

When the Soul Is Overwhelmed

Introduction. Most of us know how it feels to reach the end of our rope. It may come in a hospital waiting room, or over a stack of bills. It may come in a marriage that's in crisis, or in a night when sleep won't come and every worry gets louder. We say we're fine, but our spirit is faint and our heart is heavy.

David knew that place. But as we go through our psalm today, you notice what he doesn't do. He doesn't pretend, and he doesn't walk away from God. He prays.

Psalm 143 is the last of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130), which express deep sorrow for sin, humble confession, and earnest appeals for God's mercy and forgiveness. Today we're going to follow David's prayer from the pit to level ground. The psalm is written in four admonitions, and we'll learn that when our strength is gone, we still have somewhere to go.

I. Be Prayerful (vv. 1-2)

- A. In an urgent appeal David throws himself on the "faithfulness and righteousness" of the Lord. Both qualities connote the absolute fidelity and perfection of God in keeping His promise with His children.
 - 1. To help with prayer, ask for particular things, such as guidance on a decision, patience with a person, or help with a task. Then use the wisdom that God gives (i.e. James 1:5-8, 25) and watch for how God answers. Trust builds when you conceptualize how He acts on specific requests.
 - 2. As David takes his issues to God, he realizes (and so should we) that God answers prayer in a way that'll help us (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 John 5:14). God's primary task, as it were, is to usher us to heaven, not to make our physical existence happier or easier.
- B. Another reason for the urgency of God's response lies in David's awareness of his own unrighteousness (cp. Psalm 32:1-4; 51:1-2). He knows that God's judgment could find him guilty and thus condemn him to remain in his troubles.
- C. Thankfully, God has provided a way to be forgiven of sins (Romans 3:22-26). The blood of Jesus allows me to have fellowship with God, and allows me to repent and confess when I fall from that fellowship (1 John 1:7-10).

II. Don't Lose Heart (vv. 3-6)

- A. The adversity is described in general terms. The enemy hunts David down so that he feels as if he lives "in darkness," like those who have been "dead" for a long time. Having no apparent reason for living, the psalmist is discouraged to the point of despair.
- B. David's alienation and despair grow as he reflects on what God has done in the past. He does "remember," "meditate," and "consider" the acts of God in creation and in the history of redemption. He turns to the Lord for help with outspread hands. His need for God is so great that he likens himself to "a parched land."
- C. There's always hope for the future (2 Corinthians 4:16; Hebrews 10:35-36; 12:3). People in deep distress ask, "Where could I go but to the Lord"? Psalm 19:10

says the Bible is sweeter than the honeycomb. Therefore, to handle the problems of life, love truth and be excited about it. Raise your eyes above the horizon of physical existence and look for the eternal home (Hebrews 11:16).

III. Trust in God (vv. 7-9)

- A. Out of his deep despair David calls on the Lord to not hide His face from Him and renew His “unfailing love” and to “rescue” him speedily. He waits for God’s deliverance as a watchman waits for dawn. As long as God hides His face, he feels cut off from God’s favor and is like “those who go down to the pit,” i.e. as good as dead.
- B. Even in the depth of his despair, the psalmist is confident of the Lord. He has put his trust in Him (“for to you I lift up my soul”). If we want to be like David, then we need to offer our hearts to God unconditionally (cp. Acts 13:22), and continue to look ahead and seek His Word because it will teach us the way.
- C. The reason for the psalmist’s trust is that the Lord is his refuge and his God. He is sustained by the Lord’s promise to be the God of His people (Exodus 6:7). This is incredible trust and I want to show you four ways to build your trust:
 - 1. Be honest with God.
 - a) David doesn’t hide his fear. He says his spirit faints and his heart’s appalled (vv. 3-4).
 - b) Trust doesn’t mean pretending you’re fine. Tell God exactly where you are, including your doubts. “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) is a prayer Jesus answered.
 - 2. Remember what He’s done.
 - a) Trust is easier when you have a record to look at (Psalm 78:1-8).
 - b) Try keeping a short journal of times you were carried through, and ways you’ve seen God provide. Review it when you’re anxious.
 - 3. Stay in His Word daily.
 - a) Trust grows with regular exposure to who God is, not through occasional bursts (Romans 10:17). A small daily habit works better than an occasional long session.
 - b) David also asks to hear God’s steadfast love “in the morning” (v. 8), which suggests a morning habit.
 - 4. Rest on His character, not your feelings.
 - a) Feelings of trust come and go. Trust is more reliably anchored in what God has promised and shown in Christ (Exodus 34:6-7).
 - b) David didn’t base his plea on his own strength or merit. He said, “In your faithfulness answer me, and in your righteousness” (v. 1).

IV. Obey God’s Will (vv. 10-12)

- A. As an expression of humility and hope in the future, David desires to know “the way” he should go, i.e. the way of the Lord’s “will” (Ephesians 6:6; 1 John 2:17). Doing that will as revealed in God’s Word implies complete submission, so that what we do pleases Him (1 Samuel 15:22). God will be your shepherd, but you have to let Him!

- B. The psalmist believes that if the Lord instructs and guides him on a level path, he'll experience divine illumination by the Spirit of God.
 - 1. The "illumination of the Spirit" is the Word revealing His will (Galatians 5:16).
 - 2. The presence of the Spirit demonstrates God's care (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- C. David petitions the Lord for deliverance for his "name's sake," returning to the promises of his "faithfulness and righteousness" (v. 1). All of "life" is before the Lord, but the psalmist feels as if he's dead. Therefore, he prays that the Lord will preserve his "life" by delivering him from "trouble." He prays that the Lord may deal righteously with his adversaries by silencing them. He himself vows to remain God's "servant."

Conclusion. We began with a man at the end of his rope, and we have followed him through the whole psalm. He told God the truth about his weakness. He admitted he had no righteousness of his own. He remembered what God had done, and he asked to hear God's love in the morning. Finally, he asked to be led on level ground.

Notice what David never claims. He never says, "I deserve to be rescued." His only plea is, "For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!" (v. 11). He leans entirely on who God is.

That's why Paul reaches back to this psalm. When he wants to show that no one can stand before God on his own record, he echoes David's words in Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16. Then he gives the answer David was reaching for in Romans 3:22. What David asked for in hope, we've received in Christ.

If you came in today with a faint spirit and a heavy heart, hear this. Do what David did. Stretch out your hands, lift up your soul, and trust that God will revive you emotionally, spiritually, and physically. But then you have to turn to do His will.

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