

Psalm 143 (DHT)

- ¹ A psalm of David. YHWH, hear my prayer
Give your ear to my supplications
In your faithfulness; in your righteousness, answer me
- ² Do not enter into judgment with your servant
For no one is righteous before your face
- ³ For the enemy has chased my soul
He has crushed it to the ground
He has made my life dwell in darkness like the everlasting dead
- ⁴ My spirit in me is overwhelmed
My heart is distressed
- ⁵ I remember the days of old
I meditate on all your works
I think about the work of your hands
- ⁶ I spread my hands toward you
My soul for you like a thirsty land. *Selah*
- ⁷ YHWH, answer me quickly; my spirit is consumed
Hide not your face from me like those down in the pit
- ⁸ Let me hear of your covenant-faithfulness in the morning,
For I trust in you
Make me know the way I should walk,
For I lift my soul to you
- ⁹ YHWH, deliver me from my enemies
I take shelter in you
- ¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God
Your good Spirit leads me in the even land
- ¹¹ YHWH, for your name’s sake, revive me
For your righteousness’ sake, restore my soul from distress
- ¹² In your covenant-faithfulness, cut off my enemies
Destroy all who persecute my soul, for I am your servant.

Introduction

You will do well to leave your Bibles open. Big Idea: To find peace in the sufferings, anxieties, and overwhelming moments of our everyday lives, God’s people must (1) *rely* on God’s character; (2) *revere* God’s sovereignty; and (3) *remember* God’s works.

I have mentioned before, and will certainly again, that the Hebrew Bible (HB) has an intentional arrangement. Some say it has a strategic composition, in which latter redactors pieced together the writings of Moses and the prophets and David into what we have today, so that we are taught by both the content and by the form in which the content appears.¹ This is especially the

¹ This is called “Form Criticism,” though this term sometimes has negative connotations I do not intend to convey.

case with the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms contains five books. Psalm 143 appears in book five, which the ESV helpfully marks at the beginning of Psalm 107.

Each of the five books or collections of psalms within the Book of Psalms has its own strategic purpose. The theme of book one can be summed up as *God beside us*. The theme of book two as *God going before us*. The theme of book three as *God around us*. The theme of book four as *God above us*. And the theme of book five as *God with us*.² “The structure of Book 5 reflects the closing petition of Book 4 in 106:47. It declares that God does answer prayer (107),”³ and is thus worthy of all praise.

The psalms do not flow in a linear or chronological fashion. We know this because at the end of Psalm 72, we read that the *prayers of David had ended*, and yet Psalm 143 tells us in the superscription that this is a psalm of David. The Book of Psalms are not arranged chronologically; they are arranged based on the content of each psalm and placed in the context of other psalms with comparing themes or contrasting ideas to accentuate those similarities or differences. This is certainly the case with psalm 143.

The Structure of Psalm 138-145

Psalms 138-145 all share the same detail in their superscription, that they are all psalms of David. That so many Davidic psalms appear clustered together so long after Psalm 72 is quite unusual, except for the fact that together they are a beautifully formed chiasm.⁴ The redactor of the Book of Psalms wanted us to read 138-145 together to grasp a larger point not captured by just one of those psalms.

At the outside of this chiasm, Psalm 138 and 144-145, David blesses the Lord for his wondrous works; David thanks God for the redemption only he can give. David celebrates YHWH’s high regard for the humble and the lowly. David praises the Almighty for the kindness he shows to the humble in his deliverance of them from evil.

One step inward, in Psalms 139 and 143, David submits himself therefore to the ways of the Lord. David acknowledges that the ways of God are unsearchable. Though his ways are

² Language in this summary pulled from [Devotional: The Five “Books” of Psalms - Apologia](#)

³ [Structure of Psalms | ESV.org](#)

⁴ The structure of this cluster comes from James Hamilton, whose brief comments were limited to Psalm 143 and 139. The rest of the analysis is my own. [Sermon on Psalm 143 – The Lord's Servant by Jim Hamilton - YouTube](#)

unsearchable to David, YHWH searches and knows all. David therefore humbles himself to the will of the Almighty.

One step inward, in Psalms 140 and 142, David cries out to the Lord for salvation from his enemies. David declares to God that he has regrettably been humbled by them. David asks that YHWH not exalt the wicked who have surrounded him. David desires for the Almighty to surround him instead by the righteous.

And in the middle of this chiasm, in Psalm 141, David wants the Lord to trap his wicked enemies. Just like in 140 and 142, David wants God to surround him with the righteous. David wants YHWH to send the righteous for the specific purpose of striking David, for David wants the Almighty to teach him to walk in righteousness.

The structural center of Psalm 141 is vs. 5a: “Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.” In a great sense, this sums up the main point the redactor wishes for us to take away from this entire cluster of Psalms 138-145. The point is *not* that God’s people are free from being struck and rebuked. David *wants* to be struck and rebuked for the things that make him unrighteous, because David ultimately wants to be righteous. David wants the righteous to correct him so that he would be like them, not like the wicked who presently strike him. David wants to be saved from the wicked; both the wicked who pursue him and the wicked *within* himself. David wants to be humbled, but humbled for the purpose of relying more deeply on the will of God.

Psalms 138-145 collectively teach us that to find peace in the sufferings, anxieties, and overwhelming moments of our everyday lives, God’s people must (1) *rely* on God’s character; (2) *revere* God’s sovereignty; and (3) *remember* God’s works.

The Structure and Exposition of Psalm 143 (cf. 139)

Not only is there a strategic or intentional structure of psalms 138-145, but there is also an intentional structure within Psalm 143. Every two verses form its own unit within the Psalm. The ESV has helpfully inserted a slightly larger gap than normal between each of the six units. In chiasmic terms, Psalm 143 follows an ABCCBA format. Verses 1-2 relate to vss. 11-12. Verses 3-4 related to vss. 9-10. And vss. 5-6 relate to vss. 7-8 with the word *selah*, which means something like “pause and reflect” right in the middle. As we go through these, I’ll also draw a few connections from Psalm 139, which is the parallel psalm in the larger structure.

Verses 1-2: Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

Only someone who was convicted of their own sin as forcefully as David had been; only someone aware of their *internal* wickedness; only someone truly repentant of their sins can utter the words at the end of vs. 2 in prayer to God. *Enter not into judgment with me for no one living is righteous before you.* Yet, David, the repentant sinner, *expects* God to hear his prayer and to answer his prayer. David’s expectation is rooted in God’s faithfulness and righteousness. Paul says essentially the same thing in Rom. 3. After throwing down the theological bomb that none are righteous; no, not one, Paul immediately shifts to talk about the inherent righteousness of God. It is God, not us, who is righteous; it is God, not us, who justifies.

*Verses 11-12: For your name’s sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant.*⁵

David prays to God for salvation. David *expects* deliverance from his enemies. Ps. 139:19-22 is the parallel on the other side of the larger structure: *O that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.* It is these enemies from whom David expects deliverance. And David’s expectation is rooted in God’s righteousness and his covenant-faithfulness or steadfast-love. In the adversity and threat of destruction David faced from his enemies; in the sufferings, anxieties, and overwhelming moments of David’s life, David **relied** on God’s character.

Verses 3-4: For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore, my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.

David says in vs. 3 that the enemy made him sit in darkness. Ps. 139:11-12 is the parallel on the other side of the larger structure: *If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light*

⁵ Hamilton and others have taken Psalm 143 to be a messianic psalm; however, the evidence seems to point to this being a prayer of a sinner rather than the prayer of a deliverer. The use of the word servant is certainly eye-catching, but not persuasive in the context of the psalm or the cluster of Davidic psalms mentioned above.

about me be night, ' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.' David fears the darkness so long as God is absent; but if God is with David even in the darkness, then bring the darkness on; the appearance of darkness is a mere illusion to God's people.

Whereas in vs. 12, David asks the Lord to cut off his enemies—plural—in vs. 3 David tells the Lord that *the* enemy pursues him. Remember, David doesn't mind being pursued; David doesn't mind being crushed; but David wants these things to come from the righteous, not his enemy. To pull again from the center of the larger structure, from 141:5, the correction and rebuke from the righteous will be shown by the fruit of kindness. But this is not what was happened to David. David says the enemy has pursued and crushed him, the fruit of which being a spirit that has grown faint and weary rather than strong; a spirit overwhelmed and a heart appalled and filled with anxiety rather than peace.

Verses 9-10: Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

The deliverance that David expects in vss. 11-12, David cries for in vss. 9-10. The sinfully self-aware unrighteous servant (vs. 2) wants to be declared and made righteous by being surrounded by the righteous who steer him in the right direction (cf. 41:5). He wants to be led in the will of the Lord, not through the actions of the wicked, but through the guidance of the righteous. He declared that nobody living, not even himself, is righteous, so who is he actually calling upon to surround him and teach him? He's calling upon God who he has already declared as the source of righteousness. Ps. 139:7-8 and 24 is the parallel on the other side of the larger structure: *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! Lead me in the way everlasting!* David wants to be taught the righteous will of God by God himself, though the Holy Spirit. When life throws every wrench at David, though he does not understand it, David trusts God's plan. In the sufferings, anxieties, and overwhelming moments of David's life, David **revered** God's sovereign will.

Verses 5-6: I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.

When David feels pursued and crushed by *the* enemy and his many enemies, David is driven to God to be his light in the apparent darkness. David has already made clear that he relied

on God’s character, a character which showed itself decisively in past action. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, to meditate on God’s Word “is reading and more significantly *digesting* God’s Word.”⁶ In Psalm 143, though, it is not God’s Word on which David meditates. It is God’s decisive deliverance from the past on which David meditates. Ps. 139:14 is the parallel on the other side of the larger structure: *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.* The works David meditates on are God’s acts of creation and God’s acts of redemption. David digests and mulls over these things in his head, and when he does, he cannot help but stretch out his arms in desperation towards the Father, his Creator and Redeemer, yet again. In the sufferings, anxieties, and overwhelming moments of David’s life, David **remembered** God’s works.

Verses 7-8: Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit. Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

David’s desperation has compelled him to not just ask God to answer him as he did in vs. 1, but to answer him quickly. David’s spirit is no longer overwhelmed as it was in vs. 4, but now in vs. 7 is failing. David’s enemies surround him and cause him to sit in darkness, but it is the light David craves, the light that comes from sitting in the loving presence of God. Do not leave me, David cries, otherwise he will be just like the rest of those who are in the pit, separated from the loving presence of God. Ps. 139:17-18 is the parallel on the other side of the larger structure: *How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand, I awake, and I am still with you.* David sits in darkness, crying out to God in fear of remaining in darkness forever, but this fear does not overtake him, for “the night is darkest just before the dawn.”⁷ Morning is coming. *Let me hear in the morning*, vs. 8 says, about God’s covenant-faithfulness or steadfast-love.

The prideful think they know God’s will absent God himself; only the humble can cry to God: *make me know the way I should go*. The prideful pray in words only for God’s will to be done, actually intending that God’s will be what they themselves already want; only the humble can confess to God: *make me know the way I should go and I will submit to wherever that may*

⁶ See my message, “What Do You Thirst For?”

⁷ This quote is traditionally attributed to Winston Churchill, though there is no extant evidence of him saying this. At any rate, it has been appropriated in popular culture, particularly in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*.

lead me. When David’s spirit is overwhelmed (vs. 4) and failing (vs. 7), David relies on the Spirit of God to lead him (vs. 10). David surrenders his unrighteous spirit to the righteous Spirit of God. In the sufferings, anxieties, and overwhelming moments of David’s life, David *relied* on God’s character, *revered* God’s sovereignty, and *remembered* God’s works.

The Cross and Tomb: God’s Character, Sovereignty, and Works

We live in a fear-stricken world. Rates of anxiety are astronomical. The rampant idolatry in our day via celebrity-culture, where the goal is maximizing one’s commercial value through influence; and politics, where the goal is ratings and clicks through out-polarizing one another, has exacerbated fear and anxiety in our everyday lives. And in the coming days fear and anxiety may even grow more intense due to a unique situation we’ve not yet faced as a nation. But God’s people are not ruled by fear; God’s people are not enslaved to the virtue-signaling that often characterizes the left, or the false-equivocating that often characterizes the right. God’s people are to resist the temptation of being a mere talking-head and are instead called to be peacemakers. God’s people are to resist the temptation of participating in idolatrous practices: no one but Christ is to be worshipped; no one but Christ is to be sought after for protection or refuge; no one but Christ is to be the source of our hope; no one but Christ is to be the object of our faith; no one is to capture and stir our hearts as zealously as Christ.

When fear and anxiety abound; when we face the overwhelming moments of our everyday lives, God’s people must *rely* on God’s character; *revere* God’s sovereignty; and *remember* God’s works. This is the task for us as God’s people at such a time as this. There is no other place for us to look to see God’s character on display, God’s sovereign will on display, and God’s work on display than at the Cross and Empty Tomb of Jesus Christ.

In Exodus 34, God’s character is revealed. *YHWH, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in covenant-faithfulness, keeping covenant-faithfulness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.* This is a paradox. God both forgives sinners, yet will not clear the guilty. I will dig into this tension in my message in May on Psalm 103, but for now I will just say that the justice and love of God are not at odds with one another. There is a hymn we occasionally sing here. I really like one of the verses; finish the lyric if you know. “Two wonders here that I confess: my worth and my

unworthiness. My value fixed; my ransom paid, *at the cross.*”⁸ It was at the cross when the absolute love of God, which renders to me great worth and value, and the absolute justice of God, which covered my immense unworthiness, converged with the death of Jesus Christ.

In Genesis 50, God’s sovereign will is revealed, when Joseph resisted the urge to seek revenge on his brothers who had wronged him. *Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? What you meant for evil, God meant for good, to bring about the present result, that life would abound.* This is the same sovereign will Peter preaches of in Acts 2. *People of God, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of wicked men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.* Wicked men killed Jesus, yet it was all according to God’s sovereign will, which cannot be thwarted. The sovereign will of God was most clearly shown on the Cross and at the Tomb when the ultimate power of our world, death, was decisively defeated.

In Romans 4-5, God work is revealed. Paul explains *why Abraham’s faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’ But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into his face in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his resurrection life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* We have a hope that extends forward into eternity because of God’s decisive deliverance from the past. We have a hope that one day we too will be raised from the dead, and we have this not-yet hope because it is rooted in the already-resurrected victory of Christ.

⁸ “My Worth is Not in What I Own” by Keith and Kristyn Getty, and Graham Kendrick

Freedom from our anxious and fear-obsessed world *begins* with placing your faith in the finished work of Christ who was crucified for the forgiveness of sins and raised that by faith in that resurrection you may be reconciled to God. If you have not made Jesus and his resurrection the object of your faith and hope, there is no better time than now. Freedom begins with repentance; with the recognition of who God truly is and the recognition of who we truly are—unrighteous people. By this, I don’t mean ‘unrighteous’ in the sense of willful defiance to God; but rather as sinfully self-aware people in need of a savior. If Jesus and his resurrection is the object of your faith and hope, then when fear and anxiety abound; when we are faced with the overwhelming moments of our everyday lives, we respond by *relying* on God’s character; *revering* God’s sovereignty; and *remembering* God’s works, all of which are chiefly known by the Cross and Empty Tomb of Jesus Christ. God’s character, God’s sovereign will, and God’s works are the content of the song of the unrighteous, who like David, want to be led into righteousness by the good Spirit of God. We practice this song in the meal set before us when we remember the Cross where the debt of our sins was nailed, yet also the source from which our peace with God flows.

Let’s pray—*Lord, we thank you for your cross. We thank you that you did not leave us the way we were, but made a way for us to return to you. Work in us; transform us through the renewing of our mind to flee from the destructive worldviews and ideologies that surround us to cling to you with the same desperation of David in Psalm 143. Humble the prideful and exalt the humble in accordance with your will. Amen.*