

Life of David: The Weaker We Get The Stronger Christ Can Be

II Samuel 23

As we open to II Samuel 23, we are opening to a confession from an elderly David.

The older we get, the harder it is to hide what is really going on inside our hearts and minds. Consequently, we become more and more transparent with our feelings and fears. And God designed it that way. For as the clay pot, the tent we live in, cracks and tears, He wants the treasure of Christ within us to spill out to encourage others in their own unending struggles.

That is why David's final words spoke of the power of the Holy Spirit within him. God's grace and power, through His precious Spirit, is our only source of strength to live and die in a way that pleases God.

Listen now to David's words, the confession of a weak old man about how he found limitless strength.

That is the secret to the man after God's own heart: he knew that life was all about God, and not about him.

Stand with me as we read II Samuel 23:1-2 (NKJV):

Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; Thus says the man raised up on high, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet psalmist of Israel: 2 "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.

Pray

David said it was God in me that produced these monumental resolves and worship songs. My paraphrase of the two verses before us would be:

This is David speaking, here is the key to everything in my life: it wasn't about my words, my life, or my plan, it was all about the Lord in me!

Paul also came to this same conclusion a thousand years after David, in the New Testament. Paul talks about how he made it through so many hard times as an apostle

of Jesus Christ.

Writing to the church at Corinth, in 2 Corinthians 4:7 he said:

*we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of **the power may be of God** and not of us.*

The sum of my life, Paul writes, is the Lord.

Paul was not some superman, he was just like each of us: tempted, tired, and troubled.

But Paul learned, as each of us needs to, that:

The Weaker we Get The Stronger Christ Becomes

In the next eleven verses, after v. 7, the Apostle Paul tells us what a treasure it is for us to go through times of weakness. Even when life is as rough, as Paul's explanation shows in this passage, we go on because we believe the One who said that His strength is matured in us as we go through great times of weakness. You follow along in your Bibles as I read a word-for-word, literal translation of these verses rendered 150 years ago, by the author of the Young's Analytical Concordance (1879), Robert Young (1822-1888):

On every side being in tribulation, but not straitened; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; at all times the dying of the Lord Jesus bearing about in the body, that the life also of Jesus in our body may be manifested, for always are we who are living delivered up to death because of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our dying flesh, so that, the death indeed in us doth work, and the life in you. And having the same spirit of the faith, according to that which hath been written, 'I believed, therefore I did speak;' we also do believe, therefore also do we speak; knowing that He who did raise up the Lord Jesus, us also through Jesus shall raise up, and shall present with you, for the all things are because of you, that the grace having been multiplied, because of the thanksgiving of the more, may abound to the glory of God; wherefore, we faint not, but if also our outward man doth decay, yet the inward is renewed day by day; for the momentary light matter of our tribulation, more and more exceedingly an age-during weight of glory doth work out for us—we not looking to the things seen, but to the things not seen; for the things seen are temporary, but the things not seen are age-during (2 Corinthians 4:8-18, Young's Literal Translation, 1862).

As we turn back again to Psalm 71, we are entering into the days of weakness and old age in David's life.

Because God spends so much time capturing David's life, seen through the lens of

Scripture: we have more truth explained about how David faced and made it through the troubles of old age, than about anyone else.

As we open to Psalm 71, we will see God show us through David's life: How to get ready for growing old in a godly way. God has truths to anchor us in godliness through the closing days of our lives. These are the truths that lead to Christ's words of reward when we finish.

First, look again at David's resolve in v. 18:

Now also when *I am* old and grayheaded,
O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to *this* generation,
Your power to everyone *who* is to come.

Jesus has clearly expressed what He would like to say to each of us when we arrive safely home to dwell with Him forever: "*Well done, good and faithful servant ...*" (Matthew 25:21)!¹ Those words, from Christ, constitute for believers:

Winning the Ultimate Prize

For every part of life people recognize the ultimate prize: the Triple Crown in horse racing, the Americus Cup in yachting; the Green Jacket of the Master's Golf Tournament; and that Super Bowl winning team's ring.

For believers, there is also an "ultimate prize". Christ's "Well done!" is the ultimate prize for living purposefully for God—even in our waning years when old age and all that entails has come upon us.

It is possible to finish well, even in ill-health, and with limited strength. We have for us in the English-speaking world a song written from the lives of two saints who suffered deep loneliness and physical struggles, but who did not give in to despondency. Their lives were anchored in the hope of God's Word, and their lives became a great blessing to others, because they simply viewed all their hardships through the lens of God's Word.

Listen to this account of the setting behind the song: His Eye is On the Sparrow. Songwriter Civilla D. Martin (1869–1948) gives this account of meeting this couple in 1905 and what prompted her to write this beloved song:

My husband and I were sojourning in Elmira, New York. We contracted a deep friendship for a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle—true saints of God. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for nigh twenty years. Her husband was an incurable cripple who had to propel himself to and from his

¹ 061008AM DSS-35; 061008PM DSS-36

business in a wheel chair.

Despite their afflictions, they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. One day while we were visiting with the Doolittles, my husband commented on their bright hopefulness and asked them for the secret of it. They read us this verse:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father in heaven. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than sparrows. (Matthew 10:29–31)

Then, Mrs. Doolittle's reply was simple: "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me." The beauty of this simple expression of boundless faith gripped the hearts and fired the imagination of Dr. Martin and me.

God's Eyes Are On the Sparrow

The hymn "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" was the outcome of that experience.

1. Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come, why should my heart be lonely and long for Heav'n and home, when Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He: His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me; His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.
2. "Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear, and resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears; tho' by the path He leadeth but one step I may see: His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me; His eye is on the sparrow, and I know we watches me.
3. Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise, when songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies, I draw the closer to Him; from care He sets me free; His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me; His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain: I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free, for His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.²

What a difference it makes to see our life through the lens of Scripture. Then each day's struggles are seen as God's plan that we willingly submit to!

The prophet Habakkuk, who wrote one of the most hope-filled paragraphs in the Bible,

² Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997).

understood this vital principle. Twenty-seven hundred years ago, when Israel was in a steep decline and headed for national ruin, defeat, and deportation to Babylon, he wrote:

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3:17-18).*

The key to finishing life by ending well like this is the long term cultivation of godly habits.

Life is a constant stream of choices, and each choice we make has a consequence. The consequences of godly habits are good; the consequences of ungodly habits are bad.

Life is really that simple, and David in Psalm 71 knew that.

GOD CAN BE TRUSTED IN ALL SEASONS OF LIFE

Psalm 71 is a study of looking at the words of someone who ended well—someone whom God prompted to pause and look back over his life. At its writing the author was old, had lived through much pain, and was facing the weaknesses of old age with all its challenges, blessings, and curses.

Some have questioned the authorship of Psalm 71, but if it wasn't David, the only other possibilities would be Samuel or Jeremiah. If it was Samuel, it was most likely David who captured the thoughts from his wonderful mentor and friend and put them down on parchment to sing of God's great faithfulness. If it was Jeremiah, then there is also a hint of the troubles he confessed in Lamentations as well as the hope he declared in 3:23: ... *Great is Your faithfulness.*

I believe that David is the strongest case for authorship because this has been almost universally agreed upon from ancient times. The Bible of Christ's day (the Septuagint) says so, as do most Jewish sources.

In the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 71 is joined to Psalm 70, also written by David. In addition, the first three verses of Psalm 71 were taken directly from Psalm 31 that David wrote while fleeing from Absalom.

Most amazing, though, is the fact that Psalm 71 quotes over fifty times from twenty-six other psalms, eighteen of which are psalms David wrote: 3, 5, 7, 18, 22, 23, 31, 32, 34-36, 40, 51, 56, 57, 60, 63, and 86.

So reading Psalm 71 is probably listening to the voice of God pointing out David's resolves for life.

Regardless of which channel God used to deliver this psalm to us, it is a powerful testimony to the One we can trust in all seasons of life. For even at our weakest times when age, infirmity, and incapacity are mounting—our great God is faithful and will not fail us even when we fail Him!

David Called Us to Live Life Intentionally for God

Psalm 71 is more than just a strong comfort for the years ahead; it is also the distillation and crystallization of some underlying resolves or purposes David had learned to live by in his long and eventful life.

Much like the books written by the titans of business and finance that give their leadership "secrets" and principles which drove these men and women to great successes in their careers—Psalm 71 is David's testimony guided by the Mighty Hand of God, through the Infinite Spirit of God, of what in life is worth repeating.

David's testimony in this psalm distilled the purposes of his life. He confessed those underlying truths that had guided him well and would keep him strong no matter what else he faced to the end of life.

If you are young and the weaknesses of old age are far away, this psalm has something for you as well. It is the call to live life intentionally for God so that when the days speed by and life is getting short, you can say you are ending well because you have lived purposefully for Him.

Why is this so important? You and I live in an aimless culture driven by the latest fads and events. We also see trends in the church by the fads and events believers reflect. One trend I watch is what books make big splashes because best-selling books among Christians are indicators of common needs and desires.

For example, below are the titles of five mega-selling books written by believers in the last forty years. No matter what you may think about the authors or their books, they reveal where God's children are in their spiritual pilgrimages.

- In 1971, Ken Taylor's ***Living Bible*** (over 40 million copies sold) was a big statement that many people wanted to understand the Bible.
- The same year, Hal Lindsey's ***Late Great Planet Earth*** (28 million copies sold) was an indicator that many believers also wanted to understand the future as God had laid it out in His Word.
- In 1995, Tim LaHaye's ***Left Behind*** series (over 62 million and counting) has been a renewed statement of a new generation of people wanting to know what

God's Word says about the future.

- The surprise of the year 2000 was Bruce Wilkinson's book ***The Prayer of Jabez*** (sold 13 million copies overnight); those sales were a cry from many believers that they really wanted to experience prayer. At a Bible conference where I spoke, a woman stood at the final meeting and gave a public testimony. She said, "I have been praying the Prayer of Jabez over my family for years, but now I have verses from the Bible to use to focus my prayers for my family."
- Rick Warren's 2002 ***Purpose Driven Life*** (selling an astonishing 24 million copies) is a statement that many people are really interested in finding out how to live life for what matters to God.

But the best-selling book in all history, God's Word: *The Holy Bible*, is where we find the truth to answer these and all other deep cries of our hearts. And the 71st Psalm deals with some of the troubles common to living on planet Earth. For troubles are always with us—as Job said almost 5,000 years ago (Job 5:7). Either we are just getting through some, in the middle of some, or headed into some.

Consequently, every day is an opportunity to either focus on ourselves—our troubles, problems, misfortunes, woes (and there will always be some)—or to focus on God and His plans, promises, purposes, and faithfulness to guide our lives to the very end.

Someone has well said that life is not really mountains and valleys where we have all good times (mountains) and all bad times (valleys); rather, life is more a parallel line of railroad tracks. One side is all of our unending struggles; the other side is all of God's goodness being worked out in our lives.

Bottom line is that the Lord wants us to view all our trials through the lens of His Word—and that is exactly what David did in Psalm 71.

VIEWING THE PRESENT THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD'S WORD

(Psalm 71:1-13)

In Psalm 71, a psalm of intentional abiding, David first surveyed the challenges everyone faces as they get older. In a series of verses which blend God's faithfulness and promises, he reflected upon the problems of aging, such as the following:

CONFUSION INCREASES AS WE AGE.

David reminded us in verses 1-2 that as we get older, our minds get slower, and it is easier to get confused. Life moves so fast these days that when our minds and bodies slow down, it is hard to keep pace. This can prompt confusion.

Too many choices, too fast a pace, and too short a period to process needed information to make a decision can prompt confusion and indecisiveness as to what to do.

When confusion increases what should we do? We should declare our unwavering choice to form these godly habits:

- **Like David, flee to the Lord for hope instead of living in confusion:** *In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion (Psalm 71:1 KJV).*
- **Like David, cry out to the Lord before giving in to temptation:** *Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me (Psalm 71:2).*

INSECURITY INCREASES AS WE AGE.

In Psalm 71:3-8, David pointed out that an increase of insecurity is another challenge of growing older. Like confusion, insecurity shows up periodically from childhood; it just gets bigger and bigger the older and weaker we get. Elderly people commonly feel like they are no longer needed, and often are in the way. Combined with all the other weaknesses of life, a sense of feeling unwanted breeds an increased insecurity.

David warned, however, that God will not allow us to persist in the enticing sins of old age: a lust for comfort and convenience, a greed for recognition, and covetousness for security. God used David to remind us that the sins of old age can erase Christ's "Well done!" Remember Solomon: he started out well but failed in the end because he refused to obey God in his waning years.

The increased insecurities of aging are usually prompted by fears like the fear of pain, abandonment, rejection, death, losing control, failure, uncertain future, shame and embarrassment, strangers, losses, worrying about what people think of you, and aging itself.

How does God deliver us from fear? He does so by instilling in us a greater fear—the fear of God. What is the fear of the Lord? From references to "the fear of the Lord" that appear throughout the Psalms, below is a distilled description of what this "greater fear" means:

- Having reverence and respect for God as the all-powerful Leader of all else.
- Having certainty of inescapable accountability for behavior to God.
- Practicing the personal awareness of the presence of a Holy God.
- Humbly following His leadership by obeying His Word.³

When insecurity increases what should we do? We should declare our unwavering choice to form these godly habits:

- **Like David, resist fear by running into God's Refuge:** *Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress (Psalm 71:3).* Rather than let fears paralyze us, we should trust God's Word over the fears.
- **Like David, ask for God's help before becoming bitter:** *Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man (Psalm 71:4).* We should turn our hurts over to the Lord to handle!
- **Like David, keep remembering the faithfulness of God:** *For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth (Psalm 71:5).* We should choose to believe God's faithfulness!

³ Jan David Hettinga, Follow Me: Experience The Loving Leadership of Jesus, (Colorado Springs, Co: NavPress, 1996, Pages 193-194 and 218-219.

- **Like David, remember to praise God that He has a plan for our lives:** *By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You* (Psalm 71:6). We should seek God's plan every day!
- **Like David, let our lives be a testimony for the Lord:** *I have become as a wonder to many, but You are my strong refuge* (Psalm 71:7). In all circumstances, we should do what's right because it's right in God's eyes!
- **Like David, praise God so much that no time is left for complaints:** *Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day* (Psalm 71:8). We should praise often!

WEAKNESS AND TROUBLES INCREASE AS WE AGE.

David also noted in Psalm 71:9 that *weakness increases* as we grow older. How true! Finances decrease and deplete as does our physical, emotional, and mental strength. Our senses dim, our minds dull, and our hopes diminish. Everything in our physical world weakens from bones to teeth, from circulation to stamina, from sight to hearing. Nothing in our physical world escapes this slow (or rapid) decline.

John Wesley (1703-1791), a giant among eighteenth-century servants of the Lord, wrote this on his eighty-sixth birthday in a diary he kept for most of his adult life:

June 28. This day I enter on my eighty-sixth year. I now find I grow old:

1. My sight is decayed, so that I cannot read a small print, unless in a strong light.
2. My strength is decayed, so that I walk much slower than I did some years since.
3. My memory of names, whether of persons, or places, is decayed, till I stop a little to recollect them.

What I should be afraid of, is, if I took thought for the morrow, that my body should weigh down my mind, and create either stubbornness, by the decrease of my understanding, or peevishness, by the increase of bodily infirmities; But thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God. John Wesley.

Another realm David mentioned in Psalm 71:10 is that *troubles increase* as we age. David mentioned his enemies were as much present at the end of his life as they were at the start and throughout. And so we will also discover the older we get. From troubles with mobility to troubles with relationships, life will be filled with tribulation. It will become harder to get up, get around, sleep, hear, remember, and even trust.

Anxiety will be easily accessed, fears will multiply, and bitterness will be near at hand. Enemies imagined and enemies experienced will then all run together. There will be emotional troubles (some struggle with lifelong depression), financial troubles (some have constant financial needs and hardships), family troubles (some have hurtful children or burdensome and ungrateful parents for many years)—and all

these troubles will feel heavier to bear the weaker we get.

When weakness and trouble increases what should we do? We should declare our unwavering choice to form these godly habits:

- **Like David, trust God to the end of life:** *Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails* (Psalm 71:9).
- **Like David, trust in the Lord's ability to rescue us:** *For my enemies speak against me; and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, saying, "God has forsaken him; pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him." O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!* (Psalm 71:10-12). In a modern sense David trusted God as much as in 911, so take all fears to the Lord in prayer.

ALONENESS INCREASES AS WE AGE.

David noted in Psalm 71:11-13 that *aloneness increases*. In younger years there are endless avenues to pursue. Time flies, friends flow around us, and plans are laid out far into the future for this and that. Life is filled with classrooms, bus and car rides, work meetings, gatherings as parents; as members and participants we just can't keep up with it all.

But slowly the calendar clears, friends decrease, travel abates, and we find ourselves increasingly alone. Being alone is a lifelong condition, but it seems to sting more when coupled with increased troubles, insecurities, weaknesses, and confusion.

As some people age, they look back on **their past** and only remember what they had and lost or never had and wanted. That is a debilitating choice. Some aged people look on **their present** as a basis to complain and bewail their aches, pains, and problems. That is also a debilitating choice. Other elderly persons choose to not look at **their future** because they fear death and are afraid of dying. That, too, is a debilitating choice.

In Psalm 71, David **looked back at the past** and saw God's hand of faithfulness and power; he **looked around in the present** and saw God's plans for him and started anew and afresh declaring that is what he would do; and then he **looked ahead to the future** and saw all that God wanted him to do until he went home to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is the way to end well by living purposefully!

When aloneness increases what should we do? We should declare our unwavering choice to form this godly habit:

Like David, never give up: Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries of my life; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt. But I will **hope continually**, and will **praise** You yet **more and more** (Psalm 71:13-14). We should never be quitters even if alone, neglected, sick, ignored, rejected, maligned, and forgotten by everyone in the world EXCEPT GOD!