

September 19, 2021

**GOD'S GIFT OF IMAGINATION**



Pure Imagination

Josh Groban

from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOfaqBBxrf>

**Philippians 4:9**

**Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

## EMILY'S BRIDGE

Emily stared at the notice on the bulletin board at Peabody and Sons Architectural Firm, where she was interning. The colorful flyer had been sent out across the area that the city was looking to build a new bridge. She glanced around, checking to see if anyone was watching as she removed the notice from the bulletin board, took it to the copier, and printed a copy. She then carefully placed it back on the board, making sure to use the same pinhole.

The bridge was a part of the Jungle Park that the city planners had been working on for decades. The Jungle Park was to be a place of recreation for all the people in the area. Beyond its theme, what made the park unique was that the entire area was to be located on a large island that rested in the middle of the local lake.

The island would have a football field surrounded by a track. There would be tennis courts, a couple of baseball fields, basketball and volleyball courts, and several soccer fields. Scattered all over the island would be treehouses, swings, carousels, and everything that could encourage a young person's imagination.

The bridge to this island needed to reflect the uniqueness of the park. The city planners wanted the bridge to engage with the public before they even stepped onto the island. They didn't want just a bridge. They wanted to start the jungle experience as people crossed over to the island. The notice said that they were looking for imagination more than they were looking for practicality when considering designs. All concepts would be welcomed and considered.

Emily folded up the copy of the notice and put it into her purse. She wanted to go home and start putting her thoughts on paper, but it was a little after lunch, and she still had a lot of work to do today. Still, Emily's mind drifted while she worked her way through the pile on her desk. At five o'clock, Emily packed up her purse and was out the door.

As soon as she arrived at her apartment, she put down her purse and made a beeline for the second-hand drafting table that her dad had given her. It had come from his office before he retired. Her dad had been an architect as well, and she wanted to follow in his footsteps. She tagged her paper to the table, pulled out her pencils, and went to work, letting her imagination run wild. Without stopping for dinner, she continued working late into the night. It was Friday, and she didn't have to be at work in the morning.

Emily continued to work through the weekend, seldom stopping to eat. Her work had gone from pencils to pens to watercolors. She did not need to turn in the artwork for several weeks, but she couldn't get her mind to stop racing.

She awoke on Monday morning, asleep at the drafting table. The alarm clock was blaring from her bedroom. Emily had to get to work. A quick shower, and she was out the door. Emily barely made it to work on time, stopping long enough to grab a coffee and a quick muffin. But suddenly, she realized that she was no longer stressed. She also realized that she could not remember how the state of the project before she had fallen asleep.

Arriving home that evening, she headed directly for the drafting table and found she had somehow finished the rendering. What she had in her mind was now on paper. She carefully removed the tape from the corners and rolled it up. Then she put the painting into a cardboard tube, sealed it up, and set it by the door. There was no more to do. No matter what the city planners said, Emily knew that she had done her best work.

Emily dropped the tube off at the city planning office on the way to work on Tuesday and then put it out of her mind. She had too much work on her desk to worry about what was probably a lark anyway. Emily went about her regular work the rest of the week, hardly thinking about the project.

On Monday morning, when she arrived at work, there was a note on her desk that she should see Jason Peabody before starting her day. Jason was the son of Aaron Peabody, the founder of Peabody and Sons. Emily knew that it could only mean one thing. In her efforts to get the rendering done, she must have missed something important in all the paperwork on her desk. Today would probably be the end of her internship.

When she arrived at Jason's office, he asked her to close the door behind her. On his desk was the rendering that Emily had dropped off at the city planners. She was going to get it now. She hadn't told anyone that she had been working on a drawing for that bridge.

Jason asked her to take a seat. "Emily, how long have you worked here?" he asked.

“Five months, Mr. Peabody. And I am so sorry if I have done something wrong. That was just a little whim of mine. I didn’t mean to offend anyone or steal anyone’s thunder. I’m just an intern, and I do like my job here....”

Jason waved her to be quiet and to stop rambling. “Emily, calm down. Everything is fine. I did not call you in here to terminate you. I have a dilemma that I need your help to solve. It seems the planning commissioner came to see me this morning and gave me this drawing. Emily, I didn’t know you could do this. I don’t think anyone here knew you could. We all think you do good work, but this is exceptional. The planning commission has stopped looking for designs because this is exactly what they want. They have to put it out for bid, but we are already the favorite because you work here. This project is a big feather in your cap and ours as well.”

“But, Mr. Peabody, you said you have a dilemma. How can I help?”

“Well, it’s like this. It seems that we have a project plan to put together for this bid. I’m going to have to add a couple of people. I’ve chatted with my dad and brothers, and we want you to work on this full time. But I can’t give the job to an intern. So, we have decided to offer you a full-time position. We will help you pull together a team, but your input is key to making this happen. After all, it is your vision that got us this opportunity. But that would mean that you would no longer be an intern, and we would have to pay you a lot more money. How will we ever talk you into it?”

They both smiled. It may not have been appropriate, but Emily gave Jason a hug and floated back to her desk. Funny how things work out when you listen to your imagination.

**My son used to play soccer when he was growing up. Just about every weekend, we had a soccer tournament somewhere. Wally was an excellent soccer player, says the proud dad. I did everything in my power to encourage him.**

**One of the soccer fields we played on was just north of Dallas. Located in a remote area outside of town, I was expecting it to be one of those places I dreaded going to, where everything was muddy and no attempt made for upkeep—a place without a bathroom and dilapidated bleachers. The first time we arrived at the field, I was surprised and pleased that I was wrong. This soccer field had the most beautiful green grass, was well kept. The bleachers were well maintained, and there was a completed bathroom facility. I almost felt like they had built this park just to impress me.**

**I noticed that in multiple areas of the park, long poles were sticking out of the ground. They were colorfully painted but seemed to serve no purpose. I hadn't seen any other soccer field with poles like these. But then, none of the other soccer fields looked this green and well kept either.**

**I finally asked someone about the poles. They said that the poles were for releasing the methane. The soccer fields, as well as the park proper, had been built on a landfill. When the landfill had become full, they had brought in soil and repurposed the area. All I could think was, “what brilliant mind would conceive of turning a trash dump into a city park?” Someone had made a commitment to their imagination. Where everyone else was scratching their heads and saying, “The landfill is full, what do we do now?” Someone in the back of some planning**

room stood up and said, “Let’s build a park with soccer fields.” I can hear the laughter now. But that person persisted, and here I was looking at the result of his vision. It was a beautiful thing to see. That is what can happen when one pays attention to God’s gift of imagination and shares it with others.

Paul is writing a letter to the church in Philippi. In it, he says this:

**Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—  
put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9**

I know that I struggle with verses like this. We all know the ones I am talking about. The ones that tell us we need to listen to God’s voice then do what he tells us. I know that I personally want to mull it over and maybe run it through a filter of discerning questions before I consider what God is trying to tell me.

1. Is God really telling me to do this?
2. Do I have the resources?
3. Does it fall under my purview?
4. Am I physically up for the task?
5. Will it negatively affect other areas of my life?

But, in truth, these are not questions of discernment. These questions are an attempt on my part to find a way out, to give me a reason to say no. That’s not God talking to me. It’s a way of easing my conscience. It is also an awful way to interact with the parent of my soul. “Hey, mom, I’ll take out the trash later.” “I will cut the lawn later, sweetheart when it gets a little cooler.” “You must not have been talking to me, God, because that isn’t something I normally do.”

Let me say this bluntly, and it may sting a little. As children of the Creator of the Universe, we are not called to be 'normal.' We are called to be exceptional. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit indwelling us to do God's work. Listen to this verse from the eighth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

**28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28**

We often quote this verse, but we kind of lower our voice and toss the second half to the wind. It is pleasing to us knowing **"that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."** We can quote that anytime and get a couple of Hallelujahs and an Amen. But people don't often want to talk about **"who have been called according to his purpose."** We are not a people who appreciate caveats. We want the cake, but we don't want to go to the trouble of baking it. If we have to consider that we are **"called according to his purpose,"** then we almost feel we have a sales tag hanging from our clothes; that we are marked. And because we are marked, a certain measure of decorum and morality are expected of us; because we are labeled 'Christian', we are expected to act a certain way.

But to whom do we give the authority to define the term 'Christian'? More often than not, we give that authority to other people, not our namesake. We do that because we question our ability to listen and understand what Christ is telling us, like some kind of unwanted responsibility or commitment. We believe that we are unworthy to hear the words of Christ, much less interpret them-that



**we should leave such matters to persons than ourselves. It makes us....  
uncomfortable to be tagged with that responsibility.**

**We are all called to the same purpose. Yes, we are all different with our unique pasts, hardships, sacrifices, education, relationships, thoughts, and experiences. That uniqueness is beautiful. That uniqueness is born out of God's imagination. God doesn't just wind us up and watch us run into walls. He actively molds us and gives us purpose. When we allow God to reach into the essence of who we are and work our minds and flesh to God's purpose and glory, we get to witness firsthand the marvelous nature of God's divine presence in our life. Our united purpose is to advance God's kingdom.**

**When we look around us and see the diversity of God's children, we see that vision as a garden of hands, feet, colors, fragrances, ideas, and imaginations pulled into a single purpose of moving the Kingdom of God forward. To fully appreciate it and understand what it means to not only us, but also to God, we need a way to interpret it. We have to have a way to untangle the knots.**

**We can't begin to fathom what is going on in the mind of God, but for the fraction of God's thoughts that God shares with us, we have a tool that allows us to make sense of what God is telling us. Our imaginations. God uses our imaginations to take what we see as only mindless chaos and translate it into a meaningful dialogue between our Creator and ourselves. God shows us what we need to know and what God wants us to know.**

**We say that we love God, and we ask the question of our Creator, “How can we help?” “How can we make a difference?” “How best can we serve?” “How can we be God’s hands and feet in this world?”**

**And God answers us, “Feed the hungry.” “Heal the sick.” “Clothe the naked.” “Comfort the grieving.” “Take care of the poor.” “Build an ark.” “Repair the city gates.” “Build the temple.” “Preach the gospel.” “Love your neighbor.” “Pray for your enemies.” “Beat your swords into plowshares.” “Bring peace to the chaos.” “Be the light.” “Build a bridge.”**

**The ways that we can do this come trickling through the gift of imagination that God uses to enable us to serve. But we have to listen to what God is telling us. We have to believe what God is showing us. God uses our imaginations to reveal to us what is possible. Noah had no conceivable idea of how to build an ark. But he did not say ‘NO’ to God and brush it off as some wacky dream just because he did not understand why God would ask it of him or because it made no sense.**

**What God wants does not have to make sense to us. Our calling is to follow his directions. God does not always give us instructions that are clear, concise, and convenient. Sometimes we have to pray and dig a little deeper in the scriptures to get clarification.**

**Emily, the intern in our story today, wasn’t sure why she was obsessed with drawing the bridge that she envisioned. She didn’t wave it off as nonsense just because she didn’t understand what was driving her. Instead, she threw**

herself into the project and reaped the rewards. There's a lesson there for all of us to learn.

Instead of thinking about how impossible and unnecessary the task is that God places in our hands, why don't we see the way God wants us to see the world and just do it in God's way. His vision is so much clearer than ours.

**Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—  
put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

**AMEN**

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