

“When I Am Old”

A Lifetime of Trust

Psalm 71

Unlike many of the psalms, this psalm has no superscription (title) nor does it give any information on the occasion for its writing. Some connect Psalm 71 with David because of its proximity to Psalm 70 and its familiar language, while others have suggested Jeremiah due to its themes of lifelong calling and opposition. However, the psalm gives us no clear evidence either way. Its anonymity allows it to stand as a prayer for any believer who has walked with God over a lifetime and now seeks to finish well.

I. A PLACE OF REFUGE – CONFIDENCE ROOTED IN THE LORD (vs. 1-8)

A. Trust placed in the LORD alone (vs. 1-2)

1. The verb “trust” (תָּקַו) sets the tone of the psalm. The New Testament word for “faith” is very similar in usage as this Old Testament word.
2. It’s a word that means to have settled confidence in – it’s not momentary faith, but settled dependence on the Lord.

Psalm 18:2

² The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Psalm 31:1

¹ In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.

Proverbs 3:5

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

B. Protection found in God's presence (vs. 3-5)

1. God is called a "habitation," not merely a shelter (vs. 3).
2. The psalmist does not come to God only when he's in trouble – he dwells with Him at all times.

Psalm 90:1

¹ Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Psalm 91:1-2

¹ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the LORD, *He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.*

John 15:4

⁴ *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

C. Faith proven over a lifetime (vs. 5-6)

The trust spoken of stretches "from the womb" through every season of life. This is terminology demonstrating a lifelong trust the psalmist had in the Lord – trust that was proven from experience.

D. Praise is expressed continually (vs. 7-8)

1. As the psalmist cries out for help and deliverance, he is also calling out in continual praise ("continually" – תמיד).
2. This shows that praise is the natural outcome of a life lived in the refuge of the Lord.

Psalm 34:1

¹ I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth.

Psalm 145:2

² Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

Hebrews 13:15

¹⁵ By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.

II. A PLEA IN OLD AGE – CRISIS AND CONFLICT (VS. 9-13)

A. Fear of abandonment in weakness (vs. 9)

The fear is not the loss of usefulness, but the loss of nearness from God.

1. “Cast me not off in the time of old age” – the Geneva Bible notes makes this observation regarding this phrase: “You who helped me in my youth when I had more strength, help me now even more in my old age and weakness.”

When the psalmist prays this, he is not suggesting that God might abandon him. This is the language of faith under pressure. Hebrew prayer often speaks this way – not because God is unfaithful, but because the believer is clinging to God when strength is gone. It is not doubt; it is dependence.

2. The second line of the verse gives the parallel to this, explaining the plea of the first line. The psalmist is not questioning God’s faithfulness; he is acknowledging his physical decline, increased opposition, and diminished ability to defend himself.

In Hebrew thought, need intensifies prayer, not doubt.

2 Corinthians 4:16

¹⁶ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

B. Accusation raised by the enemy (vs. 10-11)

1. The psalmist's enemies interpret his suffering as divine rejection (vs. 11).

Job 2:9-10

⁹ Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. ¹⁰ But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Romans 8:33-34

³³ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. ³⁴ Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

By way of application, this still happens today to those that deal with the challenges of age when our enemies see us as weaker than they are and use that as a means to attack us.

2. False theology often accompanies opposition, and it is that that is used against those that are trying to lead God's people.

C. Pursuit intensified in vulnerability (vs. 10-11)

1. The enemy pursues when strength diminishes (vs. 11).
2. Weakness often invites attack – but not defeat.

1 Peter 5:8

⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the

devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Luke 22:31-32

³¹ And the Lord said, *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:* ³² *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

D. Urgent appeal for God's nearness and deliverance (vs. 12-13)

Urgency reflects dependence, not despair.

Hebrews 4:16

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

III. A PURPOSE TO PROCLAIM – HOPE AND TESTIMONY (VS. 14-18)

A. Hope resolved despite uncertainty (vs. 14)

Faith makes a conscious choice to keep trusting.

Lamentations 3:31-33

³¹ For the Lord will not cast off for ever: ³² But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. ³³ For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

Romans 15:13

¹³ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

B. Praise multiplied through testimony (vs. 15-16)

1. The psalmist testifies of what God has done. His faith is verbalized and made public (vs. 15a).

Mark 5:19

¹⁹ Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, **Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.**

Acts 4:20

²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

2. Verse 16 shows us that the only way we will accomplish what God has given us to do as we age is to “go in the strength of the Lord God.”

C. Righteousness declared without limit

1. “For I know not the numbers *thereof*” – God’s righteousness exceeds understanding and calculation (vs. 15b). In other words, “I cannot calculate (‘number’) the full extent of Your righteous saving acts.”
2. The focus here is not the psalmist’s own story or problems, but God’s character (vs. 17).

D. Legacy entrusted to the next generation (vs. 18)

1. This is why I am here and why I still preach, no matter how difficult it may be the older I get.
2. Even in old age, the mission remains the same – “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4).
 - Old age does not silence faith – it sharpens its mission.
3. The faith we have should aim beyond simply surviving the challenges and the battles – it’s aim should be succession.

Psalms 78:4

⁴ We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of

the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

Joel 1:3

³ Tell ye your children of it, and *let* your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

2 Timothy 2:2

² And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

IV. A PRAISE AFTER TRIAL – CELEBRATION OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS (VS. 19-24)

A. God’s greatness is exalted publicly (vs. 19)

B. Suffering acknowledged as God-ordained (vs. 20)

1. Affliction is neither denied nor minimized.
2. God brings His servants through, not merely out of trouble.

Job 23:10

¹⁰ But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶ Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: ⁷ That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

C. Restoration promised and anticipated (vs. 21)

1. God restores dignity, comfort, and usefulness.
 - a) “The psalmist’s request for ‘greatness’ (or

'honor') is not a boastful, self-serving prayer for prominence, but, rather, a request that God would vindicate by elevating him over those who are trying to humiliate him" (NET Bible notes)

- b) "Greatness," as used in this context, given the psalm's focus on aging, weakness, and endurance, means continued usefulness, restored confidence, public vindication, and the ability to testify again without shame. It's the opposite of being "cast off" that we see in verse 9.

2. Later years can be richer than earlier ones.

D. Praise overflowing in word and song (vs. 22-24)

The psalm ends where it began – with public confidence in God.

Conclusion:

This psalm helps us see that a lifetime of faith does not end in silence or insignificance. The psalmist prays not to be cast off in old age, not because God is unfaithful, but because age and weakness bring new vulnerability. Strength may diminish, but calling does not. Years of service may give way to quieter seasons, yet testimony remains.

Scripture recognizes this reality within the life of the church as well. That is why believers are instructed to treat older men ("elders") not harshly, but as fathers (1 Timothy 5:1). Spiritual maturity deserves patience, honor, and care – especially when long years of faithfulness are now accompanied by weariness or loss of strength. The church reflects God's character when it supports those who are finishing their course, not merely those who are beginning theirs.

At the same time, this psalm reminds those who lead that

later seasons carry their own calling and responsibility. The psalmist does not ask for position, but for continued usefulness; not for prominence, but for the grace to keep declaring God's righteousness and strength to the next generation. Faithful leaders bear responsibility to finish humbly, to speak truth graciously, and to entrust what they have learned to the next generation rather than cling to what they have held.

Together, this psalm calls both shepherds and the flock to a shared faithfulness. A congregation that honors enduring faith, and leaders who persevere with humility, bear witness to a God who does not cast off His servants when their strength fails. Psalm 71 teaches us that spiritual life is not measured only by how we begin, but by how we endure – and how we help one another finish well.