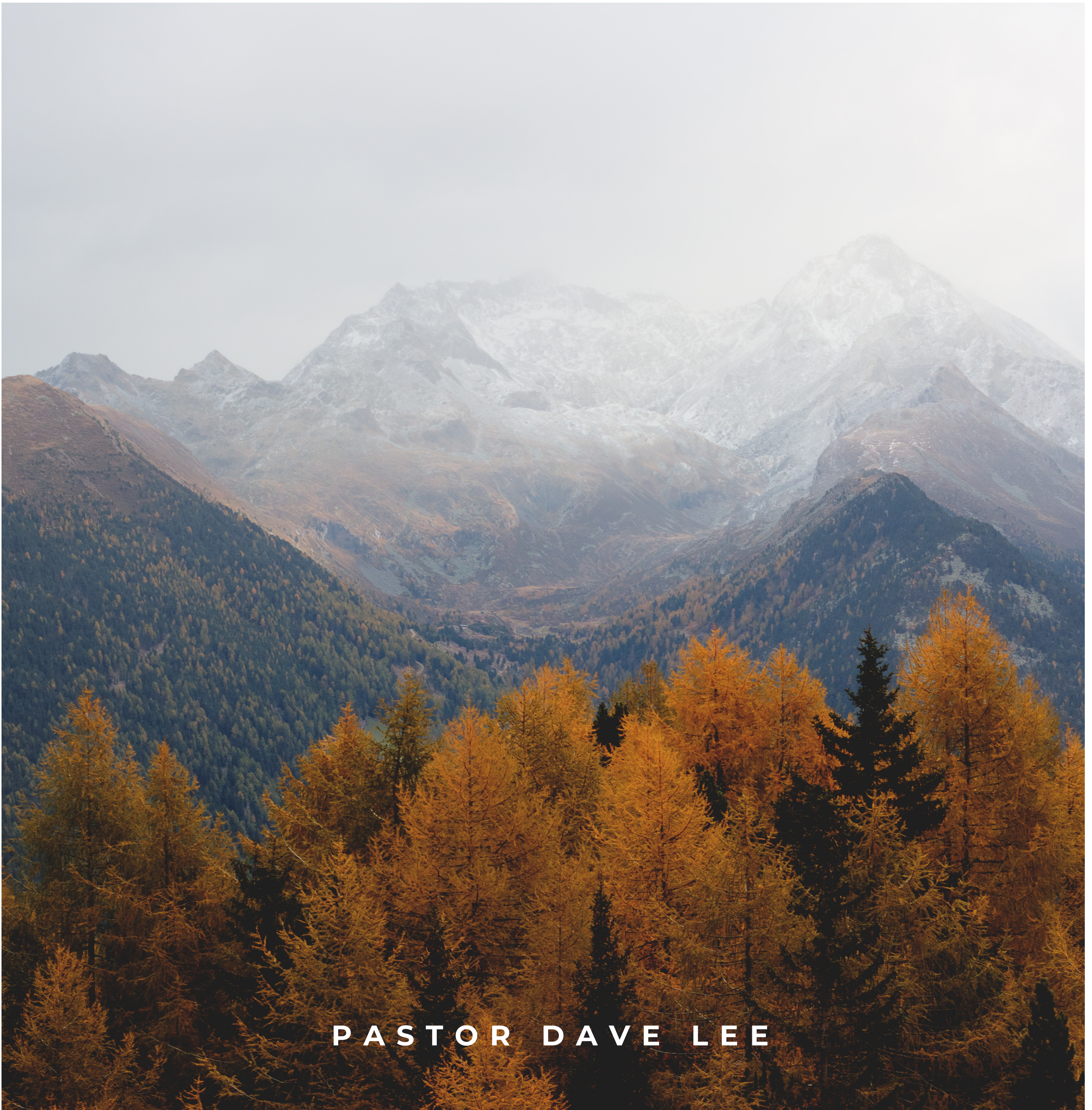


MATTHEW 25:14 - 30

BE FAITHFUL



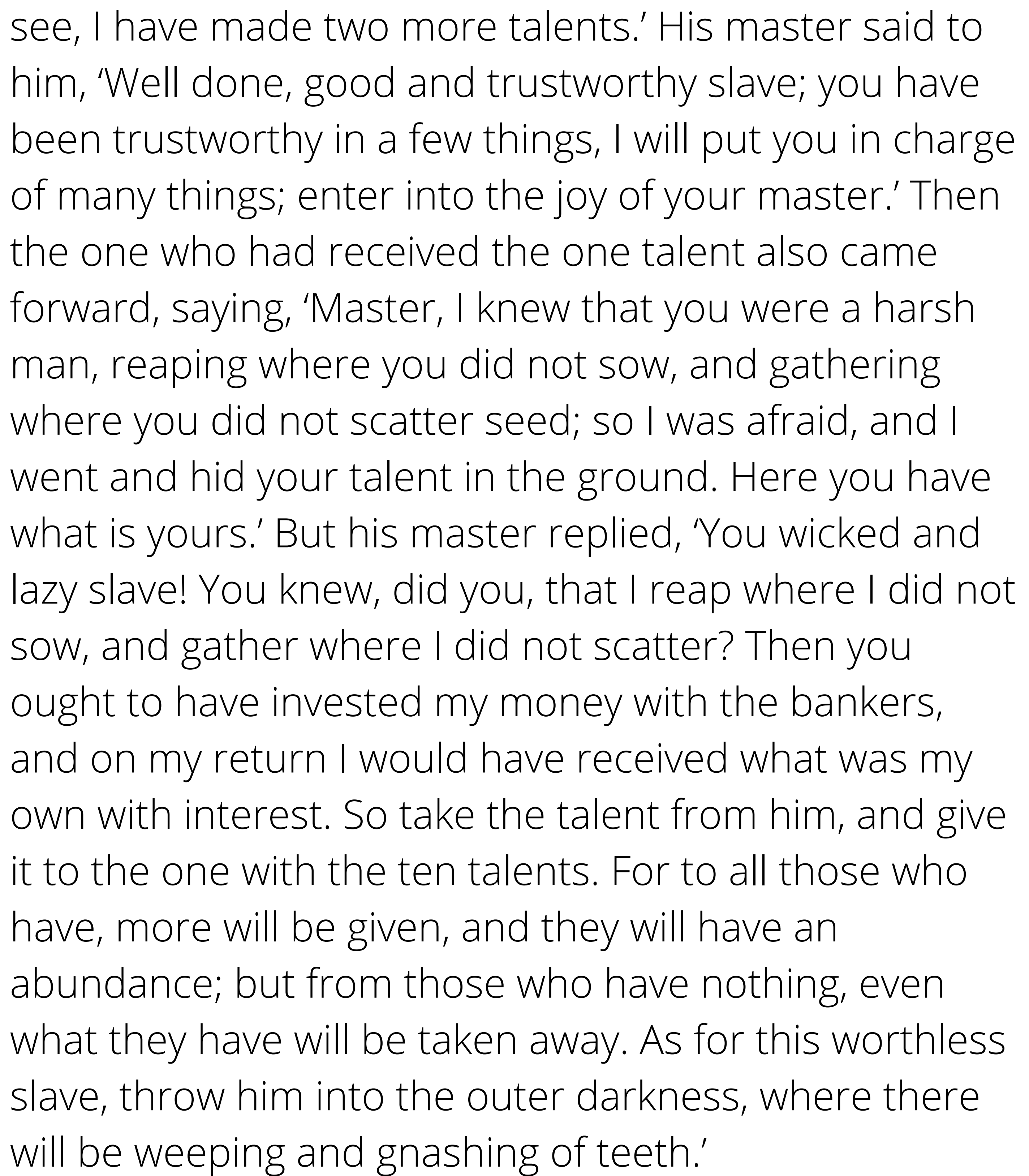
PASTOR DAVE LEE



Scripture Passage

Matthew 25:14-30

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents;



see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'



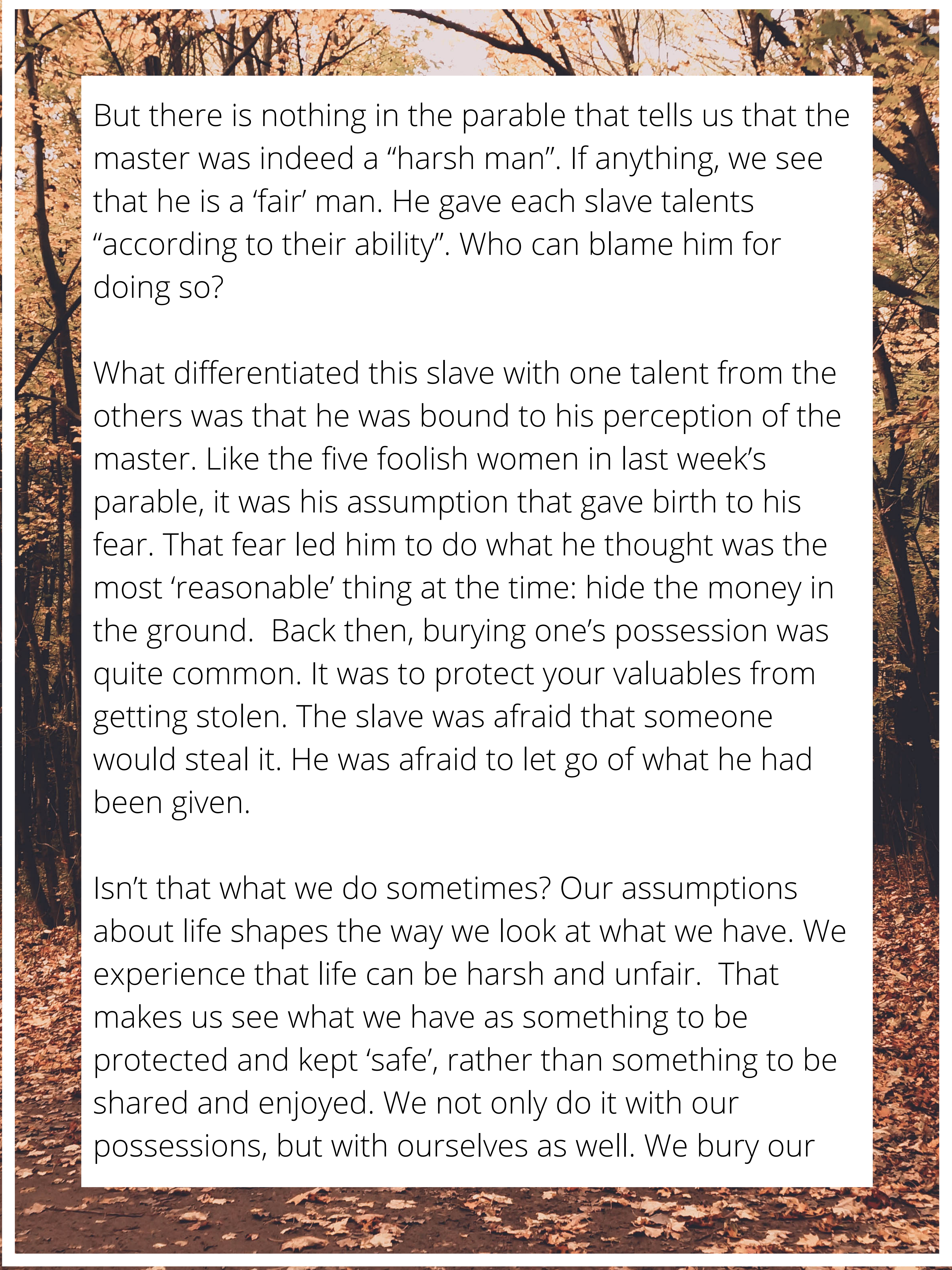
Sermon

Be Faithful

When we are afraid, we see everything in a different light. That is what fear does. It controls our thoughts, clouds our judgement, and narrows our perspective. Fear prevents us from taking any risk or responsibility for ourselves. It tricks us into thinking that what we are doing is 'reasonable,' when in fact, it really isn't.

That was the problem with the slave who had one talent. In today's parable, we see him hide the talent his master gives him. When his master comes back, he explains why: ***'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'*** (Matthew 25:24, 25). He was afraid because he "knew" that his master was a harsh man.

In a way, we can sympathize with him. What he says sounds reasonable. It makes sense. So at first, it might be easy for us to simply take his words at face value.



But there is nothing in the parable that tells us that the master was indeed a “harsh man”. If anything, we see that he is a ‘fair’ man. He gave each slave talents “according to their ability”. Who can blame him for doing so?

What differentiated this slave with one talent from the others was that he was bound to his perception of the master. Like the five foolish women in last week’s parable, it was his assumption that gave birth to his fear. That fear led him to do what he thought was the most ‘reasonable’ thing at the time: hide the money in the ground. Back then, burying one’s possession was quite common. It was to protect your valuables from getting stolen. The slave was afraid that someone would steal it. He was afraid to let go of what he had been given.

Isn’t that what we do sometimes? Our assumptions about life shapes the way we look at what we have. We experience that life can be harsh and unfair. That makes us see what we have as something to be protected and kept ‘safe’, rather than something to be shared and enjoyed. We not only do it with our possessions, but with ourselves as well. We bury our



talents out of fear. We put them away for good.

I don't want us to get stuck on looking at the word 'talent' only in terms of money. I'd like us to look at it in a more literal sense; talent as a certain 'ability,' a 'gift' a person has. This parable serves as a basis for the same English word.

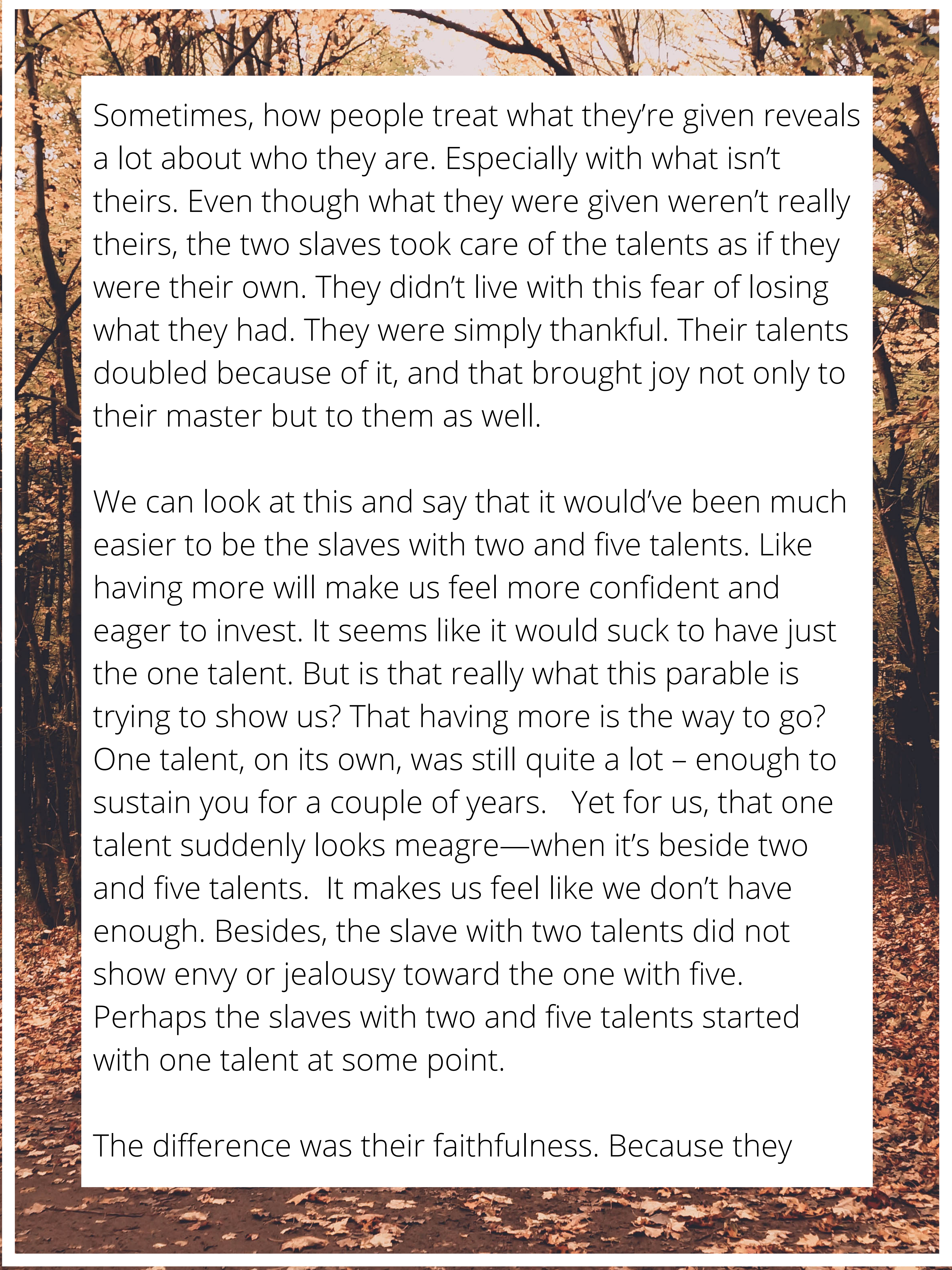
One of the ways that this pandemic has affected us is that it has made us feel totally limited and powerless. Like we can't do anything meaningful. It's hard to express ourselves to each other with masks on. We've become even more fearful and insecure. The fact that we continue to see cases rising doesn't help. Toronto is now in the Red Zone, and we've scaled back on gathering in-person for worship as a precaution. We feel frustrated and stuck. We see that we are not able to make ourselves as 'useful' as we did before. I've been finding how easy it is for our mind to drift into dark and negative places. It seems 'easier' and more 'reasonable' to simply resign to our current reality. To just let things be the way they are. To just narrow our focus to ourselves and our immediate family and friends. In a time like this, it seems like the best thing to do is to bury our talents in the ground. But where does that



eventually lead?

Life lived out of fear remains small and the same. That is what today's parable shows us. The one talent that the slave buried remained one talent. His life stayed the same until the master returned. Nothing changed. There was no fruit to be enjoyed. In the end, even the little he had was taken away and given to someone else.

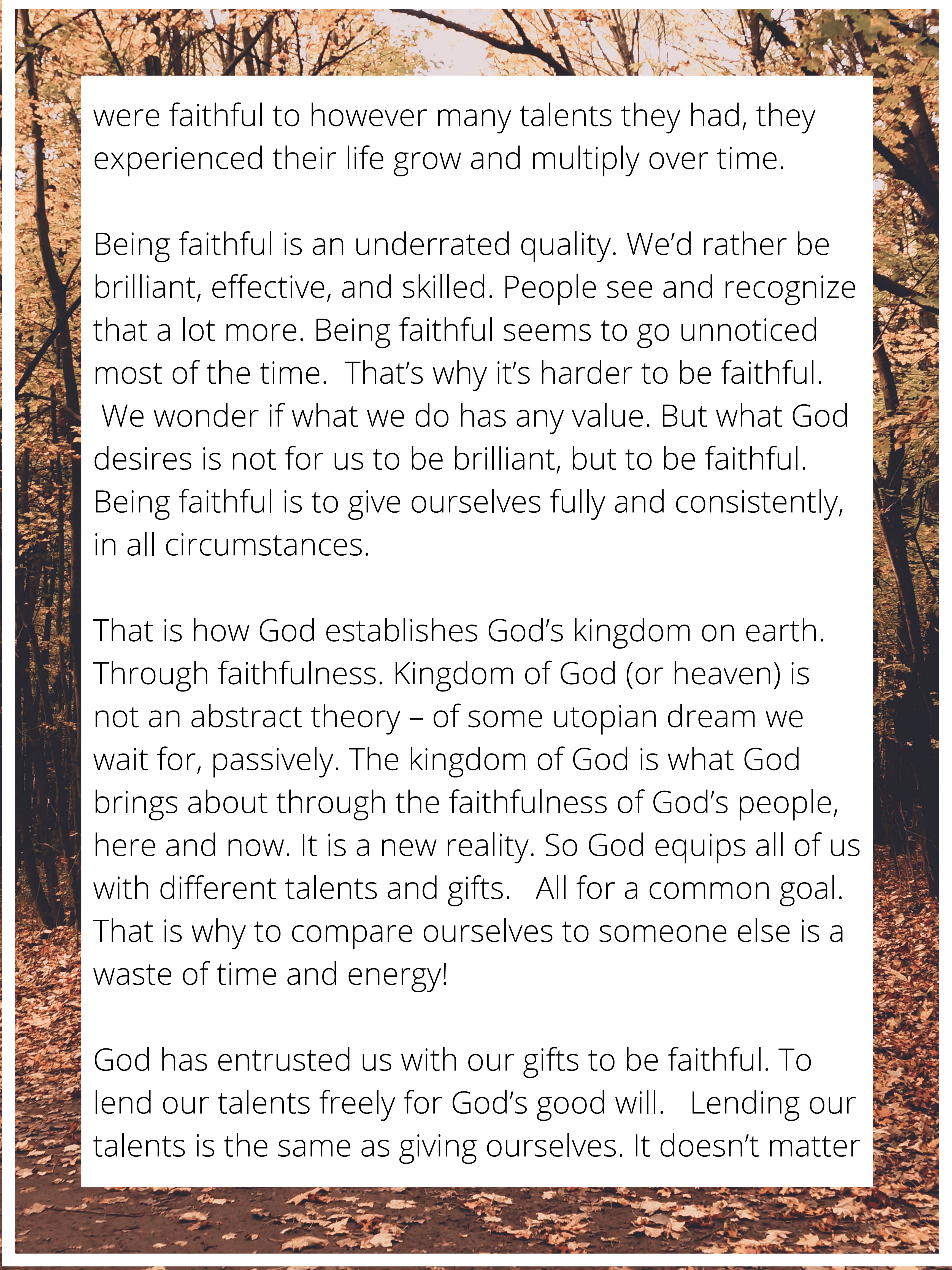
Yet the parable also shows us another kind of life. Through the other slaves, it shows us a way to a better life. Life that grows and multiplies. Life that the slave with one talent couldn't live. That is the life of being faithful. Unlike the slave with one talent, the slaves that received two and five talents were faithful with what they were entrusted. The slave with one talent probably thought he was being faithful with his talent, but the faithful ones were really the slaves with two and five talents. They didn't think twice about what to do with what they had. They didn't hold onto it tightly or hide it in fear. This is what one of them did— ***The one who had received five talents went off at once and traded with them... (Matthew 25:16).*** Right away he went.



Sometimes, how people treat what they're given reveals a lot about who they are. Especially with what isn't theirs. Even though what they were given weren't really theirs, the two slaves took care of the talents as if they were their own. They didn't live with this fear of losing what they had. They were simply thankful. Their talents doubled because of it, and that brought joy not only to their master but to them as well.

We can look at this and say that it would've been much easier to be the slaves with two and five talents. Like having more will make us feel more confident and eager to invest. It seems like it would suck to have just the one talent. But is that really what this parable is trying to show us? That having more is the way to go? One talent, on its own, was still quite a lot – enough to sustain you for a couple of years. Yet for us, that one talent suddenly looks meagre—when it's beside two and five talents. It makes us feel like we don't have enough. Besides, the slave with two talents did not show envy or jealousy toward the one with five. Perhaps the slaves with two and five talents started with one talent at some point.

The difference was their faithfulness. Because they



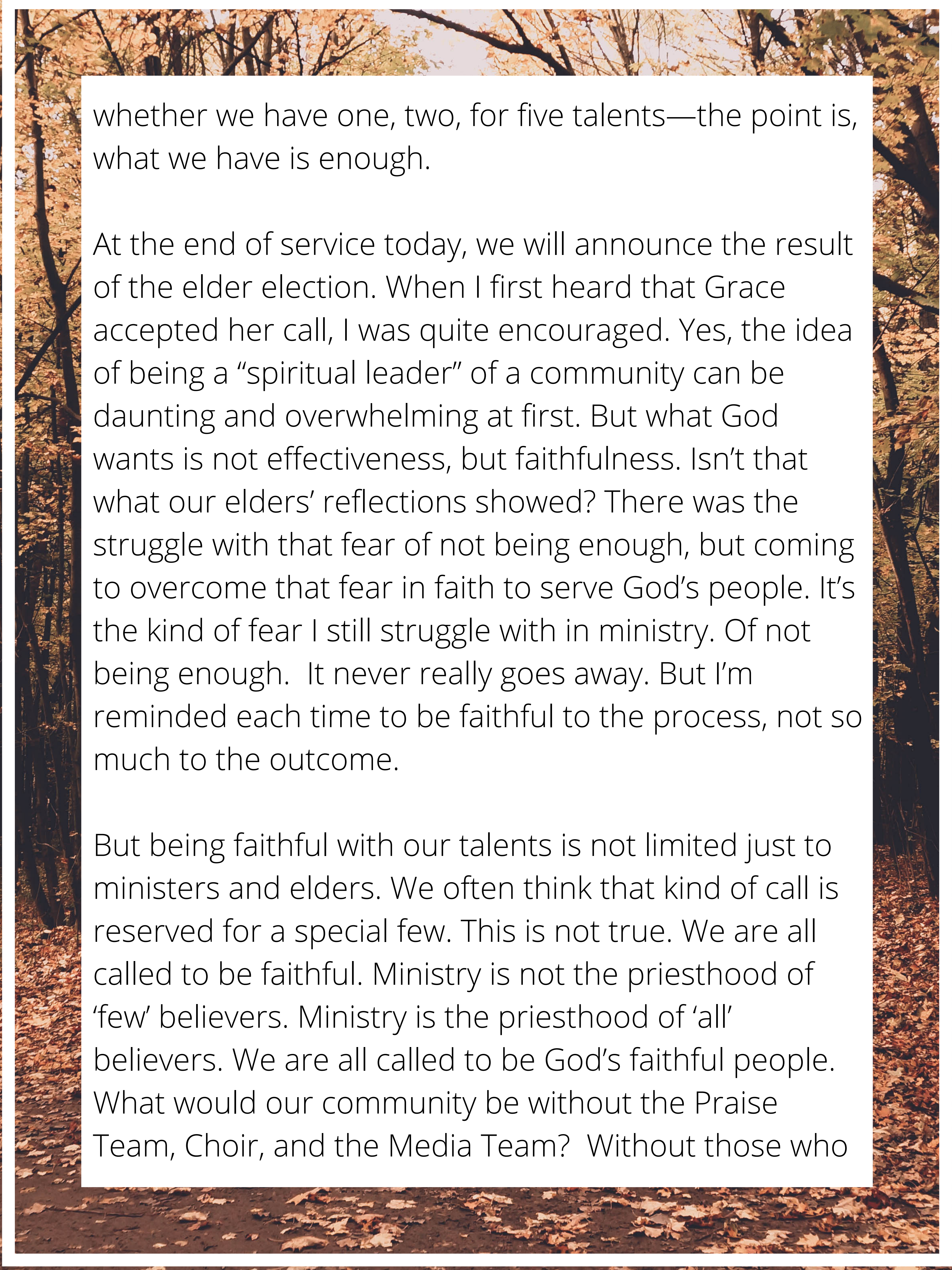
were faithful to however many talents they had, they experienced their life grow and multiply over time.

Being faithful is an underrated quality. We'd rather be brilliant, effective, and skilled. People see and recognize that a lot more. Being faithful seems to go unnoticed most of the time. That's why it's harder to be faithful.

We wonder if what we do has any value. But what God desires is not for us to be brilliant, but to be faithful. Being faithful is to give ourselves fully and consistently, in all circumstances.

That is how God establishes God's kingdom on earth. Through faithfulness. Kingdom of God (or heaven) is not an abstract theory – of some utopian dream we wait for, passively. The kingdom of God is what God brings about through the faithfulness of God's people, here and now. It is a new reality. So God equips all of us with different talents and gifts. All for a common goal. That is why to compare ourselves to someone else is a waste of time and energy!

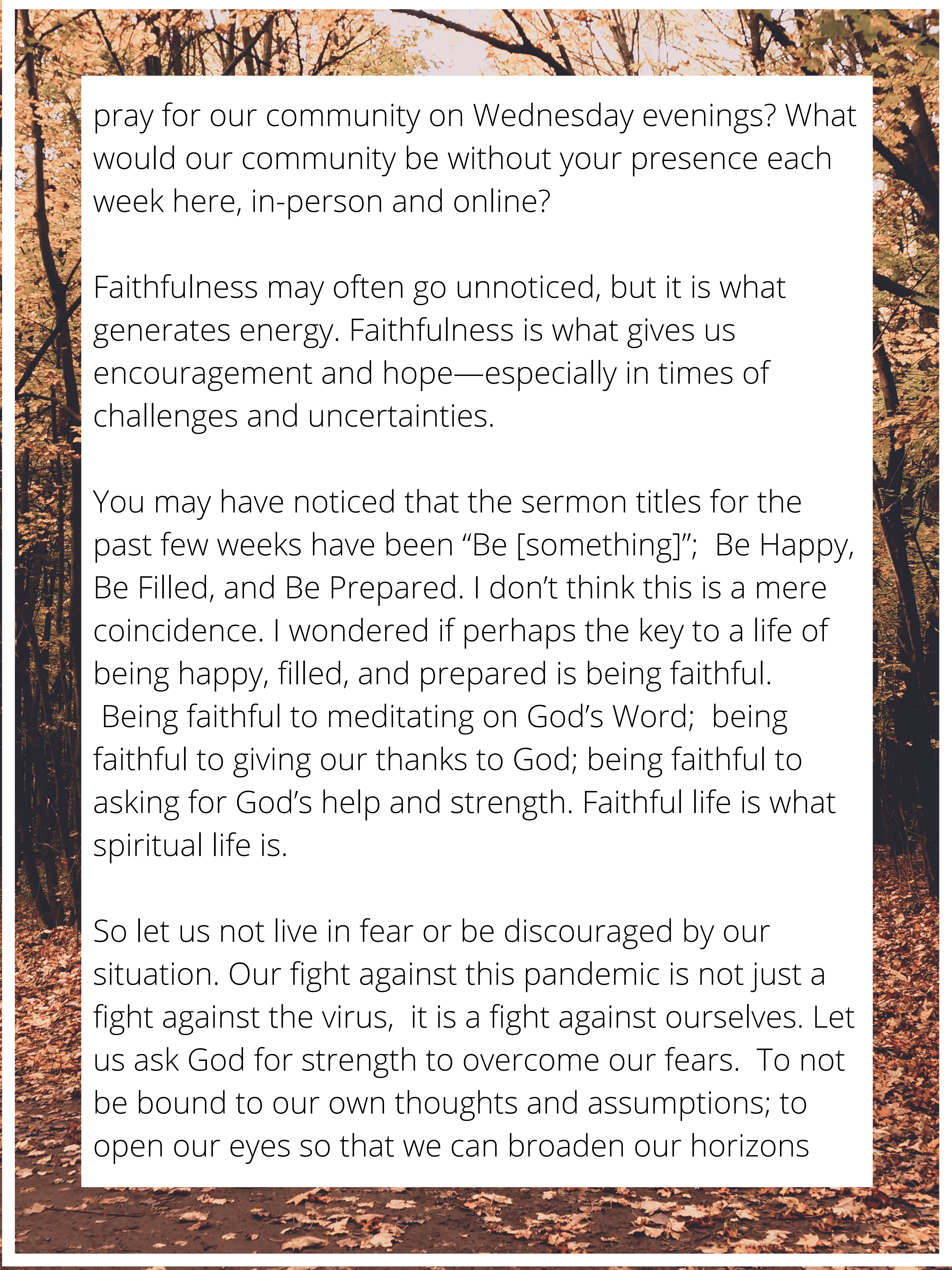
God has entrusted us with our gifts to be faithful. To lend our talents freely for God's good will. Lending our talents is the same as giving ourselves. It doesn't matter



whether we have one, two, for five talents—the point is, what we have is enough.

At the end of service today, we will announce the result of the elder election. When I first heard that Grace accepted her call, I was quite encouraged. Yes, the idea of being a “spiritual leader” of a community can be daunting and overwhelming at first. But what God wants is not effectiveness, but faithfulness. Isn’t that what our elders’ reflections showed? There was the struggle with that fear of not being enough, but coming to overcome that fear in faith to serve God’s people. It’s the kind of fear I still struggle with in ministry. Of not being enough. It never really goes away. But I’m reminded each time to be faithful to the process, not so much to the outcome.

But being faithful with our talents is not limited just to ministers and elders. We often think that kind of call is reserved for a special few. This is not true. We are all called to be faithful. Ministry is not the priesthood of ‘few’ believers. Ministry is the priesthood of ‘all’ believers. We are all called to be God’s faithful people. What would our community be without the Praise Team, Choir, and the Media Team? Without those who



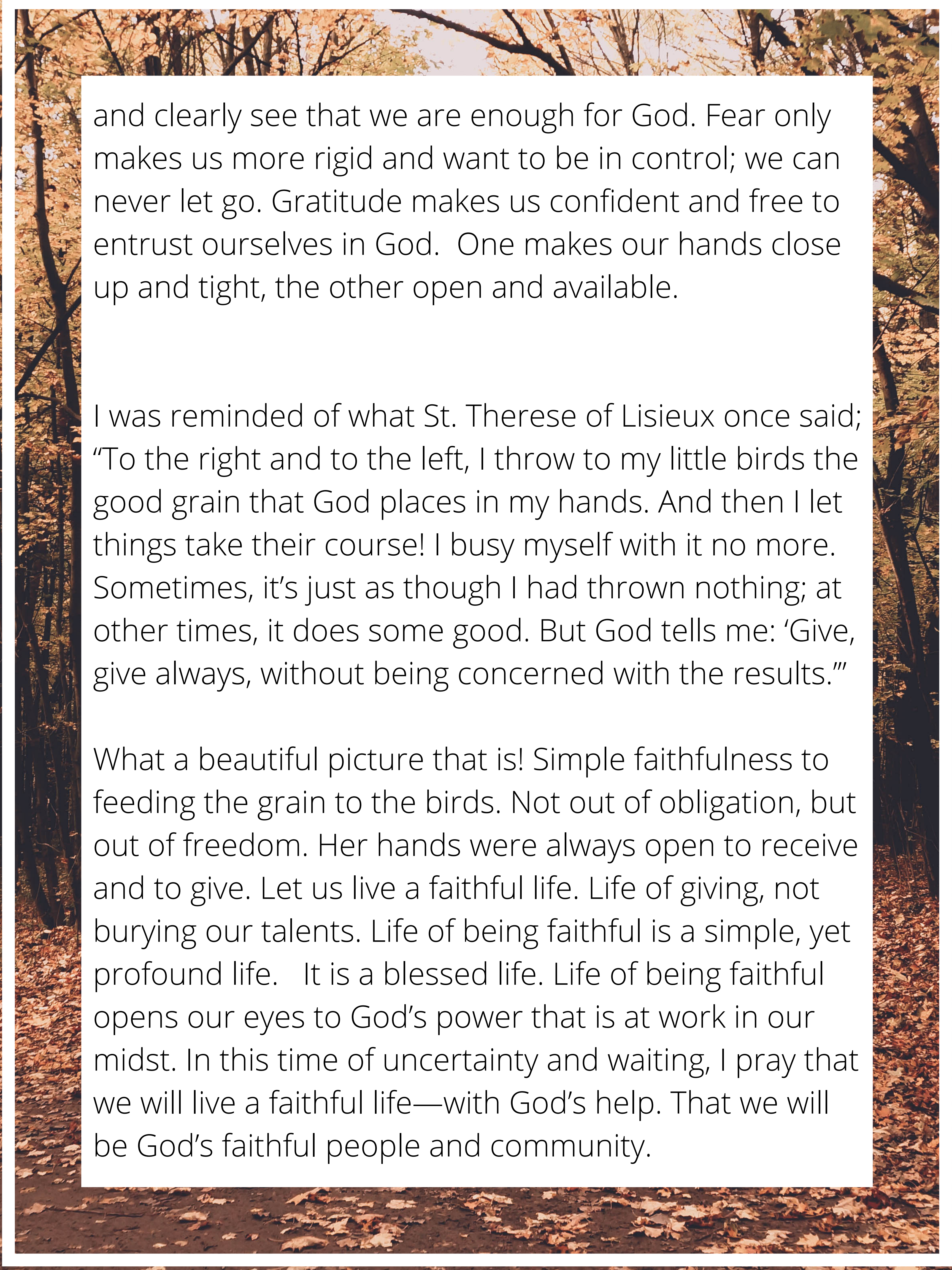
pray for our community on Wednesday evenings? What would our community be without your presence each week here, in-person and online?

Faithfulness may often go unnoticed, but it is what generates energy. Faithfulness is what gives us encouragement and hope—especially in times of challenges and uncertainties.

You may have noticed that the sermon titles for the past few weeks have been “Be [something]”; Be Happy, Be Filled, and Be Prepared. I don’t think this is a mere coincidence. I wondered if perhaps the key to a life of being happy, filled, and prepared is being faithful.

Being faithful to meditating on God’s Word; being faithful to giving our thanks to God; being faithful to asking for God’s help and strength. Faithful life is what spiritual life is.

So let us not live in fear or be discouraged by our situation. Our fight against this pandemic is not just a fight against the virus, it is a fight against ourselves. Let us ask God for strength to overcome our fears. To not be bound to our own thoughts and assumptions; to open our eyes so that we can broaden our horizons



and clearly see that we are enough for God. Fear only makes us more rigid and want to be in control; we can never let go. Gratitude makes us confident and free to entrust ourselves in God. One makes our hands close up and tight, the other open and available.

I was reminded of what St. Therese of Lisieux once said; "To the right and to the left, I throw to my little birds the good grain that God places in my hands. And then I let things take their course! I busy myself with it no more. Sometimes, it's just as though I had thrown nothing; at other times, it does some good. But God tells me: 'Give, give always, without being concerned with the results.'"

What a beautiful picture that is! Simple faithfulness to feeding the grain to the birds. Not out of obligation, but out of freedom. Her hands were always open to receive and to give. Let us live a faithful life. Life of giving, not burying our talents. Life of being faithful is a simple, yet profound life. It is a blessed life. Life of being faithful opens our eyes to God's power that is at work in our midst. In this time of uncertainty and waiting, I pray that we will live a faithful life—with God's help. That we will be God's faithful people and community.