Harley Camden, a Methodist pastor, took an evening walk along the bank of the Occoquan (**aa**·kuh·kwaan) River. The sun had set, but there was still enough light to illuminate the charcoal gray outcroppings of rock that rose up from the edge of the river. Harley’s life was in chaos, and he needed to find stability. Putting his hands on a rock by the roadside, he made a connection with someone and something much bigger than himself. Sitting down on the rock, he sensed that his center of gravity was moving down, down, down…deep into the stone beneath him.

Pulling out his smartphone, Harley called up Psalm 71, “In you, O LORD, I take refuge…Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me” (vv. 1, 3). Harley read it, and then repeated it. *Get outside your head*, he thought to himself, *let yourself rest in the Lord of the rock*. This is what is real, Harley thought, a fortress that can stand strong against any assault. Lean on God, rely on God: God is the rock in which you can take refuge. “Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me,” Harley repeated to himself, again and again.

Although Harley Camden is a fictional character in the novel *Windows of the Heavens,*his need for stability is something very real. The chaotic past few years, with the pandemic wreaking havoc on our schools, workplaces, churches, and homes; jobs being lost; educations being disrupted; and relationships coming apart, have us all scrambling for safety and security. Whenever we need to be delivered, rescued, or saved, it is good to remember that God is our rock, our fortress, our safety, our salvation.

When the writer of Psalm 71 needs to be rescued “from the grasp of the unjust and cruel” (v. 4), God comes into his life as his hope and his trust. The Psalmist puts his trust in God, declaring his faith in God’s righteousness and God’s ability to help him. Here is a man unable to overcome the obstacles in his life; but this powerless man finds help and safety in the Lord God. His security rests in the God who is his refuge, his rock, and his fortress.

The Psalmist is confident that God will deliver him our of the hand of the wicked and save him from the “hand of the unrighteous and cruel” (v. 4) because God is his hope (v. 5). Note what the Psalmist says: “You *are* my hope, O Lord God” (v. 5). His puts hope is *in* God because he knows that God *is* his hope. That is a powerful statement! It is one thing to have hope in things, but it is something entirely different and infinitely better to know Who your hope is. I hope my car will start in the morning. I hope I will have light when I flick the switch and water when I turn the tap. I hope I will have enough money to retire at age 67. But these things are *not* *my hope*. God is my hope. It is God who makes all the other things possible.

The Psalmist’s hope is in God because God proves God’s faithfulness to him time and again. Since his youth, God “upheld” the Psalmist. God knew him in his mother’s womb and presided over his birth and stayed with him every day of his life. God has a proven track record of showing up and helping when the Psalmist needs God. As the Psalmist puts his hope in God “continually,” he will also praise God “more and more” (v. 14). The Psalmist is in a crisis, and he depends upon God for help. But in this psalm, he does not slip into despair or seem to lose the sense of God’s support. He expects deliverance after deliverance, and blessing after blessing, and, in consequence, he will praise God more and more. As God’s blessings abound, so shall the Psalmist’s praises rise.

Renowned preacher Charles Spurgeon said it like this: “A dying hope would bring forth declining songs; as the expectations grew more dim, so would the music become more faint; but a hope immortal and eternal, flaming forth each day with intenser brightness, brings forth a song of praise which, as it shall always continue to arise, so shall it always gather new force.” The Psalmist is continually surprised by God whose faithfulness is eternal and who’s deeds know no limits (v. 15). With this hope and this praise, the Psalmist will go forth “in the strength of the Lord GOD” (v. 16), and he will tell all whom he meets about God’s greatness and power. His is a living hope that grows stronger each day as God continues to provide. God is the rock the firm foundation on whom the Psalmist stands.

God travels across time and space to enter our 21st-century lives and be a firm foundation for us. God is our rock and our fortress, our eternal and unbreakable hope. There is no pressure that God cannot endure, no temperature that God cannot survive, and no depth that will separate God from us. Such a description makes God sound like the gemstone garnet.

Garnet is commonly found in metamorphic and to a lesser extent, igneous rocks. Garnets can travel great distances, pushing through the crust of the earth, as pressure plates move them around. A garnet’s crystal lattice structure is extremely stable at high pressures and temperatures, making garnets unique: they can record pressures and temperatures making them an invaluable resource for scientists trying to date certain geologic events. When life gives us troubles, we need a Garnet God who is old and deep; a God who is can handle extreme pressures and high temperatures (figuratively speaking).

Like the Psalmist, we can ask God to be “a rock of refuge” in our personal *prayer time*. Like Harley Camden on the rocks of Occoquan, we can pray, “Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me.” Take some time to rest, to read Scripture, and to pray. Place your trust in the God who is your hope. Make a connection with someone, something much bigger than yourself. Get outside your head and let yourself rest in the Lord of the rock.

We can also seek God in the *community of faith*. When we are weak, we can rely on Christian sisters and brothers to help us, uphold us, intercede for us. The gathering places of God’s people are sources of healing for our bodies, minds, and spirits. We are created for community, and we tend to be stronger and healthier together. God wired us in such a way that we only become truly whole in community with God and with each other.

We can find signs of our Garnet God all around us if we take the time to look. We can offer our praises to the God who is found not only in Jesus, but in *the glory of the world* around us. When life becomes chaotic, we can find stability in a Garnet God who desires to be a rock of refuge for us. This God is a help to us in private prayer, in the community of faith and in the glory of creation. Whenever life stresses us, we can rest securely on the knowledge that God is our rock. God can handle any pressure and will travel any distance to help us.

Prayer: Lord God, let me never forget all that you do for me daily. Sustain me with the hope of my salvation and the other countless blessings you provide with your continuous presence in my lie. Lead me to live my life in testimony to your incredible blessings, that your love may be known and experience by all those I serve, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Sources:**

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**Garnet God**

Sunday, August 21, 2022 [Psalm 71:1-6](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+71%3a1-6&language=en&version=NIV), 14-16

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Have you ever heard of a petrosomatoglyph? Probably not. It is not your garden-variety word. So, let’s break “Petro-soma-to-glyph” down into its parts. “Petro” means “rock.” It is related to the name of Peter. Remember Jesus told him, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” It is also the first part of “petroleum” which is fuel drawn out of rock. “Soma” means body (in Greek); and “glyph” means “carving.” So, a petrosomatoglyph is a human body part carved out of rock.

There are ancient Celtic petrosomatoglyphs in the kingdoms of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. At Templemore (County Londonderry, Ireland) there is a slab named St. Columbkille's Stone which boasts the imprint of two human feet. This stone was the inauguration site for ancient Irish chieftains who put their feet in the carved-out footprints as they were consecrated for their work. There is something about the stability and solidity of stone that symbolized, for the ancients, the enduring nature of kingly rule.

Perhaps the ancient Israelites had a similar thought as they referred to their God as “rock.” The word “rock” may seem, at first, a strange title for God. Rocks do not rank high on our list of valuable things. Yet consider the people who coined the phrase. The Hebrew people began as desert wanderers: shepherds, hunters, gatherers of wild berries and edible plants. They lived a hand-to-mouth existence, dependent on the goodness of the earth to sustain them.

Sometimes the earth was not good. When the desert sun waxed hot and unrelenting, a large rock provided welcome shade. When wild animals or bandits appeared, a rock might be a point of defense. When there was flash flooding, a rock provided firm footing in the rushing torrent of muddy water. When a traveler lost his way in the wilderness, a rock could be a landmark marking the path or pointing the way forward. When the Israelites stopped wandering and needed permanent homes, rock was the most durable building material to shelter their families. When an Israelite felt afraid, a rock could be an altar to the God who comes to frightened men and women in the gloom of the darkest night, reminding them all will be well. The solidity and the permanence of rock can be comforting.