



EXODUS 17:1-7

# ABSOLUTE TRUST

REV. IN KEE KIM



# Scripture Passage

## Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"



# Sermon

## Absolute Trust

Wilderness is a difficult place. Wilderness is a dangerous place. The weather is unpredictable. Food and water are not readily available. The roads are not well paved. As a matter of fact, there are not roads period. It is not a comfortable place.

In the wilderness, we realize that life is not under our control; anything can happen. Unimaginable things can happen. Think about it, could you ever imagine that we'll gather together like this with masks on and worship God. Life is totally unpredictable in the wilderness. That's what the wilderness is. Living in the wilderness is not only inconvenient, it is stressful and it is quite frustrating sometimes. Many times I forget to take a mask and I have to go back home, I'm easily forgetful. I don't know how many times I do that, it's frustrating! When life in the wilderness prolongs, we get impatient, angry and even violent



## The Israelites in the Wilderness

That was what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness. When they first came out of Egypt, they were excited because they saw all the miracles that they have never seen before. They felt that God was right there with them. They saw how God parted the ocean and how the Egyptian soldiers were drowned. They felt so victorious and powerful.

But when they faced the hardship in the wilderness, all of a sudden, all that excitement was gone. They wondered: Is God among us or not? They felt helpless and hopeless. They got frustrated. They even regretted coming out of Egypt. In the end, they became violent and they even tried to kill Moses. This is what the scripture says, ***“So Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? THEY ARE ALMOST READY TO STONE ME.’”*** (Exodus 17:4) But there was more than frustration and anger. Moses saw more than that. Moses saw that they tested God. They put God to the test. This is what Moses said, ***“The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? WHY DO YOU TEST THE LORD?’”*** (Exodus 17:2)



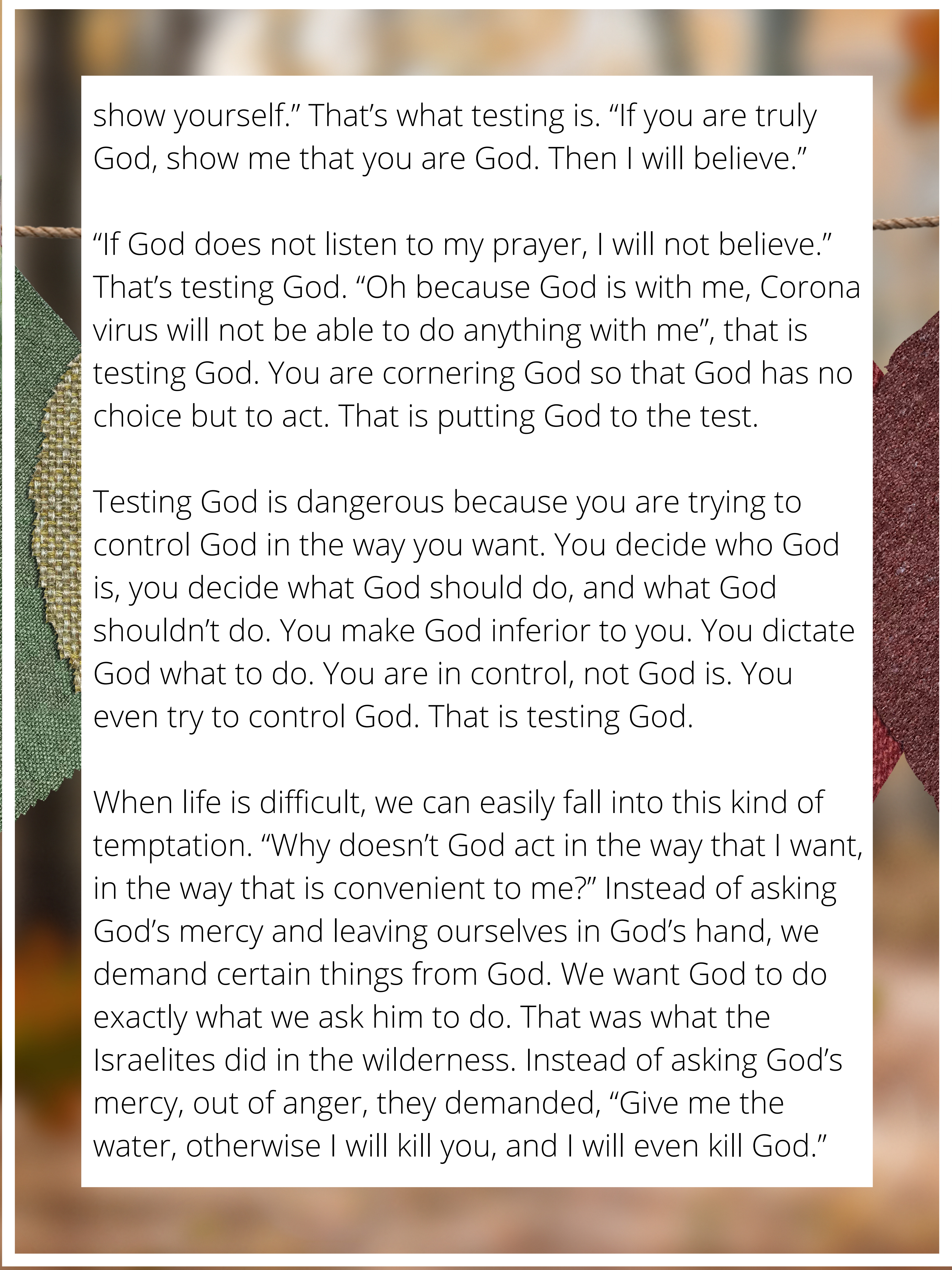
## Testing God

In the wilderness, they tested the Lord. You know, the wilderness is a place where people test the Lord. When everything is okay, you can be quite faithful. But in the wilderness, we have temptation to test the Lord. They get angry because they feel that God is totally absent and they are all alone, dealing with their helpless and hopeless situation. So in the wilderness, people test the Lord.

That's what Satan did to Jesus. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to test God. ***"Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you', and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*** Jesus said to him, ***'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'"*** (Matthew 4:5-7)

My friends, what does it mean to test the Lord? Testing God means to demand God to provide the proof for them to believe. It's like saying, "If you are really God, show yourself that you're God, so that I can believe." That's what Satan did. "If you are truly the son of God,





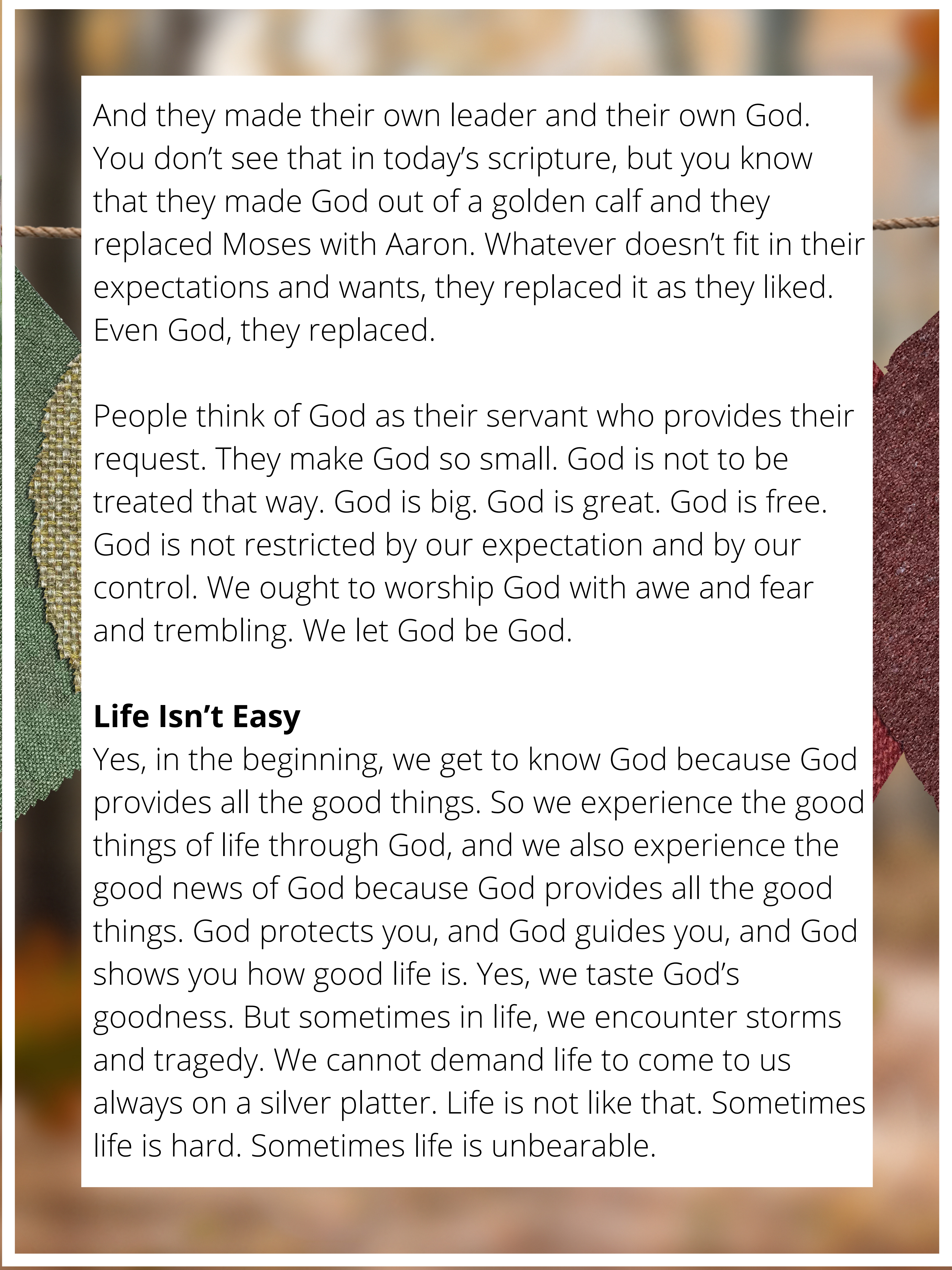
show yourself." That's what testing is. "If you are truly God, show me that you are God. Then I will believe."

"If God does not listen to my prayer, I will not believe." That's testing God. "Oh because God is with me, Corona virus will not be able to do anything with me", that is testing God. You are cornering God so that God has no choice but to act. That is putting God to the test.

Testing God is dangerous because you are trying to control God in the way you want. You decide who God is, you decide what God should do, and what God shouldn't do. You make God inferior to you. You dictate God what to do. You are in control, not God is. You even try to control God. That is testing God.

When life is difficult, we can easily fall into this kind of temptation. "Why doesn't God act in the way that I want, in the way that is convenient to me?" Instead of asking God's mercy and leaving ourselves in God's hand, we demand certain things from God. We want God to do exactly what we ask him to do. That was what the Israelites did in the wilderness. Instead of asking God's mercy, out of anger, they demanded, "Give me the water, otherwise I will kill you, and I will even kill God."





And they made their own leader and their own God. You don't see that in today's scripture, but you know that they made God out of a golden calf and they replaced Moses with Aaron. Whatever doesn't fit in their expectations and wants, they replaced it as they liked. Even God, they replaced.

People think of God as their servant who provides their request. They make God so small. God is not to be treated that way. God is big. God is great. God is free. God is not restricted by our expectation and by our control. We ought to worship God with awe and fear and trembling. We let God be God.

### **Life Isn't Easy**

Yes, in the beginning, we get to know God because God provides all the good things. So we experience the good things of life through God, and we also experience the good news of God because God provides all the good things. God protects you, and God guides you, and God shows you how good life is. Yes, we taste God's goodness. But sometimes in life, we encounter storms and tragedy. We cannot demand life to come to us always on a silver platter. Life is not like that. Sometimes life is hard. Sometimes life is unbearable.



And I see some people struggling so much because life is so unbearable for them, and they have to continue. When we experience that, what do we do? Do we throw away life? Do we blame others? Do we throw away God? And live in anger and frustration?

When you look at Job, we learn a lot about life. We learn a lot about suffering too. He worshipped God and revered God because God provided all the good things, children, a lot of abundant possessions, he was rich. And Satan said, who's not going to fear you and revere you when you've provided all these good things. Then tragedy came, challenges came. His children all died. He lost all his possessions. His wife cursed him and left him. He even lost his health. He was all alone facing the storms of his life. His friends came to help him in the name of helping him, but instead of helping him, they threw him deeper into the darkness. After he lost everything, after he was thrown into that whirlwind, he lost God too. He lost himself. He lost life. He couldn't see God anywhere. He looked around everywhere and he could not find God. This is what he said, ***"If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him."*** (Job 23:8, 9)



He lost God. God he used to know, God who used to bless him, God he could control very well with his thinking; that God disappeared. Until then his life was well under control. He could handle everything pretty well. Even his understanding of God was well under his control. "I know who God is, this is what God is" He knew pretty well. But all of a sudden, a huge storm of life threw him into chaos. In that total chaos, nothing made sense. Nothing made sense. His life was beyond his control. But you know, Job did not throw God away. Job did not throw away life. Actually, he met the real God. The real faith started blooming within himself. After he said, "I can not see God anywhere." Right after he said that, he said this, ***"But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold."*** (Job 23:10)

He knows the way I take – you see he leaves his life completely in God's hand. He knows "I don't know my way, but he knows the way I take." He understood that God knew his way more clearly than he knew his way. So he left his life in God's hand. That was what Jesus did in Gethsemane. "Let this cup pass away from me," but in the end he said, "Not my will but your will be done."

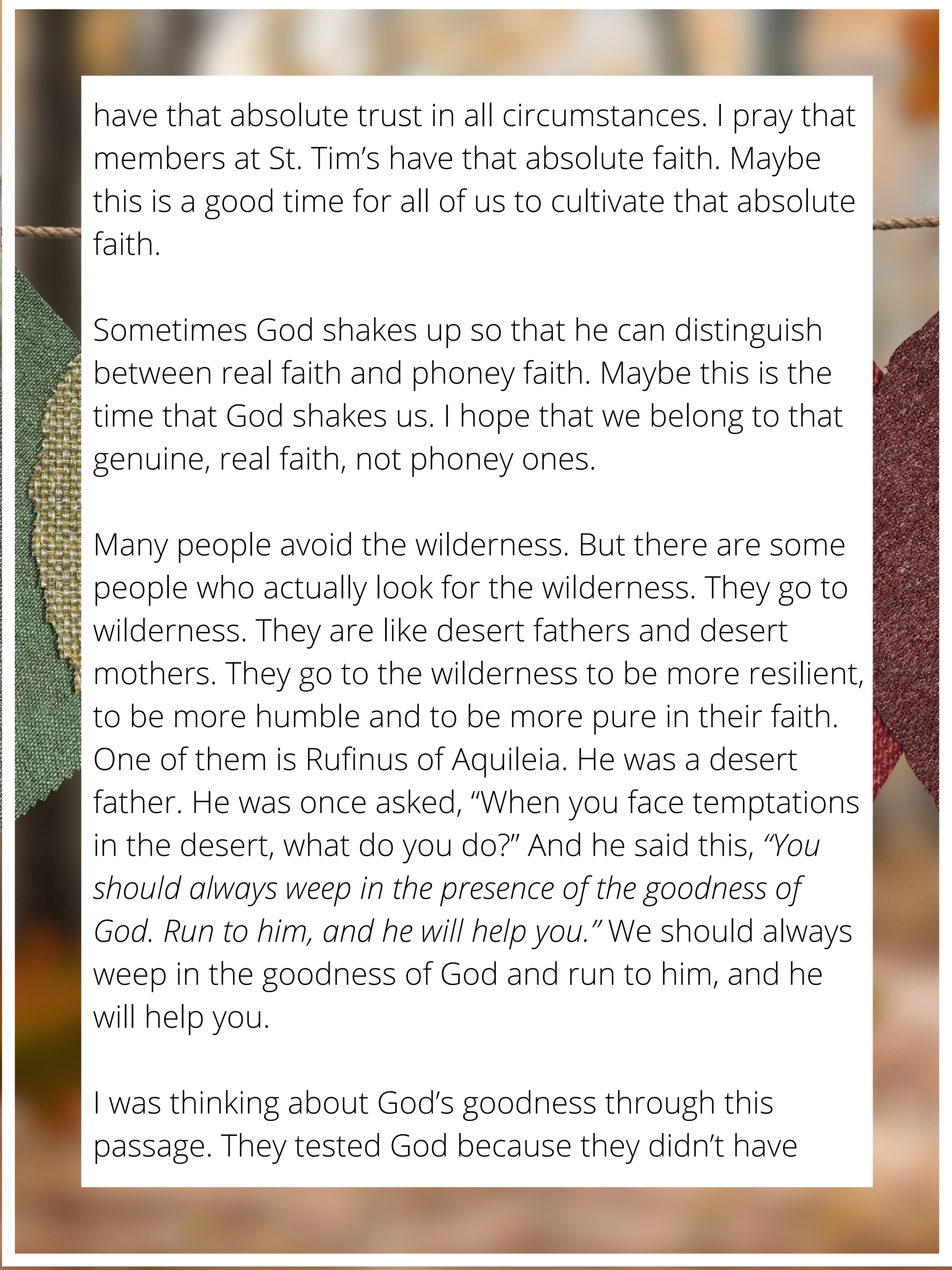


## **Our Wilderness**

My friends, wilderness is not just a place, it is a state of mind. Now the world officially entered into the second wave of Covid-19. So many people died. Ontario and Quebec, the number of new cases rose sharply. All of the world, so many infections and so many deaths. We cannot worship God as we used to, freely. We cannot meet people and socialize as we used to. Beautiful summer evening, we cannot even go out and socialize. We see so many people, including some of our KSM members, suffering financially and they are very worried about their unpredictable future. "How long is it going to last? What if the government cannot help us anymore?" They are living in a very uncertain time. We are in the wilderness.

What we should learn to do in the wilderness is not to test God but to learn to have absolute trust in God. That's only faith. Faith is only absolute. If it's not absolute faith, it's not faith. Faith is always absolute. And I believe that this is the best time to learn about that kind of absolute faith. Our life circumstances will continuously change, they won't stay the same. We will not have good circumstances all the time. But remember: God knows our way. We have to learn to





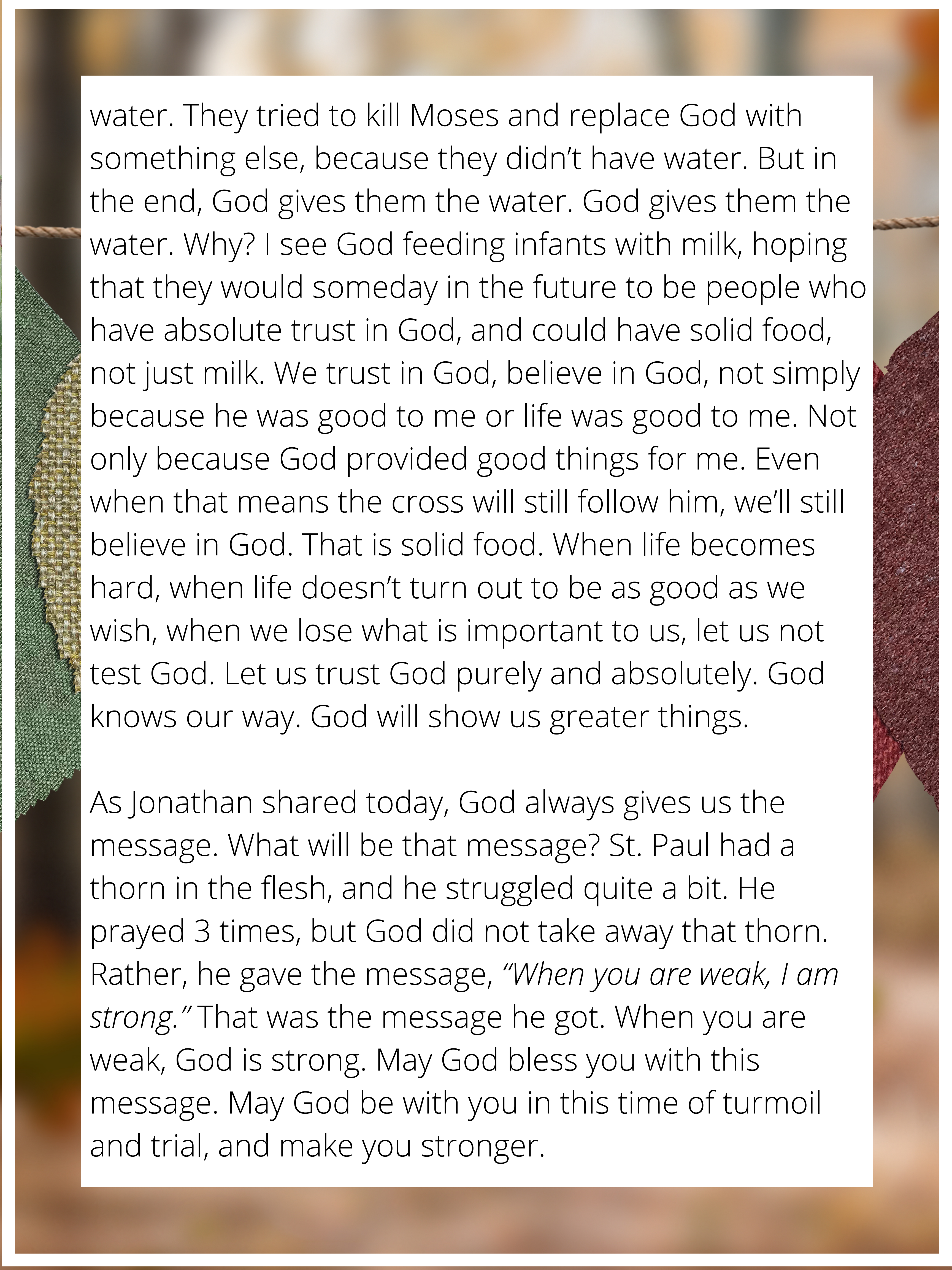
have that absolute trust in all circumstances. I pray that members at St. Tim's have that absolute faith. Maybe this is a good time for all of us to cultivate that absolute faith.

Sometimes God shakes up so that he can distinguish between real faith and phoney faith. Maybe this is the time that God shakes us. I hope that we belong to that genuine, real faith, not phoney ones.

Many people avoid the wilderness. But there are some people who actually look for the wilderness. They go to wilderness. They are like desert fathers and desert mothers. They go to the wilderness to be more resilient, to be more humble and to be more pure in their faith. One of them is Rufinus of Aquileia. He was a desert father. He was once asked, "When you face temptations in the desert, what do you do?" And he said this, "*You should always weep in the presence of the goodness of God. Run to him, and he will help you.*" We should always weep in the goodness of God and run to him, and he will help you.

I was thinking about God's goodness through this passage. They tested God because they didn't have





water. They tried to kill Moses and replace God with something else, because they didn't have water. But in the end, God gives them the water. God gives them the water. Why? I see God feeding infants with milk, hoping that they would someday in the future to be people who have absolute trust in God, and could have solid food, not just milk. We trust in God, believe in God, not simply because he was good to me or life was good to me. Not only because God provided good things for me. Even when that means the cross will still follow him, we'll still believe in God. That is solid food. When life becomes hard, when life doesn't turn out to be as good as we wish, when we lose what is important to us, let us not test God. Let us trust God purely and absolutely. God knows our way. God will show us greater things.

As Jonathan shared today, God always gives us the message. What will be that message? St. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, and he struggled quite a bit. He prayed 3 times, but God did not take away that thorn. Rather, he gave the message, *"When you are weak, I am strong."* That was the message he got. When you are weak, God is strong. May God bless you with this message. May God be with you in this time of turmoil and trial, and make you stronger.