

FINDING THE BRIDGE OVER OUR TROUBLED WATER (Philippians 4:6-9)

When this song was released, it was a turbulent time in America. The year was 1970. The Vietnam War was still raging. In recent years, three national figures had been assassinated: President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, who at the time was running to be the Democratic nominee for president. Racial strife was ongoing, as were student protests against the war.

People were longing for peace: international peace, racial peace, societal peace, and personal peace. This song addressed those longings.

If you read my devotional column in Friday's edition of the *Enid News & Eagle*, you know the song to which I refer. Now, if you read my column and don't remember the song, I'll forgive you because that sounds like something I would do. Whether or not you read the column, the song was written by Paul Simon and sung by Art Garfunkel. That song was the title track of their last album, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. It is likely the best song Simon ever wrote and certainly the best song Garfunkel ever sang. The song became an instant classic.

The same year that it was released, Elvis covered it, and it's been recorded by numerous singers, including Johnny Cash and Aretha Franklin who called it "a secular, gospel song."

Taking it at face value, the song is about a man who is expressing tender devotion to the one he loves. It wouldn't take much effort, however, to think of it as something God might say to His children.

I invite you to close your eyes as I read the lyrics and imagine God saying these words to you:

When you're weary
Feeling small
When tears are in your eyes
I'll dry them all
I'm on your side
Oh, when times get rough
And friends just can't be found

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

When you're down and out
When you're on the street
When evening falls so hard
I will comfort you
I'll take your part
Oh, when darkness comes
And pain is all around

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

Notice the last four lines of the third verse and the closing chorus:

Your time has come to shine
All your dreams are on their way
See how they shine
Oh, if you need a friend
I'm sailing right behind

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind

I want to submit to you that Jesus is our Bridge. He is the Bridge of our relationship with God. He serves as a Bridge of connection between you and me. He is the Bridge over the troubled waters that we are afraid will engulf us. Just like the generation of 1970, we, too, are looking for peace. Peace, my friend, is a Person, and Jesus is that Person. He is our peace.

Today, we are going to look at four verses in Philippians 4. Look with me at 4:6-9. We are going to consider, "Finding the Bridge Over Our Troubled Water." There are three things you and I need to do to find that peace God has for us.

Let Us Make Our Prayer Life Active

Look again at the beginning of v. 6. Notice that it is a clear command. It is not a suggestion. It is not a tip. Paul is not sharing a good idea that came to him one day. He is giving us a command. To put it in Old Testament language, we could say, "Thou shalt not be anxious about anything."

Let me ask you, "How well are you obeying this command?" Is there anything about which you are presently worrying? Your finances? Your health? Your country? Your kids? Your spouse? Your church? Your future?

I think worry must be the favorite pastime of many because they do so much of it. Do you worry so much that if you stopped worrying that you would worry over not being worried?

How can we expel worry from our lives? Eliminating worry is achieved by replacement. To stop something, you have to start something else. You are not going to successfully stop worrying by saying to yourself, "Well, I'm just not going to worry anymore." You can try to do that if you want to. Maybe you already have. How did that work for you? I guess not very well.

Paul tells us to stop worrying we must start praying. Turn your worries into prayers.

I made public my call to preach on October 17, 1982. Soon afterwards, the pastor of

my home church asked me to preach on a Sunday night. I preached my first sermon on November 14th. At the time, I was a freshman at OBU. Just over two weeks later, I received a letter in my campus mailbox. It was postmarked, “OKC, OK November 29, 1982.” It was a letter written by my dad. I don’t think I had ever got a letter from my dad before then, and I don’t ever remember receiving one after that.

I saved the letter for many years, but after several moves, it eventually got misplaced or lost. I don’t remember all that he wrote, but I do know that it was a letter of encouragement. In that letter, he paraphrased Philippians 4:6. He wrote, “Don’t worry about anything, but pray about everything.”

Those are words by which to live. If you will do that, you will evict worry from your life.

Paul uses four different words to describe the same thing: prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, requests. That is not meant to be an exhaustive list. There are others words we use to describe different aspects of prayer: intercession, confession, adoration.

The rules of golf allow a player to carry 14 clubs in his golf bag. When I play golf, I carry 14 clubs. Part of playing golf well is being good at club selection, knowing what club to use when. I hit the ball the farthest with my driver, but I’m not going to use it from the fairway or the rough because it is designed to hit a ball off a tee not off of low-cut grass or a deep, grassy lie.

Part of praying well is knowing what aspect of prayer to use at the right time. It is of no use praising God if you need to be about the business of confessing your sin. Instead of always asking God for something, we need to make sure we spend plenty of time thanking Him for what He has already done, is doing, and for what He will do.

Praying much is the key to overcoming worry. Verse 7 shows us the net effect of praying much. This is a wonderful promise. Who wouldn’t want a peace that is so big that he or she can’t even comprehend it? Paul again uses a military metaphor. He describes this kind of peace as being a garrison of soldiers standing guard over our hearts and minds. This peace will not allow any harmful emotion or hurtful thought to gain entrance into our lives.

Think for a moment about that phrase, “the peace of God.” The idea is not that God’s owns a product or a commodity called *peace*, and He wants to give you some of what He owns. That’s not it. The words *the peace of God* refer to the peace that God Himself experiences. Have you ever thought about the fact that our God is a God who is at peace with Himself? Jesus illustrates this. Read the gospels. You never find Jesus frazzled. You never see Jesus wringing His hands wondering what He’s supposed to do or wondering how things are going to turn out. There are times that Jesus is disappointed with His disciples. Often, He is ticked off with the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. He is never, however, agitated, fearful, befuddled, anxious, or worried. Instead, Jesus is confident in His Father’s care, so much so that He is able to sleep in a boat during a terrible storm.

Jesus lived His life worry-free, and He wants that for you.

I once heard about the owner of a large, successful business. He was always worried about his business. He couldn’t enjoy life because of his excessive worry. One day, he decided to hire someone to worry for him. Instead of hiring someone from outside his company, he promoted an up-and-coming, junior executive to this newly created vice-presidential position. The owner interviewed the young man and was convinced he was

just the man for the job of carrying all of his worries and concerns.

The impressive, young man was not certain he wanted to take on these new duties until he saw what his new salary was going to be. He said “yes.” After assuming his new position, he decided he should get acquainted with the financial standing of the company. He spent a couple of hours pouring over financial reports. He discovered that the company was barely making ends meet.

He went to his boss and said, “Sir, I see that some months we take in less than we make. How are you going to afford to pay me my new salary?”

The owner smiled broadly and said to the young executive, “That’s your concern, not mine.”

We read in 1 Peter 5:7, “Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about what happens to you” (NLT). The good news is that you don’t have to pay God to do your worrying. He will gladly take all your concerns if you will just give them to Him in prayer.

Let Us Make Our Thought Life Attractive

In addition to having an active prayer life, we need an attractive thought life. Look at v. 8. Don’t get too excited when a preacher says, “Finally.” Paul used that word back in the first verse of chapter one. After he says what he wants to here, he’s still got more to say. By writing “finally,” I think Paul is telling us, “This is important. Don’t miss this.”

In this one verse, Paul gives us eight things we should think about. It is not only important what we pray about, it is also, and maybe even more important what we think about. A dietician might tell you, “You are what you eat.” God’s word tells us, “We are what we contemplate.” Jesus said, “As a man thinks in His heart, so is He.

This word that is translated as “think” in my version is a word that means “to focus your mind upon.” It has variously been translated as: *reckon, calculate, take into account, and evaluate*. He tells us eight things we need to ponder well.

Some people have a reading list, certain books they want to get to someday. Most of us take a shopping list with us to the store, things we need to purchase. Paul gives us a thought list, things about which we need to think deeply:

- **True Things**—whatever conforms to life as it is and as it ought to be.
- **Honorable Things**—whatever is majestic and awe-inspiring. These are things that lift the mind and win our respect.
- **Just Things**—whatever gives God and others their due.
- **Pure Things**—whatever is free from sin and defilement.
- **Lovely Things**—whatever is winsome and attractive.
- **Commendable Things**—whatever is admirable and things that are highly respected.
- **Excellent Things**—whatever is truly virtuous.
- **Worthy of Praise Things**—whatever deserves to be held up high.

These are things that should command our attention. But do they? Are these the things that are depicted on TV and in the movies? Largely not. Instead, we watch and even

stream into our homes things that are untrue, dishonorable, unjust, impure, unlovely, uncommendable, and things that are tawdry and unworthy of respect.

What is even worse is that these things do not cause us to think. They cause us to feel and react without thinking.

Paul Robinson, a professor at Stanford University wrote an article in which he claimed, “TV can’t educate.” He went on to say, “The only way to learn is by reading.” TV, films, pictures, they don’t create thought; they just grab your emotions. He wrote that educational TV is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. In our culture, we are losing the ability to think.

Our inability to think is causing a host of problems, but one of them is the over abundance of worry. Some have accused worriers of thinking too much. That is not the problem. Worriers worry because they don’t think enough. John MacArthur wrote, “If you worry it’s because you don’t think enough; you’re being bludgeoned by your circumstances.”

Listen to what Martin Lloyd Jones wrote:

The whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he doesn’t think . . . Christian faith is essentially thinking . . . The trouble with the person of little faith is that instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else. That is the essence of worry. That is not thought; that is the absence of thought.

God gave us a Book. He didn’t give us a video. He gave us a Book because He wants us to think, and He wants us to think about things that will build us up.

If you lack peace in your life, give attention to your thought life. Follow the thought list Paul gives us in Philippians 4:8. Think on those things. Read good books and good literature. Watch movies that teach good lessons and tell good stories, not just ones that simply appeal to baser emotions. Fill your mind with good art and good music. We are what we think, and ponder, and contemplate.

Let Us Make Our New Life Attentive

Let’s look at v. 9. We talked about what the words, *the peace of God*, mean. We said that refers to the peace which God Himself experiences. Let’s think now about the phrase, *the God of peace*. This is comparable to Isaiah’s prophecy that the Messiah would be called the *Prince of Peace*. If you say that someone is a Prince or King of something, you are not just identifying where that person is from. If I read in the Bible that David is the King of Israel, that statement means much more than merely that David is from Israel. It means that Israel is the realm over which he rules.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Peace is His realm. As the God of Peace, God’s realm is peace, and those who come under His rule live in a land of peace. That does not mean that all the circumstances of our life are peaceful. It does mean that even though we are on a small boat in a lake in a great storm, we can rest peacefully in the knowledge that our God is in control.

According to v. 9, there are some things we must do in order to know that the God of

peace is with us. Paul tells the believers in Philippi that there are four things they are to practice. They are to live out what they have **learned** from Paul, what they have **received** from Paul, what they have **heard** from Paul, and what they have **seen** in Paul.

This calls for attentiveness on their part. You and I, likewise, are not going to learn much if we are not paying attention. We are not going to receive much if we are not paying attention. We are not going to hear much if we are not listening. We are not going to see much if we are not watching.

Our growth in Christlikeness demands that we watch, that we listen, that we focus, that we give our attention to the One we have been called to follow.

The truth is that neither you nor I need any help in living our old life. We don't need any instruction in how to be selfish. We know how to be proud instinctively. We are skilled at living a self-directed life without having to resort to self-help books to how to do that. No one has to teach us to be godless. We've got that down pat.

We do need help in living the new life. The NT teaches that when we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are made new on the inside. We don't lose our old nature, but we are given a new nature. This old nature and new nature do battle. We need to nurture the new nature because living the new life is new to us. We can't rely on our old habits to live the new life.

Paul recognized the believers in Philippi needed help to live the new life; so, he said, "Follow me. Do what I do. Pay attention to what I say and how I live."

We don't have Paul living among us, but we do have 13 of the letters that he wrote. We have a good idea of what he believed and how he lived. He is still a good model to follow. More than that, we have four gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. They clearly tell us how He lived and what He taught. Pay attention to His life and His teaching.

Beyond that, we have the Spirit of Jesus living in us. He is our Teacher. He helps us understand this Book. Pay attention to Him as He whispers words of counsel, words of comfort, words of caution, words of correction, and words of challenge.

Frank Lloyd Wright was a world-famous architect, arguably the most accomplished architect of the 20th century. He designed homes, office buildings, museums, and other buildings. Price Tower in Bartlesville, OK is a Frank Lloyd Wright design. He once told of an incident that may have seemed insignificant at the time, but it had a profound influence on the rest of his life. The winter he was nine-years-old, Frank walked across a snow-covered field with his reserved, no-nonsense uncle. When the two of them reached the far end of the field, the uncle stopped Frank. He pointed out his own tracks in the snow, which were straight and true. Then, he pointed out young Frank's tracks, which meandered all over the field. The uncle said, "Notice how your tracks wander aimlessly from the fence to the cattle to the woods and back again. And see how my tracks aim directly to my goal. There is an important lesson in that."

Years later, Wright told how this experience greatly contributed to his philosophy of life. "I determined right then," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "not to miss most things in life, as my uncle had."

Our goal is not to get through life as efficiently as possible. Our goal is to follow Jesus wherever He leads, and He just might take us hither and yon. Here is the point: If

we don't pay attention to Him, we will miss much of what He wants us to see and do. So, look and listen well.

As we live our lives we will encounter troubled water often, but God has a bridge for us, and His name is Jesus. He laid down His life for us so that He can live in us and through us.