

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 71:1-6

*In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
turn your ear to me and save me.
Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.
For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord,
my confidence since my youth.
From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.
I have become a sign to many;
you are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with your praise,
declaring your splendor all day long.*

Helen Hayes, the actress, told the following story in her autobiography: It was Thanksgiving Day, and she was cooking her first turkey dinner for her family. Before serving it, she announced to her husband, Charles MacArthur, and their son James: "Now I know this is my first turkey I've ever cooked. If it isn't any good, I don't want anybody to say a word. We'll just get up from the table, without comment, and go out to a restaurant to eat." Then she returned to the kitchen.

When she entered the dining room bearing the turkey, she found her husband and son seated at the table with their hats and coats on. Obviously, they didn't have much faith in her ability to cook a turkey.

At times we are like that with regard to God. We have problems, we pray to God for help, and then sit back and expect the worst to happen. We don't have much faith in him; we don't really trust him. Do you ever find yourself feeling this way?

Or we may be like a hesitant driver, waiting for traffic to clear, came to a complete stop on a freeway ramp. The traffic thinned, but the intimidated driver still waited. Finally, an infuriated voice yelled from behind, "The sign says to yield, not to give up."

Some people have a difficult time asking for help, even when it comes to asking God for help. Throughout my years of pastoring, I have known many people who do not want to share about their needs due to illness, death of a family member, mental illness, loss of job or anything else that leaves them feeling vulnerable and in need of help. Sometimes, they didn't even tell me. Why?

In their book, *The Aladdin Factor*, authors Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen (best-selling authors of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series), devote their entire book to the importance of asking for what we want in life. They list five barriers to asking:

- (1) Ignorance,
- (2) Limiting and inaccurate beliefs
- (3) Fears: Fear of rejection, Fear of looking stupid, Fear of being powerless, Fear of humiliation, Fear of punishment, Fear of abandonment, Fear of endless obligation
- (4) Low self-esteem
- (5) Pride

David, the writer of Psalm 71, testifies to us through what he wrote saying that there is no shame in asking for help from God. God wants us to ask for his help because he loves and cares for us, and he wants to help us.

It is believed that David was an older man when he wrote this Psalm. He was looking back on his life remembering that he belonged to God from the moment he was born—when God breathed life into him—and he will always belong to God.

He looked at his past and could point to moments when he knew God was with him. Maybe he did not feel it while he was in the heat of the moment; but after some time of reflection, the evidence was undeniable that God was with him. Later as he looked into the future, not know what was yet to come, he believed that God would be with him just as he had been in the past.

David asks God again for help in this Psalm. We are not sure why; we only know that he asked for help to be freed from the grip of the wicked and from the grasp of evil and cruel men. Maybe as an old man aware that death would certainly come, he was afraid of death.

He knew the wicked would be alive, well in his future as it had always been in his past. Yet David said, “I run for dear life to God; I’ll never live to regret it.” In other words, he was not going to hesitate to ask God for help, even when the wickedness all around felt suffocatingly close and threatened him.

The psalmist was not going to rely on himself to get through the adversities to come. He knew his life depended on God. God was his refuge. The personal pronoun, “You,” at the beginning of verse 5, focuses attention emphatically on God: “You keep me going when times are tough...” This is a clear message that the psalmist’s confidence was not in himself; but his confidence was in God because he knew he could trust God.

An unknown author made this analogy: “Can you imagine the captain of a ship, driven about by rough winds and desiring to drop anchor, trying to find a suitable place to do so right on board his own vessel? Such a thing seems ridiculous, but for the sake of a lesson let’s picture the skipper doing that. He hangs the anchor at the bow, but still the boat drives before the wind. He sets it on the deck, but this too fails to hold it steady. At last, he puts it down into the hold, but has no better success.

“You see, an anchor resting on the storm-driven craft will never do the job. Only as it is thrown into the deep can it be effective against the wind and tide. In the same way, the person whose confidence is in himself will never experience true peace and safety. His actions are as futile as one who keeps the anchor aboard his own ship. Cast your faith into the great depths of God’s eternal love and power. Place your trust in the infinitely faithful One.”

This is excellent advice! Remember, if your hope for riding out the storms of life is anchored on your own capabilities, your confidence has been tragically misplaced. Instead, with the psalmist declare, “In You, O Lord, I put my trust” (Ps. 71:1).

More proof that the psalmist trusted God is his use of imperatives. In verse 3, he boldly said, “**Be** my rock of refuge!” Later in verse 3 he prayed, “**Give** the command!” and then in verse 4 he said, “**Deliver** me!” Are we prepared to face our adversaries—even death—with

unwavering confidence and trust that God is with us and helping us with the difficult journeys in our lives.

Jesus knew what it was like to face adversity. People threatened to stone him and verbally abused him almost everywhere he went—even his hometown of Nazareth. He knew the worst was yet to come—that he would face deep humiliation and death even though he did nothing wrong. Even so, Jesus trusted God and God’s will.

Therefore, Jesus knew that persons who follow him and who strive for the kingdom of God will face adversity. But through his life and death on the cross, Jesus trusted and taught others to trust that God’s providence is sufficient.

The psalmist was also committed to teaching this truth to others. In verse 7, he said that he had become like a “portent” to many, meaning he became something like a prophet who warned from his own personal experiences that everyone will fall on hard times; yet they can trust in God. But even more telling is what he said in verse 8, “My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long.” You see, the hope and trust that he found in God infused him with heartfelt praises to God.

The reality is that faith lives amid adversity, so we have reason to praise God, day and night. Praise is not the celebration of the powerful and the prosperous; rather, it is the language and the life-style of those who know at all times and in every circumstance that their lives belong to God and that their futures depend on God. If our lives reflect the praises we lift to God, our lives show the world that we know God is always with us and helps us get through our adversities.

If all we do is complain to others, we communicate to others that we do not trust God to help us. We may also end up communicating our disappointment on how God is helping us, offering them an unrealistic expectation of what God will do. God’s help comes in many forms. Too often with those unfamiliar with God, there is the expectation that when we ask for healing or help and we do not get it exactly the way we expect, those people conclude either there is no God, God doesn’t care; or they may even feel God is punishing them for something. We don’t want to communicate this kind of misinformation.

This year is the 21st anniversary of the tragedy of 9/11. A plane flew into the Pentagon. Another plane was downed in Pennsylvania before it could reach its target. And two planes flew into both of the towers of the World Trade Center, destroying the skyscrapers to pieces and killing 2,977 people. Many Americans asked why and wondered if God abandoned us. People looked for a sign of hope—a reason to trust that God was with us.

One man found God in the midst of that tragedy. He had just helped pull three bodies from the rubble when he saw it in dawn's first light, standing in a sea of debris: a heavenly symbol in a hellish setting—a cross.

Exhausted and traumatized by his labors, the man dropped to his knees in tears. "It was a sign," Frank Silecchia would recall, "a sign that God hadn't deserted us."

It was a remnant of the World Trade Center's North Tower, a 17-foot-high cross-section of steel I-beams that had plummeted into the shell of an adjacent office building two days earlier.

It was Sept. 13, 2001. In the sad days and years to come, what became known as the Ground Zero Cross inspired people around the world as it was moved from site to site in Lower Manhattan. The cross-shaped beam became a symbol of comfort and hope after the horrific terrorist attack. Its odyssey finally brought it to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.

August 21, 2022 - There is No Shame in Asking for Help

God is with us in the midst of our seas of debris; and there is no shame in asking for God's help. There is no greater evidence of how deeply God loves us and wants to help us than that of the gift of his only Son, Jesus.

It is Jesus who is the cornerstone of our faith. He is the rock of our salvation. He has proven that we can trust him too. He will run to our rescue.

Jesus is our Holy teacher. He shows us God and teaches us how we can trust and put our hope in God. Jesus lived a life-style of praising God. Everyone around him saw it and it caused people to ask questions like: "Who is this man? Where does he get his great power?"

Here is the clincher for us—believers are to be like Jesus. Wow! We are to be like Jesus, and we can be if we begin with the simple request for God's help and then trusting and praising God, even when we are being tossed and turned in the stormy waters of life. Amen.