked this in his mind.

We mustn't think that he never had any thoughts of unbelief, although he did follow through in faith. I'm sure, like us all, he at times would have wondered, how could an everlasting covenant be formed with the descendants of my son if I'm to kill my son?

How can this promise ever be fulfilled if you're going to take him away? It does not make sense. And you know, friends, so it is with the Christian life.

[14:43] If you're a Christian here today, you know what that's like. Even if you're not a Christian here today, you know what that's like, don't you? So much in our lives just don't make sense.

At times, we can find ourselves saying, why, Lord? Why are you doing this? What's your purpose in this? Some of us have really bitter trials to bear, difficulties in our lives, and we wonder, what on earth are you doing, Lord?

From this awful thing? How can any good come from this awful thing that's in my life, in my experience?

We're left scratching our head. At times, things happen that apparently fly in the face of even biblical principles. And we ask, why?

Why am I being faced with such a trial? We can't speculate. We can only speculate, I should say, as to how Abraham is feeling at this point.

[15:44] We don't read in the narrative anything that tells us as such how he's feeling. But one thing we do know is this. He responds. He's been asked to sacrifice his son, and immediately he responds.

Now, think about your response and mine. How does he respond? Does he respond with questions? Does he respond with protests? Does he ask, why?

What if? Does he come with all these various counter-arguments to God as to why he shouldn't do that? He doesn't do that. Because instead, we read in verse 3, Abraham rose early in the morning. He saddled his donkey. He took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Now, at this point, you might be thinking, well, what a heartless man Abraham is. How can he even think about doing this without even a question, without even a protest?

[ 16 : 58 ] Why is he so willing just to go? Why is he so seemingly happy just to take God at his word? Why doesn't he even just go then, but not go equipped?

So he could go. He could go on that journey as God has asked him to do. And this is sometimes what you and I do, isn't it, friends? When God asks us to do something, we can do things on our own terms.

So he could go, but not take the wood. Not take the wood so that he'd have nothing to offer up Isaac with. That he wouldn't have anything to light that fire with.

He could put every and any obstacle in the way so that he simply doesn't do it. But he doesn't do that. He's fully and completely obedient.

And so he goes. He goes, and as he goes, he would have had to have journeyed three days before he would have reached Mount Moriah, Isaac with him. This isn't something that will be over in a minute.

[ 18 : 08 ] As he was going and journeying more and more and more, the thought of what he was being asked to do would have no doubt been weighing harder and heavier on his heart and on his mind.

You know, when we have time in our hands, things can become even more magnified in what they are. And we can find ourselves becoming even more fearful of them as they come closer and closer and closer.

Here he is walking with his son that distance, so aware of what the Lord had asked him to do. And again, such a picture, friend, of what God or how God often works in our lives.

He keeps us waiting. He keeps us waiting as we journey through certain points of life. Maybe he's doing that with you just now. He's keeping you waiting.

You're looking for an answer or you're looking for clarity or you're looking for a solution to a certain situation and yet you're still having to journey through life with that burden, I suppose, on your back and you're wondering how the Lord's going to answer and what he's going to do.

[ 19 : 20 ] But Abraham knew. He knew that God would do something. He knew, and this really shows, sheds light on why he's so obedient.

He knew that his son wasn't going to die. He knew that his son couldn't die because if his son was to die, God was a liar.

He knew the promises of God regarding this everlasting covenant that would stretch to Isaac and his descendants. He knew it, but not only did he know it, and this is really the difference of what it is to walk by faith.

You might not be a Christian here today and you might know all the promises of God in your head. You believe the promises of God in your head.

You believe in Jesus. You know he sent, the Lord sent his son to die for sinners. You believe all the biblical stories. That's why you're here today. But yet, true faith doesn't only believe in our heads, but also in our hearts.

[ 20 : 32 ] And when we believe in our hearts, what happens then is that that true faith, it manifests itself in our lives. So we're not just confessing with our lips, we're believing in our hearts.

It's easy, as they say, to walk, to talk the talk rather. But what about walking the walk? Abraham is walking the walk. And that's what faith is, the essence of what faith is.

And that's maybe what you're scared of. You're scared of taking that step. We talk about a step of faith, following the Lord Jesus. And essentially, it's taking God at his word, believing that he is sufficient for all of your needs, especially the need of your never-dying soul, that he's enough.

I believe, oh Lord, that you are enough. And I'm going to show that I believe that you're enough by following you, by trusting in you, by giving my life to you in the same way that you have for me.

So he acts on his faith. He shows that this isn't just a head knowledge. He knows the problem. And this is easy. It's not easy.

[ 21 : 47 ] We mustn't think this is easy. It's not easy just to... It might come across as easy in the passage, but this is difficult. Of course this is difficult. Taking God at his word, it's not easy.

Because taking God at his word, it really, it leads us to that place where we have to let go of our own self-reliance. And that's not an easy thing to do.

We like to, just to keep a little bit of a hold on how we think things should pan out. And perhaps in the small print, add our own part to the narrative of our life.

And so we hold back and we'll say, well, yeah, I believe in that part of the promise, but that part's a wee bit more uncomfortable for me. So we don't fully commit. And that's maybe where you are today.

You're sitting on the fence. Maybe a foot in both camp. You believe, but you don't. But can you see, friend, the essence of faith is fully believing.

[ 22 : 46 ] It doesn't mean that you fully understand. There's a difference. And aren't we glad we don't fully understand? If we were to fully understand God today, God wouldn't be God. He would be just like you and me.

And so he believes the promise and he goes. He gathers the wood. They make their way to Moriah. He's convinced that Isaac that Isaac will not die. Or if he's to die, as we saw in Hebrews 11, what would God do? God would raise him from the dead by faith.

Abraham, we read there, when he's tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

[ 23 : 53 ] That's what faith is. Faith is trusting in God for the finer details when we cannot understand how they're going to come to pass. Abraham didn't know as he sojourned with his son by his side how this was going to pan out, but he believed.

One commentator puts it like this, faith does not demand explanations, faith rests on promises. Faith does not demand explanations, faith rests on promises.

And that's something we all need reminded of at the dawn of 2025, that just because we cannot see the detail of the future, we can trust a God that can, a God who knows what he's doing.

And isn't that encouraging, isn't that reassuring for you and for me, that even though we can't see through the mist of time, Moriah handed all out.

And so after three days' journey, they arrive at Moriah. We see that Abraham instructs his servants to remain at the foot of the mountain while he and Isaac go up.

[ 25 : 07 ] But notice what he says there. Abraham said in verse 5 to his young men, stay here with the donkey and I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. You notice what's being insinuated from that and come again to you.

He's saying that he is convinced, just as convinced as ever, even after having taken that journey, that God will keep his promise and that he will not return from this mountain alone.

We will come back to you, both of us, alive. That is faith. So that as they begin to ascend Mount Moriah, Isaac carrying the very wood that would be used to sacrifice him, he begins to question the fact that there's no lamb.

Verse 7, And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father, and he said, Here I am, my son. He said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

[ 26 : 26 ] Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. And so they went, both of them, together.

Here they are getting closer and closer to the time of sacrifice and Abraham is really having to put his faith in practice as he gets closer to the potential reality of his son being taken from him.

He's putting his faith in practice and believing that God knows what he's doing, even when it seems otherwise. And it all comes back to those glorious words.

God will provide for himself the lamb. That's why he believes. God will provide for himself the lamb. That's why you and I believe today, is it not, the promises of God? As we look to Calvary and as we reflect upon the provision, and we'll come to that shortly, that's been made there.

[ 27 : 30 ] That even when things don't appear to make sense to you and to me, that God has provided for himself a lamb. Everything's ready.

Abraham's heart, no doubt, beating fast. What time, at what point, is God going to intervene? Yet he continues. The temptation is no doubt heightened to question, but he continues, and so we read that Abraham binds Isaac his son and lays him upon the altar, upon the wood.

You can almost slice, as it were, no pun intended, the tension with a knife. How is he coping? How is Abraham getting through all of this?

He reaches out, he reaches out his hand, he takes the knife as he's about to slaughter his son. And as he lifts that knife, we wonder, friends, what is Abraham thinking?

What is he saying to himself as he lifts that knife above his only son, above his son? What is he thinking? Well, surely, surely in his mind's eye, he's saying this.

[ 28 : 51 ] He's crying out to God, God, you said to me, Sarah, your wife, shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and his descendants after him.

And here I am about to slay him. Your name and your honour are at stake here. Lord, you must, you simply must keep your word.

Lord, you know, friends, never, ever be scared to be so bold with the Lord and to plead his promises.

Plead them boldly. You said, Lord, you said this, and so it must happen. When it happens and how it happens is up to him. But it has to happen.

You said, and of course it will. God always keeps his word. That gets tested in our experience and we don't downplay that or make it small as to how sore that can be in your experience and mine.

[ 29 : 59 ] When God tests his promises that affect us and our loved ones, it's difficult. But he always keeps his word. These are promises that might not be fulfilled in this world, but the world to come.

That's the hope of the gospel. We don't just look at the here and now, but we seek promises that stretch on to that glorious, long tomorrow that the Lord provides for you and for me.

That's the hope. That is, although we go into 2025 unsure, there's one thing we are sure of if we're in Christ. That we have an inheritance in him that is eternal.

I wonder, do you have that to look forward to? Or is it just the mountain of your experience that's overwhelming you and even that you're finding your identity in today?

Can I challenge you in love? Find out if there's more. Take that journey of discovery by faith for yourself so that you too can withhold and withstand the trials of life, whatever they might be, in the knowledge that there's more to life than this.

[ 31 : 18 ] Sometimes we think that God's never going to intervene, that he's forgotten us, he's forgotten his promises, and yet his timing is always absolutely and minutely perfect.

God had ordained that at this particular time what would happen? A ram would be caught in the thicket, that's why we see this place of testing as given the name in other versions Jehovah Jera, which means as we see here, the Lord will provide, that he always provides, and this is important friends, he always provides in the place of testing.

We panic, don't we? We ask the questions, how can this happen because of X, Y, and Z? But the wonderful thing about our Lord, friends, is this, that he never ever leaves us to our own resources. That's what it is to live a life separate from him, that's what it is to live a life that isn't of faith. We try and rely on our own resources, and sadly even as Christians we do that too, and we find that we have to come back and repent of that, but he never leaves us with our own resources, he never tests us beyond what we're able to bear, he always gives to us what we need.

But why would he do this? That's a question that weighs on our mind. What is the purpose of this test? Time is going. Was it to discover if Abraham was a faithful follower or not?

[ 32 : 55 ] We might think that God puts tests in our lives to see if we're genuine Christians, are we the real deal? He knows whether we're genuine Christians or not. He doesn't need to test us in that way.

He's died for us. He knows acutely exactly whose are his and whose are not. He took to himself the punishment of each and every sin of each and every one of his people.

He knows you. He knows me. He doesn't need to be reminded of who his children are. But he does love his children. He does love his children and he wants his children, he wants you and me if we're Christians today, he wants us to grow.

He doesn't want us to stay in primary one, if you like, in the Christian life. He wants us to grow in the knowledge and the grace of himself. That's a journey.

It's a journey that's fraught with all kinds of things in between. But nonetheless, in that journey, he wants us to grow. And in that growth, he wants us to bear more and more fruit.

[ 33 : 59 ] It's the fruit of the Spirit, to be more like him. He's not childish, he's not petty like we are. He doesn't send tests and trials into our experience to trick us in that way.

To say, I told you so. Never ever think of God in that way. That's the way we perhaps respond to one another, but not a sinless God. He sends trials and tests because he loves us and he wants to teach us.

What does Scripture tell us? It says, when we are tried in the fire, this is a fire for Abraham, when we are tried in the fire, we shall come forth as gold.

And there's an important word there. And again, I don't say this lightly or insensitively, I hope, but we can say, why is this happening to me?

see what it says, when you are tried in the fire. Let's say if, when. If you are one of the lords, you will be tried in the fire.

[ 35 : 09 ] Whatever that looks like in your experience will vary from person to person. It might be a mental trial, it might be a physical trial, it might be a trial in your family life, it might be an economic trial, whatever it is, it will be your trial, but it will come.

And I don't say that to discourage you, but that's a reality. When you are tried in the fire, you will come forth as gold.

Here we have the now and the not yet. Here we have the reality of what it is to be in time and the glorious expectation of looking forward to eternity.

Spurgeon said that God's promises never shine brighter than in the furnace of affliction. Faith in action.

Just imagine how precious to Abraham God's promise was regarding his seed after it had been tested to the limit. Because what we see is at the eleventh hour, we see that the Lord intervenes.

[ 36 : 16 ] The angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham, and he said, here I am. You can almost hear the sigh of relief. He said, do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him.

For now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. God provides just at the right time.

He intervenes at the point where we think there is no more intervention possible. And take courage from that, friend. Even in the ordinary everyday things, don't ever stop praying.

Don't ever think that someone is a lost cause or a situation is a lost cause. Keep on praying, coming to the Lord, pleading to him. Don't ever say what's the point.

And so we ask then, finally, how, very briefly, how can we have the faith of Abraham? We're not asked to sacrifice our children physically, yet we're called to make sacrifices for Christ that at times can be difficult.

[ 37 : 31 ] How can we remain faithful in these requests that God makes, these commands that God makes upon our lives? Well, not in our own strength, not using our own resources.

When we try to fabricate faith through steely determination, this is what we do at New Year, I'm going to do this, I'm really going to try to do this, when we try to fabricate faith through steely determination, it doesn't work, it fails.

We can only ever have faith by looking to and trusting in the one who this whole scene so clearly points to. You know, it's easy for me to say have bigger faith, have greater faith, and just leave it at that.

But the Lord doesn't do that to you or to me. He doesn't call us to do that which we cannot do ourselves. This whole scene, what does it point to?

Well, it points to Calvary. On Moriah, do we not see the echoes of Calvary? Let's think about the fact that Isaac is bound by his father.

[ 38 : 36 ] Abraham would have been an old man at this point. Isaac would have been at least in his teenage years. He would have been strong and fit, surely, to fight off his elderly father's attempts to pin him down.

Yet he goes down willingly. He goes willingly. In both verses 6 and 8, we read that phrase that they went together.

He would have known the promises too. A father doesn't know the promises of God and not share it with his sons. Just like you, your parents, you share the wonderful promises of the glorious gospel hope with your children.

They grew up knowing about it. It's in their DNA. They know the reality of what it is to put their trust in Jesus. He knew that he couldn't die himself, surely.

And so it was at Calvary. Calvary, God the Father and God the Son, they acted together in harmony. Jesus knew what was about to happen, yet he didn't resist.

[ 39 : 43 ] Isaiah 53, he was oppressed, afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

There were to be flames on that mount, on that altar rather, on Mount Moriah, yet Isaac would be spared, and a substitute would be provided in his place.

And that's what happens in Calvary's Hill, when the knife, as it were, of God's judgment should have eternally pierced your soul and mine. Instead, God sent his Son, the Lamb, not in the thicket, but the Lamb who came from heaven to earth.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the one who would be offered as a sacrifice on the altar of God's judgment, the one who would experience the flames of God's wrath, the one who would die so that we might live.

That's the gospel. Substitutionary atonement. He's taken our place. He's taken the place of his own children so that we don't have to die.

[ 41 : 10 ] And you know, the only way we can respond like Abraham during times of testing and trials is by having a working knowledge, if you like, of this substitutionary atonement of the Lamb of God by daily through the eyes of faith.

And this is where we need to keep not at Moriah but at Calvary, reflecting upon the wonder of that substitute. That's where we go wrong, friends, you and me with you.

We take our eyes off Jesus. We forget. We forget that if he died for us, if he saved us for our sins, there's nothing in this world that's too great for him to walk us through and to be there with us every step of the way.

So that if every day we come and we say, Father, you died for me. Every day if we lean on his finished work as the cornerstone for our very existence, we will have that well of faith to draw upon so that we can overcome the greatest of trials as we reflect upon them in the light of the cross.

Martin Luther reminds us, and I'm sorry I've gone over my time, I'm very nearly finished. Our suffering is not worthy of the name of suffering. When I consider my crosses, tribulations and temptations, I shame myself almost to death, thinking what they are in comparison of the sufferings of my blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[ 42 : 48 ] Abraham came away from this trial with new and renewed assurances, with a deeper love for his Lord, and no doubt he grew in his faith so that he was able to say this light affliction which is but for a moment is working in me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

That's the eternal view of temporal providences, and may it be so for us, friends, as we go to 2025, whatever that might be in our experience, reminding me of the words, I'm sure some of you have seen them over the past few days, of the poem, The Gate of the Year.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown. And he replied, go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. safer, that shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way. So I went forth and finding the hand of God trod gladly into the night and he led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone east.

Friends, as we stand at the gate of 2025, let's go forward in the light of his promises, taking the hand of God. I love that, the way Minnie Louise Haskins puts it in our poem, finding the hand of God.

[ 44 : 30 ] Finding the hand of God. Let's go forward, finding the hand of God, taking the hand of God, walking into the unknown, fully confident in his promises, fully confident that if we are in Christ, come what may, we are safe for time and for all eternity.

Let's pray.