

My Soul Thirsts for You Psalm 143

Main Idea: In this desperate prayer, David teaches us about the basis for prayer, the nature of spiritual warfare, and the need to make specific petitions.

- **A Plea on the Basis of the Gospel (143:1-2)**
- **A Plan for Spiritual Warfare (143:4-9)**
 - Acknowledge Your Condition (3-4)
 - Meditate on God's Work (5)
 - Yearn for God's Presence (6)
- **A Pattern for Presenting Requests (143:7-12)**
 - "Renew Me" (7-8a)
 - "Guide Me" (8b, 10)
 - "Deliver Me" (9, 11-12)

Traditionally, this Psalm has been classified as one of the "penitential Psalms" (a Psalm of confession). This is because of the confession of universal guilt in verse 2b; however, that's the only reference to sin in this Psalm (Kidner, 475). It's really an individual lament. David's main concern has to do with his desperate situation. He's troubled by his enemies, and troubled in spirit. Psalm 143 gives us a picture of a godly man in desperate prayer.

What makes David such a giant in the faith? Certainly, he was a very gifted man. He was also a tender man. And he was a tough man. But what made him unlike other gifted, tender, and tough men? We can't say that he was sinless because he certainly wasn't! David did some horrible things! I would submit that the most important practical lesson that we can learn from David is the depth of his devotional life. Kidner says, "It is this personal devotion that was David's greatness and is the continuing greatness of his psalms" (476). David was a worshipping man. He was a praying man. He was a repenting man. Psalm 143 demonstrates some of this spiritual vitality. Here we find him pleading with God. He's pursuing God. He thirsts for God. If you're interested in cultivating a deep devotional life with God, then there are three big lessons to learn from this chapter.

A Plea on the Basis of the Gospel (143:1-2)

David begins his prayer with a plea: "Lord, hear my prayer" (1a; Ps 5:1; 17:1; 28:2; 54:2; 64:1). He wants God's attention and God's answers: "In Your faithfulness listen to my plea, and in Your righteousness answer me" (1b; cf., Ps 5:2; 4:1; 13:3; 86:1). Later, David will make particular appeals for God to answer his petitions (7-12). But those petitions are delayed for the time being. Before getting to verse 7, we have some important lessons to consider.

The first lesson involves *the basis for prayer*. David roots his prayer in God's character. Notice the emphasis on God's faithfulness, righteousness, mercy, and grace in these opening verses. David knew that God had made a covenant with His people. God would be *faithful* to it. God's perfect *righteousness* provided David with additional assurance that God would uphold it. God is perfectly righteous. Since God said He would be faithful to the covenant, David could pray with confidence. David banked his hope on God's commitment to His people. Regardless of what he was feeling at the time, David could expect God to hear and answer him because of this

covenantal relationship to God.

But notice something else in verse 2. David also highlights God's covenantal *mercy* and *grace*.

He does so by pointing out mankind's universal guilt before God: "Do not bring Your servant into judgment, for no one alive is righteous in Your sight" (2; cf., Ps 130:3). On what basis does David come to God? Can he make his plea to God based on his own works? No. Can he make his plea to God based on his acts of justice? No. On what does David base his prayers? He knows that God has been gracious and merciful to him. He has not treated him as his sins deserve. He has his relationship with God based on grace, not performance. His appeal to mercy was an appeal for God's acceptance of Him.

This Psalm, then, opens with a powerful gospel statement. It reminds us that we have no right to be in the presence of God apart from God's faithfulness and righteousness; His grace and mercy (cf., Rom 3:20-26; Gal 2:15-21). In God's faithfulness, He kept His word, and brought forth the Messiah. In God's mercy, He grants sinners the righteousness of Jesus. We are accepted on the basis of grace, not works.

If you are in Christ, then you know that feelings come and go. But what never changes is our position in Christ Jesus. We pray in the name of Jesus. That's the only way we can come to God. We come because of the work of another. It's Christ's faithfulness, righteousness, and gift of salvation that enables us to pray.

On what should we bank our hope when it comes to prayer? Rest everything in Christ. Because of Christ's work on our behalf, we can come to God with our desperate pleas.

A Plan for Spiritual Warfare (143:3-6)

Before arriving at David's specific petitions that he wants God to answer, we learn another valuable lesson related to spiritual warfare. We see a picture of David's external and internal battle in verses 3-6. David exposes his present crisis to us (as he expresses it to God), and provides a helpful pattern for us. Consider three instructions for engaging in spiritual warfare: (1) acknowledge your condition (vv. 3-4); (2) meditate on God's work (v 5); and (3) yearn for God's presence (v. 6).

Acknowledge Your Condition (3-4). David doesn't temper his words. He cries out:

For the enemy has pursued me,
crushing me to the ground,
making me live in darkness
like those long dead.
My spirit is weak within me;
my heart is overcome with dismay. (Ps 143:3-4)

David has an enemy that's attacking him (3; cf., Ps 7:5; 88:3-6). This enemy is stated generally, making it easily applicable for us. Whoever the enemy is, he has been successful, "crushing" David to the ground (3a). As a result, David sits in "darkness" (3b; cf., Ps 88:6; Mic 7:8) and feels like a "dead" man (3c; cf., Lam 3:6). Internally, he has been brought low. He has a weak spirit and his heart is filled with despair (4; cf., 77:3).

Kidner says of this description "Every phrase here is so heavy with distress, that no sufferer need feel unique in what he experiences. And the similarity of those terms to those that

describe our Lord's emotions (cf., Mt 26:37; Heb 4:15ff) remind us that none need feel himself alone, or less than fully understood" (475). Amen! You aren't unusual if you have an enemy, if you feel crushed, if you're experiencing despair, or if you're spiritually weak. Further, Jesus understands our weakness, and stands ready to grant us grace. Don't hide your weaknesses. Admit them. Go to the Father with them.

At this point you might wonder, "Doesn't God already know my condition? Why tell Him about it?" Don't do that. Prayer is about communicating with your Father. Open up your heart to Him and express your weakness to Him. Tell Him about your predicament. You aren't informing Him of new information, but expressing intimacy and honesty in communication.

I love how Ligon Duncan described the prayer life of one of my Christian heroes, the mighty theologian, Francis Schaeffer. Pastor Duncan highlighted the specificity and intimacy of Schaeffer's prayers saying:

One of the things that I used to do when C. Everett Koop was still coming to the meetings of The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in Philadelphia is I would take him to the airport after the meeting was over. And it was fascinating hearing him telling stories of traveling around the country with Frances Schaeffer ... [O]ne of the most interesting things he said was it was always an experience to pray with Frances Schaeffer in the various hotel rooms around the country because when Frances Schaeffer was in private, his prayers were very direct and very intimate and very frankly a little bit eccentric. They would get in a hotel room after they had settled in and Schaeffer and his wife, Edith, and C. Everett Koop and the companions that would be with them would get ready to pray and Schaeffer would turn around and kneel at the bedside or at a chair or at the sofa and he would say, "Well, Lord, it's Fran." And C. Everett Koop was thinking, "Well, Fran, don't you know that He already knows it's Fran who's praying to Him?" And he'd say, "We're here in room 516 in the such-and-such hotel." And Koop was thinking, "God already knows that, Fran! Why are you praying that to Him?" But he'd be very, very specific about these incidental little details. If Frances Schaeffer could be that specific about those kinds of incidental details, don't you think you need to be specific about the predicament that you're in when you're praying to the Lord? David did. He tells the Lord exactly how he feels, exactly where he is, exactly what's going on. The Lord knows it already, but by following the example of Scripture, we learn that we need to spell it out. David spells out his situation to the Lord. (Duncan, "Lord, Have Mercy")

The prayer life of Schaeffer challenges me. The prayer life of David challenges me. Let's learn from them about the need to cultivate a deep, intimate, direct communion with God.

What can David do about his present crisis? He responds with God-centered meditation and yearning (5-6).

Meditate on God's Work (5). Next, David teaches us to meditate on what God has done in the past. He says, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all You have done; I reflect on the work of Your hands" (5). Memory has the ability to increase our faith in God. It can lift our spirits (cf., Ps 42). Already in our study of the Psalms, we have studied several historical Psalms, which magnify God's work in creation and redemption (Ps 105, 106, and 107). It's incredibly important to deal with your present crisis by considering God's past deeds (cf., Ps 77). As we reflect on what God has done, it inspires to say, "Do it again, Lord!" (Williams, *Kindle*).

Please note that David is not filling his mind with *nostalgia*. He does not want to go back to the "glory days," which Kidner calls "that fruitless yearning for other times and places" (475). This is a big problem for many Christians. Don't have a fruitless longing for other times and places. Instead, recall what God has done, and ask God to do a fresh, new work in your life right where you are!

See the value here of mediating on Scripture and also God's work throughout history. The Bible is filled with examples of how God has worked. Church history also contains more examples. Our own lives also are filled with times in which the Lord has blessed us in particular ways. Allow these reflections to bring you hope in the present, and ask God to do a fresh work.

Yearn for God's Presence (6). In an attitude of desperation for God, David says, "I spread out my hands to You; I am like parched land before You" (6). David spreads out his hands to God (cf., Ps 28:2; 44:20; 88:9; Lam 1:17), in a posture of prayer (cf., Ex 9:29; 1 Kin 8:22, 54; Ez 9:5). What's most important, though, is the attitude of his heart. David is longing for *God* more than anything – even more than getting answers from God! David's soul is thirsty. He knows only God will satisfy that thirst. He admits his spiritual dryness, and asks God to come and satisfy his thirst with His presence. This kind of pursuit of God is expressed powerfully in two previous Psalms:

As a deer longs for streams of water,
so I long for You, God.
I thirst for God, the living God. (Ps 42:1-2)

God, You are my God; I eagerly seek You.
I thirst for You;
my body faints for You
in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water. (Ps 63:1)

David knows that his greatest need is not answers. It's not deliverance. It's God Himself. He needs to know the nearness of God.

In God's presence, we find joy, strength, and renewal (Ps 16:11; 90:14; 63:3). When we experience His presence in close, powerful ways, we will begin to recover from spiritual darkness and dryness.

When I travel, people often ask when I return, "What was the best part of the trip?" I always say, "Coming home." I just want to be with my bride. I want to be with my family. I want to be in my home. David is expressing spiritual homesickness. His soul is in a parched land. He wants to return to his soul's resting place in God's presence. Can you identify with this longing?

Our spiritual life has ups and downs. We go through seasons of deep intimacy with God, and seasons of spiritual depression. Learn to yearn for God.

A Pattern for Presenting Requests (143:7-12)

With this expression of longing for God's presence more than anything, David enters into a time of supplication. There are about eleven petitions in this section. We may group these prayers in three categories: (1) renewal, (2) guidance, and (3) deliverance. We will find ourselves presenting these types of requests at various times in our Christian pilgrimage.

As we look at these petitions, we should also underscore David's *confidence*. Though David is despairing, his petitions are filled with expressions of confidence in God. He trusts in God (8b). He entrusts his soul to God (8b). He's hidden in God (9b). He belongs to God (10b). And he's confident that God will deal with his enemies because he's a servant of God. It's out of this dynamic relationship with God, that He can offer his petitions.

"Renew Me" (7-8a). In verse 7, David admits his need for spiritual renewal. He wants

God to hear and answer him (7a), confessing that his “spirit fails” (7b; cf., Ps 84:2; Jon 2:7). This is an expression of despair and need. He seeks God’s “face” (7b; cf., Ps 27:9; 102:2) because apart from God’s favor he is like those who go down to “the Pit” (7c; cf., Ps 28:1; 88:4). They’re spiritually dead, but he wants spiritual vitality. He knows theologically that God is with him and for him, but he wants to “experience” God’s “faithful love” (8a). He asks in particular for God to meet him afresh “in the morning” (8; cf., Ps 30:5; 90:14; 130:6; Lam 3:23) and increase his sense of God’s presence and power. This may be a figure of speech for the passing of darkness, or literally for God to appear in power in the morning to him. Either way, he knows God can renew him, as he confidently says, “for I trust in You” (8b).

Is your spirit failing? Do you need to experience God’s love afresh? Pray for the Holy Spirit to come and renew you (cf., Eph 3:14-21; 2 Cor 4:16-18).

“Guide Me” (8b, 10). David prays for guidance in three ways. In the second line of verse 8 he emphasizes *the mind*; that is, his need for *spiritual discernment*: “Reveal to me the way I should go because I long for You” (8b; cf., 25:4; 32:8). We are all called to follow Jesus in some similar ways, as we follow God’s revealed will in Scripture. Yet, the Lord puts us in particular contexts for living out His revealed will. Recall how Jesus explained to Peter and John that each of them would follow Him, but they would do it in different contexts (cf., Jn 21:20ff). Ask the Lord to show you how to best live out His word.

In the first part of verse 10, David emphasizes *the will*; that is, the need to be *obedient to God’s revealed will*: “Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God” (10a). Ask yourself, “Am I doing what’s clear in Scripture?” Start here before seeking out particulars. This may mean obeying God’s will in “small matters,” like serving in your local church, being a good steward of money, caring for the poor and afflicted, mentoring a young person, praying for your pastors and leaders. You never know where God may lead you once you start obeying Him on the basic matters of the faith.

Finally, David emphasizes *the heart*; that is, the *humility* we need to follow God’s guidance. He says, “May Your gracious Spirit lead me on level ground” (10b). David prays that the Spirit would incline his heart to follow God’s leadership. David expresses a humble attitude, admitting that He needs the Shepherd to guide him by His “good Spirit” (cf., Neh 9:20). He needs to not only know which way to go, but Someone to shepherd him to get there. The plea for a “level path” implies that David knows he may stumble (Kidner, 476). He humbly asks God to lead Him by the Spirit. As you seek God’s will, don’t merely seek answers. Cultivate a life of humility and holiness so that you are prepared to hear and do God’s will once it’s made clear.

See this: David doesn’t merely want to survive this situation; he wants to know and do God’s will. What good is living if there’s no purpose for it? Seek God’s will for a meaningful life. Do you desire to do God’s will? What proof do you have to demonstrate that you desire to do it? Are you searching out God’s revealed will in Scripture? Are you asking God for guidance for doing His will in your particular situation? Are you asking for the Spirit’s guidance?

“Deliver Me” (9, 11-12). In the remaining verses, we read of David’s great need for deliverance. He first mentions *the gift of God’s deliverance*: “Rescue me from my enemies, Lord; I come to You for protection” (9; cf., 31:15; 59:1; 142:6). It’s a simple prayer. He looks to God to rescue Him – not to weapons, horses, or other human resources.

Next, David speaks of *the goal of God’s deliverance*, “Because of Your name, Yahweh, let me live. In Your righteousness deliver me from trouble” (11; cf., Ps 30:3; 119:25). He wants

God's name to be honored in this deliverance (cf., 31:3; 106:8). Notice also he roots his prayer again in God's "righteousness" (143:1). When our righteous God grants deliverance, He alone deserves the glory.

Finally, David highlights *the basis of confidence God's deliverance*: "and in Your faithful love destroy my enemies. Wipe out all those who attack me, for I am Your servant" (12). We have come full circle now, ending where we begin, with the gospel. David's confidence comes in the character of God and in His grace-given relationship to God. David knows God's faithfulness. David knows that God will fulfill His promises, and deal with David's adversaries (cf., Ps 54:5; 73:27; 94:23). David knows that he is God's "servant."

We should remember that while we may or may not be delivered from every trial in this fallen world, because of our relationship to God, we will ultimately be delivered from our greatest enemies, because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Salvation is a gift from God (Eph 2:8-10). Praise God that Jesus said to the Father, "not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36), and followed through with perfect and costly obedience, which included His atoning death on the cross. Because of the Savior, we have hope in the midst of desperate situations.

Reflect and Discuss

- What strikes you the most about David's devotional life in the Psalms (his prayers, songs, etc.)?
- What does this Psalm teach us about the gospel, particularly in verses 1-2?
- Explain David's situation in Psalm 143. Why was he desperate for God?
- What does this Psalm teach us about our weakness and the reality of spiritual warfare?
- How can Christians today meditate on God's work in the past (v. 5)?
- In this Psalm, how do you see David pursuing God more than anything (including answers from God)?
- Read Psalm 42:1-2 and Psalm 63:1 along with Psalm 143:6. Can you identify with this spiritual longing? Explain.
- In verses 7-12, how do you see David expressing *confidence* even though he's in a time of desperate need?
- What does this passage teach us about God's *guidance*? What strikes you the most about this particular concept from this passage?
- Take a few moments to pray through this Psalm, seeking renewal and guidance.