



## Psalm 143 - Prayer for Deliverance from Enemies

A Psalm of David.

### Introduction

This individual lament is suited to a situation in which the person's troubles make him aware of his own sins. It is another cry to God from a time of crisis and affliction because of David's many enemies. It is numbered among the seven Penitential Psalms - songs of confession and humility before God. It was a custom in the early church to sing these psalms on Ash Wednesday, the Wednesday before Easter. Psalm 143 does not seem to belong to this group as much as the others do (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, and 130 are the others), but v.2 is a strong and clear statement about the unrighteousness of mankind. Psalms 6 and 38 are probably the closest to what David has penned here.

### Psalm 143:1-2 - Hear Me, and Do Not Put Me on Trial.

The opening cry for help asks God to give ear to David's pleas for mercy; the person praying here is aware of his own sins that would warrant God forsaking him. Hence v.2 prays, 'do not enter into judgement with your servant, for no one living (and thus the person praying) is righteous before you.' The term 'righteous' is commonly used in the psalms to describe either the people of God in general, for example: <<*For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous may not stretch out their hands to do wrong*>> (Psalm 125:3), or especially the faithful within the people: <<*Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name; the upright shall live in your presence*>> (Psalm 140:13). Here, however, the idea seems to be qualified to stand in God's presence: <<*Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.'* How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was

*circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised>>* (Romans 4:9-12), and not even the faithful are that in themselves; refer to the comment made on Psalm 32:6-11. Therefore the mercy that the singer prays for is not only relief from the immediate situation but God's merciful acceptance of him.

<sup>1</sup> Hear my prayer, O Lord;  
give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;  
answer me in your righteousness.

### Psalm 143:1

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Psalm 143 finds David in another crisis: *<<I call upon you, O Lord; come quickly to me; give ear to my voice when I call to you>>* (Psalm 141:1). Because his life was filled with so much activity and danger, it is impossible to link this psalm to any one particular point of crisis. It could be from the time before David was recognised as king, living as a fugitive from King Saul, or it could be from David's time as king, particularly when his son Absalom led a rebellion against him. In this crisis, David knew that he must cry out to God and that God must hear him, or he would be lost. For David, prayer was not merely a self-improvement exercise that did good whether God heard him or not; prayer was a real plea made to a real God who could be appealed unto to hear, to answer, and to help.

Give ear to my supplications. This is the same idea as hear my prayer in the previous line. David used the familiar Hebrew poetic form of parallelism, repeating the same idea in different words for the same of emphasis.

In your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. David appealed to the faithfulness and righteousness of God in his request. He asked God to act consistently with those attributes and to answer David. David knew something of the character and nature of God, and this shaped his prayer life. He could never ask God to be unfaithful or unrighteous. Yet he could ask God to act according to his character, and David did boldly make his request on that basis. Charles Spurgeon commented, "Even the sterner attributes of God are upon the side of the man who humbly trusts, and turns his trust into prayer."

<sup>2</sup> Do not enter into judgement with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.

## Psalm 143:2

Do not enter into judgement with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. David understood that if God were to deal with him only on the basis of his righteousness, it could mean judgement and ruin for David. So he asked God to deal with him on the basis of mercy, i.e. do not enter into judgement, and understood that he appealed to God because the Lord is righteous, not because David was righteous. David's thoughts may be considered as such: "Lord, I know that you are righteous and I am not. Yet I come to you as your servant, asking you to act on my behalf because of your mercy and your righteousness, not on my supposed righteousness." In saying, "no one living is righteous before you," David seemed to anticipate the apostle Paul where he quotes Isaiah: <<*There is no one who is righteous, not even one*>> (Romans 3:10), and: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23). When David said this, he was not thinking of others, as in "Lord, they - the whole world - they are unrighteous." Instead he thought about himself, as in "Lord, no one living in righteous, and I am certainly numbered among them."

## Psalm 143:3-4 - I Am Faint because the Enemy Pursues Me.

The next section describes how the enemy's pursuit has drained him of all vigour, something he wrote about elsewhere: <<*When my spirit is faint, you know my way. In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. Look on my right hand and see – there is no one who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for me*>> (Psalm 142:3-4).

- <sup>3</sup> For the enemy has pursued me,  
crushing my life to the ground,  
making me sit in darkness like those long dead.
- <sup>4</sup> Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
my heart within me is appalled.

## Psalm 143:3-4

For the enemy has pursued me. In his wide and amazing life, David knew suffering of many kinds. Here he spoke of the persecution and suffering of his soul. Perhaps there was also a physical or material aspect to his misery, but that is not in view. David ached and cried out to God out of soul-misery.

Crushing my life to the ground. David went on to describe his sense of soul-misery:

- His life felt crushed to the ground.
- He felt that he lived in darkness as would be true of those long dead.

- He felt his spirit to be overwhelmed within himself.
- He felt his heart to be distressed.

Collectively, this is a powerful picture of the deep misery of the soul. Worse for David, he felt this was pressed upon him by his enemy. This was not because David was of a melancholy or depressive nature; such misery is of its own character. This was something brought upon David by his adversary. This makes the reader reflect on the times when others caused great misery for David, misery that surely extended to the depths of his soul. There were the many years he lived as a fugitive from King Saul, having to forsake all because a wicked man persecuted him without cause. There was also the deep misery when his son Absalom rebelled against him and deposed David as king. David knew what it was like to have great soul-misery inflicted upon him from another person.

On 'sitting in darkness' Adam Clarke commented, "Literally, in dark places. This may be understood of David's taking refuge in caves and dens of the earth, to escape from his persecuting son; yea, even to take refuge in the tombs, or repositories of the dead."

Therefore my spirit faints within me. When the 'spirit' or 'soul' is said to 'faint,' the person is at the end of his strength and ability to strive: <<*I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints*>> (Psalm 77:3), <<*hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them*>> (Psalm 107:5), <<*When my spirit is faint, you know my way*>> (Psalm 142:3a), <<*For I will not continually accuse, nor will I always be angry; for then the spirits would grow faint before me, even the souls that I have made*>> (Isaiah 57:16), and: <<*As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple*>> (Jonah 2:7). David spoke long before the greater Son of David, but these words could also be in the mouth of Jesus, especially in his Gethsemane agony. In Gethsemane, before his betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus said: <<*I am deeply grieved, even to death*>> (Matthew 26:38). Spurgeon remarked, "Such words our Lord Jesus might have used: in this the head is like the members, and the members are as the head."

### Psalm 143:5-6 - I Reach Out to You in Trust.

Being at the end of his strength need not mean that David gives up; instead, if he can remember the days of old, i.e. the great deeds God has done for his people as a whole and for so many needy individuals in the past, he can have fresh courage to stretch out his hands to God. The weary soul thirsts for God as its source of energy: <<*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God*>> (Psalm 42:1 NIV), and: <<*My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to your word*>> (Psalm 119:25).

- 5 I remember the days of old,  
I think about all your deeds,  
I meditate on the works of your hands.
- 6 I stretch out my hands to you;  
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

### Psalm 143:5-6

I remember the days of old. In this dark season of his soul, David remembered, considering the days of old when things were not so bad. As well as the history of what had always done for his people Israel, David probably thought of his own early days of innocence and freshness in his life and his life with God. There were probably mixed emotions within David as he remembered the days of old. If he thought of the joy, the simplicity, and the goodness of how God met him and blessed him as an anonymous even somewhat despised shepherd boy, it would bring a warm smile to his face. Yet it would also cause him some pain to consider how far away all that seemed in his present misery of soul. There are times when it is good for someone to remember the days of old. They can remember the sweet and good times of their early life with God and benefit. They can also remember the days of old before their own time, thinking of the great things God has done among his people in days past. Even if remembering the days of old fills them with a measure of sadness to think of how distant those better days may seem. Spurgeon observed, “When we see nothing new which can cheer us, let us think upon old things. We once had merry days, days of deliverance, and joy and thanksgiving; why not again?”

I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. David’s consideration of the days of old was not only a nostalgic longing for the past. It was especially a remembrance of God’s great works. David did not only remember his own past, he remembered the Lord’s past works. For David, what made the past worth remembering was the work of the Lord. He thought carefully about what God did; meditate and think are words that speak of depth.

I stretch out my hands to you. Thinking deeply about what God did with his hands made David respond with his own hands, spreading them out before God in prayer and praise. David praised God for what he had done in the days of old, and he prayed in faith that God might do it again.

My soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Thankfully, the ache in David’s soul did not drive him away from God. It drove David to God in prayer, praise, and deep longing. His persecuted soul (v.3) sought after God with intensity of thirst.

**Selah**, used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, has never been fully understood because the Hebrew root word is undefined. Many take it to be an instruction related to either the music, such as an interlude, or the cadence of the song, e.g. stop and reflect. This is the last occurrence of *selah* in the Book of Psalms.

### **Psalm 143:7-8 - Answer Me Quickly!**

The situation is still dire, and the person praying is still desperate; therefore he asks, “answer me quickly.” He wants to hear in the morning of God’s steadfast love – whatever time of day he prays, he looks for reassurance soon! The specific relief may take longer, but the reminder of God’s steadfast love enables him to endure (v.12).

He also prays for moral guidance: “Teach me the way I should go.” Jethro had given his son-in-law Moses good advice on leadership: <<***Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do***>> (Exodus 18:19-20), but David knew that ultimately guidance came from the Lord: <<***Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long***>> (Psalm 25:4-5); refer also to the associated comments.

<sup>7</sup> Answer me quickly, O Lord;  
my spirit fails.  
Do not hide your face from me,  
or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

### **Psalm 143:7**

**Answer me quickly, O Lord.** David felt that his failing **spirit** could not last long without God’s answer and intervention. Many a saint has felt as David did, feeling an urgency to hear God’s answer. Experience had taught David that God always did things at just the right time, but the present crisis made him cry out, “**Answer me quickly, O Lord.**”

**Do not hide your face from me.** David knew what it was like to enjoy the sense of God’s favour and blessing. To feel that God might hide his face drove David into despair: <<***Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?***>> (Job 13:24), and: <<***How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?***>> (Psalm 13:1), so he pleaded to sense the light of God’s countenance. Much later, the apostle Paul wrote: <<***What then are we to***

**say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?>>** (Romans 8:31). When one lives in the sense that God is for them, they are confident in the face of any adversary. Yet if they sense that God may hide his face from them, they feel weak before any adversary. Yet David's words do not connect with the daily experience of many who think of themselves as followers of God. The spiritually insensitive man cares little about the sense of God's favour and blessing. They live only occasionally aware of a break in communion with God. David was not such a man.

**Or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.** David considered this to be the worst imaginable fate; to leave the land of the living and go to the pit of the grave. He felt that he could not go on without a continued sense of the favour and blessing of God.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,  
for in you I put my trust.  
Teach me the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.

#### **Psalm 143:8**

**Let me hear** or **cause me to hear**. David needed to hear a good word from God, and asked that he would be caused to hear it. Perhaps David wondered if God was speaking and he somehow failed to hear, so he asked, "**Let me hear.**" This is a good prayer for all to pray. Spurgeon added, "He who made the ear will cause us to hear, he who is love itself will have the kindness to bring his loving kindness before our minds."

**Your steadfast love in the morning.** David needed to hear something of God's great mercy, his **steadfast** love, his loving kindness - his *hesed*. He needed to hear this early in the day, in the morning, because afternoon or evening might be too late. Derek Kidner remarked, "He is beginning to look ahead and seek direction. The phrase, in the morning, is already a token of this by its admission that the night is not endless."

David Guzik commented, "The ancient Hebrew word here translated steadfast love is *hesed*. For centuries it was translated with words like mercy, kindness, and love. But in 1927, a scholar named Nelson Glueck (among others) argued that the real idea behind *hesed* was 'covenant loyalty' and not so much love or mercy. However, many disagreed and there is no good reason for changing the long-held understanding of *hesed* and taking it as a word that mainly emphasises covenant loyalty." Spurgeon added, "Loving kindness is one of the sweetest words in our language. Kindness has much in it that is most precious, but loving kindness is doubly dear; it is the cream of kindness."

For in you I put my trust; for to you I lift up my soul. David appealed to God on the basis of his trust and surrender to God. It was as if David prayed, “Lord, I am genuinely depending on you. Please do not let me down; speak to me and guide me.” Spurgeon noted, “If the soul will not rise of itself we must lift it, lift it up unto God.”

The expression lift up my soul is one of deep dependence and allegiance: <<*Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully*>> (Psalm 24:4), and: <<*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul*>> (Psalm 25:1); the same expression in Deuteronomy 24:15 ESV is rendered ‘he counts on it.’

Teach me the way I should go. David confessed that he did not know the way, and that he needed God to cause him to know the way. He did not only need the love of God, he also needed the guidance of God. ‘Cause me to know the way in which I should walk’ is a wonderful prayer for all to pray.

#### Psalm 143:9-12 - Deliver Me, and Teach Me to Do Your Will.

The prayer closes by repeating the request for deliverance (v.9 and v.11) and for guidance (v.10 from v.8), expressing trust in a number of ways: “I have fled to you for refuge” (v.9), “you are my God” (v.10), and the expectation based on God’s steadfast love (v.12). The appeal “for your name’s sake” in v.11 means ‘for the sake of your good reputation,’ particularly God’s reputation for faithfulness to his promises (note how righteousness is in parallel): the singer wants everyone else to know that those who have fled to God for refuge have a sure protection in him.

<sup>9</sup> Save me, O Lord, from my enemies;  
I have fled to you for refuge.

#### Psalm 143:9

Save me, O Lord, from my enemies. David’s enemies had persecuted his soul (v.3). He prayed not only for God’s encouragement, but also for his defence against these enemies: <<*My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors*>> (Psalm 31:15).

I have fled to you for refuge. This was a beautiful statement of faith. David would not take shelter in sinful pleasures, in the distractions of entertainment, in positive thinking, in self-reliance, in bitterness, in the strength of his mighty men, or in vengeance. David was determined to take shelter in the Lord. Alexander Maclaren commented, “The blessedness of contrite trust is that it nestles the closer to God, the more it feels its unworthiness. The child hides its face on the mother’s bosom when it has done wrong. God is our refuge from God.”

10 Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God.  
Let your good spirit lead me  
on a level path.

### Psalm 143:10

Teach me to do your will. David could say, “Cause me to hear your steadfast love” and “Cause me to know the way in which I should walk” (v.8). Yet in this psalm he did not say, “Cause me to do Your will.” In all his reliance upon God, he knew that God would not obey for him. Rather, the loving God would teach David to do his will: <<**Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes**>> (Psalm 119:12). He would lead David in the way of righteousness, i.e. on a level path.

Spurgeon commented, “The psalmist does not say, ‘Lord, help me to talk about thy will,’ though it is a very proper thing to talk about, and a very profitable thing to hear about. But still doing is better than talking.” Spurgeon also described how the believer should do the will of God: thoughtfully, immediately, cheerfully, constantly, universally, spiritually, and intensely.

The next lines connect this teaching work of God with the presence of his Spirit. Spurgeon remarked, “Moreover the Lord has a way of teaching us by his own Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks in secret whispers to those who are able to hear him. It is not every professing Christian that has the visitations of the Spirit of God in personal monitions, but there are saints who hear a voice behind them saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it.’ God guides us with his eye as well as by his word.”

For you are my God. It was appropriate for David to expect this of his God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will teach the willing servant obedience. This was a demonstration of the goodness of God’s Spirit; refer also to the comment made on Psalm 140:6.

Let your good spirit lead me. Christians should know what David knew - that God’s Spirit is good. They should know it even more in light of the outpouring the Holy Spirit that is part of the New Covenant. This gives no reason for a believer to fail to yield to the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, because: God’s Spirit is good: <<**You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst**>> (Nehemiah 9:20).

11 For your name’s sake, O Lord, preserve my life.  
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.

12 In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,  
and destroy all my adversaries,  
for I am your servant.

### Psalm 143:11-12

Preserve my life. David simply prayed for revival, for a renewal of life and vitality. Yet he prayed this not for his own benefit or reputation, but for your name's sake - the sake of the Lord's name and reputation: <<***For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great***>> (Psalm 25:11). This is a necessary aspect of true revival, a genuine concern for the sake of God's name, and not for the name or the advancement of any man or woman of God, or indeed the particular church they may represent. Many prayers for revival are actually self-interested, praying "Lord, let me be known for a great work of revival."

In your righteousness bring me out of trouble. David knew that his rescue would bring glory to God, so he could pray for deliverance on that basis. He could ask God to destroy all his adversaries, leaving vengeance to God against those who persecuted his soul.

In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, for I am your servant. David appealed to God on the basis of his name, his righteousness, and his mercy; yet also on the basis of his relationship with God as his servant: <<***O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving-maid. You have loosed my bonds***>> (Psalm 116:16). David understood that the servant has obligations to the master; yet the master also has obligations to the servant. Kidner concluded, "For God is pledged to his servant as surely as his servant is pledged to him." David asked God to deal with his enemies; but before that, he asked God to deal with him. He knew that his own low or uninspired or undirected walk with God was a greater danger than any enemy.