

Thinking and doing

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[0 : 0 0] Gerald for leading our worship and for the singers and for the musicians. Turn with me, please, to Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4. It seems to be the never-ending series. It just seems to keep going on. We're only looking at a few verses at a time. I think we really are at the last few verses, but I think it'll be another two or three sermons, and then we'll be done with this, and then we'll be moving on to something else. It's a great book, the book of Philippians, one of my favorite books in the whole of Scripture. Philippians chapter 4.

Let's read from verse 4 through to verse 9. This covers a couple of sermons that we looked at last time. We looked at prayer, everything behind us for nothing, but everything with prayer was supplication. So that's what we looked at last time. We're looking at verses 8 and verses 9 this evening. So let's read from verse 4. Paul says these amazing words, a bit kind of startling, a bit like this morning's text, about consider it pure joy when you fall into various trials.

Paul here says, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all.

the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. These are big, big verses that if we lived our life according to these verses, even in a small measure, our life would be very different in so many ways, knowing a peace of God and so forth. So that's what we're going to look at, but let's just come before God. Let's just ask for

His help. Our loving Heavenly Father, we come before you as your people, Lord, redeemed by the blood of your son, adopted into your family, reconciled, restored. And Father, we thank you for these great truths, Lord, that encourage us and reaffirm us, Lord, in our relationship with you, in the love that you have for us, in the love that Jesus would have for us. And Father, we thank you for this spiritual standing that we have with you. But we thank you, Lord, that though we live on this earth, Lord, you lead us, you guide us, you are always active in each one of our lives, Lord, even in the mundane things. Lord, you see, you know all things. All things are laid bare before you. And Father, we come this evening. Lord, we come as your people, perhaps every single one of us. We pray, Lord, that as you know us, we pray that you would speak to us now from your Word. We pray that that Word will come to us and be right for us at this time as individuals and perhaps even as a church. Father, we do just ask that you would speak into our situation. Our desire is that we would love you more, that we would be better disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So, Father, speak to us now, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Early last week, the BBC had a wee article on their website that this is at here. It was to do with mental illness. Usually, at the turn of the year, the BBC mentioned things about happiness and joy and getting on in life. And quite often, they talk about health, physical health. But mental health is something the BBC mentioned a lot.

[4 : 11] Mental health is never far from the news where people suffer mentally, maybe being depressed or downcast. This article was based on a project in Devon. It says this, this project in Devon is using sport and other activities to try and encourage men to talk about their mental health.

Bro Project, I quite like the title of that, it's one word, Bro Brother Project, was organized to provide companionship and fun to offer support to men who are struggling. The organization provides a range of free activities for men to attend, aiming to turn the subject of men's mental health into an open conversation. So, these activities, this one's golf, obviously, just encourage men to walk, to be together, to chat, and to open up about how they're feeling. And you know, it's not just men, women, even boys and girls suffer in this way. It's a very big issue. It might even be a big issue for you where, like many godly saints, a big dark cloud can come, and you find it hard to maybe think right and correctly about yourself, about your situation. Maybe there's no reason for it, it's just there, and that's something we looked at. Maybe we looked at depression, there are other things that can help apart from the Scripture and the Lord's words. We're coming to the end of Philippians in chapter 4, and once again, Paul is not easing off gently. He's not just kind of just saying a few platitudes before he finishes. He's really using these last few words to really almost grab them by the lapels and really say, this is really important. Finally, these are the last things I want to say. And often at the end of Paul's letters, he really says some big things, and Philippians is no exception to this.

Last time we looked at verses 6 and verses 7 about not being anxious about anything. Paul knows the world in which we live, a fallen world. We struggle. God knows that we struggle every day. I don't know what people understand to be the victorious Christian life, but life is a pressing on towards the celestial city through a giant despair and doubting castle. It's a difficult time, and as we were thinking this morning, we are encouraged to persevere and to persevere unto perfection. That is God's desire for us to keep pressing on. So last week we were looking at anxiety, the anxieties, the stress of life, and we were told to come to God to begin there. Come to God with everything, every small thing, every big thing. Don't just come to him with the big things and say, Lord, I can cope. It's often the small things that disappoint us and trip us up. And as a result, we will know the peace of God and the joy of God. These were big verses. I commend that sermon to you. But I want you to note verse 7, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds.

As we think of mental illness, to have the peace of God would very much address any mental anxieties and problems that we might have. To have the peace of God is a great thing, and that relates to the prayer we looked at last time. But now when you come to verses in 8 and 9, Paul wants to expand on this area of stress and anxiety in life. He says, be anxious for nothing, pray. But now he turns to something else. And he wants to add to our prayer life, to coming to God with everything, correct thinking and correct doing. Because he says, if we would know the peace of God, it's not just a case of simply praying. We need to think aright, and we need to do the right things as well. Often the peace of God very much relies on us and what we do as well. It's not a case of let go and let God.

We walk with God, and how we think and how we regulate our thinking and what we do is a very big part of this. Because in verse 7, Paul talks about the peace of God. But when you come to verses 8 and 9, look at how verse 9 ends. Whatever you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, put into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. So, from talking about the peace of God, he's now talking about the God of peace being with us. We would sometimes miss this in the reading, but they're very different. It's one thing to know the peace of God on a daily basis. It's another thing to know the God of peace walking with you. I think of the two of them, I think I would rather have the second of those to know that God, the God of peace, is walking with me. He is with me in all these things, because I know if he's with me, that makes a big difference. So, we're moving in some ways from, in the trials and difficult stretches of life, from knowing the peace of God through prayer, to know what it means to have the God of peace walking with us. And that's what he's looking at now, not just an attribute of God, but God himself being with us. It's a massive verse. And if we knew this, and if we knew that the, the, the, if we put into practice verse 6 and 7 and 8 and 9, our lives would be very, very different. And, and that's why we really need to consider these. So, we're very much thinking about thinking and doing. That is what verses 8 and 9, if the last one was about praying, this one is very much about thinking and doing. Because the peace of God and the God of peace very much lie with us, how we think, what we do as well. So, Paul really wants to impress us upon us.

[10:19] He mentions the word finally, not that this is the last thing he wants to say, but it's really the last imperative that he wants to mention. He's given them many instructions throughout this letter, but this is his last big one before he, he begins to, to, to sign off. So, it's good for us to sit up and to take note of these verses. So, I want to look at these two verses, 8 and 9, and see what we can learn from these, and the moments that remain. And there are two obvious points, and they, they form the sermon this evening. First of all, what are you thinking? That is the first thing. It's basically thinking and doing. Finally, brothers, verse 8, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Our thinking, from our thinking process, everything else comes. I've maybe mentioned this to you before. I heard it on OM many, many years ago. I think it was George Verwer that maybe shared it. Probably wasn't an original thought to him, where he says, if you sow a thought, you reap an action. If you sow an action, you reap a habit. If you sow a habit, you reap a life. If you sow a life, you reap an eternity.

And so, our whole course of our life begins by what we think, because what we think will determine how we feel and, and what we then begin to do. So, our destiny, what we think is such an important area of our life. And that's why your mental health, our spiritual mental health, really is worth getting to grips with and taking that seriously. And most of our grief comes from what we're thinking at any point in time. If somebody's winding you up or upsetting you or a situation's not good or you're doubting God, these things cause anxiety, stress, and it's the thoughts that cause all of these things together. Our thinking process really does affect us physically. It can give you an ulcer. It can do all sorts of things. That's why to think well is to live well. I remember when I was in Derbyshire,

I had a treadmill. It was a, I loved the treadmill. I sold it. I wish I'd never sold the thing. And it was, it was such a good thing. And I used to always use it with a heart rate monitor. And I'd decide, was I going to do fat burning? Or was I going to do cardio stuff? And you, you work out what you're supposed to set that to. Your maximum heart rate is 220 minus your age. That's what your heart rate's supposed to be, generally speaking. So if you're 50, your maximum heart rate's about 170.

Anyway, I would set this to a particular thing. And off I'd go. And when you're on the treadmill, it would, it would start to think, right, okay, your heart rate's, John, it needs to, you want to burn some fat here. We need to get this elevated up. And up it would go. And I'd find, yeah, this is, we're doing well here. The heart rate's going the way I want it to. Cardio, fat burning, or whatever.

[13 : 28] But the minute I started to think about a problem in the church, what would happen? I would, I'd be aware that I was thinking of somebody in the church or a situation in the church because the treadmill would start to go down. In other words, it was saying, your heart rate's too high. We better lower this. Instead of going up and getting your heart rate to, to work, it was saying, and it'd almost get to the point where it was flat and slowing down and saying, eh, you better sort yourself out.

I know somebody at Christmas bought themselves a watch, a kind of heart rate thing. They'd never really done that before. And in a particular situation, eh, they realized that their heart was, was too high, saying, you need to try and calm down. This was the thing that would come up.

You really need to try and calm, your heart rate's a wee bit high. And, eh, the person's solution was to get rid of the watch. Eh, eh, and it's, if I heard that, I thought, well, that's, that's one way. But you're better to deal, I would rather know if my heart rate is shooting up for whatever reason, so at least the treadmill at least said, John, stop thinking about this. Eh, start to think right, eh, and when it does this, and it, I commend these kind of watches to you if it does this and it beeps and whatever. That's a good thing. Eh, it's, it's worth thinking about. And that is, is what Paul is dealing with here, the discipline of the mind, because that will really help us in, in their mental health. And often our temperaments, sad to say our temperaments get in the way here. There are some folk, the glass is always half full, for others it's half empty. In any one situation, you can have two people, you can see, somebody can only see the problem, go, it's a disaster, what are we going to do? And somebody will say, well, at least this is happening, and these are all the good things.

I just love being in their company. Lizzie was a wee bit better at that than me. She would see the glass is half full, I often say, what are we going to do, we're doomed, and so forth. Your temperament gets in, and if you, at least if you know your temperament, you're just miserable. You're just a complaining, nothing, and left, everything's right, nothing is right. And, eh, and we can be with that small irritations that come to us, and all we do is we latch on to that, we begin to think negatively, and our mental health and every part of our body then begins to get affected. And, eh, and that's what, what Paul is addressing here. So, he comes up with, with seven things, and I want to just, all I can do is pick them out, really. I can't really expand on them much, but just to mention them here. It's worth maybe if this is, eh, I find verse eight very challenging. It's, it's not something that happens naturally to me, eh, to naturally, whatever is these things think of them. It doesn't, I have to discipline my mind to start thinking of, of the positives. And, eh, I was,

Lucille knew I was preaching this verse, and even driving here, the number of drivers that just, they must have just got their cars and decided they were going on the bypass tonight, all these nutters, and, eh, I met every one of them. And Lucille said, boy, your, your, your verse has been tested tonight. And I remember, I think, yeah, you're right. And you come, that's fine. Plus, that's a nice car you're driving. Trying to give the, the positive signs. It sometimes gets as ridiculous. But if you can laugh at that and begin to, to not latch on to these things. So, let's look at these magnificent seven, eh, things that are here. Whatever is true, he says, thinking this, this is a sense in what is truthful. Whatever is truthful in speech and, or anything that's happening, ask yourself, is the thing that you're thinking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

[17 : 11] Sometimes we, we are blinkered, we are happy to go off on something that's not true, we don't care if it's true, and so forth. And we can get ourself into all sorts of trouble. And even as it relates to God, if we're finding it hard to trust in God and our mind is agitated, ask yourself, what is true?

Is, is, will God abandon me? Does he really love me? Does he really care? Begin to speak to yourself and don't just listen to yourself. Speak truth to yourself. Begin to focus on that which is true and that which is certain. And the promises of God are those things. Those are true, those are certain.

We can rely on that. But sometimes we latch onto things that are not quite true. It's what we would like to believe or what we're, what we default to. And therefore, we need to do this and think about what is true. Secondly, whatever is noble, whatever is noble, whatever is righteous, virtuous, and good.

It means maybe looking at a situation, even looking at God, remembering that he is righteous, that he's not a God who's ungood, he is virtuous. It might be looking at another person and saying, yes, that's what they're like. Yes, they drive me nutty. But there's this other side, there's a different side to them. And you begin to think of that which is maybe righteous in that, which is good, that which is virtuous in the person. Sometimes we can only ever see negative things or situations.

You remember in Philippians, right at the very start of this letter, Paul was in a situation when he was getting grief. Paul got grief from so many people, Jews, but also Christians.

[19 : 00] Christians gave Paul such a hard time. I remember years ago asking the congregation the question, if you had a dinner party, who would be the three people that you would invite to dinner, dead or alive. That's a good thing to think through. Mine was the Apostle Paul, and John Knox was the second one, and the other one was Paloma Faith, to lighten up the other two. Because I think she's just good fun. And I thought, yeah, she'd be good. But anyway, that would be some dinner table, having those three around the table. But I'd love to sit with the Apostle Paul and think, how on earth, same with John Knox, how did you cope during those times? What were you thinking?

What kept you sane? Well, you remember right at the start when people were preaching, even Christ, to get to Paul. And in Philippians 1, 8, 17, the former preached Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. What does it matter?

He says, the important thing in every way, whether false motives are true, Christ has preached, and because of this, I rejoice. Yes, and we'll continue to rejoice. He looked at a situation that for maybe you and maybe me would go, shocking, Lord, sort them out, sit there with the wee dog sticking pins in them, Lord, sort these folk out, they're doing my head in, and just feeding your ulcer. Whereas he looks at the other side and says, Christ has preached, and I rejoice in this.

He can see this other side. So, it's good to think of what is righteous, what is virtuous, what is good and noble about that situation. Paul could have become angry, self-centered, even if it was true, and what he was thinking is true. But he focused on what is good, and we must lift our minds out of the negative. Whatever is right, thirdly, whatever is right, the right thing to do, the right thing to think. Often when we become downcast, we're not thinking right, we're not doing right, and it's stopping to think, what should I do in this situation? What is the right thing to do? That's not always easy, but the right thing before God, and in many ways, we need to think biblically towards others. That's why if you've got a good working knowledge of the Scripture, you say, the Lord doesn't allow me to feel this way towards Himself, towards others, towards this situation. I'm to trust in Him. We are to consider it pure joy, and use the Scriptures to regulate our thinking, to think about whatever is right. What would Jesus think in this situation?

Fourthly, whatever is pure. This is pure in motives and actions. What is the right thing to do, the pure thing, not sinful, not jealous, not unforgiving thoughts? We are to do that which is right and pure. Pure is just a great word. It speaks of righteousness. Whatever is just pure, untainted with sin, no wee things in here, no false motives, just 100% open and honest in our thinking before God and before others. Verse 5, number 5, whatever is lovely. Whatever calls forth love. I woke up in the middle of the day. I always wake up in the middle of every night. I can set my watch. I wake up at 4 o'clock every morning. I don't tend to, I don't want to wake up at 4, but I wake up at 4 o'clock, and I often find myself just thinking, and if I get annoyed at things, I do try and think of whatever's lovely and whatever's pure, and if there's a situation or something that's not quite, I pray for that, and I pray especially for people that might be the flying malignment, and I pray for that, and I find I often can go back to sleep when I do that.

[23 : 10] I say, Lord, bless them. Whatever's happening today, whatever, be good to them. Pour out your love upon them. Even we're supposed to pray and love our enemies. That's a great thing to be able to do.

I commend that to you, rather than sit and festering and wishing the worst. Whatever is lovely, whatever calls forth love, whatever you think about that causes you to think, I'm not just going to pray for them. I'm going to send them a wee letter. I'm going to take them out for a meal.

I'm going to tuck them into bed. I'm going to write them a sonnet, or whatever it is. You're going to really push the boat out. You're going to think of something that calls forth love towards that person. It's a very special thing if we're able to do that. Do something, think about them that causes you to be loving, either in thought or in deed towards them. Sixthly, whatever is admirable, whatever is worthy of admiration, and that may be a situation or a person you can think says, yes, this, they're not great, but this is admirable. This situation causes us to think that way.

In many ways, if you look at these, each of these attributes, if you think of Jesus, Jesus fulfills all of these himself. Lovely, pure, true. So, if you never know what to think of, think of him. Get him to regulate your thinking. Focus on him. When you focus on him, everything else just falls into place. But Paul, lastly, appears to sum everything up in these two words. Whatever is excellent, if anything, just anything that's excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. The best things that you can occupy your mind with that you could call excellent and praiseworthy is God's Word. Thinking in God's Word. God's Word is excellent. It is praiseworthy. It causes you to think very differently. And how we think really does transform our thinking. Don Carson says this, if you think holy thoughts, you will be holy. If you think garbage, you will be garbage. I like the way

Don Carson sometimes speaks. But that is so true. It is as plain as that. Lucille and I watched the first episode or the first series of Traitors. I don't know if you've been watching that program, but I remember watching it and thinking, these folk are off their head. But you can, this is the thing that you sometimes wonder why John Calvin and these guys at 26 could produce the systematic theology that they've produced at the age of 26. I don't know any 26-year-old that's having those deep spiritual thoughts. Because the thing is, we fill our heads nowadays and we have more resources than any of these guys ever had. We've got the internet, we've got books aplenty, sermons, you can listen to stuff. We have got tons of resources. But it doesn't always help us because we also spend our time with the TV. I'm not anti-TV, certainly not. But so when Traitors come up, I said to us, I don't know if I want to watch this. Do I really want to start shouting at the telly and getting annoyed and frustrated at somebody? Because you're sitting there minding your own business. You turn on that TV and suddenly you're finding yourself getting angry and annoyed. And there's a program that I just, I've never seen,

[26 : 39] I think I've seen it for 30 seconds, is it Gogglebox? Watching people watching TV. That has to be the saddest occupation ever. And you're watching them getting annoyed and then you're getting annoyed because they're getting annoyed. And we subject ourselves to this foolishly, I think. So we fill our heads with thinking that just doesn't help us. We're ready to slay somebody. That's rubbish. We're going to bed and we're annoyed and we're watching a film. That's why I never, I mean, if you're ever in our house and you hear EastEnders coming on, do-do, you'll see me scrambling across, knocking coffee tables out the way to get to the remote control. I can't even cope with the tune of that. Whenever you're watching for two seconds, somebody's threatening, they punch somebody's lights out and it's just crazy. And I think, why subject yourself to that? In kids, video games getting violent. What we put in really affects us.

And we need to take that seriously. If we are not thinking right, it's probably because we're putting the wrong stuff in there. And we need to take that seriously, that the TV and other things, and even football matches. I used to be mad for Liverpool and Arsenal and teams like that. And I remember one year, the both of them get beaten in an FA Cup semi-final. I was inconsolable. If the Lord came up, if somebody came up to me and says, what must I do to be saved? I says, I don't care. I'm not interested. I really was. And I realized that football had such a hold on me. It made me miserable.

And if there's anything like that in your life, that might be the source of your misery. And the Lord wouldn't have as miserable. We hold on to the things of this world loosely. Watch traitors or whatever, or whatever might be wholesome. Watch those things, but don't let them drag you down.

This is the thing. Take our mental health seriously. We're making it hard for ourselves when we're saying, Lord, I'm feeling a bit down. I'm going to turn on the telly and just get annoyed at this. What is the point of that? It's just foolish. So, we need to think, do things that really build up our faith. Are we thinking right? What do we think about during the day? We need to stop and begin to think according to God's Word. Jesus says, sanctify them by the truth. Your Word is truth.

Romans 12. Paul, these great words, you know them. Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Well, we're dealing with quite big things at the turn of the year, talking about your body and various things. What a way to start 2024. I want my mind to be transformed, because then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will. Psalm 119. I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Don't hide His Word in your computer or in your shelf. Hide it in your heart. That's what will cause you to think aright. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10, we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. You are tasked with that. God won't do that for you. You have to take that thought and wrestle it. Take it captive. Wrestle it into submission. We need to develop a Christian mindset. When I worked with John Lewis, I had been working in Nidre. I had a few months out before I was moving to

[30 : 20] Derbyshire or whatever. I worked in John Lewis. I hadn't worked in a secular environment for so long, and I thought, wow, this is going to be hard. I've not done this for such a long time. I've been sheltered in a Christian environment. So I made sure that I read a Christian book. I'd already had my quiet time, but I read a Christian book. I read Andrew Murray, Absolute Surrender, on the way into John Lewis every, I remember, six in the morning, pouring the rain, miserable. I don't like buses. So anyway, the potholes and the poles shaking and the steamy windows, and I'm getting to John Lewis and I'm reading Andrew Murray, and what a difference. What a different mindset I come out just into work, just loving everybody, wanting to hug everybody. Whereas if it wasn't for that, the boss would have finished me off. I just, feed yourself with, because what you eat, what you feed yourself mentally will affect your mental health. So that, first of all, is what are you thinking? Think of those seven things. And what does he say? Verse 9, and the God of peace will be with you. If we fill our heads with rubbish, that grieves the Lord, but to have the God of peace, not just the peace of God, but the God of peace with you. So secondly, and very quickly, and we're finished, what are you doing?

He says, whatever you have learned and received or heard or seen in me, put that into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. So it's not just what we think, it's what we do. The great commission is to go into all the world and to teach them to obey everything that I have commanded.

That's not an optional extra. The onus is for us to obey everything that Jesus commands, to be taught what those things are, and to obey them, to put it into practice. So what are we to do? Paul mentions three things. Whatever you have learned from me. In other words, his teaching. We have Paul's teaching.

Whatever he would say to us, whatever you read, put that into practice. Put my teaching into practice, whatever I've taught you in these letters. Thirdly, or secondly, whatever you have received from me. There's traditions in some ways from me and from others, and traditions widely accepted from the church, doctrines, practices, and so forth. And these are the things, the things that Paul says, do this, Lord's table, for I receive from the Lord what I also delivered unto you.

These things. It's not just the teaching, but the practices as well. And then thirdly, whatever you have heard from me or seen in me, that's quite something, isn't it? Whatever I've said, whatever you've seen. Paul's life matched his lip, and he says, you've seen me. And remember Timothy and Epaphroditus, these two men, look at them. Emulate others. Look at others. Be encouraged by others. They're worth their weight in gold. See, a Christian that's just seems to, they seem to rise, everybody has problems, but they seem to rise above the difficulties. They have a different mindset. They are the type of person that, that, if everything's white, it's not black. They're worth hanging around. They're worth inviting for dinner and so forth. They will just light up your wee room, light up your life. They're that type of person. Surround yourself with them. That's what Paul's basically saying. Look, listen to what I'm saying. Listen to my positivity. Look at how I'm looking at things. Look at the things that I'm doing as well. So here, Paul knows the reality of life. Let me just quote in finishing with one of the best Bible commentary series I like, the Word Bible Commentary.

[34 : 20] I love that series. It's quite a meaty thing, but they're the best commentaries as far as I'm concerned. He says this in summarizing this teaching. Paul's wish is that the Philippians might enjoy productive, worry-free lives, do not worry about anything, with their thoughts and feelings guarded by the peace of God. He has told them that how they might attain this goal with the aid of prayer and thanksgiving.

But that is not all that's required. In verses 8 and 9, he adds still other important steps. He says that fear, worry, anxiety, depression, all the countless concerns that are sailed at the Philippians' minds can be kept at bay if they will continually reckon up, think over, estimate aright, and fill their minds with all things good and true, and will rise up and put into practice the demands of the Christian gospel. That is what these two verses are all about. May the Lord help us as we walk with him.

And may 2028 be a life for us where we do know the peace of God and the God of peace who is with us day by day. Let's stand and we'll sing an old song, but it's a really good song. I've not sung this for a number of years, I don't think.