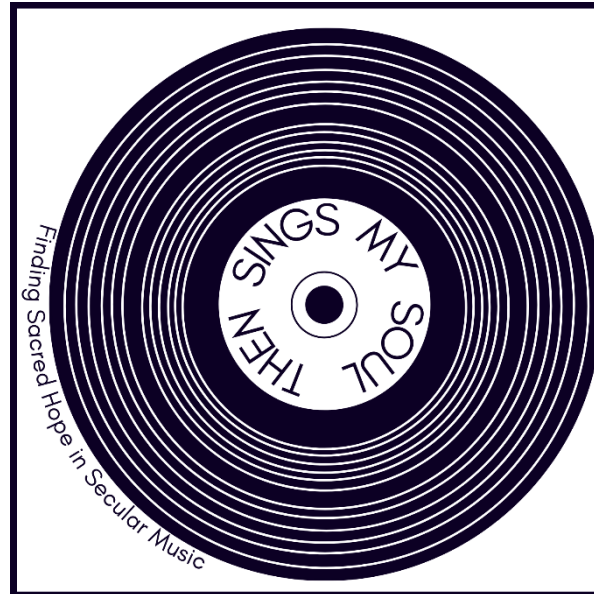


**Columbia, Missouri**  
**The Worship of God • July 24, 2022**



**THE SCRIPTURE**  
**1 Kings 19:3-13a**

When Elijah saw how things were, he ran for dear life to Beersheba, far in the south of Judah. He left his young servant there and then went on into the desert another day's journey. He came to a lone broom bush and collapsed in its shade, wanting in the worst way to be done with it all—to just die: "Enough of this, GOD! Take my life—I'm ready to join my ancestors in the grave!" Exhausted, he fell asleep under the lone broom bush. Suddenly an angel shook him awake and said, "Get up and eat!" He looked around and, to his surprise, right by his head were a loaf of bread baked on some coals and a jug of water. He ate the meal and went back to sleep. The angel of GOD came back, shook him awake again, and said, "Get up and eat some more—you've got a long journey ahead of you."

He got up, ate, and drank his fill, and set out. Nourished by that meal, he walked forty days and nights, all the way to the mountain of God, to Horeb. When he got there, he crawled into a cave and went to sleep. Then the word of GOD came to him: "**So Elijah,**

**what are you doing here?** “I’ve been working my heart out for the GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies,” said Elijah. “The people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed the places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I’m the only one left, and now they’re trying to kill me.” Then he was told, “Go, stand on the mountain at attention before GOD. GOD will pass by.”

A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before GOD, but GOD wasn’t to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but GOD wasn’t in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but GOD wasn’t in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper. When Elijah heard the quiet voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there. A quiet voice asked, “**So Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing here?**”

**THE MESSAGE**  
**“Then Sings My Soul: Bridge Over Troubled Water”**  
**Mark Briley**

*“I could really use a word right now.”* Have you been in that place? Have you been so low, or have you been so lost in the chaotic noise of your life that you just needed a word; a song; a sign? Maybe that word is a question: *“What are you doing here?”*

God asks Elijah that very question twice in our Scripture focus today. Elijah is on the run. His life wasn’t going as planned. He stood and fought for what he felt was right, but now he’s alone, tired, hungry, depressed, and feeling like it wasn’t worth it. As his run has slowed to a walk in the wilderness, his ear buds hold the melody to Simon and Garfunkel’s *“Bridge Over Troubled Water,”* which just happens to be our song of focus in our *“Then Sings My Soul”* series today. Elijah lives those lyrics: he *is* weary. He feels small. His tear ducts are dry. Ultimately, he can do nothing else but lay down. In this surrender, however, he finds he is not alone. He quiets himself enough to hear God whisper: *“All your dreams are on their way.”* He finds new purpose. Have you quieted yourself enough to hear God’s whisper? Could you really use a word right now? Your dream just may be on the way.

That all sounds good, right? But it’s so hard to hear the whisper, isn’t it. We’re generally hoping for a little louder confirmation, a little more rousing oomph behind the word like a coach’s locker room speech.



Hall of Fame Coach, Jim Valvano (or *Jimmy V* as he is most known), died at the young age of 47 from cancer.<sup>1</sup> He was back all over the news this week as the annual ESPY awards highlighted his foundation for cancer research that has raised over 300-million-dollars. Just weeks before his death, he spoke to that very audience and shared about his journey, what he learned, what he hoped for his three daughters and the world.

He spoke of the first speech he had ever given. He wanted to share a word... an inspiration... a motivational, memorable word that would lead his team to victory. He was the freshman coach for Rutgers University. He was hardly 21 himself, leading 19-year-olds. He didn't know how to give a word, motivate a team, or even how to answer the question, "*What are you doing here?*" His idol was famed Green Bay Packer coach, Vince Lombardi. He read his book called *Commitment to Excellence*. In it, he found Lombardi's first locker-room speech. It was short, sweet, and emotive. Normally, you get in that locker room some 25 minutes ahead of go time, but Lombardi waited to build suspense. The team began to wonder where he was. Three minutes before they are to take the field, Coach bangs the door open and paces back and forth, staring at the players. Lombardi shouts, "*All eyes on me.*" Jimmy V's thinking, "*Ah, this is good stuff. I can do this.*" He keeps reading. Lombardi goes on: "*Gentlemen, we will be successful this year if you can focus on three things, and three things only. Your family, your religion, and the Green Bay Packers.*" They ripped and roared, knocked the walls down, and the rest was history.

So, this young coach, Jimmy V, thinks, "*That's awesome. I can do that – 'Your family, your religion, and Rutgers basketball.' Done.*" And so, the first game is coming and he's following the plan. He makes the team wait. He's practicing right outside of the locker room: *family, religion, Rutgers basketball*. He waits and waits. Three-minute mark, he goes to bang down the door just like Lombardi. Boom! Doesn't open. Almost breaks his arm. So, a little lackluster start, but he stumbles on in and keeps it up, pacing, staring down the players and says, "*All eyes on me.*" These kids just wanted to play – they're 19 years old! He keeps going though – it worked for Lombardi. "*Gentlemen, we'll be successful this year if you can focus on three things, and three things only. Your family, your religion, and the Green Bay Packers!*"

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<sup>1</sup> [www.v.org](http://www.v.org). The V Foundation for Cancer Research. The part of Coach's speech shared in this message was originally shared by Coach V at The ESPY Awards in 1993. You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuoVM9nm42E>

He said the wrong team! It was a humbling launch that he's never forgotten. We all want to *share* a word. We want to *hear* a word. And we want it to be **loud** and clear. So that didn't work so well. But a word that Jimmy V shared that has staying power was one he used with his underdog team at North Carolina State as part of their 1983 Championship run. His word to that team? "*Survive and Advance.*" It was but a whisper and the very thing his team needed to press through one game at a time to victory.

Elijah is looking for a word. He'd like the rousing locker room speech, but he'll take whatever he can get. What he gets is a word of the "*Survive and advance,*" variety. It's soft; a whisper actually.

And it follows one of the first and greatest professional and spiritual achievements of his life. Now... he would go on to be a first-ballot hall of famer when it comes to our faith tradition but in this moment, he's had that first high of honoring God, really embracing the calling on his life and winning a big battle against 50 other prophets who were representing their gods while Elijah stood alone in defense of the God we claim. Elijah survives and advances the cause but then the big letdown. He's alone. People he's just defeated are after his head. And what kind of life is ahead of him from there?

Have you been in such a space? You've poured every ounce of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy that you've got but then what? "*What are you doing here?*" is the God question. *What are you doing here?* It's burn out. It's depression. It's uncertainty.

Paul Simon wrote the song "*Bridge Over Troubled Water*" in that same sort of space. It's why I imagine Elijah listening to it as he gives over his being to full collapse. Actually, it was probably the second Simon and Garfunkel<sup>2</sup> song on his playlist. "*Sound of Silence*" had to have been on there. "*Hello darkness my old friend...*" So haunting.



But "*Bridge Over Troubled Water?*" Simon's not sure where the song really came from. "*One minute it wasn't there,*" he said, "*and the next minute the whole line was there.*" He shocked even himself saying, "*This is considerably better than I usually write.*" Simon goes on to say that the song seemed too simple at first, but that's really what has made it universal. He was in a gospel groove at the time. Every night when he would come home, he would put on *The Swan Silvertones*, a gospel group that just

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<sup>2</sup> [simonandgarfunkel.com](http://simonandgarfunkel.com). While this is the official site of the duo, the stories told in today's message are found in many various places and articles easily reached online. As I utilized many, I don't list them all individually here.

grabbed his soul. Lead singer, Claude Jeter, did sing this Jesus lyric in one of their songs: *"I'll be your bridge over deep water if you trust in my name,"* which sparked something in Simon. He later met Jeter in person, acknowledging his debt to that creative influence and he handed him a check for \$1,000 in gratitude.

It is a soulful song – recorded by more than 50 artists now and covered by thousands since it was first released more than 50 years ago. Elvis. Johnny Cash. Aretha. John Legend. Willie Nelson. Mary J and Andrea Bocelli and one of my favorite covers of the song – a duet by Josh Groban and Brian McKnight. It has had staying power. And... it's just a whisper.

They never thought the track would take off. Even the orchestral arranger, who added the strings to the track, sent the music back with his parts added but the title, as he translated it, on top of the music read, *"Like a Pitcher of Water."* That's what he thought the song was called. Paul Simon still has the music with that title on it framed in his home. *"Nothing will amount of this song,"* they said. They knew it was beautiful, but it was a five-minute hymn offered in a whisper, not a three-minute upbeat, hardcore track that radio was pushing out in those days. But it was huge hit around the entire world. Sold millions. Won Grammys.

It's just a whisper, friends. It only had two verses at first but in studio, something Simon never does, he was encouraged to write a third verse – to let the first two be a runway for the third verse that swells as a power ballad. Simon hesitantly agreed and quickly wrote, *"Sail on, silver girl."* People wondered if this was a drug reference, alluding to the silver hypodermic needle, but Simon laughs and says, *"No. It was about my wife, Peggy, whose first silver hairs were starting to appear."* A song this soft, sung in a whisper, with a verse about Paul Simon's wife-at-the-time's greying hair – at one time the biggest song ever produced. Can you imagine? Sometimes... AC/DC's *"Thunderstruck"* or Guns N Roses, *"Welcome to the Jungle,"* just doesn't speak what is real and needed. They can pump you up but God's voice? Thunderous? I'm not so sure.

Elijah stumbles upon a cave, and before entering and hibernating for a while, God asks that question we've been pondering, *"What are you doing here?"* He's tired. He's wandered 40 days in the wilderness at this point; his own version of *"Naked and Afraid,"* and he crashes in a cave. So, when God asks, *"What are you doing here?"* he complains: *"I'm doing all the work here, God. No help. I'm the only faithful one left. Nobody gives a care about nothing. And I'm done for."*

God receives it and essentially says, *"Are you even really listening for me, or are you just complaining most of the time?"* Maybe an honest question we all need to ask

ourselves. Then he says, “*Get out of the darkness of this cave and stand out in the light and pay attention.*”

Eli stumbles out to the edge and waits. The wind blows hard enough to crack rocks but no God. This harsh wind is like the negative voices in your life. Just negative. Constantly. The negativity can crack rocks and God’s not hanging out in the negativity so quit looking for God there.

Next was an earthquake. Elijah puts on his hard hat and hangs onto the side of the cave but no God there either. This may be the noise of society in your life. The earth is shaking with conflict, and people want you to live in a noisy, nonstop outrage. It seems God’s not mixed up in that so much either.

Then the fire. Surely God is in the fire – you know, the whole burning bush thing: “*Take off your Hey Dudes or Birkenstocks and such for this is holy ground.*” This may be the dumpster-fire-of-the-day variety. Can’t find God there either.

But then... the whisper: “*So Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing here?*” And Elijah has the same answer – but I see him meeting whisper with whisper here. It’s less complaint and more confession. “*God... it’s a mess. I need help. What now?*” And God says, “*Now that spirit I can work with.*” And God lays out a plan forward from there.

This is the nature of your child who comes to you breathing heavy, scared, worked up. What do you do? You can’t reason with them until they are breathing steady again and can hear you at a whisper’s level. Then and only then do you have an ear. What do you need to release that has you on that noisy edge? An edge that surely is preventative of you hearing God’s next direction? Lay down. Listen for the voice of God that whispers: “*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.*” And then that line repeated... something Paul Simon says he never did in songs – it’s too much. But he couldn’t help it just as God asked the same question again: “*What are you doing here?*” “*Like a bridge over troubled water, I will ease your mind.*”

God will guide you from that calm place. Make space for that calm. Find an accountability partner to walk forward with you and step in faith. For whatever reason, “*Bridge Over Troubled Water*” has made that kind of spiritual connection with the world ever since. It’s been offered in thousands of worship services. It’s been part of church conference gatherings with flannel graph bridges being placed one by one by various ministries over the chaotic waters running underneath. That was one source of inspiration by a Broadway friend who submitted the song for the series.

That song... and the album that bore the same name would be the last album Simon and Garfunkel would make together. They were childhood friends from New York City – even first started as a duo entitled, *“Tom and Jerry,”* inspired by the cartoon that I presume resembled them in size and style. They ultimately created this song that is still offered with deep passion and hope today and yet... they can’t stand each other. They came together off and on through the years – mostly to perform this song – but can’t even do that now. In 1990, Simon and Garfunkel were inducted into the *Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame*. Garfunkel thanked Simon, calling him *“the person who most enriched my life by putting those songs through me.”* Simon responded, *“Arthur and I agree about almost nothing. But it’s true, I have enriched his life quite a bit.”* After performing three songs, the duo left that induction without speaking and haven’t since as far as I understand. Simon was later inducted to the Hall of Fame as a solo artist and said, *“I regret the ending of our friendship. I hope that someday before we die, we will make peace with each other,”* adding after a pause, *“No rush.”* Just last year, Garfunkel gave an interview for *American Songwriter* magazine and referenced the song saying, *“I’ll be your friend when you’re in trouble. Well, I’m in trouble now that I’m 78, Paul. If you’re supposed to be my friend, coming behind me, give me a call.”*

I wish this ended cleaner for them... and maybe it still will. A song that, as a gentle whisper, says, *“I’ve got you. I’m with you. I’ll be a bridge through and over the hard things. I will ease your mind.”* It’s amazing that its authors have lost this beautiful message to the troubled water. I say this because it’s the truth of their journey, and also because it’s the truth we often live within ourselves.

A second Broadway member who submitted this song for the series said this song has been personal for a long while. It came out while their brother was in the Army and serving in Vietnam. He came home bitter, disillusioned, and forever changed. It was the story for many. Our Broadway friends said, *“I saw this song as one to let him know that his sister would be there for him.”* Unfortunately, the brother’s bitterness continued to grow, and he lived a further alienated life until his death. She said, *“I could have given up on this song at that point – like it didn’t work – but I’ve held onto the truly eternal hope of what the song offers the world.”*

Sometimes the only word we can hear is *“Survive and Advance.”* Be we are made for more than survival. We are made to hear the whisper of God, to settle ourselves enough to hear clearly and press forward, and to be a bridge for each other into the very presence of God.

I am now invested in Simon and Garfunkel’s reconciliation and pray for it. I’m invested in the eternal peace of our Broadway friend that holds onto this song with hope. And, friends, I’m invested in this hope for your life, too. I see you. I hear you. I love you and we’re shouldering this season together.

The Apostle Paul said, “*As far as it’s up to you, be reconciled to each other.*” In what relationship to you need to truly be a bridge over the troubled water of the past? To truly let that water, go under the bridge; forgive and move forward. That heals. So, let’s tune out the noise – the wind and earthquakes and fire and hear God’s voice asking ever so patiently, “*What are you doing here?*” And when we can quiet ourselves enough to hear it... I trust God will follow with the next steps forward. May that... ease your mind. Your dream may just be on its way.

### **Song of Focus**

#### **“*Bridge Over Troubled Water*”**

by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel

©1969 Paul Simon

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.

Sail on silver girl, sail on by.  
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.

**BROAD HEARTS    BROAD MINDS    BROAD REACH**