

Growing Old Gracefully and Usefully

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Carol and I are delighted to be with you folks here at Providence Church. We have developed a relationship with many of the people here. It goes all the way back to the 1990's when actually Barb and Jack came to visit us in South Africa and, of course, John and Connie were with them at that particular time, and previous to that, Barb had been involved in our Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling Program at the Masters College, and at that point I was the Director of that program. So it's great to be here and I think of a statement which was made by George Burns, the comedian, he said, "At my age, I'm not only glad to be here, I'm glad to be anywhere." And that's a bit like with us as well.

Several years ago, a relatively young man of about 35 years of age came up to my wife one day and he said to her, "You must really be beautiful on the inside." And she didn't know exactly what that meant and looked a little perplexed and he realized that she didn't understand what he was talking about, and then he said, "You know the Bible says though the outer man is decaying, the inner man is being renewed day by day." At that point she just wondered how decayed she really was. But at any rate, I want to speak to you today on the subject of "Growing Old Gracefully and Usefully."

Now, some of you may wonder why in the world are you speaking on growing old? Don't you realize that some of us here are not old? Well, I'm speaking on that because by God's grace, one day you very likely will be old and besides that, what I have to say about growing old is very applicable to you as you grow old. And what I'm going to do today is have you look with me at a passage of Scripture which was written by an old man. I'm referring to Psalm 71 which was written by an old man, the old man being David, and David in this particular instance was probably pretty close to death. Psalm 71 is a couplet with Psalm 72 and Psalm 72 concludes with these words, the writer who was David said, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." I'm at the end of the road, he says, and in terms of writing Psalms, that was probably the last Psalm that David wrote. So what we have here is an old man who is giving us some counsel in terms of how he faced and prepared for old age gracefully and usefully. In this Psalm he says in verse 18, "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come." And just a little bit before that he said, "O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still," even though I am now an old person, "will declare Your wondrous deeds."

Now, some people look on growing old as kind of like getting a horrible disease. I remember one lady that I was counseling, she came in for counseling and she said that she sometimes got tired and wasn't able to do as much as she had been able to do when she was a younger person. So I said to her, "Well, you know that's something you can expect, that as you grow older you won't have as much strength as you previously had." In fact, in this particular Psalm, the psalmist mentions that very fact. In verse 9 he says, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails." I'm not as strong as I used to be. O God, don't forsake me. And so she was bemoaning the fact that she didn't have the strength that she used to have and so I said, "Well, that's something you just have to expect as you grow older." She said, "I'm not old! I don't want to be old!"

She looked upon becoming old as something that was horrendous but the Bible sees it otherwise. In Proverbs, the 16th chapter, and verse 31, the Bible says, "A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness." And in Job 12:12, Job says that wisdom is with old people, and the truth is that if we haven't learned anything by the time we become really old, we've wasted a lot of time. I'm now 82 years of age and if I don't know more than I did when I was 50 years of age, I wasted 32 years. So that's what Job is referring to when he says, "Wisdom is with aged men, With long life is understanding." We ought to grow old gracefully and usefully.

In 1 Timothy 5, the Bible recognizes the fact that older people are not to be despised but rather they are to be honored. 1 Timothy 5 says that when you are talking to an older man, don't sharply rebuke that man, but rather you appeal to him, you talk to him respectfully as you would to your father. And then you talk even to the younger men as you would brothers. Then he says about the older women, you are to relate to them as though they were your mother, and the Bible says that you are to honor your father and your mother. And at the same time you are to speak to younger women as sisters in all purity. So Scripture has much to say about the fact that we should grow old gracefully and usefully.

In Psalm 92, the Scripture speaks of older people in this way, it says that the righteous man, and how do you become righteous? I remember I was asked to visit a lady who was in her mid 90's, she was in a nursing home, and a friend of mine was concerned about his mother's spiritual condition so he asked me to visit her. And when I was asking the Lord how can I approach the situation because he really wasn't sure of her salvation and he was aware of the fact that in the near future she would pass into eternity, and so he was rightly concerned about the spiritual condition of his mother, and I was asking the Lord, "Lord, how shall I approach this? What shall I say to this dear old lady?" So she came in and was sitting down there and I had decided at that point that I would actually read to her a passage that would be an encouraging passage and that was Psalm 92:12-14 which says, "The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree," and he spoke of the palm tree because palm trees, I was in Lebanon on Mount Lebanon a few years ago and the guide that took us to the top of Mount Lebanon pointed us to some palm trees and he said, now this is what he said, I don't know whether it was true or not but he said that those palm

trees went all the way back to the time of Solomon. If that's true, those palm trees that looked pretty healthy at that point, were 3,000 years old.

It says, "The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree." He's not going to be like a little bush that comes one season and it's gone by the time the next season arrives. He will be like that palm tree and, "He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, They will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and very green." And I remember in talking to that woman, I went on to talk about how we become righteous, I talked about the fact that all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that none of us are righteous in our own stead, and our only way of becoming righteous is through the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, and I presented the Gospel to her about how his righteousness is transferred to our account and that's how we become righteous. Then it goes on to say that he flourishes in old age and she looked at me and she said, "You know, there is a man here at this nursing home, he's almost 100 years of age," and she said, "He is really full of sap and very green." Well, she got the idea that as older people we can still continue to bear fruit for the Lord. So the Bible has much to say about the fact that he wants us to grow old gracefully and usefully as well.

Now in this Psalm, Psalm 71, we have David who is, as I said, an old man, is going to give us some information writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, 2 Timothy 3:16. This is part of the "all Scripture which is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that we might be fully equipped unto every good work." Well, this is part of that to help us to become fully equipped to every good work. In Romans 15:4, we are told what was written in former times was written for our instruction. And 1 Corinthians 10:11, the Bible says essentially the same thing, it says that whatever is written was written for our instruction upon whom the ends of the ages have come. So what we have in Psalm 71 is David giving us instruction about how to grow old gracefully and usefully and what, of course, should be true of older people should be true of all of us if we name the name of Jesus Christ.

Now, what we have in Psalm 71 is David making some wonderful statements, I call them resolutions. He is stating some resolutions which he as an old man has made and he is doing that so that we too might know the kind of resolutions that we should make as we grow older. Now, it's important to notice that David realizes that there are some problems as you grow older. Ecclesiastes 12 describes some of those problems and that's why Ecclesiastes 12 says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," because a day is going to come when you're going to have a lot of problems. So the Bible is very honest and realistic in terms of the fact that sometimes as older people we do have certain problems.

In verse 1 of Psalm 71, David indicates that he is under attack. Verse 2, the same thing, he says, "I need Your help, Lord. Listen to me and save me." In verse 2, he says "Incline Your ear." Then in verse 4, he says, "Lord, I need some rescuing. Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man." In verse 9, he says, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my

strength fails." And there are a lot of old people who think they are abandoned and that others really don't care if they are around and wish that they weren't. He is experiencing a diminishing as far as his strength is concerned. In verse 9, he is talking about being cast off and forsaken. Verse 10, he indicates that he has enemies because, "For my enemies have spoken against me." So there were people who were criticizing him, speaking against him. Verse 10, he says there were people who were watching for his life. They are getting together and planning how they can destroy him. Then in verse 13 he says, "Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed." Then when you drop down to verse 20 he says, "You who have shown me many troubles and distresses."

So he's being realistic in terms of the fact that growing old is not always just a piece of cake, there are difficulties, but in the context of all of that, in the midst of the fact that he is realistic, he also indicates that as you grow older, you can grow older gracefully and usefully and, of course, there is a message here for young people too, if you want to grow older gracefully and usefully, David has some counsel for you as well. The question I put to you this morning is the question: do you want to grow old to the glory of God? Do you want to grow older in a way that is graceful and useful? And what I find in this Psalm are eight resolutions that David indicates we should make.

I doubt that we'll have time to look at all of those eight resolutions because there is so much in this Psalm but look at verse 1 where we have the first resolution that David made and it's a resolution that all of us should make, regardless of our age, and the resolution was that when we are challenged, we should make God our refuge rather than grumble and complain. Now, when David speaks of a refuge, what is a refuge? A refuge is a place of safety, it's a place of security, it's a place of protection. David has enemies and he needs a refuge, he needs a place of safety, security and protection and he's saying, "Lord, you are my refuge. You are my refuge. You are my place of safety and security." And I ask you even now: what or who is your refuge? When you have difficulties, regardless of what they are, physical, spiritual, involving people, involving circumstances, what or who is your refuge? Can you really honestly say, "Lord, in you I have taken refuge and I still am taking refuge"?

Now, David is under attack and being under attack, he tells us that when he is under attack, here's what he's going to do: he's going to take refuge in God and his sovereignty. Now at this time in his life, David could look back over his life and he could have decided that he would take refuge in his successes, and they were many. After all, it was David who had slain the giant Goliath and delivered the nation of Israel from being overtaken by the Philistines. It was David who had been chosen by God to be king of Israel. It was David who had written many of the Psalms. It was David who had written the most beloved of all Psalms, Psalm 23. It was David who had been anointed as king over the whole nation of Israel. It was David who planned to build the temple. It was David who on numerous occasions led the armies of Israel to victory over their enemies. So it's significant to note that when he was attacked, he didn't take refuge in his reputation, he didn't take refuge in his learning, he didn't take refuge in his money, he didn't take refuge in his friends, he didn't take refuge in his family, he didn't take refuge in his skill and in his position, instead he said, "In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge."

So David could have taken refuge in his successes or he could have taken refuge in the victories that he had had when people said bad things about him. When he was tempted, being ashamed because in verse 1 he mentions the issue of being ashamed. And at that point he could have moaned and groaned, he could have grumbled, he could have complained, he could have become defensive, he could have said it's not fair that I should be treated in this particular way. At this point David could have done what many older people are tempted to do. He could have spent his time reflecting on his past failures and they were many. He could have reflected on the many times in the past when he sinned grievously. David could have remembered the way that he had sinned with Bathsheba and thought about how awful and terrible that it was. He could have reflected on the times when he made bad decisions. He could have allowed himself to reflect on his complicity in the death of his son as described in 2 Samuel 12. He could have allowed himself to remember and dwell upon how his son Absalom had rebelled against him and hated him and actually wanted to destroy him. He could have spent time thinking about how his son Amnon had committed incest with his sister Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 and how his other children had failed him. He could have reflected on the way Saul had become jealous of him and actually tried to kill him. That's what many older people do when they look back over their lives and when they are being honest they know that there have been a lot of failures, but David didn't reflect on his successes, he didn't moan and groan about his failures, he didn't become depressed, filled with bitterness, shame, remorse, self-pity. He didn't respond to his difficulties as many older people are prone to respond. He might have been tempted to despair and defensiveness but he didn't give this response to his problems, instead he made a resolution. He said, "When I'm under attack, it's in you that I'm going to find my place of safety, my place of security, my place of just being taken care of."

He did here what he advised people to do in Psalm 46. It was David who wrote Psalm 46 where the Bible says, "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; Though its waters roar and foam," there is all kinds of turmoil all around us, "Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved. God is my refuge and God is my strength."

I know from my personal experience as an older person and from my experience of counseling many older people, that one of the things we older people are tempted to do is what David didn't do. Sometimes we are prone to defend ourselves, we are prone to remind ourselves and others of all of our past successes or failures. For example, I know of some Christian older people who have allowed themselves to be constantly downcast over the fact that they have children who are not walking with the Lord. For a real Christian, there is probably no more disheartening experience than the experience of seeing his or her children walking away from Christ and Christian values. When their children were at home, these parents tried to bring them up in the Ephesians 6:4 way, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They sought to live Christ before their children. They faithfully went with them to church. They prayed for them and with them. They taught them Scripture. And yet their children got older and left home and turned their

backs on Christian values. They chose to live in and for the world. They have turned away from Christ and lived according to values that are certainly not Christian values.

Well, those same parents whose children are not presently living as full out Christians, have spent long hours evaluating themselves and asking a lot of questions. For example, they spend time repeatedly asking certain questions such as, "Where did we fail? Where did we go wrong? What should we have done differently?" Those parents begin to play the "perhaps" game, "Perhaps if we had prayed more. Perhaps if we had exercised more discipline. Perhaps if we had been easier on them. Perhaps if we had spent more time with them. Perhaps if we had had more fun with them. Perhaps if we had listened to them better." They play the "perhaps" game. Or if they don't play the "perhaps" game, they play the "if/only" game, "If only we had done this. If only we had done that."

Now, a certain amount of examining is good. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 13:5 that we should examine ourselves. And in 1 Corinthians 11:28, the Bible says if we don't examine ourselves, God will, and for this cause some of you are weak and sick and some have actually died. Then in 2 Peter 1:10, the Bible says we should be diligent to make sure that we are in the faith, that we have a basis for believing that we are Christians. So there is a certain amount of examining that is good but the truth is that none of us have ever done everything perfectly. The truth is that as 1 John 1:10 says, "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Concerning this matter of wayward children, John Piper, he has a podcast and in one of these podcasts someone had written in and said, "We hear from grieving parents a lot and I suppose that to parent in this broken world is pretty much a guarantee of parental grieving, so what do you do when your children grow up in the church but then leave the faith and you are left with a lingering question over how you have failed in the process?" One father said, "Pastor John, does God promise to save my children? Some teachers say that I need to have faith and others who claim it and that God would save them. I have four children, all of them were raised in the local church, all of them walked away from the faith. Two of them seem to be returning but both struggle with sinful lifestyles. The other two are very far from God. I am so depressed over my children's spiritual condition and have asked the Lord to forgive me for being depressed. Do you have any advice for me?"

And Piper goes on at that point to say, well he asks the question, "Does the Bible promise to save our children? What do I do if I feel like I've failed or I'm just depressed because I don't know?" And Piper says that there is nowhere in the word of God where God promises that he will save our children. Proverbs 22:6 is a verse which is frequently quoted and some would say that it claims that if we do a good job parenting, our children will not walk away, but Piper says that's not what that verse is talking about. That verse does not contain an absolute promise but a generalization that we can hope for, pray for and work for.

He says that he doesn't believe that in the word of God, God absolutely promises that he will save our children. He says, "I have three reasons for that and more but here are

three." He says, "In Isaiah 1:2 God says, 'Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.'" Now if it were true that good parenting always resulted in faithful children, that would be a very strange thing for God Almighty who is the perfect parent, to say." Then he says, "I'm reading right now this long sorry history of the kings of Israel with bad kings being followed by sons who turned out to be good kings, and good kings who were followed by sons who turned out to be bad kings. It's a simply stunning mixture of good and evil and gives me great pause not to make quick and easy assumptions that the bad always produce bad kids, and the good always produce good kids. It's simply not true. It is not so simple, not in the Bible."

Then he says thirdly, "Jesus said about family relations and the effect his Gospel has on them does not produce a guarantee that our children will be saved." Then he quotes from Luke 12 where Jesus said, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Even more strikingly, Piper quotes Matthew 10:21 which says, "Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death."

Now all in all as I look at those and a lot of other things, I don't think the Bible gives any absolute promise to parents that faithful parenting will result in faithful children. It's likely to produce faithful children and we should pray and hope that it will, but I don't think an absolute promise exists which leads now to the last part of the question: what am I going to do with horrific discouragement? What am I going to do when my children walk away from Christ? Am I going to become depressed? What are we to do? And Piper says, "The first thing I would say is that none of us can pass final judgment on our own parenting and neither can our children. Their memories and our memories are fallible. Situations are very complex. We know for sure that there will always be some sins against our children that should be confessed to God, confessed to them and made right as far as they will allow us to make it right, but there is no final judgment about how we did. That will only come to light at the last day and that's true for our children in their assessment as well as our own assessment. This means that the possibilities of peace, joy, hope and love in the present moment cannot depend decisively on our assessment for how we did as parents. We don't take refuge in how well we did or how our children turned out." He says, "Our hope for the present moment to survive emotionally and even thrive amid the profound gut wrenching disappointments of life, is the fact that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, to save parents from their sins and to save children from their sins. We must build our present lives on the Gospel and not on parenting successes and not be undone by parenting failures. That's a denial of the Gospel. The key is to ask God by the Holy Spirit to give us the faith and wisdom to weave together the passages of Scripture and walk in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, for Paul says in Romans 9:2-3, 'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were

accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Then he said, "'Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved,' Romans 10:1. We do devote ourselves unstintingly morning and night, day after day to earnest prayer that those we love will be saved. We engage in special seasons of focused prayer. We draw friends into that and ask them to pray for our children. We as led by the Lord may even fast for our children." Then Philippians 4 says, "do not be anxious about anything," don't be anxious about anything, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." So Piper says we hand over our souls and the souls of our children to the sovereign goodness and wisdom of God and we forsake anxiety.

Well, that's what David did because many of his children, some of his children didn't turn out that good but in that situation and other situations where he had experienced failure, what he did was make the Lord his refuge. "Lord, you are my place of safety. You are my place of security. You are my place of protection." May God help us do the same too, where we live to the glory of God, we turn over situations, we believe in his sovereignty, we believe that he always does things well, we believe that he is altogether wise, we believe that he is gracious and we trust him not because of circumstances in our family or in our businesses or in our world, we just trust God and we learn to come to the Lord and say, "I have taken refuge in you. I'm going to trust in you. I'm going to rely upon you." And that's what we must do in every situation as we grow older, we take our refuge in the Lord and we trust in him.

The second thing that David did which is an example for us, is found in verses 5 and 6. These are two wonderful verses. He says, "You are my hope." Verse 1 he says, "You are my refuge." Verse 5 he says, "You are my hope," and we need to ask what does it mean when he says that you are my hope? Well, hope is an expectation of good. It's something that brings delight. What does hope do? It lifts a person's spirit. It gives a person a positive attitude toward life. In this statement, David tells us something about his attitude toward life, toward his situation. He tells us he's determined not to depend on his circumstances for his hope. He tells us that his hope was not based on his talents, nor was it based on his intellect, nor on his friends, nor on his personality, nor on his education, nor on his skills. His hope was not based on the approval of other people, it was in God, or more appropriately he had determined that God would be his hope. Can you say that, "You are my hope, Lord?" When things aren't going well as you would like them to go, are you committed to saying, "Lord, You are my hope?"

Then notice in that same verse he says something else, he says, "You are my confidence." Now if we are to understand what this means, we must ask ourselves what the word "confidence" means, and perhaps the best way to understand what David meant is to look at another place in Scripture where the word "confidence" is used, and for that we can turn to the New Testament where Paul uses this word. Now in the context of 2 Corinthians 1, Paul has been under attack. He has been blamed, he has been described as

a deceiver, promising something and then not delivering his promises. He has been blamed and saying, "You are in it for the money. You are in it for fame. That's why you're doing what you're doing." Awful things were being said about Paul and what Paul says in verse 12, "our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end." And what Paul is saying is, "I have heard the accusations. I have heard the things which you have said. I have examined my heart and my conscience says what you are saying is not true." And as the result of that he says, "I have confidence."

Now, what David is saying is, "Lord, you are my confidence. You are my assurance." A person who has confidence is assured. What does this tell you about David? It tells you that he went through life not with timidity, not being fearful, not being embarrassed, not being ashamed. He went through life assured, with confidence.

Now in our days sometimes we hear people saying that they have an inferiority complex. I have heard that in counseling on a number of occasions from people who say, "You know, my problem is I just have an inferiority complex." Well, David didn't talk about an inferiority complex. A person who has an inferiority complex is really saying, "I'm not confident. I don't have assurance." In the New Testament, the Greek word that is translated "confidence" is sometimes translated by the word "boldness or courageous." That's the way it's translated in Acts 4:13. Now what's happening in Acts 4 is that the apostles have preached the word and as a result of that, they were warned that they should never again talk about Jesus. "Shut your mouth. Don't talk about Jesus, and if you do, we'll throw you in jail." And yet in spite of that warning, the early Christians went out and they preached the word and Acts 4:13 says that when people saw the assurance, the boldness, that's our word "confidence," they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. In spite of what others were saying, they were bold in continuing to talk about Jesus. There was a sense of assurance that they had.

So what does it mean to be a confident person? It means you're a person who believes with Paul, believes in Philippians 4:13 where he says, "I can do all things through Christ who infuses his strength into me." He acts like David did in Psalm 71. He was courageous. He had a "God can" attitude. "God can do it. Maybe I can't but I'm sure God can," and the result was that David was bold. David went through life with a Philippians 4:13 attitude. He went through life with a "God can" attitude. He believed Romans 8:28 that, "God can work all things together for good to those who believe God, love God and are called according to his purpose."

David went through life with that confidence, with that assurance, in spite of what was happening around him and in verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 71, David tells us that this had been his practice since he was a youth. It says, "By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb," and he says, "You are my strong refuge and my mouth is filled with Your praise." I want you to notice what David says, "You have been my refuge from my youth." He says, "O God, You taught me from my

youth," verse 17, and as you read many of the Psalms that David wrote in the book of Psalms, you get something of a glimpse of how diligently and humbly and receptively David had sat in God's classroom. "You've taught me, Lord, from the time that I have been young."

Well, what had God been teaching him? Well, in Psalm 19, David tells us his attitude toward the word of God and he says that the word of God is able to cause you to rejoice; the word of God is able to restore your soul; is able to make wise the simple; it can cause the heart to rejoice; it can lighten the eyes; it can help you to make wise judgments. David wrote that in Psalm 19 and then David also wrote Psalm 119 which is a Psalm that Charles Spurgeon says was written by David. It was his conviction it was, and many others agree with him. And all through Psalm 119, you have 176 verses and almost every one of the verses in Psalm 119 has something to say about the word of God. David loved the word of God. He thought about the word of God. He meditated on the word of God and what God did was use the word of God to give him confidence.

I was just reading this morning, in fact, about a certain woman who has had a lot of physical problems, problems that her hands, she was not able to use her hands and she would wake up in the morning and she was filled with pain and not knowing what was going to happen the rest of the day, and she said that every day what she did was turn to the word of God and on one particular occasion where she woke up and she was weeping because of the problems she had, she turned to Psalm 56 and as she meditated on Psalm 56, what the Lord did was brought comfort to her. Psalm 56:3 says that because of the enemy, "I will put my trust in the Lord." He said, "I'm not going to allow my mind to go off wherever it wants to go. I'm going to take charge of my mind and I will put my trust in the Lord." And to put your trust in the Lord means you put your trust in the word of God because the word of God is the word of the Lord.

So if we're going to grow old gracefully and usefully, we need to resolve that the Lord is going to be our hope, our confidence, and the Lord is going to be our source of assurance. David was resolutely committed to a living God, a God-centered life, which means he was committed to a Scripture-centered life. David really believed God's word. He loved God's word because it was God's word. David was resolutely committed to God in such a way that he had a positive, expectant, assured attitude as he faced the challenges of life. You see, David didn't have a casual relationship with God, he had a vital relationship with God. God was not an add-on factor in his life, God was his life. It was his reason for assurance. In the New Testament we find Paul who certainly was one of the great men of God, saying, "For me to live is Christ. That's my life, it's Christ." And in a sense that's what David is saying in Psalm 71:5 and 6. For David, God was his life, God was his hope, God was his assurance, and God was his confidence and so it must be with us if we want to grow old gracefully and usefully. Circumstances may change, people's attitudes and behavior toward us may change, but God will never change because Hebrews 13:8 says he is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Well, one more thing and that is, that's all that I'll mention today, and that is as you look at this Psalm, what David is saying is that we must resolve to use our mouths so much for

praise that there is no room left for grumbling and complaining. He says in verse 8, "My mouth is filled with Your praise." If his mouth is filled with praise, there is not any room for anything else. "My mouth was filled with Your glory all day long." Then in verse 14, David says, "as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more. My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And of Your salvation all day long." Then he says in verse 18, "even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation."

I have a testimony. You know, I have had people say to me, "What's the secret of your perseverance? You've been a Christian since November 1951?" And by God's grace, though I certainly haven't been a perfect Christian, nonetheless I want to go on to serve the Lord and hope by his grace I'll do that until the day I die. What else would I do? I don't believe in retirement.

You know, Jay Adams in a book which is called "Wrinkled But Not Ruined" has a lot to say about Psalm 71 in this particular book, and he talks about the fact that we live in a throw-away world. You know, we buy something and instead of getting it fixed when it doesn't work, well, we go out and buy something else, so we throw things away. You go into a grocery store and you buy a food product and on it will say, "This is good to be used until such-and-such a date," so we put a shelf life on food products. Well, praise God, God doesn't put a shelf life on us as Christians and say, "You can serve me, you can honor me, you can be a witness for me until a certain time, then you go on the shelf and you are no longer to be used for me."

Well, Jay in this good book, he says, "An older person must be like a fruit bearing tree that still produces in old age. There is no need to dry up and fade away in old age as many do. There is no need for a person to waste the last years of his life watching television. He may still have a productive place in God's kingdom if only he will. Here's one of the great differences between those who are happy in old age and those who are not: people with time on their hands who do nothing in the service of Christ tend to become ingrown, self-centered and sicker than those who busy themselves with productive ministry. That ministry may differ from their ministries in earlier times but every older believer who is still conscious may serve in some capacity. Part of the excitement of doing so is finding new and suitable ministries for one's remaining capabilities. Praising God to others and finding something worthwhile to do for God is the way to stay fresh and green in old age. When people fail to do this, they dry up. Old age ought to produce much praise as well, but, says one person, 'I don't know how to praise God very well.' The answer you should give him," says Jay, "'What better time is there for you to learn how to do it than in old age?' Old Augustine said, 'I cannot think that it is at any time of life too late to learn.'"

We need to learn. I preached actually this message at Lynwood Baptist Church a few weeks ago. There is a dear older lady, I can say old lady because she's now 12 years older than Carol and myself, and she's 94, and we have a ministry at Lynwood Baptist Church called "Strengthening Ministries Training Institute," and we have students that are coming from all over South Africa and some from Zimbabwe and some from Malawi,

and we've even had students that have come from Europe that have come over to take courses with us in South Africa because it's cheaper to come to South Africa than to come to the United States. At any rate, I challenged the people in Lynwood Baptist Church and this dear older lady, we provide food for the students who come. They come, we provide lunch for them, we provide refreshments for them, and this dear old lady, her husband died just about two months ago and this dear old lady devotes her time to come and help in the kitchen with my wife and Beth and there is another older lady who comes and she helps in the kitchen in providing the food. And one of the people in our church there, she's a nurse, she came in one day when this 94-year-old lady was hustling around providing food for our students and she warned her, "You know, if you fall down and you break your bones...." And she's a nurse now, she knows what she's talking about, and she says that the bones of older people don't heal nearly as well and so, in effect, she was warning her and saying, "You shouldn't be here." But that dear old lady loves the opportunity that she has to be a servant and to reach out for others.

And that's what was going on with David as well. He says, "Even when I'm old, don't forsake me until I declare." I can tell people. Not just on the basis of a book that I've read, that God can do this and God will do this, I know from experience that God will do it and God can. And we who are older as we live longer with the Lord, we can speak of things that those who are younger in the faith can't speak of. I tell I've been a pastor since 1957 and there's hardly anything that has happened in any of the ministries in which I've been involved that I can't look back and say it happened before and God brought us through, and if he did it in the past, he's not going to quit now. And I can say that from experience. I can say it because I believe the word of God says it, but I can say it also because I know it's true from my own personal experience.

So as we go on in our relationship with the Lord, God just gives us more and more opportunity to praise him and give him the glory, and if we persevere, it's not because of us, it's because of him. We can say with the psalmist, "Lord, You are my refuge. You are my hope. You are my confidence. And Lord, You are the one who has sustained me and I'm going to fill my mouth with praise to You and not with grumbling and murmuring."

Jay in this book "Wrinkled But Not Ruined," he says in Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in their midst," and he said as we grow older, many of us, and Jay is six years older than I am so he can say this from experience and he said that you could alter that verse to say, "Where two or three older people are together, there you will find a lot of grumbling and a lot of complaining." And unfortunately that's often true. As we grow older, instead of having mouths that are filled with praise, we have mouths that are filled with grumbling and with complaining.

Well, that's not how to grow old gracefully or usefully. It's a commitment, Lord, that I'm going to praise you. I'm going to tell others about your power, your righteousness, your goodness, your mercy, your love, and especially about Jesus Christ. I'm committed to doing that and may God help us to make the same resolutions and be committed to the same things that David was for his honor, for his glory, and for the good of the people as well.

Thank you, Father, for this opportunity to look into your word and have this older saint who had many successes but also many failures, but he's learned from those failures and he's communicating to us to not go around moaning and groaning about our difficulties, the bad things that have happened, but giving glory to you and filling our mouths with your praise. Forgive us, our Father, when that hasn't been true and please help us to be more like David in Psalm 71. We pray for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.