

Grey-haired Reflections

Psalm 71

Pastor Bryan Clark

Years ago I was out playing golf one day. The course was almost empty. I kind of had the place to myself. I was all alone so I was playing through fairly quickly. Probably about halfway through I caught up to an older gentleman who was playing by himself, and I asked if I could play with him. He said that would be fine. He was in his late 80s. If I remember right, he was 88 or 89. He still was playing golf by himself.

So he teed up the ball, got out his driver, and he looked at me and said, “You know, when I hit these, I really can’t see ‘em very well, but I can sure hit ‘em.” So he lines up on the ball, takes his backswing, swings and just misses the ball by a mile. So he’s stuck in his follow-through, he’s looking down the fairway, the ball’s still sitting on the tee, and I’m wondering, *Do I say something?* He just freezes for a little bit, and then he says to no one in particular, “Yeah, I can’t see ‘em, but I can sure hit ‘em.” Then he starts laughing, and I thought, *I like this guy.* And we ended up being quite good friends. We played golf together regularly. His name was Charlie Sargent, and he was actually the founder of Sargent Irrigation, quite a pioneer in well digging and irrigation in the Sand Hills. I had the privilege of doing his funeral for him when he was in his mid 90s.

You know, for some reason I’ve always had friends that were in their elderly years. I don’t know why really. Maybe it’s because my grandparents had such a significant influence on my life. But thinking back over my life, I’ve always had friends in that season of life. To listen to Charlie talk about what he’d experienced over 90 years of life was always fascinating to me. But we understand we live in a culture that does not value the elderly. They’re too slow. They’re in our way. We need to marginalize them. We need to institutionalize them because we’re very important and we need to get on with our business.

I think it’s very important we understand when we identify ourselves as a pro-life church, that means we must be as passionate about the elderly as we are passionate about the unborn. I think as the “Boomers” move into their retirement years and start to drain the system we’re going to be facing some very difficult moral choices; they’re going to reflect a value system that greatly concerns me.

The reality is sometimes in our youth, sometimes in our prime of life, we fail to appreciate what our seniors have accomplished through a lifetime. I remember many years ago we had been at youth camp all week (just like this past week) and came home, and it had been a very powerful week. Many of the youth had been deeply impacted by the week. When we got back, there was a small group that asked if they could meet with me after lunch on Sunday. So we gathered together, and there were a handful of them that quickly became very critical about the worship of the church. They’d come out of a fairly dynamic week at camp and they were really disappointed with the worship in the church. So they were telling me about that, and they were very critical. What was wrong with these older people, and why don’t they know how to worship, and why can’t they worship like us, and what are we going to do about this?

In my mind, I’m thinking, *You know, most of you have not really been serious about your walk with God for a full week, and you’re criticizing people who have walked with God for 50 and 60 years!*

And I said to them exactly that. “You know, I appreciate your enthusiasm for worshipping what God has done. But you need to understand you’ve only been serious about your walk with Jesus for a few days, and you’re criticizing people who have walked with God for 50 years. You need to be really careful about that.”

It’s an amazing thing when you stop and think about it, that we have people among us who have walked faithfully through the stuff of life, the ups and downs for 50, 60, 70 years. Those are the real heroes among us. I would suggest to every teenager to take down the picture, the poster of the professional athlete. Take down the poster of the musician. Take down the poster of the celebrity, and put up a poster of these people who have walked with God for 50, 60, 70 years because they are the heroes among us.

That is the perspective of the psalm this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Psalm 71. Nobody knows who wrote Psalm 71, although likely it was David—for a couple of reasons. One is the first three verses are almost identical to Psalm 31. We know that was a psalm of David. Second of all, the language sounds very much like David’s other psalms. And there are places in here where it certainly sounds like he was the king. So we’re going to go with that assumption. Whether that’s the case or not really doesn’t affect the translation at all.

In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be ashamed. In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline Your ear to me and save me. 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. (Psalm 71:1-3, *NASB)

There are a lot of familiar images there. Ones we’ve talked about even in the last couple of weeks. So I’m not going to take a lot of time on those. God is a refuge, a place of safety. The prayer is that he would never be ashamed. He could look back over a lifetime and not be ashamed of how he has lived his life. In verse 2, there are three verbs there—rescue, deliver and save. The New International Version kind of mixes up the order, but they should go in that order—rescue, deliver and save—three Hebrew words. One is a reference to snatching prey out of the mouth of the predator; that would be *rescue* me. *Deliver* is to take that prey back to a place of safety. And *save* is that critter going back down its hole or in its nest, or whatever. You’d have to imagine if this is David as a shepherd, he’d seen that many times where he had rescued one of the sheep out of the mouth of a predator, taken it back to a place of safety and released it into a safe place. And so he sees God in that way, that God has been the one who has rescued him, has delivered him, has brought him back to a place of safety.

In verse 3 he mentions “**a rock of habitation**”. A couple of weeks ago we talked about a rock as being a firm place for your footing when you’re in the midst of the battle. This is a different Hebrew word. This means kind of like a huge boulder or a cliff or a crag. It’s more the idea of a safe place than it is a place for battle, that God would deliver him up on the very top of the rocks so no one can get to him. It would be a place of safety. Verse 4:

Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man, 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. (vs. 4-6)

He’s beginning to look back now over a lifetime, and God has been his hope. You think about over the period of 60, 70, 80 years, and all of the things that we wrestle with, that we put our hope in. We

put our hope in other people. We put our hope in our career. We put our hope in our bank accounts. We put our hope in our stuff.

And yet, looking back over a lifetime, he's saying, "You know, at the end of the day there's only one thing that really was my hope, and that is God Himself. You've been my confidence. You've been my strength. You've always been there for me." As a matter of fact, when he says in verse 6, **"You are He who took me..."** it's the Hebrew "You are the one who cut me." It's literally an imagery that You are the one that cut the umbilical cord. It's a way of saying, "God, You were there from the very beginning. You've cut the umbilical cord. And you have been my hope. You have been my strength. You have been what has sustained me through all of the stuff of a lifetime."

Verse 7, **"I have become a marvel to many..."** Some translations say a "portent". It's not really a word we use much. It means you have been a sign, and it can go either positive or negative. You have been a sign of God's discipline. You have been a sign of God's faithfulness. Probably in this case it goes both ways. David is saying as others have looked on and watched his life, they have marveled. They have seen him at his highest highs, and they have seen him at his lowest lows. And they have marveled at his journey.

You know, the reality is when you commit yourself to God, there is no real clear roadmap in the sense that you don't know what lies ahead. You may have high highs and you may have low lows, and you may have everything in-between. Think about David's journey. There were times when it seemed like he would die. There were times when it seemed like he would be totally defeated. But he also had these unimaginable mountaintop experiences, and people have sat back and watched, and he's become a marvel. He's been a sign of God's presence in his life. That's what he is saying.

I have become a marvel to many, for You are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with Your praise and with Your glory all day long. (vs. 7-8)

Look carefully at verse 8. It's a very interesting challenge that he makes to all of us, but in the psalm specifically to senior adults that what's coming out of your mouth is filled with praise. Your glory would mean God's reputation, that God's reputation is enhanced by what's coming out of your mouth.

One of the things that I think all of us need to think about is what's coming out of our mouths. Is it crabby and critical, or is it enhancing God's reputation? We'll come back to that theme a little later in the psalm.

Verse 9: **"Do not cast me off in the time of old age."** "Cast me off" means set me aside. Don't put me on a shelf. The psalmist is crying out to God, saying, "God, don't set me on a shelf; don't set me aside." And the reason he's saying that is because the rest of the world does that to the elderly.

The seniors among us feel this intensely on a daily basis. At one time they had their strength and they were highly productive and they were greatly valued. But in a performance-driven culture, when you can't perform anymore, you are set aside. You are put on a shelf. And the seniors feel that everyday. They drive too slow. It takes them too long to turn the corner. It takes them too long to park. They're in our way! We're very important, and they need to get out of our way! They take too long at the checkout line. Everywhere we turn, they're in our way. At least that is what we communicate. And they feel that. They're not stupid. They know that's how the culture feels about them. And because that's true, it creates this anxiety. So the psalmist is saying to God, "God, don't You do that! Don't set me aside. Don't put me on a shelf."

Then the psalmist says, **“Do not forsake me when my strength fails.”** (v. 9b) “When my strength fails” is a really interesting description of that final season of your life. I couldn’t really appreciate this until I had my heart surgery. I was 39 years old and up until that point had a certain sense of immortality. Although mentally I knew differently, that was the first time that I was really challenged and the first time I got some sense of what it must be like when you begin losing your strength and begin aging.

In the first couple of weeks of my recovery I felt weaker than I had ever experienced before. I’ve always been a pretty physical person. Suddenly I was so weak I could hardly care of myself, and I was struck with the reality that *I am at risk here*. If someone were to break into the house, I can’t do anything about it. If the car doesn’t start, I can’t go down there and fix it. If Patti has a flat tire, I can’t do anything about that. If the house catches on fire, I really can’t do anything but hope I get out. I was struck with my own vulnerability and the risk of all that.

I was supposed to be walking to get exercise, and it was January. It was freezing outside, and I couldn’t take one more day of walking up and down a 10-foot hallway. So I said to Patti, “Let’s go to the mall.” Probably the only time in my life those words have ever come out of my mouth. But I said, “I can’t stand this one more day; let’s go to the mall.” When we got to the mall and we began walking, I experienced something I have never experienced before. All of a sudden I felt my anxiety level going up and up and up because I realized if someone bumps into me, I’m going to splat on the floor. I do not have the physical strength to recover from that. I can’t stop myself. I’m just gonna splat right here on the floor. And suddenly I was concerned about everybody walking around me and by me because they were going to bump into me and they were going to knock me on the floor. I was very aware if somebody were to come up and grab Patti, I couldn’t do anything about that. I had never known a feeling like that before, and my anxiety got to the point where I finally said to Patti, “I gotta sit down for a minute, kinda ‘weirdin out’ here.”

I began to think, *I wonder if this is what it’s like when you begin to grow old*. I had a new appreciation for why my grandfather in his 90s avoided crowds, why it must be terrifying for some of our senior adults to work their way through these crowded halls because one bump and you’re splat on the ground. For the first time in my life I had some appreciation that that’s really hard. And that’s what this psalmist is saying here when he’s defining this season of life. It’s when his strength goes, and he’s not the person he once was. He looks back to days when it was different. Verse 10:

For my enemies have spoken against me; and those who watch for my life have consulted together, saying, “God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver.” (vs. 10-11)

In the psalm, if this is indeed David as the King as he’s in his twilight years, people aren’t going to sit around and revere him. His enemies see this as a moment to attack. He’s weak, he’s vulnerable; he knows that. And it’s reflected in his desire for God to protect him.

O God, do not be far from me; O my God, hasten to my help! 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. But as for me, I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more. My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and of Your salvation all day long; for I do not know the sum of them [meaning “I can’t even begin to count all the times God has been faithful”]. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone. O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. 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. (vs. 12-18)

When he says, **“When I am old and gray,”** it’s not future tense. It’s present tense, meaning now that he is old and gray. Verses 14 through 18 are very interesting as he is speaking to himself, and the desire of his heart in his final season of life is what comes out of his mouth would be praise. What comes out of his mouth would be a celebration of God’s goodness and faithfulness, so much so he can't even count all the times that God has come to his rescue. His passion is that God would not forsake him because he wants to pour himself into the next generation that they might know God’s faithfulness, that they might know God’s power.

Now you stop and think about what the psalmist is doing is issuing all of us a challenge, but specifically it’s peer to peer. It’s in his senior years that he is challenging himself and all other seniors to say what comes out of our mouths after walking with God for 50 years needs to be praiseworthy. It needs to reflect a lifetime of knowing God. It needs to be pouring into that next generation who is going to have to serve in the trenches and carry on God’s call.

Over the last several years, maybe it’s because of where I am at in my own age, but I've become very aware of those senior adults in their final chapter who are finishing extremely well and those who are finishing so poorly that I find myself asking the question, “What’s making the difference?”

Patti would say this has almost become an obsession with me because I’m so passionate about wanting to finish well. I see what happens to the younger generation when people that we’ve looked up to and respected as godly people finish so poorly, and suddenly they're confused by that and they're saying, “What’s happened here? What's going on? I don’t understand that. I thought it was really worth it to live this journey pursuing God? But I don’t understand. Is that what happens after 50 years of walking with Jesus?” And I find myself saying, “God, I'd rather be dead than to finish that way.” Like the psalmist, I want to finish well. So I ask myself, what makes the difference between those who thrive and those who finish so poorly.

I think the psalmist tells us in verse 18 that the passion of the psalmist in his twilight years is to pour himself into the next generation. In other words, he never got out of the trenches. Even though we retire from our jobs, we never retire from God’s call. And as we pour ourselves into the next generation, there’s a sense of purpose. There’s a sense of significance. I understand what my role is. Therefore I want to be really careful of what’s coming out of my mouth, that what’s coming out of my mouth properly reflects this is what it looks like after walking with God for 50 years. That’s the calling of the senior saints among us.

Gordon MacDonald has written a book called *The Resilient Life*. I would highly recommend it to everyone. In that book he talks about this and he says:

I am disappointed in the number of so-called Christian people whom I have met who opted out of the search for resilience at an early age. They stopped thinking and hinged themselves to ideas that are dangerously out of date. They maintain the semblance of a spiritual life that was developed in the past and which has never evolved and deepened to match the new realities of life. They slowly empty their spiritual tank of yesterday’s zeal and vision and now merely go through the motions of a fantasy faith that makes no sense in the streets of the real world.¹

Have you ever stopped to think about how true it is that people identify you for this season of your life? For example, if you're my age in your mid to later 40s, have you ever tried to tell people how great you were in high school? Nobody cares. It just doesn't resonate with anybody. It's a part of your life that no longer is relevant to anyone. So you end up being defined by that last season before you die.

Patti and I were laughing about this the other day. When I was younger, everything in my life was about athletics. I was clearly in the jock crowd in high school. That's what I did with my free time. That was my interest. That's what defined me. When Patti and I married that was clearly the definition of who I was. But the only me that my kids have ever known has not been the jock guy; it's been as a gear-head because that's really what defines me more today. It's my interest in building and fixing and those types of things. And so if you're to ask my kids how would you define your dad, "Oh, he's in the gear-head crowd," because that's this season. And I don't know what the next season will be.

I see this all the time when I do funerals. This past week we did the funeral for Sue Hansen who was just a godly, godly woman in the church. She happened to be my administrative assistant for seven years—just a wonderful godly example. And she finished like a champion. But in the midst of the service, one of her college friends (and there was a group who stayed in touch all these years) read about what Sue was like in those college days. I told her afterward, "You know, that was so good because that's a Sue we have never known." And I thought again, *You know, there's a whole life that she lived, but in essence you're defined by that last season of life.*

I think for senior adults you need to ask yourself what will define this season for you. Do you realize that through a lifetime you could have been on fire for God? You could have served in every capacity imaginable. You could have poured your life out for God. But if in this final season you lose your way, that's all your grandchildren will remember. For 50, 60, 70 years your grandchildren will say, "Oh yeah, my grandmother, she was critical and crabby," because all they will remember is that last season. You're peers will just remember that last season. It's the last season that defines you. That's why it's so important that we finish well.

We have some outstanding seniors here, seniors that are finishing so well, that have walked with God for 50, 60, 70 years. And you need to know we are watching. Over the last two or three years I have been watching with intensity. I want to know what makes the difference between those who finish well and those who lose their way.

You go through the psalm from verse 14 through verse 18. It'd do us well for all of us to memorize those words and ask ourselves, *Is that what is coming out of my mouth? Is that how people would define me if this were my final season of life?*

In Gordon MacDonald's book he upholds Vernon Grounds, the former President and Chancellor of Denver Seminary, as his model of a resilient life. And Vernon is a very good model. He is a remarkable man. But we have models among us. I would say for me, my greatest model would be my dear mother. My mom has gone through more than any ten people combined should have to go through. And yet she remains so sweet in her spirit, so in love with Jesus, so involved in the trenches. And when I see that, I find myself saying, "I want to be like that." She's my number one hero.

I think another one among us for me would be Claudine Lehman. What a remarkable woman. Her husband was the founding pastor of this church and for 30 some years served faithfully as the senior

pastor. A few years ago he went home to be with the Lord. And he finished like a champion. I'll tell you, I've analyzed that one over and over again. What was it that caused him to finish so well? But Claudine is a remarkable story in her own right. Claudine started working in the office 40 some years ago and still continues to be a valuable member of our staff today. If I was a senior pastor coming in looking maybe to take this job and you were to tell me, "Oh, by the way, the founding pastor's wife is still running the office and she's been there for 40 some years." I would say, "Whoa, I'm going somewhere else!" But the experience here has been remarkably the opposite. Claudine is a godly sweet woman who oozes out the reality of the presence of Jesus everywhere. I've just been amazed at her ability to continue to grow and change as the church has changed and to have such a positive, enthusiastic spirit. And I've watched Claudine over these last years and I've said, "I want to be like that."

I want a generation to look at me and say I want to know what it looks like when you've walked with Jesus for 50 years and be compelled that they would say, "That looks like it's worth it! I'm gonna do it!" You senior adults need to understand how disheartening it is to the youth when they look at you after you've walked with Jesus for 50 years and they can't figure out what's happened. Why have you disconnected? Why have you become so critical? Why have you become so crabby? And that in essence is what will define the last season. We need to celebrate the many, many, many seniors who are champions among us.

With all of this in mind, let me re-read those verses and have all of us ask the question, "Is this what's coming out of my mouth?"

But as for me, I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more. My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and of Your salvation all day long; for I do not know the sum of them. I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone. O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. 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. For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? *[In other words, how can I do any less because of who You are?]* You who have shown me many troubles and distresses will revive me again, and will bring me up again from the depths of the earth. May You increase my greatness and turn to comfort me. 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. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You; and my soul, which You have redeemed. My tongue also will utter Your righteousness all day long; for they are ashamed, for they are humiliated who seek my hurt. (vs. 14-24)

The psalmist challenges himself in his grey-haired season of life that everything that comes out of his mouth is praiseworthy and a reflection of the presence of God over a lifetime.

Years ago I heard Becky Pippert tell this story. It was about a church that was in the Pacific Northwest. It was a very stuffy traditional church, but they decided they wanted to be more active in reaching out to the campus that was in their city. So they put flyers in different places on campus inviting people to come attend the service. Well, they really didn't think anyone would attend, and for weeks nobody did.

And then one week a young hippie decided to attend (this was in the 70s). And he was just kind of the poster child of the hippies in the 70s. He had long messed-up hair. He had a dirty t-shirt. He

had long bell-bottom jeans, no shoes, barefoot. He came walking into this very traditional, very stuffy church and the service was already in progress. So he came down the center aisle and began looking for a seat, and of course was causing quite a stir.

He kept working his way closer and closer to the front because there were no seats available. Finally he got all the way up to the front. There were no seats available, so he simply crossed his legs and plopped down on the carpet right before the preacher. Of course, everybody was quite horrified that this young hippie would be so disrespectful of the church.

The service kind of limped along, and all of a sudden you could hear a murmuring in the crowd. And clear in the back, one of the pillars of the church, an elderly gentleman, stood up, very proper, three-piece suit, watch chain, walked with a cane and began working his way down the center aisle to this hippie. And slowly he moved, and slowly the service slowed down and slowed down, finally just coming to a stop. Everybody held their breath and they watched. They're thinking in their minds, *Who can blame this elderly gentleman for what he's about to do. He could not possibly process why this young hippie would so desecrate this church.*

So he works his way slowly to the front and then to everyone's amazement, he lays his cane on the ground. With all of the strength he has, he folds his legs and he plops down on the carpet next to the hippie. And he stayed there the entire service, so he would not have to worship alone.

I find myself thinking, *I want to be that man. I want to maintain a theology of grace until the day I die. I don't want to be critical. I don't want to be crabby. I want to properly reflect to the next generation this is what it looks like when you've walked with God for 50 years, and it's so compelling that they would say, "That's worth it to me. That's worth it to me. I'm gonna go for it."*

We're going to do something unusual this morning. We don't usually do this. But I want to speak to two groups. First I want to speak to those of you that are teens and twenties. It must be an overwhelming thought to think about walking with God for 50 and 60 years. It may at times seem like it's just not even a possibility. If you would say this morning, "You know, the passion of my heart is that I want to be found faithful. I want to walk with God for 50 years. I want to finish my race well, but right now in my teens and twenties, that just looks so overwhelming," but you just want us to know this is your heart, this is your passion, this is what you want, I'm going to invite you in just a moment to come on down. Just kneel down here anywhere in the front, and we're going to pray a prayer of dedication for you.

The second group of people I want to talk to are those of you among us who have walked with God for 50 years or more. You may have had your ups and downs like all of us, but you have walked with God for 50 years or more. Would you be willing to get up out of your seat and come down here and lay a hand on one of these young people? You might be a grandparent. You might not be relationally connected at all. But you're saying to these young people, "I want you to know we're for you. We love you; we celebrate you; we're for you." And part of what you're saying is, "I'm going to do everything in my power to model in a very positive way what it looks like to have walked with Jesus for 50 or 60 years, to make that so compelling that these young people would say, "I want to be like that; I think it's worth it.'"

I'm going to go ahead and ask those of you in your teens and twenties, if you're willing to make that commitment, to just get out of your seats and come on down. Those of you that have walked with God 50 years or more—we'll take the time that's necessary—get out of your seat, come on down. If you see one of our senior saints struggling, feel free to jump up and help them down here.

I think one of the things that makes Lincoln Berean unique is on every given weekend we have people from 104 years old all the way down to the nursery. We have a significant representation of all those seasons. We have some of the most amazing godly seniors in this body. And it is important for you young people to know, they are for you. They love you. They cheer for you. They want nothing more than to see you walk faithful for the next 50 to 60 years if God gives you that.

I want to introduce you to Vernon Smith. If I could put a poster in my bedroom of my heroes, Vernon would have to be one of those on the poster. Vernon is 87 years old. He's walked with God for 68 years. Vernon has a beautiful, sweet relationship with Jesus. If I was to ask the question, "What does it look like after you've walked with God for 68 years?" and I look at Vernon, I'd say, "That's worth it. I want to be like him." He was a missionary in Nigeria, has served in church ministries from filling the pulpit to being an elder to teaching Sunday School. And up until just a couple of months ago, he was still a LifeGroup leader. As I said, staying active in the trenches. A remarkable man. He is going to issue a challenge to the youth and then lead us in a prayer of dedication for them.

Vernon Smith:

Young people, thank you for having the courage to come forward to make a stand for our Lord Jesus Christ. It takes a bit of guts, doesn't it? But from here on, you'll hear the word *obey* from the Word, from God, very often. Obey. And God is going to call some of you maybe to faraway places, some of you maybe to some place in the United States, maybe to Lincoln, maybe to this church or your own church, another church perhaps. And others, maybe He'll call you just to that important mission field—your own home where there's a block of little kids who need the Lord Jesus. Bear one thing in mind. God will never fail you. And there's a flock of older folks who love you, who will pray for you and uphold you in every way they can. And I'd like to leave just a word of Scripture with you this morning—God's word to Joshua as he entered a different phase of his life. Joshua 1:9:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua's qualities were faith, courage, obedience and devotion to the Law of God. You folks who are older who have come down here in front, those of you who couldn't come (maybe you were like me, a little bit weak in the knees), let's pray together for this tremendous group of young people before us here this morning:

Father, we stand in awe of what You are doing in this place. We know from watching that You love us, that You care for us, that You are raising up a new generation of soldiers for Jesus. Watch over them we pray, enable them as they serve. Father, we thank you again for all You mean to us. You are a holy wonderful God, One who would look upon sinful people and raise them up and put them in places of obedience and ask them to do what You want them to do. Watch over us today we pray as we go out into a needy, needy world. Guide our actions, our thoughts. Strengthen us for the task. We pray in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

¹--from Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life: You Can Move Ahead No Matter What*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), p.22-23.