

Growing Old Gracefully and Usefully Part 2

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Well, it's been a joy to be back with you here in the United States. Since the last time we were here, which was two weeks ago, three weeks ago, we were in Pennsylvania visiting some of our supporters there, people who have prayed with us and for us, and then having spent a little bit of time in Pennsylvania, we moved on to Arkansas where we spent some time with another one of our supporting churches, the Bible Church of Little Rock, Arkansas. I ministered there for a number of weeks previous to going to South Africa and we were actually asked to come and join the ministry there and it would either have been us moving to Arkansas or going to South Africa and South Africa was the place that we decided God wanted us to be. So we're grateful for the opportunity of coming back here and visiting with some of our dear friends and, of course, we spent a considerable time here at Providence and you folks have become very dear to us and Carol and I can't tell you how much we really appreciate you.

This summer was our 60th wedding anniversary and some of you know that I'm a fan of Jonathan John Bunyan and that Pilgrim's Progress has been a book that I've spent more time in probably than any other single book except the Bible, and we've just recently had the privilege of having two volumes of our exposition and application of Pilgrim's Progress published. The second volume is here so now we have over 800 pages of explanation from Pilgrim's Progress which is available. But at any rate, we appreciate you folks and especially the support and the help that we receive from some of you in actually accomplishing that ministry of putting the exposition of Pilgrim's Progress. It's amazing. If you haven't gotten involved in Pilgrim's Progress, you must. It's amazing the insights that God gave to John Bunyan in the 1600s. If you understand Pilgrim's Progress, Maureen Bradley has said you'll be an accomplished theologian, and I believe that with all my heart. So thank you for your encouragement in that adventure, as well as the help that some of the people here in the church have given to us in publishing that book.

Well, as was mentioned to you today, I want to continue a message that I started two Sundays ago from Psalm 71. At that time, I said that Psalm 71 and you might as well turn in your Bibles to that Psalm because we're going to be coming back to that, we said that this Psalm was written by an old man and it's a couplet with Psalm 72 which concludes with the words that, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse have ended." So this Psalm was written by David toward the end of his life and we want to see what David has to say

about how to live your life whether you're young or whether you're old, to the glory of God.

Now, the idea that some people have about growing old is that it's something not to be desired but the Bible has a different opinion about that and God's word, of course, is true. In Proverbs 16:31, the Bible says, "The gray head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." Then in Proverbs 20:29, the Bible says, "The glory of young men is their strength, And the honor of old men is their gray hair." It's not just the gray hair, but it's what that gray hair represents. Proverbs 4:18 says that life is like the beginning of the dawn and it grows brighter and brighter until the perfect day. So what that Psalm is saying is that life gets better as you grow older, not worse. In Psalm 92 says the righteous man, someone who is righteous we know in Jesus Christ, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, forgiven of his sin, he flourishes like the palm tree. He grows like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God and they will still yield fruit in old age. They shall be full of sap and very green.

Now, Psalm 71 is picking up on that idea of the fact that as we grow older, we can grow more godly, more useful even to the Lord than we did previously. Now with that as a background, I just want us to again come to Psalm 71 where we have a Psalm that is part of the inspired word of God. This Psalm in which God inspires an old man, David, to write about how Christians can grow old gracefully and usefully, they can grow old to the glory of God.

Now as we look at this Psalm, Psalm 71, the Psalmist tells us that old people sometimes have problems and he lists some of the problems that he was experiencing here. In verse 1, he's under attack. Verse 4, he's calling out to God to rescue him. Why does he need rescue? Because he's having some problems. Verse 9, he's afraid of being cast off and forsaken as is often the case with older people. Verse 9, he mentions that he's experiencing a diminishing of his strength. Verse 10, he talks about enemies. Verse 10, he talks about those who are consulting together to destroy him. Verse 13, he has adversaries. Verse 20, he says he's experiencing many troubles and distresses. So this old man had had and still does have some problems, and yet it's evident from this Psalm that what he's doing is giving us a description of what it means to grow old gracefully and usefully and to the glory of God.

Now, what I find in this Psalm are eight biblical resolutions for growing old gracefully and usefully, and in our last message, we were able to look at only three of them and when I was asked to preach again, I suggested I might preach on something else but I was outvoted and so we're back again and I'm going to preach the rest of the message from Psalm 71.

Resolution chapter 1. I've said that in this Psalm if we look at it carefully, we can find at least eight resolutions that we should make if we're going to grow old to the glory of God and one of them is in verse 1 where the Psalmist says that, "In You, I will take refuge; Let me never be ashamed." And I said a couple of weeks ago that every one of us has a refuge to which we run, but when do we run to a refuge? Because we think we're in

trouble. A refuge is a place of security, it's a place of protection, and so the Psalmist is saying, "When I have problems, I find my security, I find my protection in you and so I have resolved that God will be my place of refuge." And as we go through life, we're going to face problems. Jesus said, "In the world you're going to have tribulation." That's a promise. "In this world you're going to have tribulation." Well, what do you do? What should you do when you have tribulation? Well, probably the most important thing you should do is to remember that God is your refuge and you run to him remembering Psalm 46 which says, "God is our refuge and our strength, A very present help in the time of trouble."

Well, we noted that a couple of weeks ago. The second thing we noted a couple of weeks ago was that if we want to grow old gracefully and usefully, we need to make the resolution that the Psalmist made in verses 5 and 6. He says, "For You are my hope." Now hope has an expectation of good. How am I ever going to expect anything good? I'm going to expect everything good because God is my Father and I turn to him. So we need hope. A hopeless person is a person who is miserable; is a person who is sad, depressed. Once you lose hope, you lose enthusiasm, you lose excitement, you lose strength.

And so he said, "You are my hope," but he also said in verse 5, "You are my confidence." You've been my confidence, in fact, from the time of my youth. From the time when I went out to face Goliath. Everybody else was afraid of Goliath and ran away from him, but as a young person, I ran out and confronted Goliath. Why did I do that and how did I have the strength to do it? It was not because I thought that I was so strong. It was not because he considered himself to be the champion slingshot thrower in the world. It was because he had confidence in God.

The word "confidence" means he had assurance. A lot of times we hear people talking about having an inferiority complex and when you ask, "What is an inferiority complex?" An inferiority complex means they lack assurance. It means they lack confidence. And he's saying, "I don't have confidence in myself really, but I have confidence in you." So as we go through life and we face difficulties, we say, "You, Lord, are my confidence." The word "confidence" is sometimes translated in the Bible, the same word is translated "boldness or courage." Where do I get my courage? Where do I get my boldness? I get it from you. And so we need to continually make that commitment.

Then, thirdly as we continue on with this Psalm, we saw last time that we should make the commitment that we will use our mouths so much for praise that there is no room left for grumbling and complaining. You just read through the Psalm and he says, for example in verse 8, "My mouth is filled with Your praise. My mouth is filled with Your glory." My mouth is not filled with grumbling and groaning about all my problems and how I'm being mistreated. My mouth is filled not with my own strength, with my own wisdom, with my own personality. My strength is found in you and my mouth is filled with your praise, and on and on through the Psalm he talks more about praising God.

I mentioned the last time that Jay Adams has written a book which is called "Wrinkled but not Ruined," and it's about older people and a lot of what Jay had to say is from

Psalm 71. And Jay said that if you took that verse in Matthew 18 which says that, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be in their midst," if you change that just a little bit and say, "Where two or three older people are gathered together, there you'll find murmuring and complaining." And that's so often true as we grow older, we begin to complain more, murmur more. Well, if you're going to grow old gracefully and usefully and to the glory of God, you've got to stop that kind of stuff and fill your mouth with praise.

Think about how much you have to be grateful for. I mentioned to someone this week that we need to pay attention to Philippians 4:8. Whether we're old or whether we're young, we need to pay attention to that verse and it says that we are "to let our minds dwell on whatever is lovely, whatever is just, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is worthy of praise, whatever is excellent." Let your mind dwell on those things and that's what the Psalmist is saying. You know, people that are influential, people that are a blessing to other people, are people who are just praising God. Not the groaners and the moaners. People stay away from them. But the people who are praising God, are full of positive things to say about God, are the people who are influential.

Well, that brings us to our fourth resolution and the fourth resolution that I find in this particular passage is that we should resolve to steadfastly hope and learn to never give up even if we're alone and forgotten by everyone in the world except God. We should resolve to steadfastly hope. That's a decision you have to make. You decide that you're going to steadfastly hope because your hope is God and if God is your hope, then there's never a reason for ultimate despair. And you must learn never to give up, never to throw in the towel, never to say, "Well, I've had it. I can't go on from here." No, regardless of what happened to you, you never give up and you remember that even if you're forgotten by everyone else, you're not forgotten by God.

That's certainly part of the message of verse 12 where he says, "O God, do not be far from me; O my God, hasten to my help!" Then in verse 14 he says, "But as for me, I will hope continually." That's a decision. He wasn't going to hope that way because he felt like doing it. He said, "As for me, I have made a decision that I will hope continually. And I made a decision that I'm going to praise You yet more and more." In Psalm 34, the Psalmist said, "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My mouth shall make her boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear thereof and be glad."

So we must make a decision. You know, I often in counseling with somebody who's moaning and groaning, I'll remind them of Psalm 57 where the Psalmist said, "My heart is fixed, O God. I will sing and I will give praise." I made a resolution, Lord. I'm not going to allow my heart to go wherever it wants to go. I'm going to sing and I'm going to give praise. And in the midst of Psalm 57, he talks about lions who are trying to destroy him. He's saying that even when there are those who would destroy me, I am not going to allow myself to grumble and complain. I'm going to sing and I'm going to give praise. That's a decision you make that you're not going to allow yourself to be ruled by your

feelings but you're going to do what's right, and if you look hard and long enough, you find that there are plenty of things for us as people to give praise to God.

Then the fifth resolution we should make if we're going to grow old gracefully and usefully is that we must remember that there are great things about God that are beyond what we can even imagine. There are great things about God beyond what we could ever imagine and that certainly is indicated by verse 15 where he says, "My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And of Your salvation all day long; For I do not know the sum of them." That little phrase, "I do not know the sum of them," could be translated, "I do not know the number of them." I don't know everything about the salvation of God. I don't know everything there is to know about God and I'm going to praise him because he is beyond anything that I could ever imagine.

Now, you notice in this particular phrase, that he's saying that God is beyond our imagination, we could never fully understand how great and how wonderful God may be. In verse 14, the Psalmist says, "as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more." Now, that particular statement reminds us of what the Psalmist said in Psalm 139:1-6. He said, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all." You're so great you don't just know what I've said, you know what I'm about to say. That kind of thing is just incredibly wonderful and so he says, "You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me." This is beyond what I can understand. This is beyond what I can grasp. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain it."

Now all of that reminds us of what Paul said in Romans 11:33 and 34 where he spoke of the unsearchable riches of God's wisdom. You are wiser than I could ever imagine. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" Well, what that's saying, of course, is that God is beyond whatever we could imagine. He is so great that we cannot completely understand him. Now, this is so important for us to realize, that God is incomprehensible for us. What this is talking about is the incomprehensibility of God. We have a tendency to judge God on the basis of what man can do but God is incomprehensible. It doesn't mean you can't comprehend him, but it does mean you can't comprehend him entirely. You can't know God in his fullness. He is beyond anything that we could ever imagine.

The Psalmist here has an Isaiah 40:9-31 attitude about God. He says that, "All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? As for the idol," you have idols that you worship other than God, you put them in the place of God, "a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith fashions chains of silver. He who is too impoverished for such an offering Selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from

the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth." He thinks his God is so great he is sitting on the circle of the earth. "And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers," in comparison to him. He stretches out the heavens like a woman or a man might stretch out a curtain. God is so great that the heavens are like a curtain that God stretches out and he "spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. 'To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?' says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing." They say there are billions of stars out there and God knows them all by name and he is the one who keeps them up there in the sky, not one of them is missing. Then he asks the question, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD,'" God doesn't know what's happening with me. Why do you say such a foolish thing? If he could stretch out the heavens as a curtain, if he could know the names of all of the stars in the heaven, if he could keep them floating around up there, why do you say, O Jacob, "My way is hidden from the Lord, God doesn't know about what's happening to me, And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God?" Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired." He never has to go to take a nap. "His understanding is inscrutable." It's beyond comprehension. "He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength." So he's saying God is so great that it will keep me from becoming utterly discouraged.

David who wrote Psalm 71 really believed what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 32:17. He said, "Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm!" You just needed to stretch out your arm and there were all the heavens. And he goes on to say, "There is nothing too hard for thee." In Matthew 19:26, Jesus said the things that are impossible with men are possible with God.

Now what we're referring to here is the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God. I've already said that doesn't mean that God cannot be understood to a certain amount, but it does mean that God cannot be fully comprehended. Now that should be a comfort to us.

This past week I was talking to a young man about some things that were happening in his life and with some of his associates, and he was somewhat discouraged. "How could this be happening?" And of course, the point is how could God take these horrible circumstances and work them together for good? He began to question whether God can do that. No, God can do it because his strength and his power and his wisdom is incomprehensible. It's beyond anything we could ever imagine and so as we go through life, there will be things and sometimes they don't make sense to us, but that isn't the

issue, the issue is whether they make sense to God and they do, and his understanding is much beyond our understanding.

So when we face difficulties and we don't see how this works together for good, we can't see how it could work out, we remind ourselves that God is incomprehensible. He can do what you and I cannot do. He can do what no one else can do and there will be those times. I remember when I was in seminary a number of years ago, people were always asking the theology professors, "What about this? And what about that? And why does this happen? And why does that happen?" And my seminary professor said, "Guys, let's let God know some things that we don't know." You know, we want to play God rather than say, "Well, I don't know how this can work out. I don't know why this happens entirely, but I do know God knows, and if he didn't have a purpose for it and wasn't able to work it all together for good, then it would never happen." So we must as we go through life and there will be times when you don't figure out, can't figure out God, and the only way you can completely figure out God is if you were God, but we must constantly remember that God is God and we're not, and God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think.

Then the sixth resolution that we must make from Psalm 71 is that if we're going to grow old gracefully and usefully, we must learn to see pain and suffering as God's perfect tool to shape our lives and us in ministry and bring glory to his name. In Psalm 71:20, he said, "You who have shown me many troubles and distresses." He realizes God is sovereign and if anything unpleasant happens, God could have kept it from happening. "You who have shown me many troubles and distresses But you will also revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth." You have a purpose in all of this and you will one day help me to understand how all of the hard things and difficult things that have happened which don't seem to make sense, you bring them together and use them for good.

Now, this is what the Bible teaches and we must remember Deuteronomy 29:29 which says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those that are revealed, they belong to us and to our children forever." There are secret things that God says, "That's my territory. They belong to me." And when there are things that are happening that we can't understand, they don't seem to fit, we need to say, "No, I don't understand but God does and God can put together that which I cannot put together," and we need to stop questioning God and start trusting God, realizing that he's great and incomprehensible.

Then we see that he is able to take the sufferings. Do you remember James 1 where James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations"? Count it all joy. Get excited about the fact that you have troubles and you have trials because God is going to use those trials to test you. What does that mean? Well, he tests the reality of our faith. In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian has just become a believer and the next thing that he encounters is the Hill of Difficulty. He becomes a Christian and everything is going to be smooth and easy now? No. No. He becomes a Christian and then he is faced with the Hill of Difficulty. Why does God bring hills of difficulty into our lives? Is it just accidentally? No, God has a purpose for it. Nothing happens that

doesn't have a purpose for it as far as God is concerned and he uses the trials to test us. He tests the reality of our faith.

As Christian was going up the Hill of Difficulty in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, he was going up that hill of difficulty because according to Mark 4, what happens to some people who make a superficial commitment to Christ is they bail out. They quit and so God tests the reality of your faith by whether or not you're going to continue on even though you have difficulty, and if you bail out, you bail out because you don't have real faith, you don't have real faith that God is up to something and God is doing something good. So here you have the commitment of that, "Yes, I will have trials, I will have tribulations, but God will revive me. God will strengthen me. God will work all of these things together for good." Well, that's what's certainly important if we're going to live a life to the glory of God.

Then a seventh resolution that we must make if we're going to live a life to the glory of God, is that we must resolve to make God the rock of our salvation and the one on whom we ultimately depend for comfort and deliverance and you find that in Psalm 71 at the very beginning where he says in verse 3, "Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress." And what he says there in Psalm 71, he also says in Psalm 18 where he says, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Now here in Psalm 71 he says the Lord is the rock of my habitation. Now what does he mean by that, the Lord is the rock of my habitation? Well, the rock is the foundation. That's what he's saying. The foundation of my life is not my own strength, it's not everything that's going well. The rock of my life, the foundation of my life is you. Is you.

He's the rock of your habitation. You say, "What does that mean that he's the rock of our habitation?" Well, it means, habitation means home. That's where you live. You know, right now we're in the United States of America and if you were to ask us, "Where is your home?" we would indicate we're not at home because our habitation, our home is on Oregon Street in Pretoria, South Africa. So it's from Oregon Street in South Africa that we go and it's to Oregon Street in South Africa that we return. That's our habitation. That's the place that's home for us where we're comfortable, where we have the Lord to protect us.

So we're saying that if we want to grow old gracefully and usefully and we want to continue to flourish in him, then we must consider God to be the rock. Our family is wonderful. Our wives are wonderful if they're believers and faithful to us. I've been married 60 years and I'm grateful that I've never once had any question about my wife's commitment to me. I've never questioned her faithfulness. I've never had to think that she was out to get me. She was a place, a person, who brought real comfort to me, but my place of habitation is not my wife. She's not the rock of my habitation. She's just one of the good gifts that God has given to me over these years. But God is the rock of my habitation and whenever I am a bit uncertain and insecure, I need to remind myself and

say, "Wayne, God is the rock of your habitation and God has not changed and you can always go to God and find your refuge and your strength in God." And I believe that's one of the resolutions that we must make if we are going to grow old to the glory of God.

Now, there is one other resolution that I want you to notice and that's found in Psalm 71:22, 23, 24. The Psalmist said, "I will also praise You with a harp, Even Your truth, O my God; To You I will sing praises with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel." Verse 23, "My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; And my soul, which You have redeemed." Now in 1 Peter 4:11-12, Peter said that God has given to every one of us a special gift. Each one has received a special gift and each one should employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks should do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God. Whoever serves should do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. What he's saying is to every believer God has given a special gift, an ability by which he can serve other people and by which he can glorify God. And David many years before Peter ever penned those words was essentially saying the same thing in verses 22 and 23 and 24.

He says, "I will also praise You with a harp." One of the abilities that God had given to David was the ability to play a harp. In verse 22 he says, "To You I will sing praises with the lyre," and God had given David the ability to play on a stringed instrument. Then verse 23 he says, "My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You." God gave him a mouth which he could shout for joy and sing praises to God. He says, "I will praise You with a harp." That's a commitment I'm making, Lord. I have a harp and I'm going to use it for you. I'm going to use the lyre, which is a stringed instrument, and I promise you I'm going to sing praises with you. And you have given me lips and I'm going to use my lips to give praises to you.

So for us as we grow older, there must be the realization that every gift that we have, every ability we have has come from God and that everybody sitting here this morning who is a believer has been given a gift. That's what 1 Peter 4 says. And he's been given a gift and we should commit ourselves to saying, "Lord, I promise you that I will use the gift that you have given me to serve you, to glorify you, and I'm going to do that to the time of my death."

Now, part of the ministry in which we're involved is in South Africa and it's a ministry called SMTI, Strengthening Ministries Trending Institute. In that ministry we need students, we need teachers, we need people who do administrative work, we need secretarial help, and we need people who do advertising, people who purchase materials, food and other products that we use in that ministry. We need people to prepare and serve food, we need people who prepare the facilities, and much of the food part of our SMTI ministry is supervised by my wife and daughter, but thank God, they are assisted by a 94-year-old lady and a more than 70-year-old woman who refuse to use their age as an excuse. When one woman who was a nurse tried to dissuade these ladies from serving as enthusiastically as they were doing because of their age, both of them refused to listen. Both of them stated that they're excited about the privilege of being able to serve. Now

both of these ladies would agree with David who prayed in Psalm 71:18 that God would even to old age and gray hairs not forsake him until he could proclaim God's might to another generation. "I'm going to use my harp to praise God. I'm going to use my lyre," a stringed instrument, "to praise God. I'm going to use my lips, I'm going to use my mouth and I'm going to praise God until the end of my days."

Well, concerning this matter of growing old to the glory of God, John Piper says, "Getting old to the glory of God means getting old in a way that makes God look glorious." Is the way you're getting old making God look glorious? It means living and dying in a way that shows God to be the all-satisfying treasure that he is. And doing that, Piper says, would include not only living in the ways that make this world look like your treasure. Is it? If people were to observe you, what idea would they get as far as what is your treasure? Is your treasure in this world? We should live, says Piper, in such a way that people would realize that the world is not our treasure. This means that most of the suggestions that this world offers for our retirement years are bad ideas. They call us to live in a way that would make this world look like our treasure and when that happens, God is belittled. Getting old to the glory of God means resolutely resisting the typical American dream of retirement. It means that we are so satisfied with all that God promises to be for us in Christ that we're set free from the cravings that create so much emptiness and uselessness in retirement. Instead, knowing that we have infinitely satisfying and everlasting inheritance in God that's just over the horizon, that makes us zealous in our few remaining years to spend ourselves in the sacrifices of love, not in the accumulation of comforts.

What will it mean to get old to the glory of God in America? It will mean a radical break with the mindset of our unbelieving peers. It will mean a radical break with the typical dream of retirement. Ralph Winter, who was a US Senator for World Missions, said this when he wrote an article called "The Retirement Booby-Trap." He said, "Most men don't die of old age, they die of retirement." I read somewhere that half of the men retiring in the state of New York died within two years. Save your life and you'll lose it. Just like other drugs, other psychological addictions, retirement is a virulent disease, not a blessing. Where in the Bible do we see that? Did Moses retire? Did Paul retire? Did Peter retire? Did John retire? Do the military officers retire in the middle of a war? Millions of Christian men and women are finishing their formal careers in their 50s and 60s and for most of them, there will be a good 20 years before their physical and mental powers fail. What will it mean to live these final years for the glory of God? How will we live them in such a way as to show that Christ is our highest treasure?

Piper says, "When I got prostate cancer and had surgery at age 60, I recalled the experience of Charles Simeon. Simeon was the pastor of Trinity Church in Cambridge, England. He learned a very painful lesson about God's attitude toward his retirement. In 1807, after 25 years of ministry at Trinity Church, his health broke when he was only 47. He became very weak and had to take an extended leave from his labor. Handley Moule, a biographer, recounts the fascinating story of what God was doing in Simeon's life. Simeon's broken condition lasted with variations for 13 years and then it passed away quite suddenly and without any evident physical cause. It was while he was on his last

visit to Scotland, he found himself to his great surprise just as he crossed the border from England into Scotland almost as perceptibly renewed in strength as the woman was after she touched the hem of our Lord's garment. He says that he had been promising himself before he began to break down that he would continue to be very active in Christian ministry up to 60 and after 60 he was going to take a Sabbath evening of retirement, and when that happened at almost 60, he seemed to hear his Master saying, 'I laid you aside because you entertained with satisfaction the thought of resting from your labor. But now you have arrived at the very period when you had promised yourself that satisfaction and you have determined instead to spend your strength for me to the latest hour of your life, and because you have understood that, I have doubled, trebled, quadrupled your strength that you may execute your desire on a more extended plan.'

"How many Christians set their sights on a Sabbath evening of life, resting, playing, traveling, the world's substitute for heaven since the world does not believe there will be a heaven beyond the grave. The mindset of our peers is that we must reward ourselves now in this life for the long years of our labor. Eternal rest and joy after death is an irrelevant consideration. When you don't believe in heaven to come and you're not content in the glory of Christ now, you will seek the kind of retirement that the world seeks and what a strange reward for a Christian to set his sights on, twenty years of leisure in retirement while living in the midst of the last days of the infinite consequence for millions of people who need Christ. What a tragic way to finish the last mile before entering the presence of the King who finished his last mile so differently."

Oswald Sanders was still speaking, preaching at 89 years of age and until that point he had written a book a year for Christ since he was 70, that's 19 books, and Piper said, "Everything in me said, 'O God, don't let me waste my final years. Don't let me buy the American dream of retirement, month after month of leisure and play and hobbies and putzing around in the garage and rearranging the furniture and golfing and fishing and sitting and watching television. Lord, please have mercy on me. Spare me this curse.'" Oh may God spare us that curse as well and be committed to serve him faithfully, to use whatever gifts he has given us until the day when he calls us home.

In Psalm 71:18, the Psalmist indicated he had a passion to make the greatness of God known to the generations that are behind. He said, "Even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me until," he had a goal, he had purpose, he had things he wanted to accomplish, "don't forsake me until I proclaim Your might to another generation, Your power to all those to come." And oh, that God would give us a passion in our final years to continue to serve God with whatever gifts we have so that we'll be able to look back and be filled with thankfulness, and as we look forward, we should look forward with hope.

Now, the Psalmist says, "My praise will continue to be of you. I will praise you yet more and more," and what I've described for you two weeks ago in the first message and in this message, is I believe what God would tell us about how to become old to the glory of God and how we can become old in a graceful and in a useful way. That is God's plan for growing old gracefully and usefully and biblically and I urge you, my brothers and sisters

in Christ, that you join with me and with Paul and with John Piper and many other people of God, to commit yourself to making these resolutions that are found here in Psalm 71 your resolutions to the end that God may be glorified and we will receive the blessing that comes from being in the center of the will of God for us. Will you commit yourself to that? I promise you that throughout eternity you'll not be sorry that you did. Now is the day. May God help you to recommit yourself and to press on, realizing that joy is found in knowing him and serving him and serving his people.

Thank you, dear God, for your word. Thank you for others who have gone before us and who have left for us a pathway, reminders, of what it means to serve you not until we can retire, but to serve you faithfully, enthusiastically, until the day that you decide that we should come home. Forgive us, Lord, for our sloppiness at times. Forgive us for our laziness. Forgive us for demonstrating to the world that who you are and what you are is not our treasure, but forgive us, Lord, for acting so much like people who have nothing to look forward to. And please, Lord, so work in our hearts today that we might recommit ourselves to being the kind of people that are described in Psalm 71. We ask for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.