

IT'S GREAT TO BE GRAY!

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A Study Of Psalm 71

INTRODUCTION:

A. Growing old is something most people don't truly look forward, but it's something all of us face:

1. A young child can't wait to be older so he can be big like everyone else, as a teenager he can't wait to be a little older so he can do whatever he wants to do, when in college he can't wait to be a little older so he can be out in the real world making real money, when he's in his 20's and 30's he can't wait to be a little older so people will take him seriously. Then he hits forty & he quits keeping up with birthdays & tells everyone every year he's 39! In his forties and fifties he doesn't look to growing older with the same anticipation, but says retirement might be nice → Then he hits old age & wishes he could be young again! Isn't life odd sometimes!
2. Often the things we associate with growing old and old age are not positive things... It may also be that in our society older people are also looked down upon and not respected as much
3. Biblically speaking, it is a time of honor, respect, glory, & praise! It's when wisdom, knowledge, & experience culminates and faith increases! (**Prov 10:29; 1 Tim 5:1-2, XX**)

B. As we turn to psalm 71 we find a psalm dedicated to the subject of growing old. It pictures well both the challenges and the blessings to be found in a time of old age and gray hairs!

1. I am going to assume the writer of this Psalm was David. The language of Psalm 71 fits David very well. Many also believe it really is the sequel to Psalm 70 which is attributed to David
2. Even David, a man of great power and wealth and godliness, had to fight the struggles of old age! But what we learn from him is that this a time of great blessing & usefulness in God's service!
3. This lesson isn't just for those who are gray headed! Part of the reason why David was able to find great blessings in his old age was that he had committed his whole life to serving God!

IT'S GREAT TO BE GRAY: REALIZING CHALLENGES AND BLESSINGS OF FACING OLD AGE

A. Throughout this psalm there is an emphasis on the struggles and challenges presented in growing older:

1. One of the problems David experienced as was a loss of physical strength (**Psalm 71:9**)
 - a. When we think of David we don't think of a person who appears physically strong and dominant... But David was a strong man, a mighty man of war, a courageous man!
 - b. Remember how David slew Goliath? How he experienced victory after victory? How God wouldn't let him build the temple because he was a man of war? (**2 Samuel 8**)
 - c. After defeating the Philistines David says that God burst through his enemies! (**2 Sam 5:20**)
 - d. David was a mighty man, but old age caught up to him... It had to be humiliating and sad when he was told, "You can't come up to battle with us anymore!" (**2 Sam 21:15-17**)
2. He also had to deal with the fact that his troubles just continued on as normal (**Psalm 71:4, 10, 13**)
 - a. David's enemies are plotting against him, attacking him verbally, and trying to get him to doubt God's presence & protection – But they had been doing this from the time he first stepped into the public spotlight... so what's new? Well, now he is an old man!
 - b. David's enemies may not have gotten more numerous and their attacks may not have gotten stronger, but his strength was weaker! This made his struggles even harder!

- c. As you grow older your struggles often don't go away. The problems these struggles cause are then increased by the lack of strength to fight them! David knew this personally!
- 3. It appears that another thing David struggled with was loneliness (**Psalm 71:9-12**)
 - a. David's enemies knew exactly what they needed to say to strike at his heart and it appears their words were working on David! He is praying intensely for God not to forsake him... why? Because his enemies were saying that God had & that David was alone!
 - b. Maybe they pointed to his lack of strength and his struggles and said, "Where's your God now? Where are your friends now? You are alone & you've got no one to help you!"
 - c. Add to this the fact that he saw friends, parents, & even some children die ahead of him
- 4. We can read of the great challenges David experienced toward the end of his life (**1 Kings 1-3**)
- 5. After describing the difficulties experienced in old age Solomon says, "All is vanity!" (**Ecc 12:1-8**)
 - a. This poetic passage shows how hands tremble, teeth fall out, vision starts failing, strength fails, fears increase, hair loses its color, hearing starts to go out – Age takes its toll!
 - b. He says old age can bring days that are so bad people say, "I don't enjoy them anymore!"
 - c. Why does he say all is vanity? When viewing life from solely a physical perspective & you consider all the problems & struggles coming with old age, life is pointless & empty!
- 6. Considering this, one may ask, "What's the use in growing old? Why should I even try to enjoy my old age? What good can I be as an old person? Is there anything great about being gray?"

B. As David faced growing older, he found great blessing in remembering his relationship with God throughout the years gone by:

- 1. David talks about how he had trusted and hoped in God from the time of his youth (**Psalm 71:5-7**)
 - a. From the time David was a young man, even as a boy, he had placed his trust and hope in God... His childhood is filled with memories of serving God and God's care in his life
 - b. His trusting God even from before his birth seems to be a hyperbolic expression → He's emphasizing that there's never been a time when he wasn't serving & trusting God
 - c. Today we'd speak of someone like David as a person who became a Christian early in life, who was raised in a Christian home, who always had God as a central part of his life
 - d. Even as a young person, David trusted God to deliver him from lions and bears while tending his father's sheep! Then he showed trust to stand up & fight Goliath when the men of war were shaking in their boots! His trust was real, personal, & powerful!
- 2. Later in the psalm he speaks about how God had taught him from his youth (**Psalm 71:17**)
- 3. As he writes this psalm as an older man, he brings with it the perspective of being able to look back over a life of trusting in God and experiencing God's faithfulness! (**Psalm 71:3, 14-16**)
 - a. In another psalm David acknowledges how he had observed a law from the time of his youth through his old age → That God does not forsake the righteous! (**Ps 37:23-26**)
 - b. David is saying that he lost count of all the great things God had done in his life a long time ago... He says that it's impossible to number the ways & times God had saved him!
 - c. It's with his memories of God's works in his life that he'll battle his enemies → Like he's saying, "You don't scare me! I know my God will take care of me & deal with you!"
- 4. The result of these things is David possesses insurmountable trust! (**Psalm 71:20-21**)
- 5. One of the great things to be found in growing older is the deepening of our trust and the strengthening of our relationship with God! (**Lamentations 3:21-26**)

- a. It is only by looking back through the windows of old age that one can appreciate so fully God's faithfulness! Your memories form a movie about the faithfulness of God that can be played over and over again! This is something that gets better with age!
- b. Like David, one of the keys for it being a good time in your life & not a time of bitterness is to focus on how God has blessed you in the past & shown His faithfulness to you

C. David was also able to find growing older to be a great blessing because he continued and even increased his service to God!

1. David is old, oppressed, and physically weak, but he refuses to quit serving God! **(Psalm 71:17)**
 - a. In American society when a person reaches 60-65 years of age (sometimes earlier) they start looking to retire, to quit working so they can take it easy → This isn't bad at all
 - b. What's bad is when people apply this to their service to God --- They still strive to not sin, but many retire from activity in their faith both in the local church & on a daily basis
 - c. Some people's usefulness is captured by their desire for the days gone by or regret for what could've been → The present doesn't mean much and they have little hope
 - d. Like David is saying, "Yes I am old, oppressed, & weak, but I am STILL going proclaim Him!"
2. For every challenge David faces, he increases his praise & trust even more! **(Psalm 71:14)**
3. David desires more time, health, and protection because he wants to tell the coming generation about God's greatness! **(Psalm 71:18-19)**
 - a. David was concerned about the coming generation – He wanted to make sure they knew God and the great things God had did in the past – So he wants God to be with him!
 - b. He sees his older years as a great & special opportunity to teach others about the Lord!
 - c. We talk about wanting to be around longer to "watch the fleeting changes of life's uneven ways..." → How more nobler is this! This reminds me of Paul's feelings **(Phil 1:19ff)**
4. He doesn't just continue to worship God in his old age, he continues to worship God with the zeal and passion typical of his youth! **(Psalm 71:22-24)**
 - a. As you read these words it doesn't sound like an older person is writing them! They sound like they are coming from a young person... They're filled with enthusiasm and zeal!
 - b. As David grew older, his love for the Lord grew stronger! This is why as he got old his desire for worship and his enthusiasm in worship did not wane! He still longed for it!
 - c. He doesn't get bored with worship or get tired of it... He says he is going to shout with joy... He puts his all into his worship! Notice too how he's ready to do this all day long!
5. While there are certainly limitations one must face in growing older, it is not a time to retire from serving God, but a time to build on our service and usefulness to Him:
 - a. God's purpose for the church includes the work of those who are older **(Titus 2:2-4)**
 - b. It is not a time to sit back and let those who are younger do all the work... The younger need the wisdom and experience that those who are older bring with them
 - c. If you want to find joy, meaning, and fulfillment in your "golden years" continue to serve and worship God with zeal & enthusiasm! Keep the fires of worship burning bright!

Conclusion: The time of old age is not a time to quit living, to retire in your service to God, or to become cynical, bitter, or resentful... It's a time of greater faith and special service in God's kingdom! It's a special period in your life that God values and so should we!