

PSALM 107:1-9,33-37

BE FILLED

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Scripture Passage

Psalms 107:1-9,33-37

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants. He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. And there he lets the hungry live,

The background image shows a park scene in autumn. In the foreground, there's a path covered with fallen brown leaves. To the left, a large tree trunk is visible. The middle ground shows more trees with some green and some yellowing leaves. In the background, a blue railing and a building are partially visible through the trees. The overall atmosphere is calm and scenic.

and they establish a town to live in; they sow fields,
and plant vineyards, and get a fruitful yield.

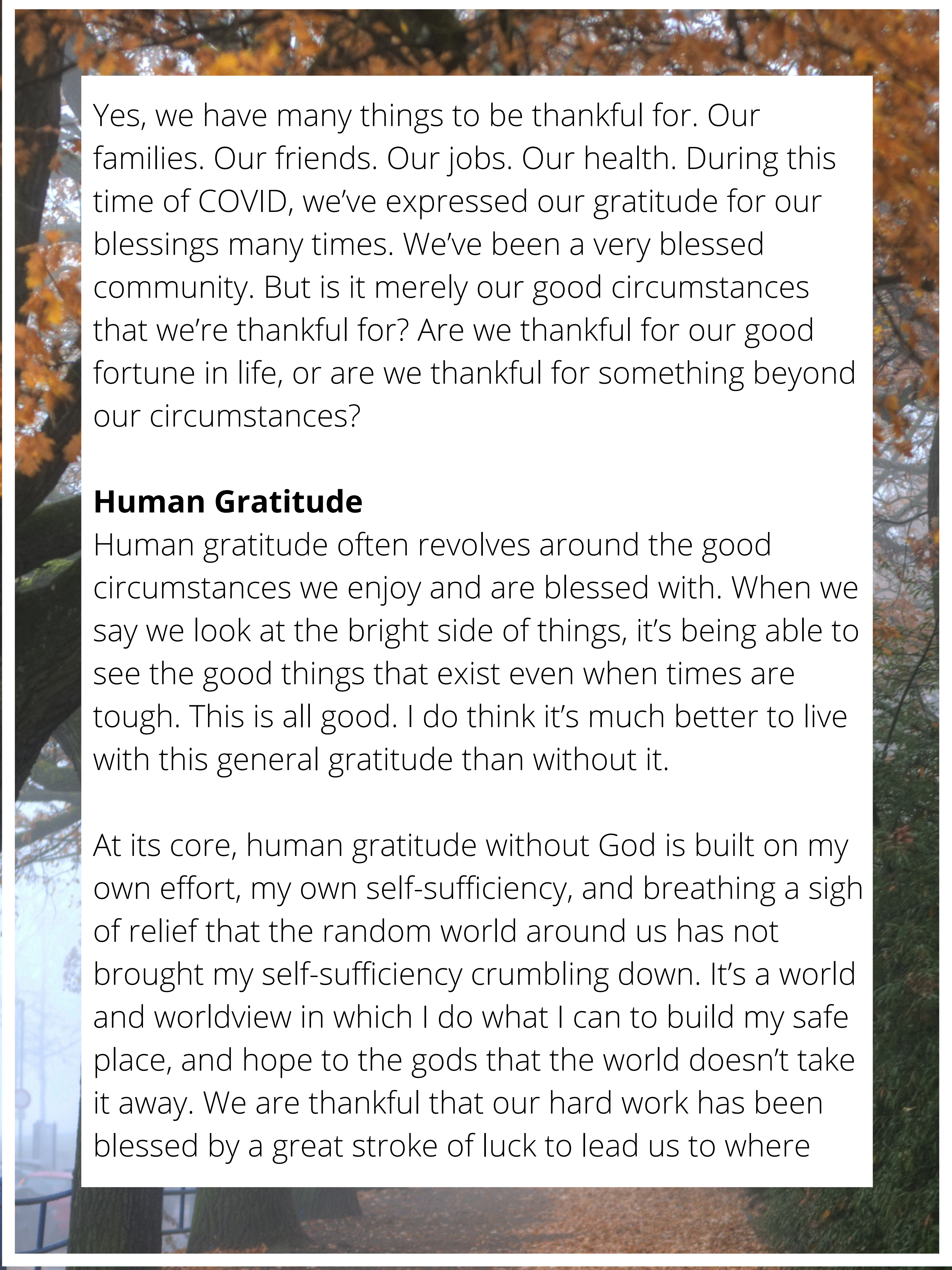
Sermon

Be Filled

Today's psalm of thanksgiving to God that we read today reflects the core belief of the people of Israel. Verse one starts with this: "***O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.***" (Psalm 107:1). This verse summarizes in a nutshell the faith of God's people. Their faith is rooted in God, who is good, and on God's steadfast love. The Hebrew word for steadfast love is *hesed*. *Hesed* connotes a lot of things; love, enduring loyalty, and allegiance. It's about God, who first loved his people and displayed loyalty to them. The people of God then respond to that love and faithfulness with thanksgiving. This gratitude to God is at the core of their faith.

Two Kinds of Gratitude

We all agree that gratitude and thanksgiving is a good thing. That is how we should live - with gratitude. But is the gratitude we have just a human gratitude of a general sort? Or is it gratitude to God? These are two different kinds of gratitude. That is what I want to reflect on today.



Yes, we have many things to be thankful for. Our families. Our friends. Our jobs. Our health. During this time of COVID, we've expressed our gratitude for our blessings many times. We've been a very blessed community. But is it merely our good circumstances that we're thankful for? Are we thankful for our good fortune in life, or are we thankful for something beyond our circumstances?

Human Gratitude

Human gratitude often revolves around the good circumstances we enjoy and are blessed with. When we say we look at the bright side of things, it's being able to see the good things that exist even when times are tough. This is all good. I do think it's much better to live with this general gratitude than without it.

At its core, human gratitude without God is built on my own effort, my own self-sufficiency, and breathing a sigh of relief that the random world around us has not brought my self-sufficiency crumbling down. It's a world and worldview in which I do what I can to build my safe place, and hope to the gods that the world doesn't take it away. We are thankful that our hard work has been blessed by a great stroke of luck to lead us to where



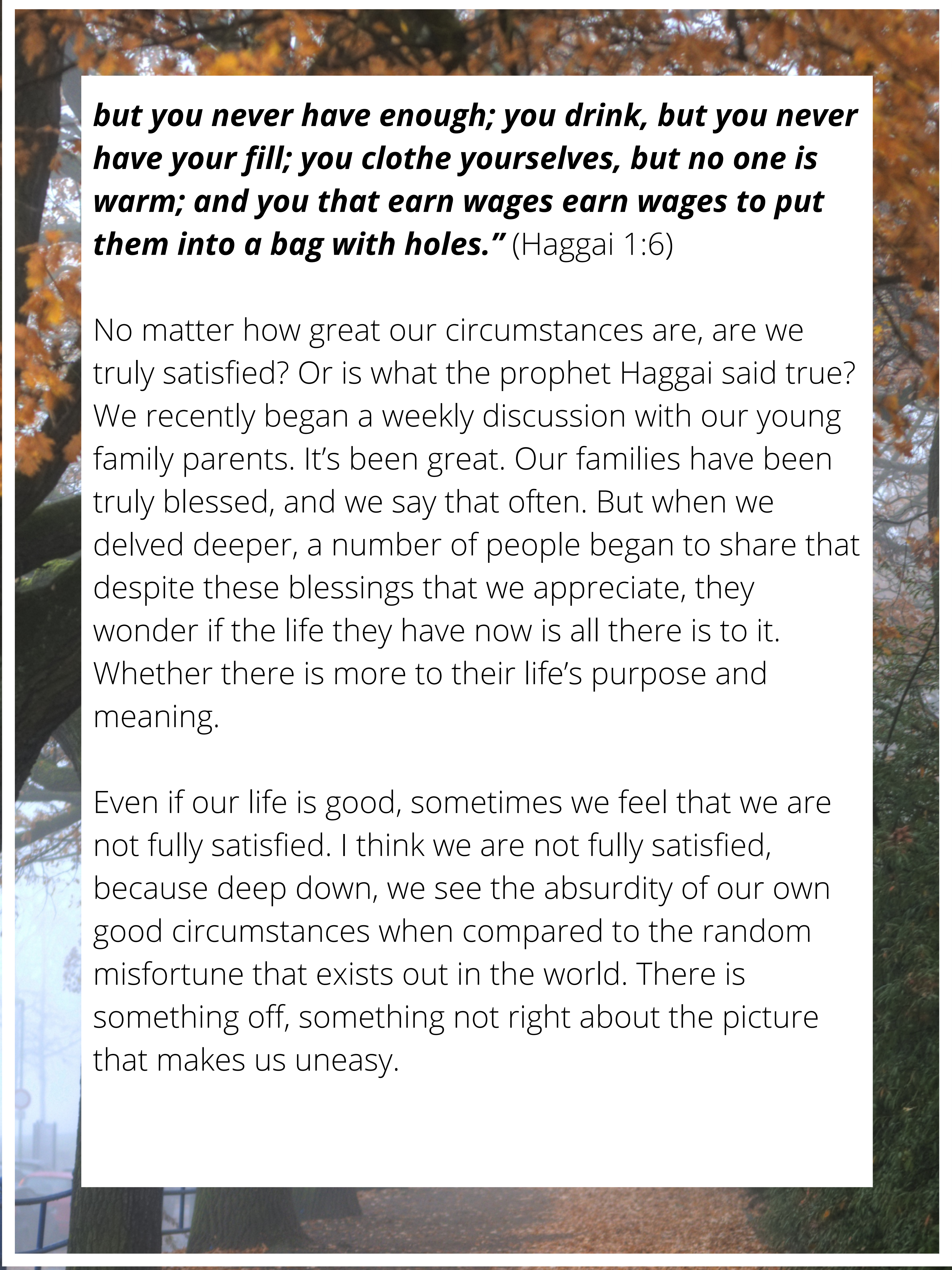
we're at.

We revel in this kind of gratitude when we meet with family and friends for special occasions like holidays. We're thankful for how things have turned out. We share love, good times and warm feelings. In this space we bask in our blessings and enjoy a taste of life as it's meant to be. In these moments, we feel a great contentment.

Are We Satisfied?

But I wonder if this general gratitude leaves us satisfied? This type of gratitude focuses on the "silver lining" in things. It tells us to "look on the bright side of things." and all these other phrases we've heard. To not dwell on the negative things too much and not complain, because our circumstances might be less fortunate at any moment. I think it's a fleeting gratitude, because our self-sufficiency can be pierced and taken away at any moment. It's a precarious gratitude. Is this gratitude enough to fill us?

The prophet Haggai said this, and these are words from God that he is saying: ***"Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat***



but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.” (Haggai 1:6)

No matter how great our circumstances are, are we truly satisfied? Or is what the prophet Haggai said true? We recently began a weekly discussion with our young family parents. It's been great. Our families have been truly blessed, and we say that often. But when we delved deeper, a number of people began to share that despite these blessings that we appreciate, they wonder if the life they have now is all there is to it. Whether there is more to their life's purpose and meaning.

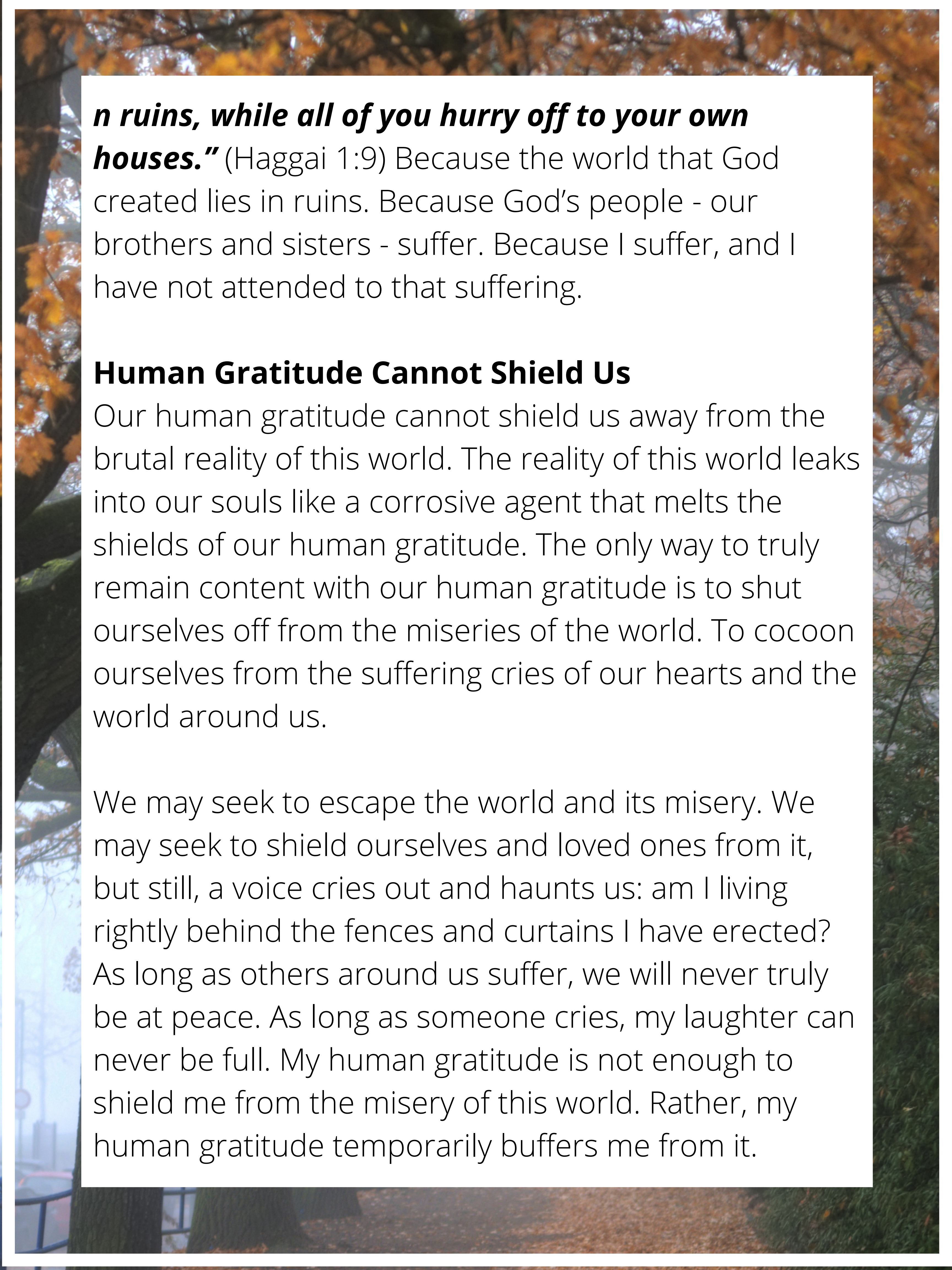
Even if our life is good, sometimes we feel that we are not fully satisfied. I think we are not fully satisfied, because deep down, we see the absurdity of our own good circumstances when compared to the random misfortune that exists out in the world. There is something off, something not right about the picture that makes us uneasy.

Our Suffering

As human beings, we are deeply connected creatures and seek a harmonious connection with the universe that we live in. Whether we know it or not, the plight of others seeps deep into our psyches. The suffering of others gnaws away at us. This is why when we are inundated with bad news, it depresses us. We feel anxious even though our own lives are going well. We need to shut it off or block it out to get back to our good spirits. We somehow know that we are unfairly privileged by luck and circumstance, and we feel pangs of guilt about it. We may try to push these feelings aside, but they remain eerily present in the shadows of our souls.

Our spirits are intimately connected with the world that God has created. I am indeed my brother's keeper, my sister's keeper. When one suffers, I suffer. In the midst of our abundance, in the deep recesses of our souls, we still feel very impoverished and unsatisfied.

The prophet Haggai asks why people feel this way: even though they have sown much, even though they eat, drink and clothe themselves. He gives God's response: ***"Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies i***

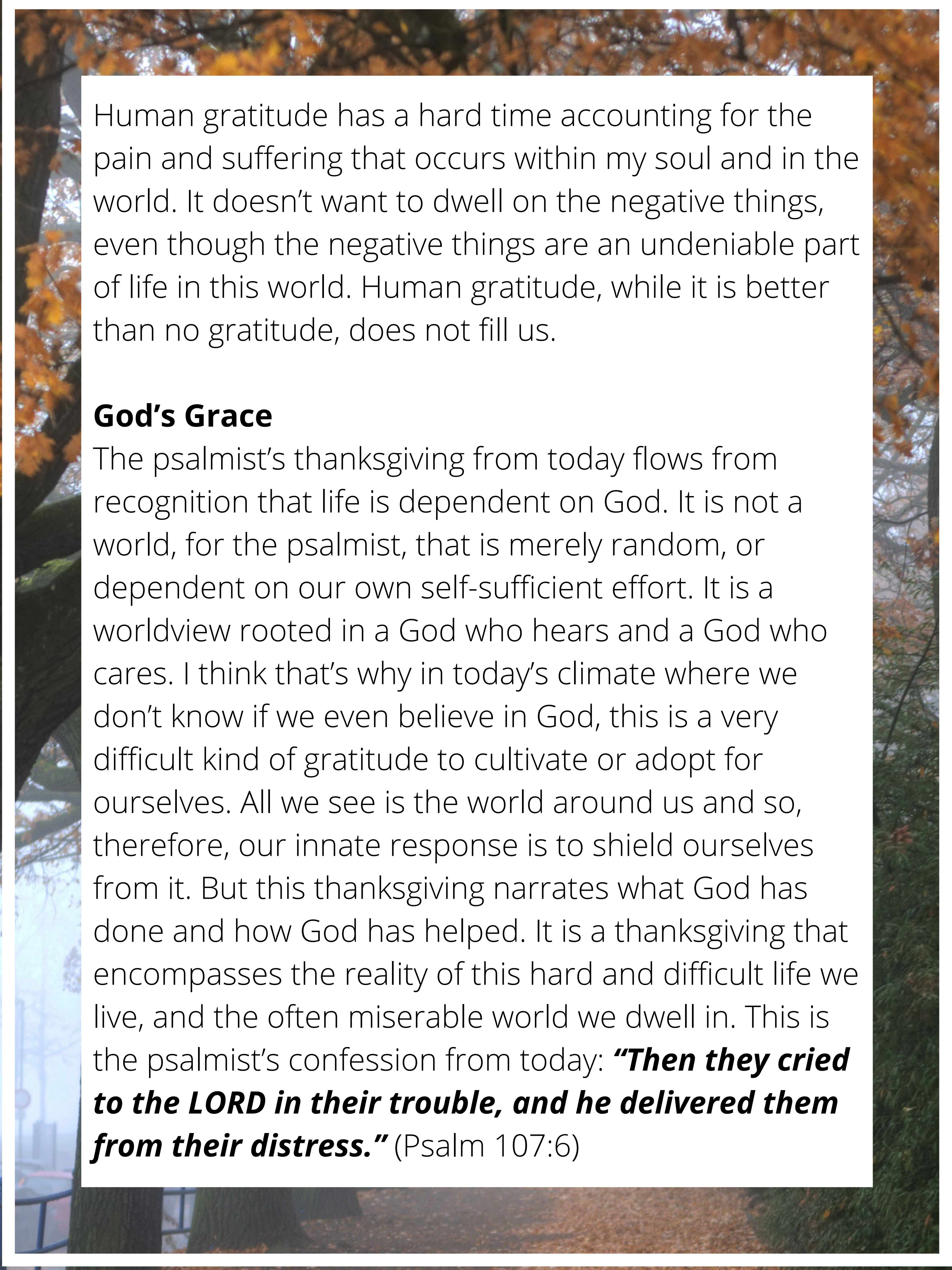


n ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses." (Haggai 1:9) Because the world that God created lies in ruins. Because God's people - our brothers and sisters - suffer. Because I suffer, and I have not attended to that suffering.

Human Gratitude Cannot Shield Us

Our human gratitude cannot shield us away from the brutal reality of this world. The reality of this world leaks into our souls like a corrosive agent that melts the shields of our human gratitude. The only way to truly remain content with our human gratitude is to shut ourselves off from the miseries of the world. To cocoon ourselves from the suffering cries of our hearts and the world around us.

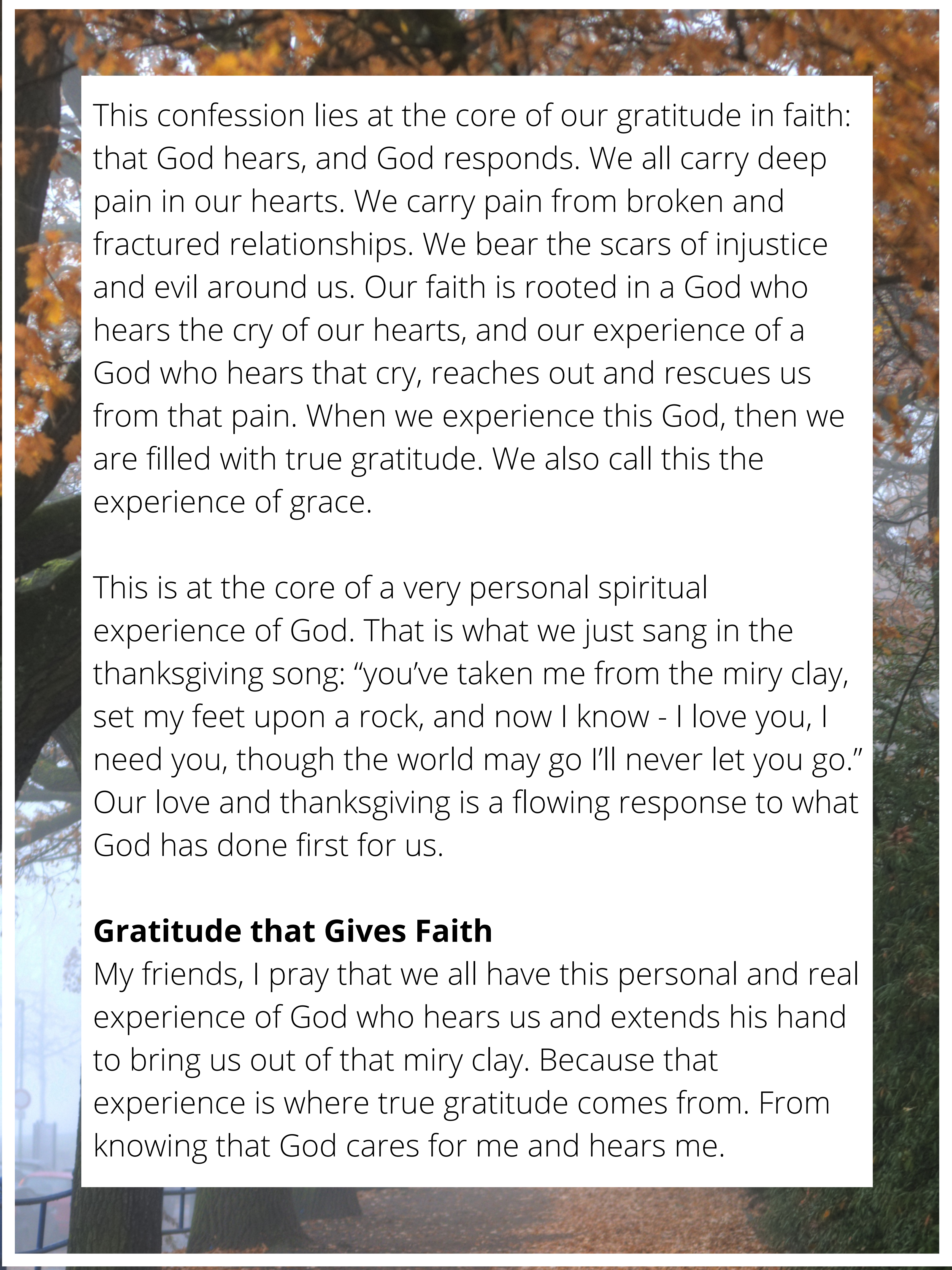
We may seek to escape the world and its misery. We may seek to shield ourselves and loved ones from it, but still, a voice cries out and haunts us: am I living rightly behind the fences and curtains I have erected? As long as others around us suffer, we will never truly be at peace. As long as someone cries, my laughter can never be full. My human gratitude is not enough to shield me from the misery of this world. Rather, my human gratitude temporarily buffers me from it.



Human gratitude has a hard time accounting for the pain and suffering that occurs within my soul and in the world. It doesn't want to dwell on the negative things, even though the negative things are an undeniable part of life in this world. Human gratitude, while it is better than no gratitude, does not fill us.

God's Grace

The psalmist's thanksgiving from today flows from recognition that life is dependent on God. It is not a world, for the psalmist, that is merely random, or dependent on our own self-sufficient effort. It is a worldview rooted in a God who hears and a God who cares. I think that's why in today's climate where we don't know if we even believe in God, this is a very difficult kind of gratitude to cultivate or adopt for ourselves. All we see is the world around us and so, therefore, our innate response is to shield ourselves from it. But this thanksgiving narrates what God has done and how God has helped. It is a thanksgiving that encompasses the reality of this hard and difficult life we live, and the often miserable world we dwell in. This is the psalmist's confession from today: ***"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."*** (Psalm 107:6)

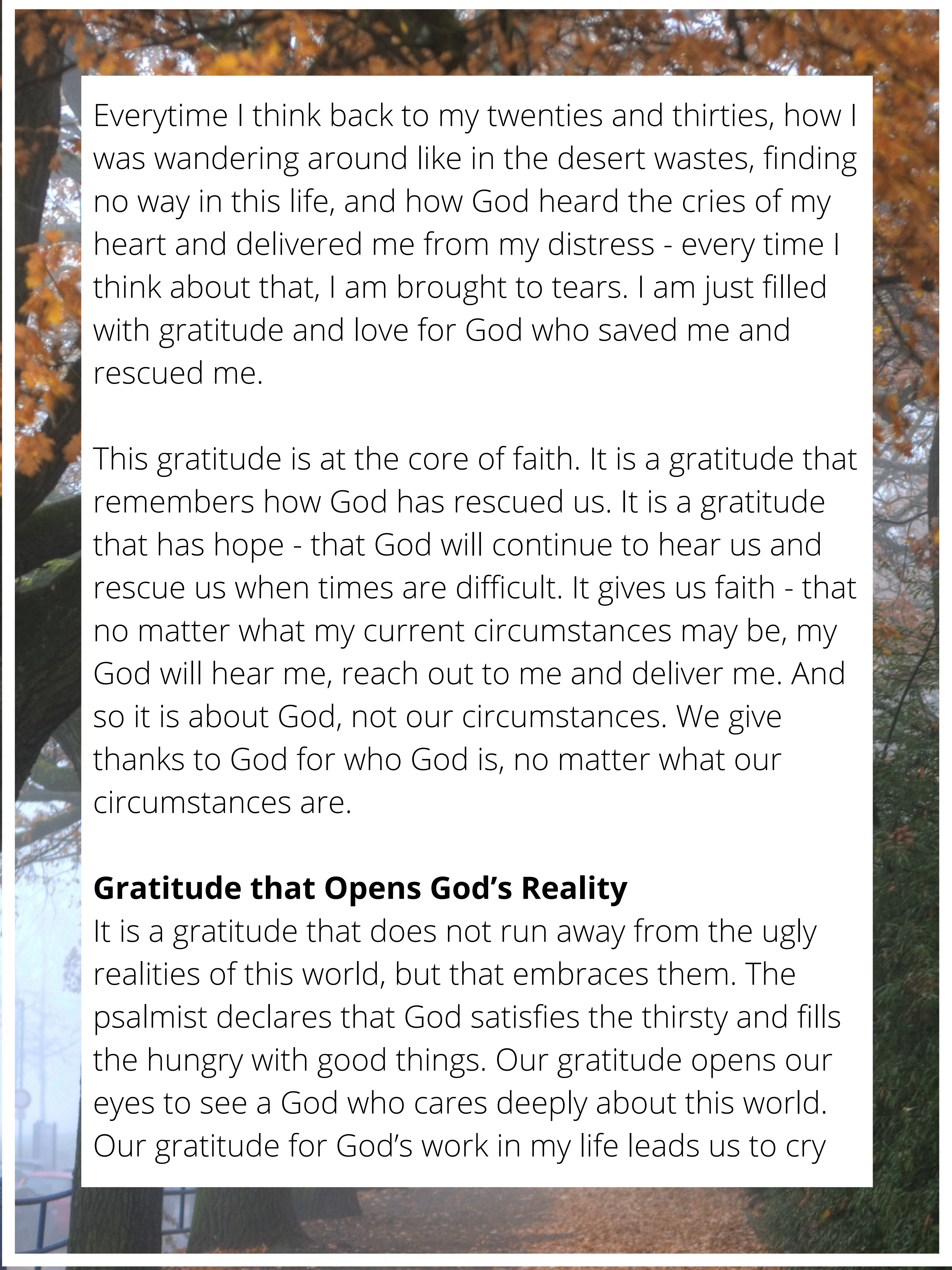


This confession lies at the core of our gratitude in faith: that God hears, and God responds. We all carry deep pain in our hearts. We carry pain from broken and fractured relationships. We bear the scars of injustice and evil around us. Our faith is rooted in a God who hears the cry of our hearts, and our experience of a God who hears that cry, reaches out and rescues us from that pain. When we experience this God, then we are filled with true gratitude. We also call this the experience of grace.

This is at the core of a very personal spiritual experience of God. That is what we just sang in the thanksgiving song: “you’ve taken me from the miry clay, set my feet upon a rock, and now I know - I love you, I need you, though the world may go I’ll never let you go.” Our love and thanksgiving is a flowing response to what God has done first for us.

Gratitude that Gives Faith

My friends, I pray that we all have this personal and real experience of God who hears us and extends his hand to bring us out of that miry clay. Because that experience is where true gratitude comes from. From knowing that God cares for me and hears me.

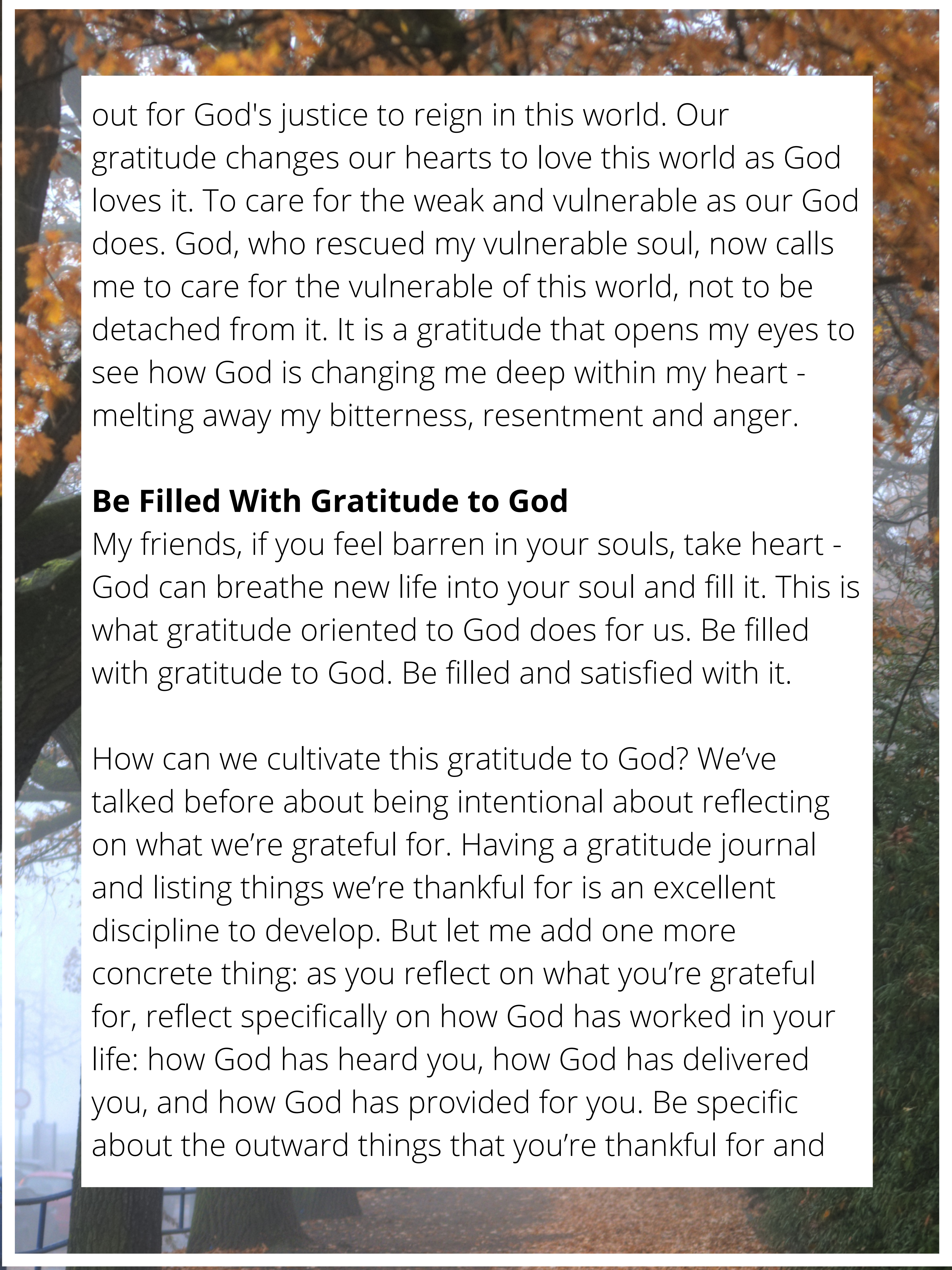


Everytime I think back to my twenties and thirties, how I was wandering around like in the desert wastes, finding no way in this life, and how God heard the cries of my heart and delivered me from my distress - every time I think about that, I am brought to tears. I am just filled with gratitude and love for God who saved me and rescued me.

This gratitude is at the core of faith. It is a gratitude that remembers how God has rescued us. It is a gratitude that has hope - that God will continue to hear us and rescue us when times are difficult. It gives us faith - that no matter what my current circumstances may be, my God will hear me, reach out to me and deliver me. And so it is about God, not our circumstances. We give thanks to God for who God is, no matter what our circumstances are.

Gratitude that Opens God's Reality

It is a gratitude that does not run away from the ugly realities of this world, but that embraces them. The psalmist declares that God satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. Our gratitude opens our eyes to see a God who cares deeply about this world. Our gratitude for God's work in my life leads us to cry

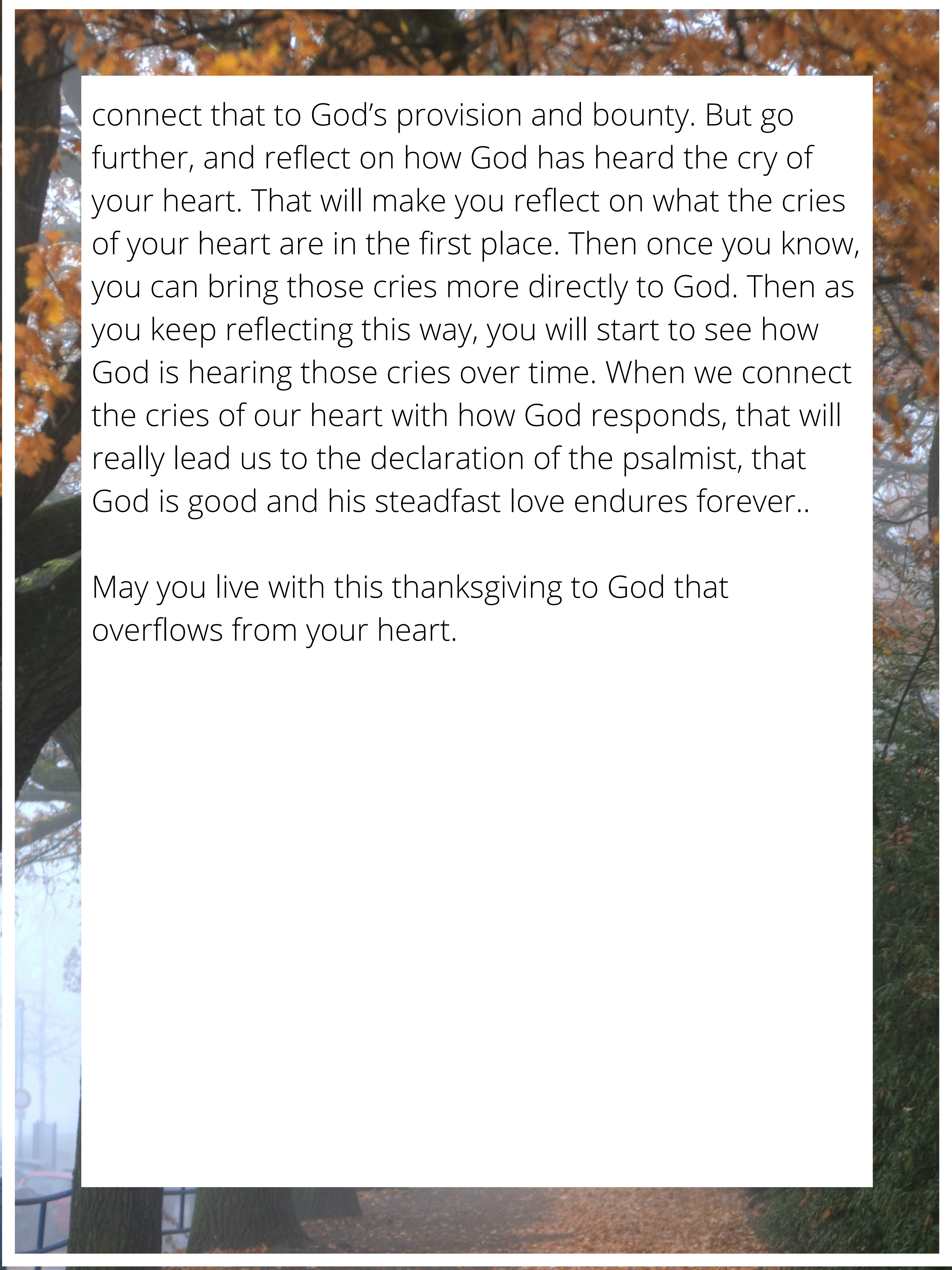


out for God's justice to reign in this world. Our gratitude changes our hearts to love this world as God loves it. To care for the weak and vulnerable as our God does. God, who rescued my vulnerable soul, now calls me to care for the vulnerable of this world, not to be detached from it. It is a gratitude that opens my eyes to see how God is changing me deep within my heart - melting away my bitterness, resentment and anger.

Be Filled With Gratitude to God

My friends, if you feel barren in your souls, take heart - God can breathe new life into your soul and fill it. This is what gratitude oriented to God does for us. Be filled with gratitude to God. Be filled and satisfied with it.

How can we cultivate this gratitude to God? We've talked before about being intentional about reflecting on what we're grateful for. Having a gratitude journal and listing things we're thankful for is an excellent discipline to develop. But let me add one more concrete thing: as you reflect on what you're grateful for, reflect specifically on how God has worked in your life: how God has heard you, how God has delivered you, and how God has provided for you. Be specific about the outward things that you're thankful for and



connect that to God's provision and bounty. But go further, and reflect on how God has heard the cry of your heart. That will make you reflect on what the cries of your heart are in the first place. Then once you know, you can bring those cries more directly to God. Then as you keep reflecting this way, you will start to see how God is hearing those cries over time. When we connect the cries of our heart with how God responds, that will really lead us to the declaration of the psalmist, that God is good and his steadfast love endures forever..

May you live with this thanksgiving to God that overflows from your heart.