

ABRAHAM: ONE NOMAD'S AMAZING JOURNEY OF FAITH

The Pleasures of Passing God's Exams

Genesis 22:11–19

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

After years of walking with God, Abraham's journey had brought him to a hill-top altar in the land of Moriah. It was the ultimate test of faith, offering Isaac as a sacrifice. Each step of faith to this point had been mere prelude—warm ups—to this fearless leap into the gracious provision of God.

“God will provide,” Abraham confidently told his beloved boy as they approached this place of testing (Genesis 22:8). Unwavering, Abraham laid Isaac on the stone and drew his knife to kill his son as a sacrifice, when “at that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham! . . . Don't lay a hand on the boy! . . . for now I know that you truly fear God’” (22:11–12).

Abraham's arm relaxed, and his eyes beheld a ram caught in a thicket—God's provision! In minutes, Abraham, with Isaac by his side, offered the lamb in the place of his son. And as they turned to go, Abraham gave God a name to memorialize the moment. It was a name forged in the fires of faith. A name to inspire future generations, who, like Abraham, would look to that same mountain for God's provision in times of testing. A name that one day would be fastened to a cross on which God's own Son would hang in our place as an offering for the sins of the world: “the LORD will provide” (22:14).

The test complete, Abraham and Isaac walked down the mountain arm in arm, praising God as they reveled in the glow of God's blessing and the pleasure of passing God's exam.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we'll look at the aftermath of God's test—the trip *down* the mountain after the test is over, enjoying God's blessing. Joy is the feeling Abraham and Isaac experienced . . . joy overflowing!

Quotable

*God will show
me the path of life
that's obedience.
And once you have
walked in that
path, you will know
joy; you will know
pleasure.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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“The heart is glad!” says Chuck Swindoll, as he underscores the pleasure that follows tests of faith:

The spirit is filled with cheer and delight and celebration. I don't believe Abraham came down from that mountain with a grim face. I know Isaac didn't! They came down together, probably arm in arm talking about how God provides in marvelous ways we never expect Him to.

Now, as you picture Abraham and Isaac celebrating together, read Genesis 22:11–19. Use the *Searching the Scriptures* technique of putting yourself in the scene as you read.



Observation: Put Yourself into the Scene

Put yourself in Abraham's place. Imagine the scene on top of a windswept hill. At center was a large, flat stone altar. The tools needed for a burnt offering were at hand: wood, rope, knife. Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, the boy for whom Sarah and he had longed their entire married life, the miracle baby whom God had promised. Write down the feelings that you imagine him experiencing in each moment:

- As he hears God's voice (Genesis 22:11–12)
- As he accepts God's provision (22:13–14)
- As he receives God's blessing (22:15–18)
- As he returns to his home in Beersheba (22:19)

Now read the same passage from Isaac's point of view, and write down the feelings that you imagine him experiencing in each moment.



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Do you observe anything else in your reading, perhaps a cause and effect, an emphasis, or repeated words? Note your observations below.



Correlation: Blue Skies after the Storm

So often in Christian circles, we focus on the negatives: the struggles, worries, disappointments, and burdens. Sadness dominates our attitudes like thunderclouds, as we dwell on failing marriages, wayward children, declining standards—the 10 percent negative instead of the 90 percent positive.

However, this triumphant scene in Abraham's life shifts our focus from the storm to the blue skies that follow, from the harshness of the test to the pleasure of passing. Look up the following verses, and write down the benefits of a positive outlook.

Psalm 16:11

Proverbs 15:15

Proverbs 15:29–30



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The Bible doesn't gloss over the potholes in life's road, but it never gets stuck in them. Why? Because God is good, and His tests are meant for positive ends. In his sermon, Chuck Swindoll observed **four positive outcomes** from God's test and Abraham's obedience. In the next phase of our *Searching the Scriptures* study, let's take a closer look at each one as we decipher the text's meaning.



Interpretation: Joyful Principles after We Pass the Test

Return once more to Genesis 22:11 where the angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham at the moment Abraham's knife is poised to strike Isaac. How do we interpret the *person-to-person* nature of God's intervention?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Becomes More Real

At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!" (Genesis 22:11)

What meaning do you draw from the closeness of this encounter between God and Abraham?

What link might there be between the *intensity* of the test and the *realness* of our connection with God when we take a step of faith?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Relieves the Pressure as He Affirms Our Faith

To His often-faltering servant, the Lord said, "I *know* that you truly fear God" (Genesis 22:12, emphasis added). These are not the words of a severe God who never is pleased. On the contrary, they are like wings that lifted Abraham's spirit and food that filled his soul.



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What does this scene reveal about God, His tests, the relief God brings, and the affirmation we feel?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Provides for Our Additional Needs in Surprising Ways

"Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket" (Genesis 22:13). Don't miss the word, *then*. Only *after* Abraham released his son into the hands of Isaac's heavenly Father did God reveal to Abraham the substitute He had planned all along. The ram may have surprised Abraham but not God! And remember: *God never runs shy of rams in thickets!*

What principle do you see in the timing of God revealing His provision to Abraham?

When We Pass God's Tests, God Multiplies His Blessings as He Ratifies His Promises

Twice the word *because* appears in Genesis 22:16–18. Find these instances, and write down what they reference.

God multiplied the seed of faith that Abraham planted that day into a harvest of blessings beyond numbering. Don't forget that the original readers of Genesis were the Hebrews amassing at the border of the Promised Land ready to cross the Jordan and conquer their enemies.



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What did this restatement of blessings and ratification of promises mean to these Hebrews?

What about God's faithfulness and provision applies to us today?



Application: Next Time You're Tempted to Major in the Minors

Abraham and Isaac's joy after passing God's exam offers three lessons to uplift our hearts when God tests us.

- *Reflect on the benefits that have come your way.* Through the trial, let the psalmist's prayer be yours: "May I never forget the good things [the Lord] does for me" (Psalm 103:2).
- *Refuse to allow the few negatives to eclipse the many positives.* Set aside self-pity in favor of the more delightful fare of thankfulness. Even a few positive words of gratitude can open a window and refresh your attitude.
- *Renew your motivation by decreasing your expectations.* After passing his test with an amazing display of faith, Abraham didn't expect God's blessings as if he were entitled to them. He just obeyed and left the blessing part to God.

Perhaps one of these applications hits home, or maybe God reveals an application just for you. Write down what you find meaningful in this passage and how you can put it into practice.



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Now let's close in prayer, ever mindful of God's overflowing blessings before, during, and after God's tests and of the pleasure they bring.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the wonderful way You guide me and for Your provisions that come again and again like rainbows after the rain. Thank You for Your grace that You revealed to Abraham when You provided a ram as a sacrifice to take Isaac's place—a foreshadow of the grace revealed at Calvary. Whatever trials or hardship life brings, keep my eyes on that mountain of provision and my heart ever thankful. Amen.



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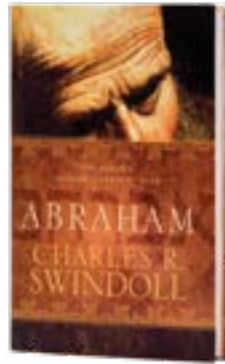
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For the 2017–2018 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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