

## PSALM 71: Selected Verses

- <sup>1</sup> In you, O LORD, I take refuge;  
let me never be put to shame.
- <sup>2</sup> In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;  
incline your ear to me and save me.
- <sup>3</sup> Be to me a rock of refuge,  
a strong fortress, to save me,  
for you are my rock and my fortress.
- <sup>6</sup> Upon you I have leaned from my birth;  
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.  
My praise is continually of you.
- <sup>17</sup> O God, from my youth you have taught me,  
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
- <sup>18</sup> So even to old age and grey hairs,  
O God, do not forsake me,  
until I proclaim your might  
to all the generations to come.

Faith is not some momentary thing you pull out of your pocket or purse when you need it. Faith that is real and makes an impact in our lives is a journey. Sometimes the journey takes us to ever new heights. We discover or rediscover some solid ground of trust, trust in a larger truth, a larger justice, a larger goodness and love... our lives are held in a larger flow of eternity and "God" is the beginning, middle and end of it.

Other times, faith can grow dim and lifeless, lacking the vividness of divine presence and the trust that we are accompanied by a larger presence in all we're going through. Sometimes, we lose our inspiration, we are disoriented and disillusioned. Our faith is not at the centre and sometimes we wonder whether it will ever come back to what it was.

Given how vulnerable we are to life's vicissitudes, many of which are well beyond our control, it is spiritually natural that faith will not just remain the same. The great mystics and spiritual masters of the Christian tradition (the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross is a good example) speak of "the dark night of the soul." For him (and for others), the dark night is a difficult experience, but not necessarily a bad one. Spiritual growth in our lives does include working through our times of difficulty where we are stretched and bowed down. In fact, he argues, the dark night is usually something we pass through in more mature times of spiritual awakening and growth. The fact that we are wrestling with faith and haven't just abandoned it is a sign that growth is being aroused. The new situation that is our lives and our larger needs are demanding the kind of faith that can grow with us to sustain, ground

and direct us in ever new ways. We need resurrection after every new stage where some dying to what has been has happened.

What I love about Psalm 71 is not only how the psalmist is praying to God to become the solid foundation, the “rock”, “refuge” and “fortress” so familiar in less turbulent days. And not only is the psalmist praying once again for “rescue” and “deliverance.” But the psalmist is mapping out their whole life within God’s sustaining and accompanying presence: “Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother’s womb... O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds...” The psalmist is continuing to do what they’ve always done, which are those practices of worship, prayer and meditation that have sustained the relationship of faith whether the season of life has been a challenging one or a joyous one.

But here is the final appeal: “So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.” Not only must God be the beginning, middle and end for the psalmist, but their experience of the ever-present God throughout life (even through the dark night when God may have felt absent) may be something of great value to share with the next generation still in the childhood and youth of life.

For some of us it’s not straightforward to share our faith with younger generations. Whether they are students, fellow congregants, children or grandchildren, our world is changing, and sometimes younger generations are being taught that new and younger is better than more ancient wisdom. Older generations may have their experiences, but they come from a world that has now changed. This is a sad commentary of our times. But may your experience be different. May you experience those children and youth who recognize genuine wisdom when they are in its presence. May they see the wisdom that comes out of the humility and vulnerability of having lived, seen, lost, suffered and made one’s share of mistakes.

**PRAYER:** O ground of our being whom we name “God”, hear us when we pray to you. You have been that larger presence in and through our lives whether we’ve known and acknowledged you or not. You are the beginning, middle and end of all that is our life. Whether we’re in this world a few more years or many years, within the span of eternity our lives are but a moment. We have known moments of wonder and grace, moments of jubilation and victory. Other times have been difficult, discouraging, painful and disorienting. May we rediscover what it means to be connected with you every moment we breathe. May our faith, hope and love come alive anew as we live these days and season of our lives... You know us inside and out, O God... Each of us has been crafted uniquely. We have been made to absorb and become shaped by life’s experiences. Our bodies age and sometimes break. Our minds become forgetful, sometimes painfully so. Our hearts rejoice but also hurt.

Embrace us in all of who we are and all we have yet to become in your presence... In Jesus' name; Amen.