

Old Age and Faith in Psalm 71: An Exegetical Study in Dialogue with Developmental Psychology

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Description

Psalm 71 portrays old age as a season of vulnerable yet hopeful faith, in which memory of God's past help sustains prayer, resilience and witness to the next generation.

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Abstract

Psalm 71 is the clearest psalm in which the petitioner prays explicitly in view of old age, yet its exegetical contribution to a biblical theology of aging remains underexplored. This study aims to interpret Psalm 71 exegetically and to bring its findings into dialogue with the psychology of aging. It employs a qualitative exegetical method based on the Masoretic Text (BHS), analysing structure, parallelism, key terms and verbal forms, and then relates the results heuristically to Erikson's theory, religious coping and spiritual resilience. The analysis shows that the psalm moves from refuge (vv. 1–8) through lament over old age (vv. 9–13) to hope and proclamation (vv. 14–18) and praise (vv. 19–24), bound together by the motifs of lifelong trust (minnē'ûrāy, "from my youth") and divine righteousness (šēdāqâ). The study contributes a text-grounded model of aging faith in which memory, petition and generational witness form the basis of resilience.

Keywords: Psalm 71; old age; Hebrew exegesis; religious coping; generativity

INTRODUCTION

Aging is a stage of life that brings significant physical, psychological, social and spiritual change. Declining strength, the loss of social roles and the awareness of approaching death often generate fear of abandonment and existential anxiety, while also opening space for life review and the search for meaning (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, pp. 75–82; B. G. Knight & Sayegh, 2011). Recent studies show that religious coping can buffer the effects of stress in older adults (Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020) and that religiosity, social support and wisdom are associated with well-being among older adults in Indonesia. For a country in which most older adults live within religious communities, the question of how the biblical texts themselves articulate the experience of aging before God is therefore not only academic but also contextually urgent.

Among the psalms, Psalm 71 stands out because the petitioner prays explicitly in view of old age: "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; when my strength is spent, do not forsake

me" (v. 9, author's translation), and again, "even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me" (v. 18). Other psalms mention old age, but differently: Ps 37:25 ("I have been young and now am old") is a sapiential observation, Ps 90:10 reflects on the brevity of life, and Ps 92:15 promises that the righteous will bear fruit in old age. Psalm 71 is distinctive in combining petition from within old age, a retrospective confession of trust "from my youth" (vv. 5, 17) and a vow to proclaim God's power "to the generation" (v. 18). It therefore offers a rare canonical witness to the spirituality of old age.

Previous scholarship has followed three largely separate lines. First, commentators have focused on the form of Psalm 71 as an individual lament, its verbal parallels with other psalms (especially Pss 22, 31, 35 and 40), its lack of a superscription and its relation to Psalm 70 (Brueggemann & Bellinger, 2014, p. 318; deClaissé-Walford et al., 2014; Goldingay, 2007; Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005; Tate, 1990). Second, studies of aging in the Hebrew Bible have described the social status, honour and vulnerability of the elderly in ancient Israel (D. A. Knight, 2014) and the theological and spiritual tasks of aging and dying (DeVries, 2021; Finlay, 2015), but without a detailed exegesis of Psalm 71. Third, a growing body of research reads the Psalms with psychological and trauma-informed models, showing both the potential and the methodological risks of such dialogue (Hays, 2023; Kim, 2021; Schweers, 2023), while pastoral-psychological studies use biblical texts to illustrate religious coping and resilience in later life (Avlorina, 2025; Chia, 2022; Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020). None of these lines has offered an exegesis of Psalm 71 that shows from its structure, vocabulary and verbal forms how the text itself constructs the faith of an aging person, and only then evaluates that construction critically in conversation with the psychology of aging.

This article addresses that gap. Its aim is to interpret Psalm 71 exegetically and to bring the results into a critical dialogue with the developmental psychology of aging. The study is guided by two questions: (1) How do the structure, key terms and verbal forms of Psalm 71 construct the experience of faith in old age? (2) How do these exegetical findings relate to the concepts of ego integrity, religious coping, generativity and spiritual resilience? The article argues that Psalm 71 presents old age not merely as a time of decline but as a season in which the memory of God's lifelong faithfulness, expressed in petition and praise, grounds both resilience and generational witness. Its contribution lies in offering a text-grounded biblical model of aging faith that can inform Old Testament theology and, secondarily, pastoral care of older adults.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative exegetical study of Psalm 71 with an interdisciplinary dialogue component. The interpretive approach is grammatical-historical and literary-poetic: it attends to the Hebrew text, poetic parallelism, structure, key words and the function of verbal forms within the psalm and its canonical setting. The object of study is Psalm 71 (vv. 1–24). The primary source is the Masoretic Text as presented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger & Rudolph, 1997), including its Ketiv–Qere notes and apparatus; English renderings are the

author's own translation. Morphological and syntactic analysis follows Waltke and O'Connor (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990). Secondary sources comprise critical commentaries on the Psalms and peer-reviewed journal articles in Biblical Studies, the psychology of religion and gerontology. Journal literature was identified through Crossref searches using the keywords "Psalm 71", "old age or aging AND Hebrew Bible", "lament psalms", "religious coping AND older adults" and "generativity AND ego integrity", with priority given to peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2026 and to studies of Asian populations.

The analysis proceeds in four steps. First, the text is delimited and its literary and canonical context is examined, including its relationship with Psalm 70 and its parallels with other psalms. Second, the structure of the psalm is determined on the basis of shifts in addressee, mood and key words. Third, each strophe is analysed with attention to key Hebrew terms, verbal forms and parallelism. Fourth, the exegetical findings are synthesised and brought into dialogue with Erikson's stage of integrity versus despair, religious coping theory and the concept of spiritual resilience (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Pargament, 2001).

This method is chosen because the psalm's portrayal of aging is carried by its poetic form and vocabulary; only close reading can show whether psychological categories illuminate the text or are imposed upon it. The psychological theories are therefore used heuristically, as conversation partners after the exegesis, and not as a grid that determines its results. This order guards against reading modern constructs into an ancient prayer while still allowing the text to address contemporary questions about aging.

The psychological categories themselves also require critical use. Erikson's stage model was developed in a Western, individualistic context; cross-cultural studies nevertheless report that the link between generativity and ego integrity also appears among older adults in Central Europe and Cameroon (Busch et al., 2018) and in Japan (Toyoshima & Kusumi, 2025), while research among Filipino older adults shows that spiritual coping in later life is often communal and oriented toward transcendence (Tianio & Manlapas, 2026). These findings caution against assuming that Erikson's categories apply unchanged, and they make the communal and theocentric emphases of Psalm 71 a relevant corrective for collectivist Asian contexts such as Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literary Context, Text, and Structure of Psalm 71

Psalm 71 stands near the end of Book II of the Psalter, immediately before the Solomonian Psalm 72, which closes the "prayers of David son of Jesse" (72:20). Unusually within Book II, it lacks a superscription in the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint (Ps 70 LXX) supplies one, attributing the psalm to David and adding a reference to "the sons of Jonadab and the first captives", which suggests that the psalm was later read as the prayer of the exiled and the aged. Many commentators read Psalm 71 as a continuation of Psalm 70, and a number of Hebrew manuscripts join the two psalms (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005; Tate, 1990). The shared vocabulary supports a close link: the plea for haste (71:12 ;6 ,70:2, חַיֵּשׁ) and the wish that

opponents be put to shame (24, 71:13 ;70:3, בּוֹשׁ). This study reads Psalm 71 as a literary unit in its own right, since it has its own structure and inclusio (see below), while recognising that in the canonical sequence it expands the brief cry of Psalm 70. The psalm is also dense with phrases shared with other laments: vv. 1–3 closely parallel Ps 31:2–4, v. 12 echoes Pss 22:12 and 38:22–23, and v. 13 recalls Pss 35:4, 26 and 40:15. This anthological character does not make the psalm derivative; an aged petitioner gathers the prayer language of a lifetime and makes it his own (Goldingay, 2007).

On the textual level, the most significant feature is the Ketiv–Qere in v. 20. The consonantal text (Ketiv) reads תַּחֲיִינוּ, הִרְאִיתֵנוּ, תַּעֲלֵנוּ with first-person plural suffixes (“us”), whereas the Qere reads תַּחֲיֵנִי, הִרְאִיתֵנִי, תַּעֲלֵנִי with singular suffixes (“me”), in line with the rest of the psalm (Elliger & Rudolph, 1997). The Ketiv may reflect the communal reuse of an individual prayer, a phenomenon also observed in the communal laments as carriers of shared memory across generations (Kim, 2021); the Qere preserves the individual voice. This study follows the Qere for the flow of the psalm while noting that the Ketiv already points to the communal reception of one person's aging faith.

The structure of the psalm is determined by alternating petition and praise, by the repeated motif of time (מִנְעוּרִי “from my youth”, vv. 5, 17; זְקֵנָה “old age”, vv. 9, 18) and by the five-fold occurrence of צְדָקָה “righteousness” (vv. 2, 15, 16, 19, 24). The root בּוֹשׁ “to be ashamed” forms an inclusio between the opening plea אֶל-אֲבוֹשָׁה (v. 1) and the closing certainty כִּי-בִשּׁוּ (v. 24). Commentators divide the psalm in different ways, some into three larger sections and others into smaller units (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005; Tate, 1990). The five-strophe division adopted here (Table 1) follows changes in addressee and mood (from petition to confession, lament, hope and praise) and the recurrence of the key words just noted.

Table 1. Structure of Psalm 71 - Author's analysis of the Masoretic Text (BHS)

Strophe	Verses	Movement	Key Hebrew markers
A	1–4	Plea for refuge and rescue	חֲסִיתִי, אֶל-אֲבוֹשָׁה, צְדָקָה
B	5–8	Confession of lifelong trust	מִנְעוּרִי, מִבֶּטֶן, תָּמִיד
C	9–13	Lament over old age and enemies	זְקֵנָה, עֹב, אֶל-תִּרְחַק
D	14–18	Turn to hope and vow of proclamation	וְאֲנִי, אֶיֱחַל, לְדוֹר
E	19–24	Praise of the incomparable God	מִי כָמוֹךָ, תָּשׁוּב, בּוֹשׁ

Refuge and Lifelong Trust (Psalm 71:1–8)

The psalm opens with a confession in which the prepositional phrase is fronted for emphasis: בְּךָ-יְהוָה חֲסִיתִי (“In you, O YHWH, I have taken refuge”, v. 1). The Qal perfect חֲסִיתִי expresses a settled stance rather than a momentary act: the petitioner speaks from an existing relationship of trust. The following form, אֶל-אֲבוֹשָׁה לֵעוֹלָם (“let me never be put to shame”), introduces the fear that governs the whole psalm: that a life of trust might end in public

disgrace. The appeal is grounded in God's character, בְּצִדְקָתְךָ (“in your righteousness”, v. 2), which in the Psalms denotes God's saving faithfulness to the covenant relationship rather than abstract justice (Brueggemann & Bellinger, 2014, p. 318). Grammatically, אֶל-אֲבוֹשָׁה is a first-person volitive (cohortative form) negated with אַל, functioning as a wish addressed to God (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990).

Verses 5–6 shift from petition to retrospective confession and contain the temporal key of the psalm. The petitioner calls God תִּקְוָתִי (“my hope”) and מִבֶּטְחִי מִנְעוּרִי (“my trust from my youth”, v. 5) and then pushes the horizon back even further: עָלֶיךָ נִסְמַכְתִּי מִבֶּטֶן (“upon you I have leaned from the womb”, v. 6). The Niphal נִסְמַכְתִּי depicts dependence as a bodily image of being supported, which anticipates the loss of strength in v. 9. The rare participle גִּזִּי (v. 6) is difficult; it is usually rendered “the one who took me” from my mother's womb, and its uncertainty should be acknowledged (Tate, 1990). The adverb תָּמִיד (“continually”, vv. 3, 6, 14) binds the whole life span together under unbroken praise. Two explanations of גִּזִּי are usually offered: a derivation from גָּזַח (“to cut, sever”), hence “the one who severed me” from the womb, or an emendation to עָזִי (“my strength”) by analogy with Ps 22:10; the parallel with Ps 22:10–11, which also traces trust back to the womb, supports the general sense in either case.

Verse 7 adds a social dimension: כְּמוֹפֶת הָיִיתִי לְרַבִּים (“I have become like a portent to many”). The term מוֹפֶת can denote either a sign of divine protection or a sign of divine judgment; read beside v. 11, the petitioner's long survival of suffering has made him an ambiguous sign that others interpret as abandonment, while he himself interprets it as protection: וְאַתָּה מִחֲסִי-עוֹ (“but you are my strong refuge”). Strophes A and B thus establish that the faith of old age is rooted in a remembered history with God that reaches back to birth. Elsewhere מוֹפֶת denotes a sign of divine judgment (Deut 28:46) or a person who serves as a sign to the community (Isa 8:18; Ezek 12:6, 11), which supports reading the petitioner's visible suffering as a public sign open to contrasting interpretations.

In dialogue with developmental psychology, this retrospective confession corresponds closely to what Erikson describes as life review in the final stage of integrity versus despair, in which the older person integrates the whole of life into a meaningful story (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, pp. 75–82). The exegesis, however, shows a decisive difference: in Psalm 71 integrity is not achieved by the self's acceptance of its own life but is received through God's faithfulness “from the womb”. Memory is theological before it is psychological. In terms of religious coping, the passage illustrates benevolent religious reappraisal, in which past experience of God's help is used to interpret present distress (Pargament, 2001, p. 72).

Vulnerability in Old Age (Psalm 71:9–13)

The central lament of the psalm is formulated in v. 9 as a double negative petition in synonymous parallelism: אֶל-תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי לַעֵת זָקְנָה // כְּכֹלֹת פְּחִי אֶל-תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי (“Do not cast

me off in the time of old age // when my strength is spent, do not forsake me"). The Hiphil jussive **תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי** evokes the image of throwing away something that has become useless, while the infinitive construct **כְּבָלוֹת** (from **כָּלָה**, "to come to an end") describes strength as something that runs out. The parallel lines thus join a temporal marker (**לְעֵת זְקֵנָה**) and a physical marker (**כְּבָלוֹת פָּחִי**): old age is experienced as the time when the body no longer guarantees one's worth.

Verses 10–11 explain the fear by quoting the enemies: **אֱלֹהִים עָזְבוּ דָרְכּוֹ וַתִּפְשׁוּהוּ** **כִּי־אֵין מַצִּיל** ("God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver", v. 11). The perfect **עָזְבוּ** takes up the very verb of the petitioner's plea in v. 9 (**עֲזֹב**). What the petitioner fears as a possibility, the enemies proclaim as a fact. The crisis of old age is therefore not only physical but theological and social: weakness is read by others as evidence of divine abandonment, which makes the aged person vulnerable to exploitation. The answering petition in v. 12, **אֱלֹהִים אַל־תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי** ("O God, do not be far from me"), echoes Ps 22:12, 20, and the imprecation of v. 13 (**יִבְשׁוּ**) turns the shame the petitioner fears (v. 1) back upon the accusers. The enemies in the individual laments are often portrayed less as historically identifiable persons than as figures through which the petitioner's identity and vulnerability are constructed (Stocks, 2021). Biblical narratives confirm that physical decline in old age could expose a person to diminished social power (e.g., 1 Kgs 1:1–4; cf. 2 Sam 19:35–37), even though old age was also associated with honour and wisdom (D. A. Knight, 2014).

Psychological research confirms that older adults commonly experience fear of becoming a burden, loss of social relevance and heightened vulnerability (B. G. Knight & Sayegh, 2011; Liu et al., 2025). The exegesis shows, however, that Psalm 71 does not suppress these fears; it voices them directly to God through imperatives and jussives. This corresponds to what Pargament calls collaborative and petitionary religious coping, in which the person neither denies distress nor passively waits, but actively brings it to God (Pargament, 2001, pp. 56–60). The text's further insight is that the threat is also social: the community's judgment that the weak have been abandoned by God. The psalm thus offers a biblical critique of social attitudes that equate diminishing strength with diminishing worth. Recent studies also show that religious coping and resilience remain important resources for older adults under stress, although their effects vary with social support and context (Liu et al., 2025; Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020).

Hope and Generational Witness (Psalm 71:14–18)

Verse 14 marks the turning point of the psalm with the emphatic pronoun and adversative waw: **וְאֲנִי תָמִיד אֵיחָל וְהוֹסַפְתִּי עַל־כָּל־תְּהִלָּתְךָ** ("But I will hope continually and will add to all your praise"). Over against the enemies' claim, the petitioner sets his own decision. The Piel imperfect **אֵיחָל** denotes patient, expectant waiting, and the Hiphil weqatal

וְהוֹסַפְתִּי (‘‘I will add’’) presents old age not as the end of praise but as a time to increase it. The repetition of תָּמִיד links this hope with the lifelong praise of v. 6.

Verses 15–16 concentrate the theme of צִדְקָה: ‘‘My mouth will recount your righteousness ... I will make mention of your righteousness, yours alone’’ (צִדְקָתְךָ לְבִדְךָ, v. 16). The admission סְפוּרוֹתַי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי (‘‘for I do not know their number’’, v. 15) indicates that God's saving acts exceed the capacity of memory. Verse 17 then names God as teacher: אֱלֹהִים לְמַדַּתִּי מִנְעוּרַי (‘‘O God, you have taught me from my youth’’). The Piel perfect לְמַדַּתִּי frames the whole of life as an education in God's נִפְלְאוֹת (‘‘wondrous deeds’’) that continues וְעַד-הַנֵּה (‘‘until now’’).

Verse 18 repeats the plea of v. 9 but gives it a new purpose: וְגַם עַד-זְקֵנָה וְשִׁיבָה (‘‘Even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your arm to the generation’’). The pair זְקֵנָה וְשִׁיבָה intensifies the reference to old age, and the conjunction עַד introduces the goal of the petition: the petitioner asks to be sustained in order to pass on testimony. The metaphor זְרֹעֶךָ (‘‘your arm’’) recalls the language of the exodus (e.g., Deut 26:8), so that personal memory is joined to Israel's communal story of salvation. Within the Psalter, זְרֹעַ is repeatedly associated with God's acts of salvation (e.g., Pss 77:16; 89:11, 14; 98:1). The second half of the verse, לְכָל-יָבוֹא גְבוּרָתְךָ (‘‘your might to all who are to come’’), extends the horizon from the next generation to all future ones.

This vow corresponds to Erikson's concept of generativity, the concern to establish and guide the next generation, which Erikson and Erikson see as continuing into old age (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, pp. 81–82). Kimble and McFadden extend this to spiritual generativity, the transmission of faith and values (Kimble & McFadden, 2002, pp. 38–40). The exegesis, however, nuances the psychological reading: in Psalm 71 the content of what is passed on is not the self's legacy but God's זְרֹעַ and גְּבוּרָה. Generativity here is doxological: the older person's remaining strength is requested for the sake of witness.

Restoration and Praise (Psalm 71:19–24)

The final strophe begins with a confession of God's incomparability: וְצִדְקָתְךָ אֱלֹהִים (‘‘Your righteousness, O God, reaches the heights ... O God, who is like you?’’, v. 19). Verse 20 is the theological centre of this strophe. It acknowledges that the same God who rescues has also caused the petitioner to see צָרוֹת רַבּוֹת וְרָעוֹת (‘‘many and bitter troubles’’), and it expresses hope in a series of imperfects introduced by the adverbial use of תִּשׁוּב (‘‘you will again ...’’): God will again revive and again bring up מִתְּהוֹמוֹת (‘‘from the depths of the earth’’). The image of the depths evokes the realm of death; the aging petitioner hopes for God's life-giving restoration from near-death distress. As in other

psalms that speak of rescue from the depths or from Sheol (e.g., Pss 30:4; 86:13), the language describes renewal of life in the present rather than a developed doctrine of resurrection, although later readers could extend it in that direction.

Verses 22–24 close with vows of praise that name musical instruments (כְּלִי־נָבֶל) and invoke God as קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל (“the Holy One of Israel”, v. 22), a title rare in the Psalter and characteristic of Isaiah. The whole person is involved: שִׁפְתַּי (“my lips”), נַפְשִׁי אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ (“my life, which you have redeemed”, v. 23) and לְשׁוֹנִי (“my tongue”, v. 24). The perfect פָּדִיתָ and the closing perfects כִּי־בָשׁוּ כִי־חָפְרוּ are best read as perfects of confidence, expressing certainty of a deliverance not yet fully visible. The inclusio with v. 1 is thereby completed: the one who feared shame ends by declaring that his accusers are ashamed. The perfect of confidence is a recognised use of the suffix conjugation for future events presented as certain (Waltke & O’Connor, 1990); a past reading (“they have been put to shame”) is also possible, but the vows of praise that precede it favour the reading adopted here.

In psychological terms, this movement from lament to praise illustrates spiritual resilience, which Nelson-Becker and Thomas describe as the capacity to sustain meaning and growth through spiritual resources amid struggle in later life, and which Reis and Menezes observed among long-lived older adults who draw on religiosity in daily life (Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020; Reis & Menezes, 2017). The exegesis adds two elements often absent from psychological accounts. First, resilience in Psalm 71 does not deny suffering; it holds together God’s role in “many troubles” and God’s power to revive (v. 20). Second, resilience is expressed communally and liturgically, through public praise and instruments, rather than as a private inner state. Manning et al. similarly describe spiritual resilience as both protecting and promoting well-being in later life, and studies of lament as a pastoral resource show that giving voice to distress before God can contribute to healing (Dickie, 2019; Manning et al., 2019).

Synthesis: A Biblical Model of Aging Faith

The exegetical findings and their psychological counterparts are summarised in Table 2. The comparison shows genuine points of contact but also clear differences, so that the dialogue is mutually critical rather than merely illustrative.

Table 2. Exegetical Findings in Psalm 71 and Psychological Concepts

Exegetical finding	Key text	Psychological concept	Point of difference
Lifelong trust remembered from youth and birth	vv. 5–6, 17 (מִנְעוּרִי, מִבֶּטֶן)	Life review; ego integrity (Erikson)	Integrity is received from God’s faithfulness, not achieved by self-acceptance
Fear of being cast off when strength fails	vv. 9–11 (זָקֵנָה, עֲזָב)	Existential anxiety; petitionary coping (Pargament)	The threat is also social-theological:

Hope and vow to proclaim to the next generation	vv. 14–18 (אֵיחָל, לְדוֹר)	Generativity; spiritual generativity	weakness read as divine abandonment What is passed on is God's deeds, not personal legacy
Praise after many troubles; hope of revival	vv. 19–24 (תְּשׁוּבָה, פְּרִיָּה)	Spiritual resilience	Resilience is communal and liturgical, and holds God's role in suffering

Compared with previous commentary, which treats old age as one motif within an anthological lament (Goldingay, 2007; Tate, 1990) or reads the psalm primarily within the 70–71 sequence (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005), this study shows that the temporal markers “from my youth” and “old age” structure the psalm and determine the function of its other motifs, including the plea against shame and the praise of צִדְקָה. Compared with studies of aging in the Hebrew Bible (D. A. Knight, 2014) and with theological reflections on aging and memory (DeVries, 2021; Finlay, 2015), it provides a detailed exegetical basis for these themes in a single text. Compared with psychological and pastoral studies that use Psalm 71 illustratively (Avlorina, 2025; Chia, 2022), it shows that the text itself contains a theology of aging that both affirms and corrects modern categories. As Schweers and Hays demonstrate for other psalms, psychological models can illuminate the Psalms when they remain subordinate to textual evidence (Hays, 2023; Schweers, 2023). Accordingly, the psalm does not provide a biography of the petitioner, and its age references may function representatively in Israel's worship; the dialogue is offered at the level of the experience the psalm articulates, not as a reconstruction of the author's psyche.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine how Psalm 71 constructs the experience of faith in old age and how its findings relate to developmental psychology. The exegesis shows that the psalm moves from refuge (vv. 1–8) through lament over old age (vv. 9–13) to hope and generational witness (vv. 14–18) and praise (vv. 19–24). This movement is held together by the temporal arc from the womb and youth to old age and grey hairs, the five-fold confession of God's צִדְקָה, and the inclusio of shame (vv. 1, 24). In this text old age is a season of real vulnerability, socially and theologically as well as physically, but it is also a season in which remembered faithfulness grounds hope, increased praise and witness to the next generation.

The article contributes a text-grounded biblical model of aging faith in which memory, petition and generational testimony are the basis of resilience. It also shows that categories such as ego integrity, religious coping and generativity illuminate the psalm but must be qualified by its theocentric and communal orientation. The study is limited to a single psalm read in its final form; it does not reconstruct the historical author, and its use of psychological theory is heuristic. Further research could examine other Old Testament texts on old age (e.g.,

Ps 92:13–16; Eccl 12:1–7; Isa 46:3–4) and could test the model empirically among older Christians, including in Indonesian church contexts.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study did not involve human participants, interviews, surveys, or personal data requiring ethical approval.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF AI USAGE

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing and an AI assistant Claude Opus 5.5 to support the revision of the manuscript, including restructuring, drafting revised passages and identifying literature through Crossref. All exegetical judgements, sources and final wording were reviewed, edited and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this article. [Authors: confirm or adjust this statement so that it accurately reflects your use of AI.

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