

## Why Should I Care about the Elderly?

*Why Should I Care?*

By Steve Viars

**Bible Text:** Psalm 71

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### **Faith Church**

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A couple of years ago in New York City a woman was walking down the sidewalk early on a Sunday morning when she was attacked by a knife-wielding man. The surveillance video at a nearby business documented what happened next where a homeless man heard the woman's cries for help and immediately went to her aid. The attacker turned his attention to the homeless man which allowed the woman to run away from the scene. What she apparently didn't know was that the attacker chose to take his anger and cruelty out on whom the media later called "the homeless hero" by stabbing him repeatedly in the chest. The attacker then fled and the homeless man took a couple of steps and then collapsed in a pool of his own blood.

What the video reveals next is especially shocking: within a minute or so, people start walking by the victim and doing nothing. One man came out of a nearby building and took a picture of the dying man on his cellphone. Several pairs of people stopped and looked and kept right on walking. One woman paused and lifted the victim's head to reveal the pool of blood and then walked away. The police would later report that a couple of 911 calls came in reporting a woman screaming but nothing about an injury related to the homeless man. An hour and 20 minutes later, some firefighters found his body while responding to another 911 call and discovered that the homeless hero had died at the very spot where he had given everything to save someone else.

There is a hard lesson that comes from a story like that and it's that we live in a world that frequently seems to live by the motto: why should I care? Why should I care? And we could multiply stories to illustrate that tendency all morning long of apathy and indifference to the needs of others. Thankfully, there are plenty of other stories on the other side of the ledger and I'm not suggesting that it's all bad but if we're honest this morning, I think most of us could find examples of not really caring about the needs of those around us in our own hearts, in our own lives. It doesn't really take a visit to New York City now does it? And maybe we wouldn't say it this way out loud but our actions, maybe inactions, would sometimes suggest unless there's a capital Me in the equation, I really don't care. After all, why should I? Why should I?

With that in mind, open your Bible now to Psalm 71. If you don't have a Bible with you, just pull out the one that's under the chair in front of you and turn to the front section, to the New Testament, to page 422.

We'd like to take the first several Sundays of this new year and just address that question head on: why should I care? We'd like to apply it to several different categories of people or types of situations where indifference is often apparent even among the children of God. So this morning, we're going to study Psalm 71 and ask: why should I care about the elderly? We live in a throw-away society that often values youth and skinny jeans over wisdom and seasoned godliness. I didn't quite get mine on this morning.

We're just going to take out our Bibles and see what Scripture would say about that. Next Sunday, we're going to ask: why should I care about racial reconciliation? I've asked my good friend, Dr. Charles Ware, to deliver that message to our church family. Dr. Ware is the President of Cross Roads Bible College in Indianapolis and is a dynamic speaker of the word of God and I would really encourage you to invite everyone you know to church next Sunday. We're going to be making some promotional materials available to you online as well. I promise, you'll care a lot more about racial reconciliation when Dr. Ware is done with us next Sunday and I believe that could have a very positive impact on our entire community.

The following Sunday, we're going to talk about: why should I care about the poor? We need to have that conversation from Scripture. Then, the Sunday after that, we have invited Bill Moore and Randy Patton. That will be the Sunday after our Biblical Counseling Training Conference so both Randy and Bill will still be in town. They are both leaders nationally and internationally in the Biblical Counseling Movement. We have supported these men for years in their ministries and prayed for them and I'd like them to give us a report about what is happening around our country and around our world, especially under the heading of: why should I care about the hurting?

Let's ask the Lord in these first few Sundays of the year to help us evaluate our own hearts on these matters of apathy and indifference. Is it possible that we operate in a "why should I care" frame of mind far more often than we should? If so, let's just let the word of God help us. Let's let the word of God help us.

Now, topics like this don't appear in a vacuum. You know that. We're doing this for a reason and the reason is, I think, that addressing the question "why should I care" head on has a lot to do with this annual theme this year of loving our neighbors. You're not going to be able to love your neighbor well unless you have a set of biblical answers to the question why you should care. In this matter of loving our neighbors, I want to be sure that it doesn't just become a slogan that takes us nowhere so we've identified five key emphases where we're especially trying to make that happen this year. One is by implementing our soul care initiatives to achieve deeper friendships within our church family. We want to grow in loving the neighbors we go to church with every Sunday so we're going to work on that together. Then, as individual church members, growing in

our ability to build stronger relationships with those who live right around us believing that when Jesus said to love our neighbors he very well may have meant learning to love our actual neighbors. There's a thought. Then, as a church family, developing our parish mentality to especially serve those who live near our two ministry campuses. So, we want to think strategically and proactively about what it means to especially serve and minister to those who live right around us. Fourth, launching our Faith Community Development Corporation to serve urban neighborhoods with excellence. If the city is asking us to help revitalize urban neighborhoods with some of the highest concentrations of poverty in this entire community, we want to show Christ's love to each and every street in this town well. Loving our neighbors. Then, constructing the first phase of our senior living community and we're going to have more to say about that later on this morning.

Let me just ask you, I talked with you about that list last week and I've repeated it again this morning, let me ask you just to think down over that list. I hope you already have several responses to those concepts. 1. I hope you would say: that's exactly the kind of things we need to be working on as individuals and as a church. It's a polar opposite of the illustration we started with this morning. Instead of being the "why should I care church," we want to be the Good Samaritan church, don't we?

I hope you would also say that you personally have some room to grow in these areas. True? Believing that 2:14 could help each one of us as individuals get to a better place if we'll let the word of God have its work on our hearts and lives and I hope you're excited about that prospect.

Thirdly, I hope at least one of these ideas especially resonates with you where you could see yourself becoming personally invested in helping us accomplish these initiatives as a church where God would lead different ones of us to especially go after one, it just resonates with you, I imagine you would say. I think also in a number of cases, you might say, "You know, for some of those I don't need to wait until we unpack this in a message or a series of messages, I know some of the steps that I need to take in some of these areas already and so I'm just going to get on it. That's all I need."

Lastly, I hope we'll be sure to bring the Savior and bring the gospel into all of this recognizing that his power is required to demolish the sin of self-centeredness and replace it with hearts of compassion. We want to be people who are learning what it means to think and to say and to live "I do care. I do care because Jesus is leading me and teaching me and empowering me to care."

With that in mind, let's read Psalm 71 and let's let this great passage allow us to answer the important question: why in the world should I care about the elderly? Good question. Psalm 71 will help us.

"1 In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed. 2 In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; Incline Your ear to me and save me. 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. 4 Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man, 5 For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth. 6 By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You. 7 I have become a marvel to many, For You are my strong refuge. 8 My mouth is filled with Your praise And with Your glory all day long.”

Now listen to this,

“9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails. 10 For my enemies have spoken against me; And those who watch for my life have consulted together, 11 Saying, ‘God has forsaken him; Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver.’ 12 O God, do not be far from me; O my God, hasten to my help! 13 Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed and consumed; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me. 14 But as for me, I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more. 15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And of Your salvation all day long; For I do not know the sum of them. 16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone. 17 O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. 18 And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come. 19 For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?”

We’re asking this morning: why should I care about the elderly? With the time we have remaining, let’s allow this passage to give us three reasons we should value and seek to love those who are older in our church family and in our community. I hope you’re saying to yourself right now, “Lord, help me to evaluate myself on this issue and help me to be ready to repent and help me to be ready to change.” Is that what you just said to yourself? Is that what you just said to your God as you allow these verses to go deep in your soul?

Three reasons we should value and seek to love those who are older in our church family and community: 1. because they have found their strength in God in the past. That’s what the first six verses are all about. Now, we’re not exactly sure who wrote this Psalm or in what context it was written. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament suggests that this was written by King David about a group of people called “the sons of Jonadab” when they were first made prisoners but, honestly, we can’t be dogmatic about all of that. Frankly, that’s true of a lot of the Psalms and I think that may be true, they are generic enough, so that we can apply this timeless truth to whatever setting we find ourselves in at the moment.

But we know this, we can say this for sure: this Psalmist is a person who is getting old and he gives us very important insight into that stage of life. He peels back his heart for us. He also gives us insight into how people like you and me might be able to be instruments in the hands of the God to whom the Psalmist is praying. Did you recognize that if we're thinking correctly, we could actually be an answer to this man's prayer?

Well, where does he start? By reminding us of the importance of deciding who or what you'll trust. He affirms at the very beginning, "In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge," or as the New King James puts it, "In You, O LORD, I have placed my trust." He also says this later, "For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth. By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother's womb; My praise is continually of You." The picture here is of a man who has spent a significant percentage of his years following the Lord and believing the Lord's word and trusting God to sustain him and strengthen him for the challenges of life. Understand, that's certainly not the way many people choose to live like the contrast in places like Psalm 20: some trust in chariots, some trust in horses. But this man, like the Psalm 71 man, "We will trust in the name of the Lord our God."

You see, everybody has to at some point in time, decide who or what are you going to trust. Who are you going to trust for truth? Who are you going to trust for direction? Who are you going to trust for deliverance and ultimately for your eternal destiny? I would suggest to you that getting that right, that's more important than anything else you could name. This Psalmist says, "Everyone who knows me knows in You, O LORD, I have placed my trust."

From our perspective of New Testament theology, we understand that that's a decision that has to be made at a point in time. Demonstrated in even what is probably the best known verse in the entire Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him." There has to be a point in time where you decide that you are trusting him. Here's the beauty from our church family's perspective: we have a significant number of older men and older women in our church who could say this exact same thing that there was a definite time in their life where they admitted their sin, they placed their faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord and since then, they have been trying to walk out their faith in gospel saturated change and growth and service and practical trust. Not perfectly, nobody here would claim that but the summary of their life thus far could legitimately be made: there's a person who is trusting the Lord. There is a person who is walking in the Lord. There is a person who is growing in the Lord. It's not horse, it's not chariots, it's not their own strength or righteousness, they are trusting in the name of Lord our God.

I realize you might say, "How old are we talking about here?" Well, the Bible doesn't say, does it?" I suppose you could look at it from the perspective of anybody older than you. I don't know. I certainly believe this: in the throw-away culture in which we live, the sooner you develop the ability to honor those who are older, the better and the more we

practice this principle as a church family, the healthier we will be. I absolutely believe that.

We could also add this: we have some older people in our church, they might be squirming just a little bit right now because they would acknowledge, “Well, my trust in God didn’t exactly start when I was a youth.” Some would say, “I had to go through some pretty hard knocks and then I came to Christ later in life.” Well, there’s a lot to learn from persons like that as well, now that they are old.

Another theme that emerges is the confidence that comes from finding God to be your rock, trusting in him. We saw that in verse 3, “Be to me a rock of refuge to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress.” I would just say to you this morning that if you’re here regardless of your age and would say, “I don’t have a personal relationship with God, I’ve never placed my faith and my trust in him,” God sometimes allows great tragedy to occur in our world just to help us evaluate the nature of our trust. One of the great reasons to place your trust in God is the strength and the stability he gives you. Like this great Psalm said, “I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined to me and he heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog and he set my feet upon a rock.” It doesn’t matter what the weather is. It doesn’t matter what’s happening down at the state house. It doesn’t matter even when great tragedy comes, this is what’s most important, “You set my feet upon a rock making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.”

You may be here this morning and God would want you to look at someone who is older or maybe even someone who is younger who trusted Christ as Savior and Lord and they have clearly been pulled up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, they have placed their feet on the rock of Jesus Christ. You’ve heard their new son, you’ve seen their new life and now God wants you to respond to their testimony by placing your faith in him. If you’re in that position, we would encourage you to do that this morning.

Psalm 71 is about a man who allowed God to develop that trust and that corresponding faithfulness for a long, long time and I want to suggest that we ought to be extremely thankful that the Lord has allowed us to have men and women just like that around us in our church family and I and we categorically reject the church growth approach out there that suggests that we ought to position ourselves only to reach the hip. Or we ought to position ourselves only to reach the young because we don’t really care about having older people, we don’t want older people around here. Why should we care about them? That is a goofy philosophy of ministry and we absolutely reject it out of hand because of passages just like Psalm 71.

There is a twist, though, in this Psalm. Did you notice the change in logic as we were reading down through? Now the man is old. Not going to hide that. That’s something we ought to really love about the Bible. He can be honest and authentic about his fears and his concerns and even in a song of worship, he presents those before the Lord which gives

us then a second reason why we should care about the elderly: it's because they are in special need of God's strength today. You see, God never whitewashes or minimizes the challenges faced by his people in a sin-cursed world. Let's just face it this morning, there are aspects of getting old that just stink. That's just all there is to it. I found that in the original Hebrew, it just stinks and when Satan told Adam and Eve that they could rebel against God and they would not surely die, he proved the depth of the lies he was capable of telling. We are all dying physically and the pain and the difficulty that goes with that stage of life can be immense.

So, the Psalmist is just honest about it, the unique challenges that come with old age. He says, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength is spent." You see, what's going to happen to me when I can't take care of myself anymore humanly speaking, this man is asking. Think carefully about the power of that phrase, "When my strength is spent." I know some people like that, don't you? I was just at the viewing of a dear former neighbor of ours whose husband was a marvelous local historian, had incredible recall of dates and events from Lafayette history, often things that were obscure, only known by a handful of people. I used to love standing out in our front yards and just having conversations and he could recall dates, he could recall names. I loved that. Now his wife has died and he's in a wheelchair and he couldn't even remember my name. We weren't even sure that he realized that he was at the funeral viewing for his own wife. What happens when my strength is spent?

I realize you might say this morning, "Hey, I don't like thinking about that." To which I would say: my job is to help you think about that because it's coming, my friend, unless Jesus returns first. God's word often employs great creativity just to help us think. Like this, are you familiar with this passage from Ecclesiastes 12? "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days come and the years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them. When the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are not darkened and the clouds do not return after the rain." Now, listen to some of this metaphor: "In the days when the keepers of the house tremble," he's talking about your arms, "and the strong men bow down," talking about your legs. "When the grinders cease because they are few." Anybody wonder what that's about? It makes you want to go and get a good steak this afternoon, doesn't it? And chomp that baby really good while you can. "And those that look through the windows grown dim. When the doors are shut in the streets and the sound of grinding is low. When one rises up at the sound of a bird and all the daughters of music are brought low." Also, "they are afraid of height and of tears in the way. When the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is a burden and desire fails for man goes to his eternal home and the mourners go about the streets." You see, the Psalmist is saying: what happens then? Who among us has not had that conversation with ourselves?

His position is that God would continue to be near. He believes that God will continue to provide help. "O God, don't be far from me. Hasten to my help." This man refuses to lose his faith and confidence in his old age. Now, here is the \$100 question. Are you ready: how does God frequently answer that prayer? How does God provide strength and help to

people in need? The answer is frequently, what? Through his people. Through his people and understanding and believing that principle is crucial to overcoming apathy and indifference, friends. It's a profound part of the answer to the question: why should I care about anyone? The answer is: because I can be an instrument in the Redeemer's hand. I can be a component of the way the heavenly Father answers prayers just like these.

Now, let's broaden that out beyond the elderly for a minute and then we'll bring it back around but think about the depth of your belief and our belief that God frequently uses us to demonstrate to others that he cares. We said part of loving our neighbors this year includes these emphases as individual church members growing in our ability to build stronger relationships with those who live right around us and as a church family, developing our parish mentality to especially serve those who live near our two ministry campuses. Well, how do we do that? How do we do that?

One of the tools we're recommending to help us is called Next Door. It's just a computer program. It's kind of like a Facebook for your neighborhood is what it comes down to. Many of your neighborhoods where you live probably already have a Next Door. You can set one up if no one in your neighborhood has done that but then you can start communicating very naturally, very easily with your neighbors about needs and about resources. Well, this weather has given us plenty of opportunities to do that, huh? Which is why I'm so glad for our youth pastor, Johnny C., and many of the young people in our youth group. Johnny lives over in Brookfield Heights and so he posted on Next Door this message: "Are you tired of shoveling snow? I and a team of teens from Faith Church would love to help shovel your driveway and sidewalks for no cost. Please let me know if we can be a blessing to you." It's amazing how many neighbors responded to that offer and how many of our teens have been out snowstorm after snowstorm after snowstorm shoveling the neighbors who live all around us. Why? Because God cares and we want to be instruments in his hand.

That's really the point: we have to make the connection between believing that God truly cares about those in need and simultaneously believing that God uses his people as instruments to demonstrate the validity of his concern. You see, what are we? We're the message: God cares with skin on. That's what we are. We're here to practically demonstrate that God cares about you. That's our answer to: why should we care?

The same is true with our community development corporation. We've said that we want to launch our CDC to serve urban neighborhoods with excellence and I just want to be sure that I've clarified that it's true that there is a home renovation component to that but there is so much more than that. This isn't about houses, it's about lives and I'm so glad, this is one of the maps that we're using actually prepared by our city. We call it the Green Dot Map and depending on where you are, you may be able to see it better than others, but the city actually helped us identify all the various neighborhoods downtown and then plotted where Faith Church members live currently. It gives us an opportunity just to identify the most logical places for us to work.

They also helped us identify the six areas, the six neighborhoods in our community that suffer from the greatest economic need and that's where we're working. Again, it's not so much about revitalizing homes alone. We're investigating ways to serve the public schools in those regions. We want to collaborate with some of the social service providers who are already there and the more we investigate the opportunities that are already being generated practically take your breath away if you're letting God transform you from "why should I care" to "I know exactly why I should and I do." By the way, some of those who live in some of our urban neighborhoods and that's our strategy, by God's grace we have two suburban campuses now. We've bookended our town and we want to marshal suburban resources to address urban need together.

You understand, unlike the Psalm 71 man, some of these persons aren't asking "what's going to happen to me when I'm old," they're concerned about "what's going to happen to me next week when I can't pay my rent" or "when I can't buy my groceries" or "I lose my job," etc. etc. etc. We want to be in a position, and thankfully along with a number of other evangelical churches who are having similar conversations together, we want to be an instrument of God's love in answering the very kind of prayers like we're reading here.

Now, what about our senior citizens? What about senior citizens in our church and in our community, those who are praying, "O God, don't be far from me. O my God, hasten to my help." Why should I care about the elderly? Why should you care about the elderly? Because we can be used of God to be an answer to this prayer. I know what some of you are thinking, "I hope my Pastor gives me some very practical take-aways so that I can be sure that I'm applying this well." Isn't that what you're thinking right now? Good. You say, "I wonder if he loves me that much?" Feel it. I love you a ton.

Here are some of the things that I want to encourage you to do as a result of what we're talking about: 1. I want to encourage you to find an older person or an older couple in this church and take them to lunch, have them in your home, take them out for supper and ask just to hear their life stories. Ask them to tell you some of the important lessons that they have learned. Find out if they have any needs around their home or in their life that your family might be able to meet and just build a relationship with a person or a couple who is older.

You know, my Mom believed in this. When she was taking us to church as children, we had an older, just a refined godly woman in our church named Mrs. Kirk and as she got older, Mrs. Kirk was unable to drive but she still wanted to come to church and so my Mom just said, "We're going to start taking Mrs. Kirk to church." It didn't matter if that meant we had to get up a little earlier; it didn't matter if that was inconvenient; it didn't matter if we had to show up at the church with an old person. I do not recall my Mom taking a vote on that issue. My Mom did not believe in a home that was a democracy. There wasn't anything democratic about it at all. It was a friendly, benevolent dictatorship.

And Mrs. Kirk, of course, wanted to be the church house on time which meant that we kids were going to be up and ready at the car on time. Again, there wasn't a vote about that either and if we didn't quite understand that, then we might be able to contemplate it later when we were missing our lunch because if you don't work, you don't eat. That's what the Bible says and my Mom and Dad were pretty comfortable about teaching us that too. I'm just simply saying that for some of us, our families would be enhanced and our love would be increased...it would be better. My life is better as a result of spending time with Mr. Kirk and I praise God for a Mom who modeled for our family.

I want to thank Bob and Joan L. who have done such a great job in leading our Caleb's kin group and they're going to be moving down to North Carolina later on this year. I'll be talking to you about a number of staff changes tonight at our church family night but I'm glad for Jeremy and Alicia V. who are already working with our Caleb's kin group. We want to invest in that group well.

Here's another practical take-away: I would encourage you to talk to your deacon. I realize you might say, "Well, I'm not sure I know who my deacon is." Call the church office if you don't and we'll help you make that connection. But for some of you who have known the Lord for a period of time, why not say to your deacon, "Listen, I know you and your wife work a ton around here. Could you help me identify one of the senior citizens that's on our deacon's care list and maybe I can help lighten your load by especially serving them." That would be one of the ways that we as a church family could be sure that we were loving our neighbors well.

We also, hopefully in the plan of God, plan to construct the first phase of our senior living community together. We've had extensive discussions with our seniors. Frankly, they don't want to hire cooks, they don't want to hire social directors. They don't want to pay that kind of money for all of that. There are places like that in our town, fine, nothing wrong with that but our seniors are asking us, they don't want to mess with outdoor maintenance either. They would like to live in independent units that were close. So that's what that subdivision is: a series of nice smaller homes clustered around a club house. They can decide how they want to do their meals. They can decide together how they want to do social activities, etc. etc. Our church is hoping to, we'll see, we're hoping to be able to pay all the development costs to put that subdivision infrastructure in place and then we're working financially with the seniors to make the housing available and then those funds will be returned to their heirs when the time comes.

I don't know how popular that's going to be. We're going to see. The first subdivision has eight houses but we have at least thought through what would happen out here on the north side of our property if that was a need in this church or in this community. But the bottom line is, we think that when we have this in place, it's going to allow us to scream a message to our seniors and to our community: God cares about those who are older and so do we. And so do we.

One more way: believing that our seniors can help us magnify God's strength to the next generation. "And even when I'm old and gray," this man says, "O God, don't forsake me until I declare your strength to this generation, your power to all who are to come." I don't mind telling you that I'm concerned about the next generation. I'm concerned about the conditions in this culture that we're leaving for the next generation and we will serve our young people well if we can have older people around these ministries as long as possible. By having senior saints on our property, we're going to be able to serve them more naturally but we're also going to allow them to serve in our ministries longer than they might be normally able to serve and that will be a great help to all of us.

What's the assignment? The assignment is: this week to look for opportunities to say and to live "I care. I care because of the work my compassionate God is doing in me."

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, Lord, thank you for this great Psalm, thank you for the authenticity of it. Lord, I pray that this church would be known as a place that loves those who are older demonstrably and loves all who are in need, our neighbors, because of our love for you. Teach us that in Jesus' name. Amen.*