

*...in feiner
Lingzi Anwesen.
...wird die Messen
...wird die
...bei allen Gern*

PHILIPPIANS

3:4B-14

Pressing Toward the Future

REV. SIMON PARK

*...Korin, damit sie in
...Gemeinde wissen
...auf Lingzi
...Abkochen*

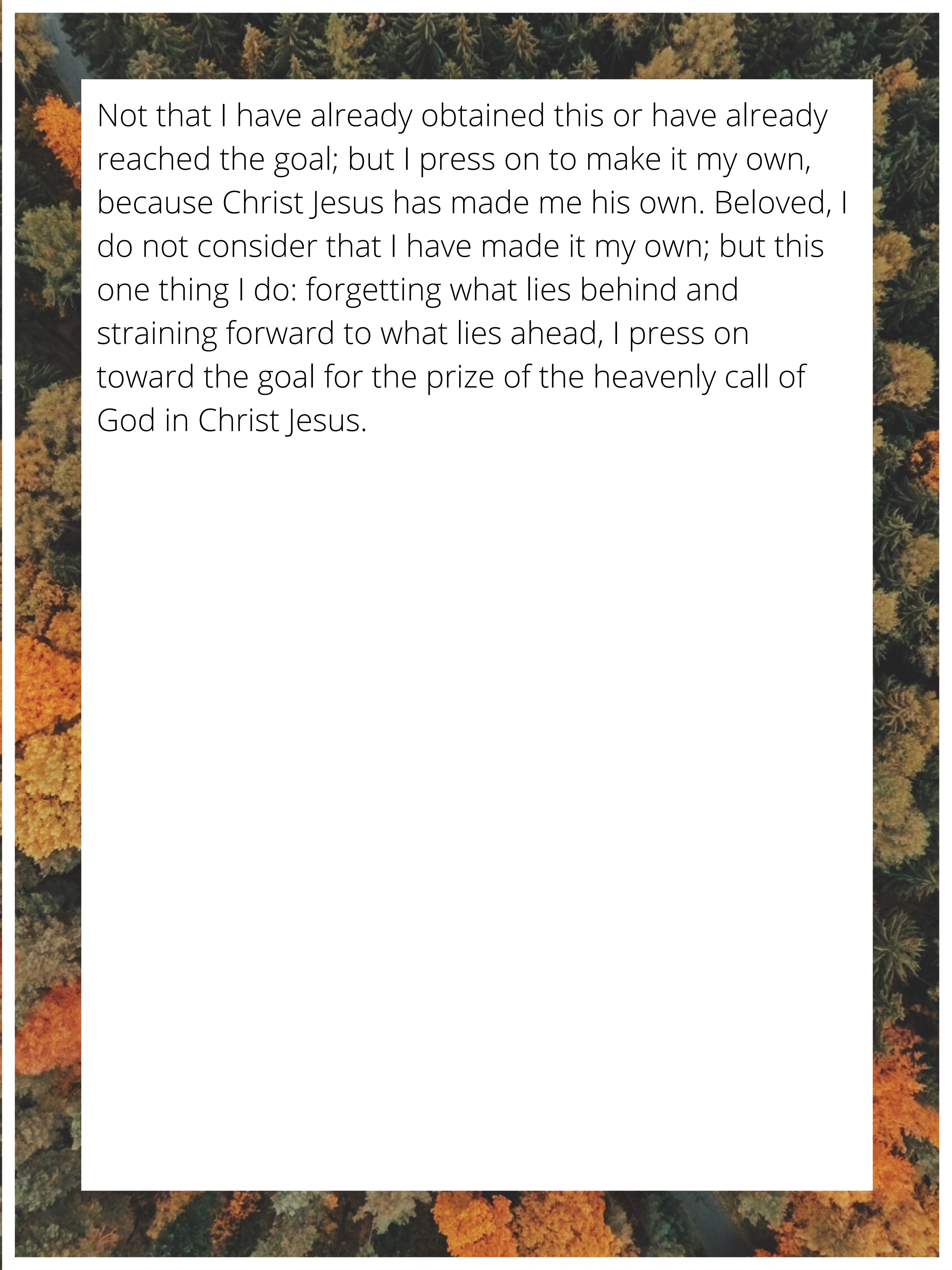


Scripture Passage

Philippians 3:4b-14

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

An aerial photograph of a forest, showing a mix of green evergreen trees and deciduous trees with yellow and orange autumn foliage. The trees are densely packed, and the colors are vibrant. The image is used as a background for the text.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

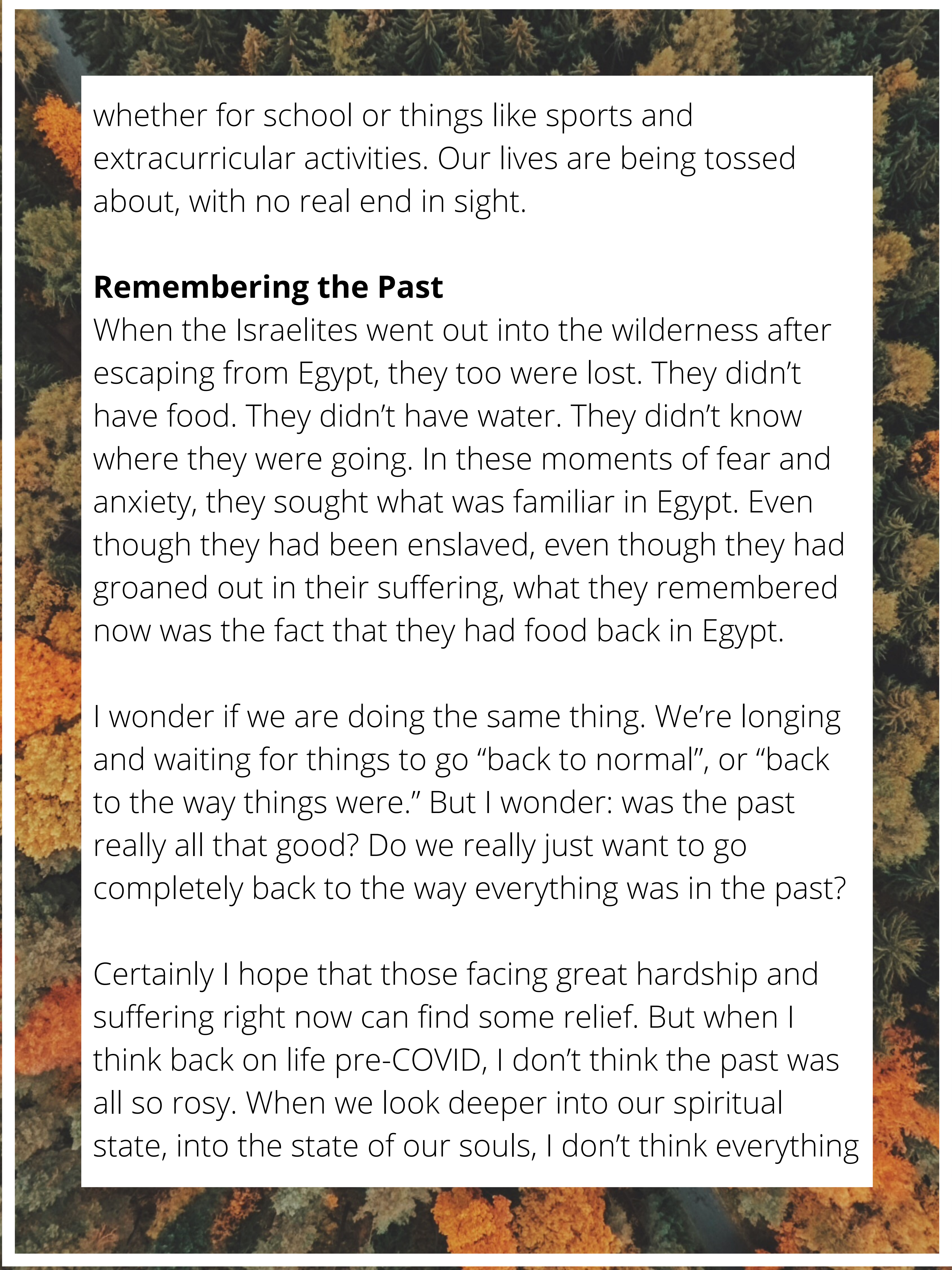
Sermon

Pressing Toward the Future

Our Old Anchors

2020 has been a year of so much change. We have been bombarded by one thing after the other. We have lost our moorings. We feel adrift at sea, not knowing where the waves will take us. When we feel anxious, we seek solid anchors. These anchors are often rooted in what we know; in the past.

We miss the old anchors of our pre-COVID life. The ability to see and meet people anywhere and at any time. The normal routines we took for granted. The comforts and conveniences that defined our everyday life. I really feel for all the disruption that's taken place. So many businesses are hurting, and livelihoods have been very affected. I went to pick up some Korean takeout food and I asked her, 'how's business?'. And she replied, 'yeah we're getting by'. Basically business is 50% of what it used to be. I went to get my hair cut the other week and I asked how it is and it's not even 50%. How are people going to live? Our kids' and young people's lives have been affected in so many ways,

An aerial photograph of a forest, showing a mix of green and yellow trees, suggesting autumn. The image is used as a background for the text.

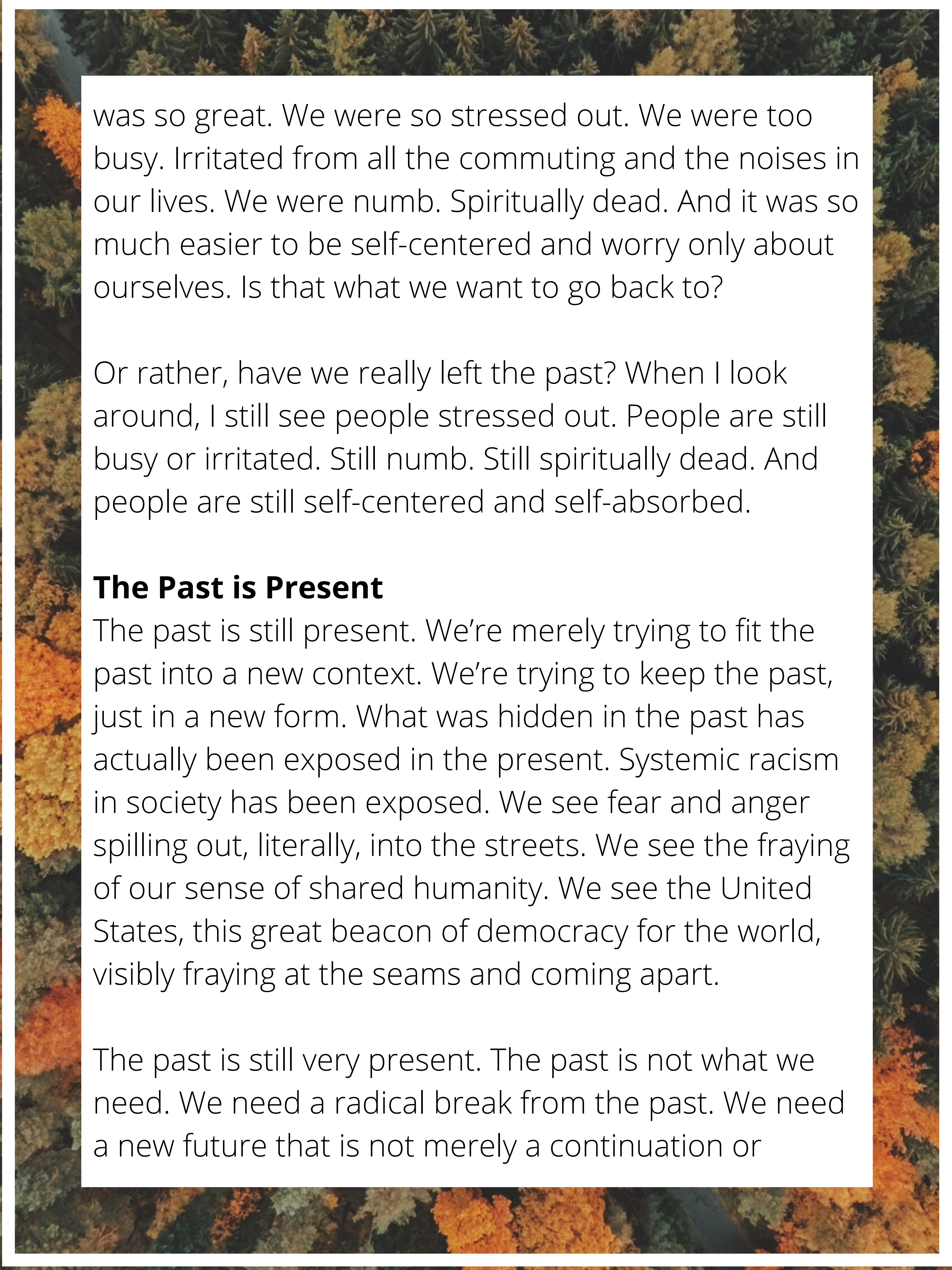
whether for school or things like sports and extracurricular activities. Our lives are being tossed about, with no real end in sight.

Remembering the Past

When the Israelites went out into the wilderness after escaping from Egypt, they too were lost. They didn't have food. They didn't have water. They didn't know where they were going. In these moments of fear and anxiety, they sought what was familiar in Egypt. Even though they had been enslaved, even though they had groaned out in their suffering, what they remembered now was the fact that they had food back in Egypt.

I wonder if we are doing the same thing. We're longing and waiting for things to go "back to normal", or "back to the way things were." But I wonder: was the past really all that good? Do we really just want to go completely back to the way everything was in the past?

Certainly I hope that those facing great hardship and suffering right now can find some relief. But when I think back on life pre-COVID, I don't think the past was all so rosy. When we look deeper into our spiritual state, into the state of our souls, I don't think everything



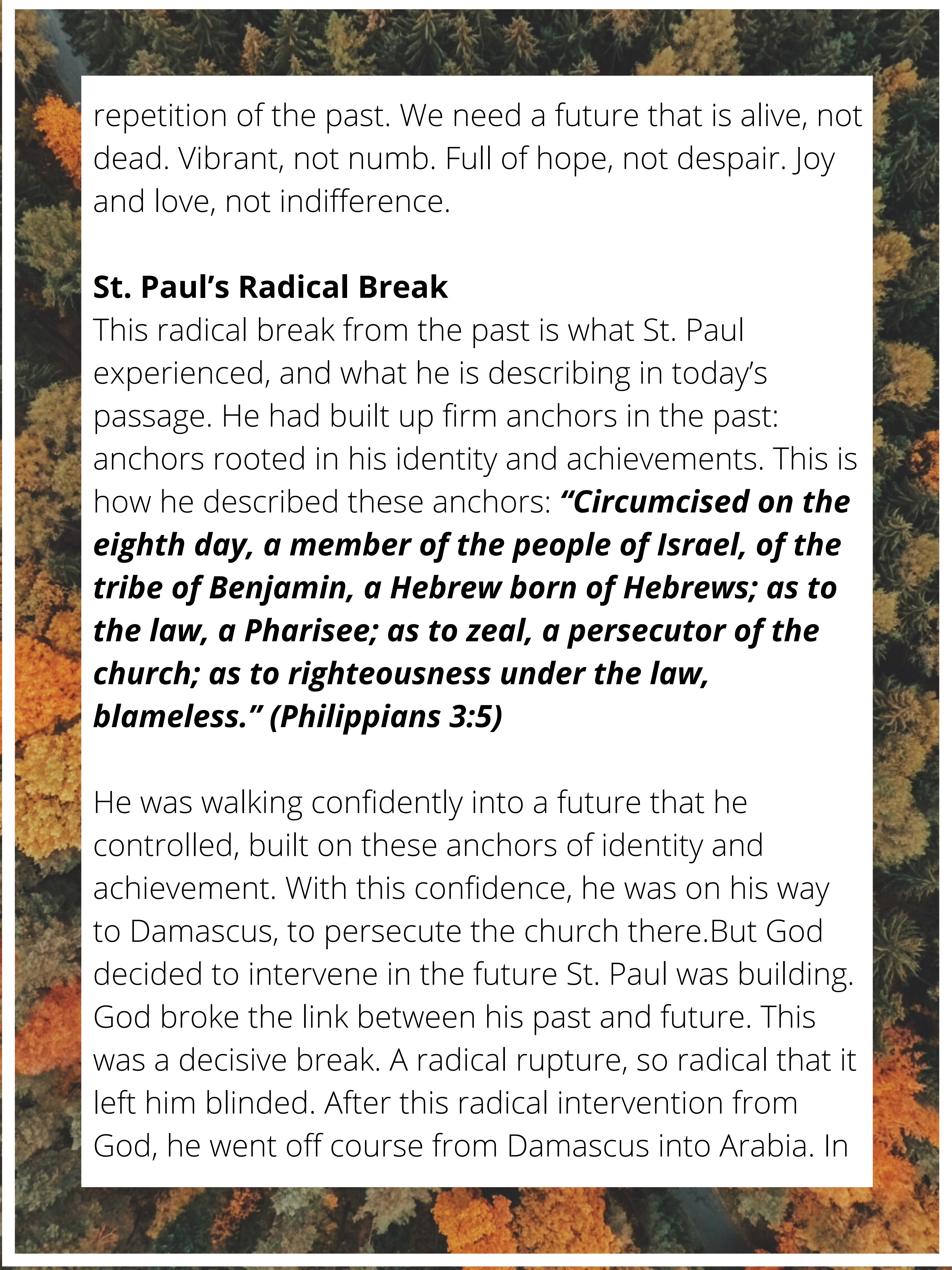
was so great. We were so stressed out. We were too busy. Irritated from all the commuting and the noises in our lives. We were numb. Spiritually dead. And it was so much easier to be self-centered and worry only about ourselves. Is that what we want to go back to?

Or rather, have we really left the past? When I look around, I still see people stressed out. People are still busy or irritated. Still numb. Still spiritually dead. And people are still self-centered and self-absorbed.

The Past is Present

The past is still present. We're merely trying to fit the past into a new context. We're trying to keep the past, just in a new form. What was hidden in the past has actually been exposed in the present. Systemic racism in society has been exposed. We see fear and anger spilling out, literally, into the streets. We see the fraying of our sense of shared humanity. We see the United States, this great beacon of democracy for the world, visibly fraying at the seams and coming apart.

The past is still very present. The past is not what we need. We need a radical break from the past. We need a new future that is not merely a continuation or

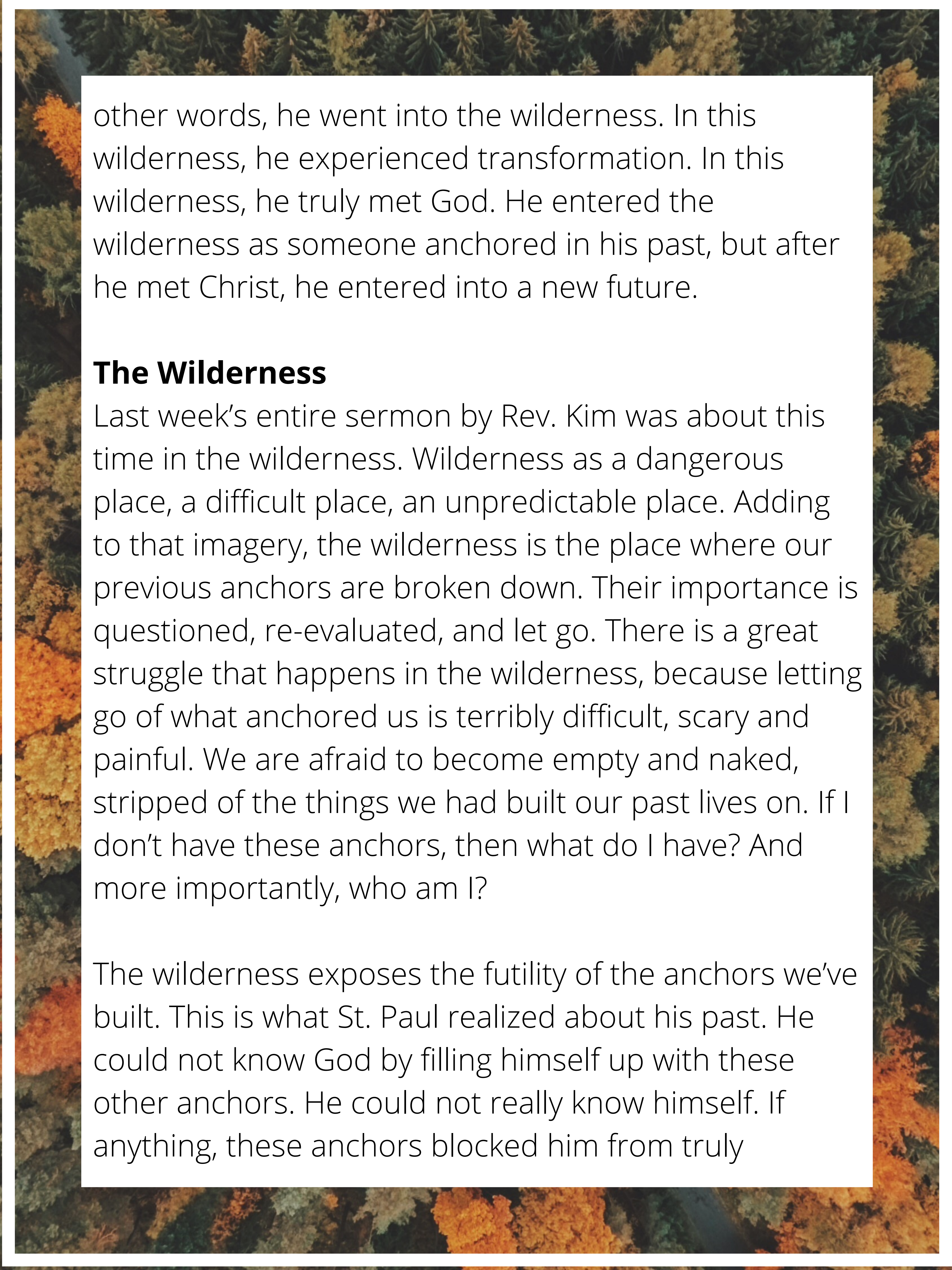


repetition of the past. We need a future that is alive, not dead. Vibrant, not numb. Full of hope, not despair. Joy and love, not indifference.

St. Paul's Radical Break

This radical break from the past is what St. Paul experienced, and what he is describing in today's passage. He had built up firm anchors in the past: anchors rooted in his identity and achievements. This is how he described these anchors: ***"Circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."* (Philippians 3:5)**

He was walking confidently into a future that he controlled, built on these anchors of identity and achievement. With this confidence, he was on his way to Damascus, to persecute the church there. But God decided to intervene in the future St. Paul was building. God broke the link between his past and future. This was a decisive break. A radical rupture, so radical that it left him blinded. After this radical intervention from God, he went off course from Damascus into Arabia. In

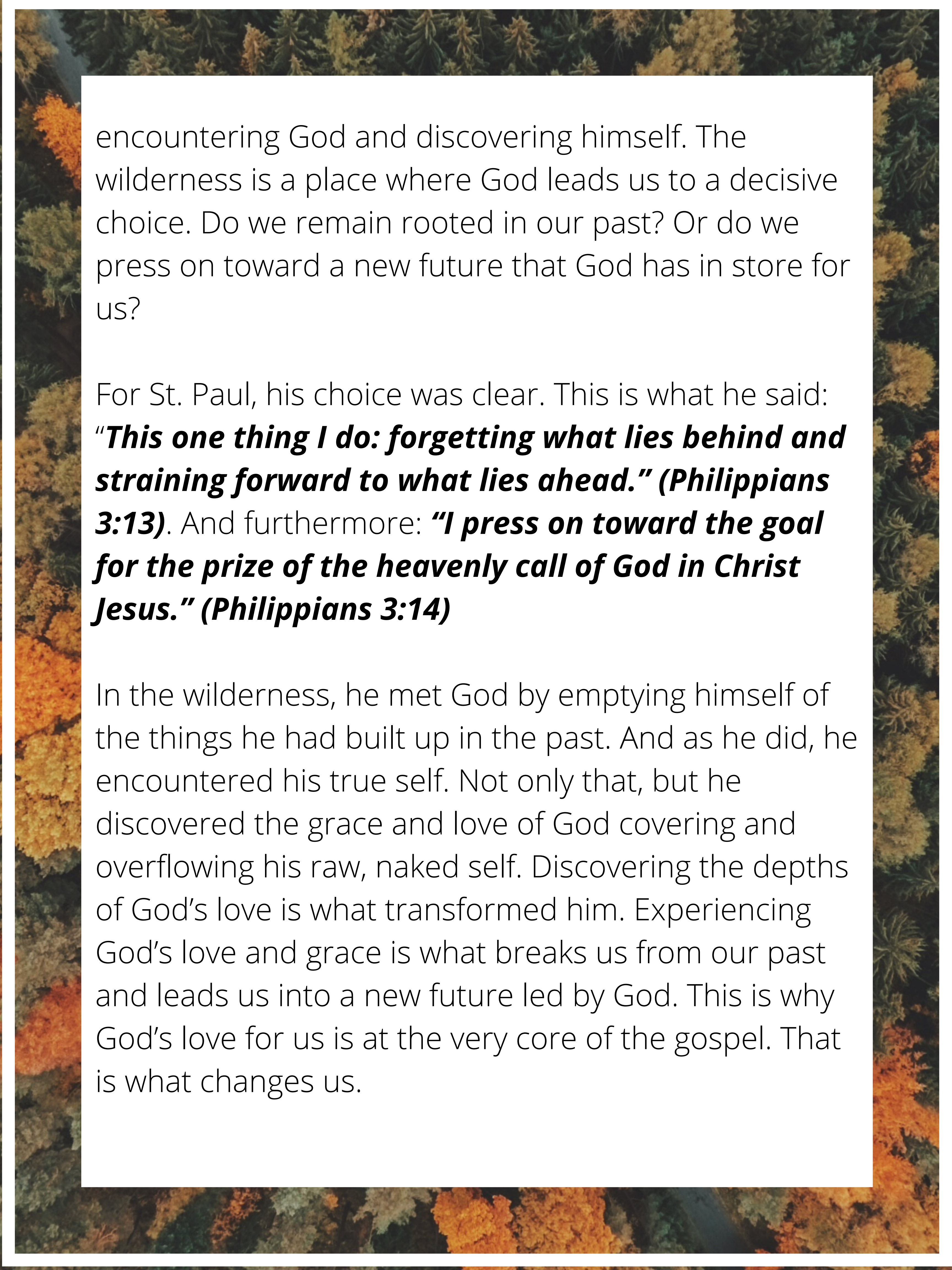


other words, he went into the wilderness. In this wilderness, he experienced transformation. In this wilderness, he truly met God. He entered the wilderness as someone anchored in his past, but after he met Christ, he entered into a new future.

The Wilderness

Last week's entire sermon by Rev. Kim was about this time in the wilderness. Wilderness as a dangerous place, a difficult place, an unpredictable place. Adding to that imagery, the wilderness is the place where our previous anchors are broken down. Their importance is questioned, re-evaluated, and let go. There is a great struggle that happens in the wilderness, because letting go of what anchored us is terribly difficult, scary and painful. We are afraid to become empty and naked, stripped of the things we had built our past lives on. If I don't have these anchors, then what do I have? And more importantly, who am I?

The wilderness exposes the futility of the anchors we've built. This is what St. Paul realized about his past. He could not know God by filling himself up with these other anchors. He could not really know himself. If anything, these anchors blocked him from truly

An aerial photograph of a forest, showing a mix of green and yellow trees, suggesting an autumn scene. The trees are densely packed, and the colors are vibrant against a dark background.

encountering God and discovering himself. The wilderness is a place where God leads us to a decisive choice. Do we remain rooted in our past? Or do we press on toward a new future that God has in store for us?

For St. Paul, his choice was clear. This is what he said: ***"This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead." (Philippians 3:13)***. And furthermore: ***"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14)***

In the wilderness, he met God by emptying himself of the things he had built up in the past. And as he did, he encountered his true self. Not only that, but he discovered the grace and love of God covering and overflowing his raw, naked self. Discovering the depths of God's love is what transformed him. Experiencing God's love and grace is what breaks us from our past and leads us into a new future led by God. This is why God's love for us is at the very core of the gospel. That is what changes us.

A Future Lead by God

In the past, the future we strove for is a future that we create, one that we control. A future we are comfortable with. That we can see. But the future that God calls us into is not in our control, but a future that God leads. This future is a decisive break from our past. The past, which is so powerful, no longer has a grip on us, and we are no longer victims of our past. Rather, the future is now in God's hands.

We don't know what the future holds. I'm sure there will be many unexpected things that arise. We can only expect that, what a year this has been. Our calling, however, is not to know the future, but to press on toward it with absolute trust in God. This is the story of faith: A calling to leave behind our past, what is comfortable, and press forward in faith toward the unknown, trusting absolutely in God.

This was the story of Abraham, who is the father of faith. From the very beginning of faith, this is what it was. God said to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1). Go from all that you know, all that you're comfortable with. Break free from t

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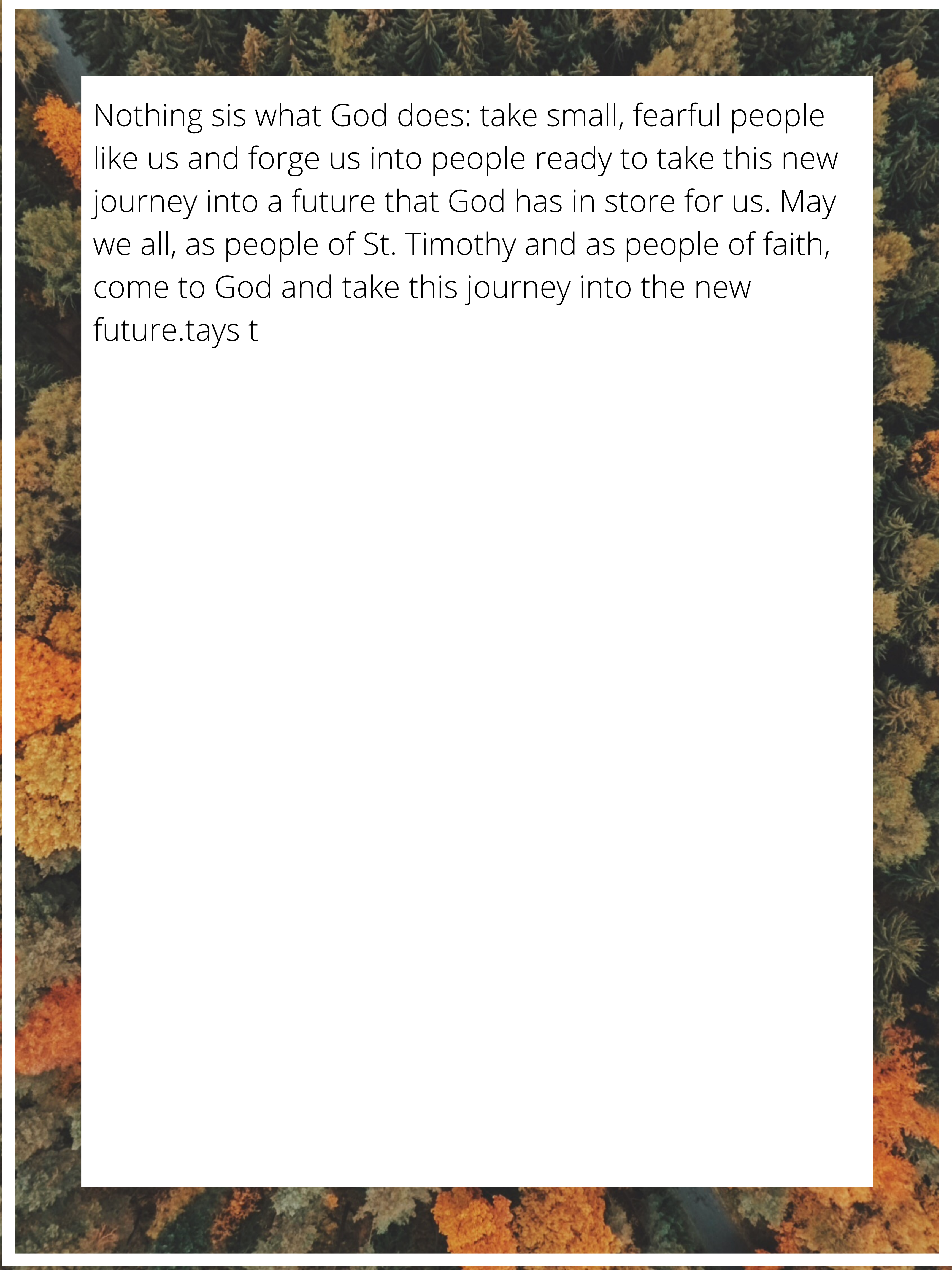
he past to a future that I will lead.

In these anxious times, rather than seek an escape from the wilderness, we need to to embrace it. With absolute trust in God, it is time to let go of the things that gripped us in the past, and press on toward a future that God has in store for you and I. In the past, we were gripped by our numbness, our stress, our need to keep up with the standards we held for ourselves, and with fractured relationships. But in the new future, I see free hearts, souls that sing, hearts that forgive and reconcile, and people who feel and care.

Shed our Enslavement to the Past

When the Israelites first entered the wilderness after escaping Egypt, they were mere fugitives: slaves escaping captivity. They were still in their enslaved mindsets and thought like slaves. But in the long journey of the wilderness, they were shaped and forged into the people of God, ready to journey into the promised land that God would lead them into.

In our time of wilderness right now, we need to shed our enslavement to the past and be forged as people of God. If we are courageous enough, if we have faith, that



Nothing is what God does: take small, fearful people like us and forge us into people ready to take this new journey into a future that God has in store for us. May we all, as people of St. Timothy and as people of faith, come to God and take this journey into the new future. says t