

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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## Psalm 143 — Hear Your Servant, Lord

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 143

- Psalms 142 and 143 express the same need for deliverance from enemies, employ a common vocabulary, and contain an identical phrase (142:3; 143:4).
- Psalm 143 is the last of what Christendom has traditionally identified as seven penitential psalms (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143).
  - ✓ “It is true that only verse 2 acknowledges wrongdoing, and even then the confession of sin is not personal. . . . Still it is not wrong to think of Psalm 143 as a penitential psalm. For one thing, although the opening verses are in the form of a general confession of sin rather than a personal one, they nevertheless hit on the chief problem for anyone who seeks mercy from God: God is righteous; we are not.” — James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1236.
- The psalm heading in the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint) adds “When his son is pursuing him”—referring to Absalom’s rebellion.
- David appears to have drawn phrases in Psalm 143 from many other psalms (primarily from his own). This demonstrates how valuable Scripture memorization (or, Scripture familiarity) provides encouragement and wisdom during times of distress.

### 2.0 Reading Psalm 143 (NAU)

143:1 A Psalm of David.

Hear my prayer, O LORD,  
Give ear to my supplications!  
Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness!

143:2 And do not enter into judgment with **Your servant**,  
For in Your sight no man living is righteous.

143:3 For the enemy has persecuted my soul;  
He has crushed my life to the ground;

- He has made me dwell in dark places,  
like those who have long been dead.
- 143:4** Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me;  
My heart is appalled within me.
- |              |                        |                             |               |
|--------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| <b>143:5</b> | I remember             | the days of old;            |               |
|              | I meditate             | on all Your doings;         |               |
|              | I muse                 | on the work of Your hands.  |               |
| <b>143:6</b> | I stretch out my hands | to You;                     |               |
|              | My soul <i>longs</i>   | for You, as a parched land. | <b>Selah.</b> |
- 143:7** Answer me quickly, O LORD, my spirit fails;  
Do not hide Your face from me,  
Or I will become like those who go down to the pit.
- 143:8** Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning;  
**For I trust in You;**  
Teach me the way in which I should walk;  
**For to You I lift up my soul.**
- 143:9** Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies;  
**I take refuge in You.**
- 143:10** Teach me to do Your will,  
**For You are my God;**  
Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.
- |               |                                    |  |
|---------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>143:11</b> | For the sake of Your name, O LORD, | revive me.                             |
|               | In Your righteousness              | bring my soul out of trouble.          |
| <b>143:12</b> | And in Your lovingkindness,        | cut off my enemies                     |
|               | And                                | destroy all those who afflict my soul, |
- For I am Your servant.**

### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 143

#### 3.1 Outline

- I. The Psalmist Solicits God's Attention (vv. 1–6)
  - A. He Pleads for God's Grace (vv. 1–2)
  - B. He Presents His Case to God (vv. 3–4)
  - C. He Projects God's Goodness (vv. 5–6)
- II. The Psalmist Solicits God's Action (vv. 7–12)
  - A. He Longs for God's Response (vv. 7–8)
  - B. He Begs for God's Rescue (vv. 9–10)
  - C. He Rests in God's Reliability (vv. 11–12)



— Adapted from George Zemek, *Road Maps for the Psalms: Inductive Preaching Outlines Based on the Hebrew Text* (Valencia, CA: The Master's Academy International, 2006), loc. cit.

#### 3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “Hear my prayer”
  - In addition to this plea, David adds “Give ear” and “Answer me.”

- This threefold plea indicates a certain degree of urgency—David needs the Lord’s aid.
- v. 1 “my supplications”
  - Literally, “my prayers for grace.”
- v. 1 “Your faithfulness . . . Your righteousness”
  - In keeping His covenant, God exhibits absolute fidelity and integrity.
  - These qualities demonstrate God’s commitment to His people and guarantee an answer to prayer.
- v. 2 “no man living is righteous”
  - Righteousness is a theme in Psalm 143. Man’s righteousness cannot measure up to God’s righteousness.
    - ✓ Compare Job 4:17; 7:20–21; 15:14–16; and 25:4–6.
  - “How can we appeal to God for mercy on the basis of God’s righteousness, when it is God’s righteousness and our lack of it that is the problem?” — Boice, *Psalms*, 3:1238.
  - David recognizes that his own unrighteous behavior has resulted in his troubles. God is chastising him for his sins.
  - “[F]or by works of the law no flesh will be justified” (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16) appears to be a free citation of Psalm 143:2.
    - ✓ Paul adds “by works of the Law” in order to give David’s general statement a particular application.
    - ✓ Paul substitutes “all flesh” for “all living,” employing the more familiar Hebraism. “All flesh” suits his argument well since it has overtones of rebellion and disobedience (Gen 6:12).
    - ✓ “The expression . . . , ‘will not be justified,’ corresponds to . . . ‘in Your righteousness,’ in the previous verse, thus intimating: I rely not on my own righteousness, for it is blemished, but rather I rely on Your righteousness, which is perfect, and according to which You deliver Your servants.” — Amos Hakham, *Psalms*, 3 vols., Koschitzky Edition (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 3:433.
    - ✓ Paul’s “justified” is a passive verb indicating that God is the agent of the action. Its future tense has an eschatological implication. The context of Psalm 143:2 does not directly refer to an eschatological situation, but Romans 3:19–20 implies it. Indeed, the concept is grounded in a final divine judgment.
    - ✓ Luther included Psalm 143 (along with Pss 32, 51, and 130) among the “Pauline Psalms.”
- v. 3 “has persecuted my soul”
  - With another triple turn of phrase David indicates the seriousness of his situation. Together with the present phrase, “has crushed my life” and “has made me dwell in dark places” imply death as the potential outcome.
    - ✓ The concluding phrase (“like those who have long been dead”) confirms the meaning of the triple phrases.



- **v. 5** “I remember . . . I meditate . . . I muse”
  - Yet another employment of a threefold pattern, just as in verses 1, 3.
- **v. 6** “My soul *longs* for You, as a parched land. Selah.”
  - Compare Psalms 42:1–2 and 63:1.
  - This is the final occurrence of “Selah” in the Psalter. It divides the psalm into two parts and requires that the reader or hearer meditate upon the concept of thirsting for God Himself.
  - *Why should you thirst for God?*
- **v. 7** “Answer me”
  - This is the first of another triplet. The next two elements are “Do not hide Your face” (v. 7b) and “Let me hear” (v. 8a).
  - Compare verse 1.
- **vv. 8–10** Lessons on the **Attitude, Basis, and Confidence** of Prayer
  - Note how David’s requests reveal his **Attitude**:
    - (1) “Teach me the way in which I should walk” (v. 8b). Implies individual destiny.
    - (2) “Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies” (v. 9a). Implies inability to save oneself.
    - (3) “Teach me to do Your will” (v. 10a). Implies that the priority is God’s will, not self-fulfillment.
    - (4) “Let Your good Spirit lead me” (v. 10b). Implies an awareness of needing to be shepherded.
  - ✓ Three requests for divine instruction accompany a single request for divine intervention. The believer understands that God rescues those who are obedient to His Word.
  - Note the **Basis** for these requests and David’s cause for **Confidence**:
    - (1) “For I trust in You” (v. 8a).
    - (2) “For to You I lift up my soul” (v. 8b).
    - (3) “I take refuge in You” (v. 9b).
    - (4) “For You are my God” (v. 10a).
  - ✓ God alone can respond to the psalmist’s requests. The psalm’s message is theocentric, focused on God Himself.
- **vv. 8–9** — *If David had already learned to trust God to protect him and provide for him (see Ps 140:12–13), why has his confidence waned?*
  - (1) “Is it because this confidence soon becomes self-confidence or over-confidence? (See Matt. 14:25–31.)”
  - (2) “Or is it because God is reminding us that we are still sinners dependent on his grace alone? (See v. 2; cf. Ps. 130:3.)”
  - (3) “Or is it to encourage us to desire God for himself alone? (See v. 6; Luke 10:20.)” — Eric Lane, *Psalms 90–150: The Lord Reigns*, Focus on the Bible (Geanies House, UK: Christian Focus, 2006), 215.



- **v. 8** “in the morning”
  - The darkness of David’s troubles will not last forever. See Psalm 30:5.
- **v. 10** “You are my God”
  - Compare David’s identification as God’s servant (vv. 2 and 12).
  - “The fact that I am Yhwh’s servant means Yhwh has accepted an obligation to me; the fact that Yhwh is my God means I have accepted an obligation to Yhwh.” — John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 3, Psalms 90–150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 677.
- **v. 10** “Your good Spirit”
  - This same phraseology occurs only here and Nehemiah 9:20. Both texts refer to divine instruction by the Spirit of God.
  - God’s goodness is the cause of such instruction—the Spirit’s teaching is a divine benefit to God’s people.
- **v. 11** “Your name”
  - The final triplet of the psalm consists of “Your name,” “Your righteousness,” and “Your lovingkindness.”
- **v. 11** “revive me”
  - David’s life was crushed (v. 3) and overwhelmed (v. 4), but will be quickened and rescued (v. 11).
- **vv. 11–12** “In Your righteousness . . . in Your lovingkindness”
  - An inverted inclusio (v. 1, “in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness”) brackets the psalm placing the focus upon God’s steadfast, loyal love for His people (cp. v. 8).

#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 143

**“Lord, Hear Me In Distress”**  
(Tune: “Come Christians, Join to Sing”)



- 1 Lord, hear me in distress, regard my suppliant cry,  
And in Thy faithfulness and righteousness reply.  
In judgment do not cause Thy servant to be tried;  
Before Thy holy laws no man is justified.
- 2 The enemy has sought my soul in dust to tread;  
To darkness I am brought, forgotten as the dead.  
My spirit, crushed with grief, is sad and overborne;  
My heart finds no relief, but desolate I mourn.
- 3 Recalling former days and all Thy wondrous deeds,  
The memory of Thy ways to hope and comfort leads.  
To Thee I stretch my hands, let me not plead in vain;  
I wait as weary lands wait for refreshing rain.

- 4 My failing spirit see, O Lord to me make haste;  
Hide not Thy face from me, lest bitter death I taste.  
O let the morn return, let mercy light my day;  
For Thee in faith I yearn, O guide me in the way.
- 5 Lord, save me from my foe, to Thee for help I flee;  
Teach me Thy way to know, I have no God but Thee.  
By Thy good Spirit led from trouble and distress,  
My erring feet shall tread the path of uprightness.
- 6 O Lord, for Thy Name's sake revive my fainting heart;  
My soul from trouble take, for just and true Thou art.  
Remove mine enemy, my cruel foes reward;  
In mercy rescue me who am Thy servant, Lord.

— Words: *The Psalter*, 1912; Music: Charles J. Dale, 1904

## 5.0 Praying Psalm 143

- May Your faithfulness and righteousness bring an answer to my prayer. [v. 1]
- Lord, I have no righteousness of my own. Be gracious to me. [vv. 1–2]
- Father, cause me to long for You just like dying plants on my doorstep thirst for water. [v. 6]
- Lord, I trust You in all of my troubles. [v. 8]
- O God, teach me to do Your will, not mine. [v. 10]



## 6.0 Applying Psalm 143

- During distress you must **learn** to trust God—and relearn it again and again.
- It is not enough to receive God's teaching—you must **long** for *Him*.
- You must think and **live** as a true servant of God.

Mature believe that he was, David felt he still had a great deal to learn about God. He had spiritual insight enough to know that he could know God better only if his life was conformed to God's will. So he surrendered unconditionally to God's will, knowing that will always to be good, acceptable, and perfect (Romans 12:2).

....

So David surrendered to God's will—be it victory and vindication, or defeat, disgrace, and death. God's will be done. Whatever it was, David felt sure he would get to know God better if he did His will. He would know more of His *nearness* ("Thou art my God"), more of His *nature* ("Thy Spirit is good"), more of His *name* ("for Thy name's sake").

John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series  
(Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 2:635