

**God, Right & Wrong**  
**Psalm 119:137–144**  
**Tsadhe**

**Intro:** Some truths are easiest to say when we don't desperately need them.

- It's easy to say, "*God is good*," when life is good.
- It's easy to say, "*God is faithful*," when the prayer gets answered the way we hoped.
- It's easy to say, "*God knows what He is doing*," when what He is doing makes sense to us.
- But what do you say when life doesn't seem to agree with what you believe about God?
- What do you say when you prayed and the answer didn't come?
- What do you say when somebody you trusted disappoints you?
- When something you thought was secure suddenly isn't?
- When the doctor walks into the room and says something you never expected to hear?
- When someone you love dies?
- When you've tried to do the right thing and life still seems terribly wrong?

That's where *Tsadhe* meets us.

As we've traveled through Psalm 119, we've repeatedly seen that *the blessed life is a Word-centered life*. But a Word-centered life doesn't mean an easy life. In this stanza, the psalmist's world is anything but easy.

- His foes have forgotten God's words (v. 139).
- He feels "*small and despised*" (v. 141).
- And by v. 143, "*trouble and anguish*" have found him.

His circumstances don't look particularly righteous. But listen again to how he begins.

*"Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules" (v. 137).*

- He doesn't begin with what's wrong with his life.
- He begins with what's right about God.
- He doesn't begin with what he doesn't understand.
- He begins with what he knows.

And I think that's the great lesson of *Tsadhe*. The psalmist doesn't judge God by what is happening around him. He judges what is happening around him by what he knows to be true about God.

**Big Idea:** Because God is always righteous, His Word is always right and He can always be trusted, even when life is hard.

So, I want us to see that in three movements this morning.

First: God Is Righteous in Everything He Says (vs. 137–138)

Second: God's Word Has Been Tested and Proven True (vs. 139–142)

Third: God's Word Gives Us Life in Trouble and Anguish (vs. 143–144)

### **First: God Is Righteous in Everything He Says (vs. 137–138)**

*137 - "Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules."*

Notice the order. The psalmist begins with God and then moves to what God says.

- *"Righteous are you."*
- *"And right are your rules."*

That order matters. God's Word is right because God is righteous.

The Hebrew word translated "*righteous*" is *tsaddiq*, and it begins with the Hebrew letter Tsadhe, the letter that begins every verse in this stanza. So the very first word of the stanza announces its great theme: **Righteous**.

And notice that the psalmist doesn't begin by telling us what righteousness ought to look like in us. He begins with God. *"Righteous are you, O LORD."*

Before righteousness becomes something God requires of us, righteousness is eternally true of God.

- God never had to become righteous.
- He never decided one day to start doing what was right.
- He never had to work at being righteous.
- God is righteous.
- He is righteous

And because God is righteous,

- there has never been a moment when God *was* wrong,
- there is not a moment when God *is* wrong, and
- there never will be a moment when God *will be* wrong.

That's what Moses said about Him - *"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4).*

Abraham understood the same thing when he asked, *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Genesis 18:25).*

Of course He will. Always.

And because God is righteous, His Word reflects His righteous character - *“And right are your rules” (Psalm 119:137).*

Then v. 138 adds another word - *“You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness.”*

- God’s Word is righteous because God is righteous.
- And God’s Word is faithful because God is faithful.

That word *“faithfulness”* carries the idea of firmness, reliability, dependability. It belongs to the same Hebrew word family from which we get *“amen.”* When we say *“Amen,”* we’re saying, *“Yes. That is true. That is sure. You can depend on that.”*

**ILL:** And the psalmist says that’s what God’s Word is like. You can put your full weight on it. It’s like the pew you’re sitting on this morning. You can trust it, no matter how you feel or feel about it.

There are no gaps in God’s faithfulness. There are no hidden defects in His character. God never surprises Himself by acting out of character. You and I do.

- Have you ever said something and later thought, *“Why did I say that?”*
- Have you ever done something and thought, *“That wasn’t like me?”*
- Sometimes we disappoint ourselves.
- Sometimes people we trust disappoint us.
- But God never acts contrary to His character.

And that means His commands aren’t arbitrary. God doesn’t wake up one morning and decide something is right and then change His mind the next day. What God says flows from who God is.

**So, obedience is ultimately an act of trust in God.**

When I obey God, I’m saying, *“I trust the Person behind the command.”* And sometimes that’s easy. Sometimes it isn’t.

- There may be something God has clearly said in His Word that rubs against what I want.
- There may be something in Scripture that our culture rejects.
- There may even be something God has allowed into my life that I can’t reconcile with what I thought He would do.

And this is where the order of v. 137 becomes so important.

Always start with God - *“Righteous are you, O LORD.”*

Then bring your circumstances underneath what you know about Him.

And remember, there is a difference between asking God a question and putting God on trial.

Habakkuk asked God questions. *“O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?” (Habakkuk 1:2).*

- The Bible gives us room to ask why.
- Why did You allow this?
- Why didn’t You stop that?
- Why did You answer that prayer one way and this prayer another way?

Those questions don’t necessarily reveal unbelief. The Daily Devotions will help you with this.

But while we ask questions, Psalm 119:137 gives us somewhere to stand.

**IMP:** I may not understand what God is doing, but I know who God is.

- God is righteous.
- And because God is actions are right
- And because God is righteous, His Word is right.

That brings us to the second movement.

### **Second: God’s Word Has Been Tested and Proven True (vs. 139–142)**

After looking first at God, the psalmist now begins looking around at the world in which he lives. That’s the proper order. If I only look at the world or my circumstances, I’ll get depressed. If I look to God first, I’ll be encouraged. But the psalmist can’t forget the real world, and neither can you, and so he writes,

*139 - “My zeal consumes me, because my foes forget your words”*

That word “*forget*” means more than having a momentary lapse in memory. These people are living as though God hasn’t spoken. They disregard His Word. And the psalmist cares deeply about that and expresses it in the words, *“My zeal consumes me.”*

Do you remember the previous stanza? *“My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law” (Psalm 119:136).*

Now he says his zeal consumes him because people forget God’s words. I like putting those verses together.

**APP:** His zeal has tears in it, and that’s an important word for us.

Biblical zeal isn’t merely getting angry at people who don’t believe what we believe.

- Jesus had zeal for His Father’s house (John 2:17), and

- Jesus also wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Truth mattered deeply to Him, and people mattered deeply to Him. You could say that reconciliation is reconciling truth and people.

- God is righteous
- We are sinners
- Jesus saves us on behalf of God and from our sin

**IMP:** And the more we love God and His Word, the more deeply we ought to care when people live without it. Maybe because we've lived without it, and know the consequence. Maybe because we see the consequence in those who do. But, *a love for God creates a love for people.*

But notice something else. The fact that other people disregard God's Word doesn't make the psalmist doubt God's Word. That's important in every generation.

- Truth doesn't become true because most people believe it.
- And truth doesn't become false because most people reject it.
- People may forget God's words.
- God's words remain true.

Then we come to one of my favorite expressions in this stanza. *140 - "Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it."*

I especially love those words, "*well tried.*"

The Hebrew comes from the language of refining metal by fire.

- You heat the metal.
- The impurities rise.
- The dross gets exposed.
- And what is genuine remains.

The psalmist says God's promise has been through the fire. And nothing false has been found in it.

- Nothing unreliable.
- Nothing impure.
- God's Word passes the test.

Now, that doesn't mean that you and I stand over the Bible as judges and decide whether God's Word measures up to our standards. Life tests our confidence in what God has said. There are times when trusting God comes relatively easily. Then comes the fire.

- Disappointment.

- Suffering.
- Unanswered prayer.
- Opposition.
- Grief.
- Uncertainty.

And those are the moments when we discover whether we really believe what we say we believe. But here's the wonderful thing.

God's Word has already been carried through those fires for thousands of years.

- Abraham carried God's promise into a situation that looked humanly impossible, and God was faithful (Romans 4:18–21).

- *"In hope he believed against hope...  
He did not weaken in faith...  
No unbelief made him waver...  
He grew strong in his faith...fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised."*

- Joseph carried God's purposes through betrayal, slavery, false accusation, and imprisonment, and eventually he could say, *"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good"* (Genesis 50:20).
- David carried God's promises while hiding from people who wanted to kill him and he could still pray, *"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge"* (Psalm 57:1).
- Paul carried the gospel through beatings, imprisonment, opposition, abandonment, and eventually toward martyrdom. Near the end he could say, *"But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me"* (2 Timothy 4:17).

Generation after generation has carried faith into the fire  
and found God faithful and His Word true.

- Cultures rise and fall.
- Governments rise and fall.
- Ideas come and go.
- People change their minds.
- God's Word remains true.
- And some of you know this personally.

**IMP:** There are verses you love today that you loved differently thirty years ago. Why? Because you've lived with them.

- You carried Psalm 46:1 into the hospital room - *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*
- You carried 2 Corinthians 12:9 into a time of brokenness - *"My grace is sufficient for you."*
- You carried Romans 8:28 - *"to those who love God all things work together for good"* - through something that didn't look good at all.
- You carried John 11:25 to a graveside - *"I am the resurrection and the life."*

You didn't merely read those verses.  
You leaned the full weight of your doubt and disbelief on them,  
only to have it transformed into the faith that sustained you.

**IMP: Why? How? Because you didn't hold on to those verses. Those verses held you.**

That's what the psalmist is saying - *"Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it."*

- There's a special love for the Bible that only experience can teach us.
- God's Word becomes very precious when we have need it desperately and discover again and again that God is faithful.

But the psalmist's difficulty isn't over. He writes, *141 - "I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts."*

"Small" here carries the idea of insignificant, of little account. Other people don't think much of him. Maybe some of you know what that feels like.

- You were overlooked.
- Your contribution went unnoticed.
- Somebody else got the recognition.
- Someone chose someone else over you.
- Someone whose approval mattered to you, didn't value you the way you hoped they would.

And if we're not careful, being despised by people can tempt us to adjust ourselves so that they'll approve of us.

- We change what we say.
- We soften what we believe.
- We compromise how we live.

Why? Because we want to matter in somebody's eyes. The psalmist chooses something better - *"I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts."*

- People may forget him.
- He won't forget God.
- People may disregard him.
- He won't disregard God's Word.

You can be ignored, overlooked and discounted by people and still be known by God. Jesus says that the Good Shepherd *"calls his own sheep by name"* (John 10:3).

- You can be despised by others, and deeply loved by God.
- You can appear insignificant in the eyes of the world and live a life of eternal significance because your life belongs to Christ and is shaped by His Word.
- The history of Christianity proves this to be true.

**Read:** *A Passion for the Impossible* (the life of Lillas Trotter)

And then v. 142 gives us the anchor underneath all of this - *"Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true."*

- Forever.
- Don't miss that word.
- People change.
- Cultures change.
- Ideas of right and wrong change.
- Our circumstances change.
- Our emotions change.
- Even our convictions can feel stronger some days than others.
- God's righteousness doesn't change.

***"For I the LORD do not change"* (Malachi 3:6).**

And because God doesn't change, truth doesn't change. And this is why Jesus prayed for us, saying, *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth"* (John 17:17).

- God's Word doesn't become true because we believe it.
- It doesn't become false because someone rejects it.
- It doesn't expire when the culture moves on.
- God is righteous forever.
- His Word is true forever.

That means you and I always have somewhere solid to stand. And that brings us to the final two verses.

**Third: God's Word Gives Us Life in Trouble and Anguish (vs. 143–144)**

*143 - "Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight."*

We can all relate to these verses.

He didn't go looking for trouble. Trouble found him.

- Some trouble comes from foolish choices.
- But sometimes trouble just finds us.
- The phone rings.
- The doctor walks into the room.
- Someone you love dies.
- A relationship breaks.
- A job doesn't materialize.
- A degree isn't gained.
- Something you thought was secure suddenly isn't.
- You can go to bed one night expecting tomorrow to look much like today, and by tomorrow evening your world can look completely different.
- Trouble found you.

**IMP:** And the psalmist doesn't pretend it doesn't hurt. He calls it *"trouble and anguish."*

The Hebrew words suggest distress, constriction, being pressed into a tight place. Life is closing in. And I'm so glad the Bible talks like that.

- The Bible doesn't tell hurting people, *"If you really trusted God, this wouldn't hurt."*
- It doesn't say, *"If you really believed in Heaven, you wouldn't grieve."*
- It doesn't say, *"If you have the joy of the Lord, you can't be sad."*

The psalmist says, *"Trouble and anguish have found me out."*

- Trouble is real.
- Anguish is real.
- You and I both know that.

But those aren't the only realities in that verse – *143b - "But your commandments are my delight."*

This is marvelous!

**Very IMP:** Trouble and delight occupy the same verse because they can occupy the same heart.

- You can grieve and worship.
- You can hurt and trust.
- You can cry and still have hope.
- You can honestly say, *"This is breaking my heart,"* while also saying, *"God is good."*

- The presence of anguish doesn't eliminate the possibility of delight when our delight is rooted in something deeper than our circumstances.
- And the presence of delight doesn't eliminate the possibility of anguish when we live in a fallen world.

That makes me feel better about my wishy-washy heart.

Sometimes Christians make life harder for ourselves because we assume spiritual maturity ought to eliminate emotional contradiction.

But my confidence before God doesn't finally rest on my ability to maintain the proper emotional state. Thank God for that!

- My hope rests in Jesus. His faithfulness is perfect. Mine isn't.
- His trust in the Father was perfect. Mine isn't.
- His obedience was perfect. Mine isn't.

#### **Fourth: This is Exactly Where the Gospel Meets Us.**

Think about Jesus in Gethsemane. *"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38).* That's anguish.

Then He prays, *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."* And then, *"Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).*

- That's trust.
- That's anguish.
- Anguish and trust occupied the same heart.

Jesus never had to pretend His suffering wasn't real in order to remain faithful. And He remained perfectly faithful all the way to the cross. Hallelujah!!!

Isaiah said He was *"despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).*

He experienced suffering beyond anything you or I will ever understand. And yet He *"humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).*

And here is the glorious thing.

At the cross, what looked terribly wrong was accomplishing something wonderfully right. The only perfectly righteous Man who ever lived was condemned. The innocent One died. The Creator was crucified by His creatures.

Why? Why? Peter tells us that Jesus *“suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).*

And yet Peter also says Jesus was *“delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).* God was accomplishing redemption.

- There’s sorrow and joy together.
- There’s wonder and fulfillment together.
- There’s question and answer together.

The righteous One died for unrighteous people like you and me. And God raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:24).

- Friday looked like the failure of every promise.
- Sunday morning proved that God had never lost control.

Jesus told His disciples He would be rejected, killed, and rise again (Mark 8:31). And He did.

God’s Word went into the darkness of the tomb and came out proven true.

That’s why the resurrection gives us such confidence when we can’t understand what God is doing.

**APP:** I know we endure great hardships in this life, but we’ve already seen what God can do with the darkest day in human history.

- He turned Calvary into salvation.
- He turned a grave into an empty tomb.
- He turned what looked like the triumph of death into the defeat of death.
- So when I can’t understand what God is doing today, I look toward the empty tomb.
- The resurrection tells me that I can trust the God who made the promise.

And then Tsadhe ends - *“Your testimonies are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live” (v. 144).*

Notice where the stanza ends. Exactly where it began.

Verse 137: *“Righteous are you, O LORD.”*

Verse 144: *“Your testimonies are righteous forever.”*

- God is righteous.
- God’s Word is righteous.
- Forever.
- Trouble isn’t forever.
- Anguish isn’t forever.

- Being small and despised isn't forever.
- Are you hearing the good news yet?
- Those things all have an expiration date.
- But God's righteousness doesn't.
- His Word doesn't.
- His faithfulness doesn't.
- His love for His children doesn't.
- His promises don't.

Forever is the key.

And then the psalmist prays one final prayer – *144b - "Give me understanding that I may live."* I find that fascinating.

- He doesn't say, "God, explain everything to me."
- He doesn't say, "God change my circumstances."
- He doesn't even say, "God heal my hurt."
- He says, "Give me understanding that I may live."

There's a difference.

We usually want God to explain the trouble.

- Why did this happen?
- Why did You allow it?
- Where is this going?
- How is this going to turn out?

And sometimes God gives us answers. Sometimes He doesn't. The psalmist asks for something even more important.

*"Give me the understanding I need to live faithfully while I'm still in it."*

After 143 verses about the Word of God, this man still says, "*God, I need You to help me understand.*"

I love that that honesty.

- We never outgrow that prayer.
- You can study the Bible for fifty years and still pray, "Give me understanding."
- You can earn degrees.
- You can learn Hebrew and Greek.
- You can read theology.
- You can teach Sunday School.
- You can preach sermons.

And every time you open this Book you still need to say, *“Father, give me understanding.”*

And notice why: *“That I may live.”*

- The goal isn't merely knowing the Bible.
- The goal is being shaped by the Bible.

There's a difference.

- You can know Bible stories.
- You can memorize verses.
- You can understand doctrines.
- You can learn Hebrew words.
- You can win Bible trivia contests.
- All of those things may have value.
- But the goal is life.

God's Word should eventually find its way into our decisions, our marriages, our parenting, our friendships, our reactions, our priorities, our words, our desires, our attitudes, our spending, our forgiving, our loving, our serving.

The Word we study should increasingly become the life we live.

### **That's the blessed life.**

And ultimately, Jesus doesn't merely give us instructions about life. Jesus gives us life.

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).*

*“I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).*

### **Gospel**

- You don't receive eternal life because you understand enough of Psalm 119.
- You don't receive eternal life because you obey God's Word well enough.
- You receive life through Jesus Christ.

It's this simple:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).*

*Whoever has the Son has life (1 John 5:12).*

- Jesus lived the righteous life you and I have failed to live.
- Jesus died the death our sin deserved.

- Jesus rose from the dead.
- And when we trust Him, God does something astonishing.
- He takes our sin and places it on Christ, and He gives us Christ's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

So Paul can say that God is both *"just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (Romans 3:26).

God remains righteous while declaring sinners righteous because Jesus has satisfied divine justice.

- And the risen Jesus gives us His holy Spirit.
- The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26).
- The Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:17–18).
- The Spirit takes the Word of God and increasingly forms the life of Christ in us.

That's what it means to *"make disciples here and around the world."*

- Do we trust God perfectly when trouble comes? No.
- Do we always respond to anguish exactly as we should? No.
- Do we always live out everything we know from Scripture? No.

But again, it's Jesus' perfection, and not my own, that is my ultimate trust.

**Conclusion:** So where has *Tsadhe* taken us?

First, God Is Righteous in Everything He Says (vs. 137–138) - *"Righteous are you, O LORD."*

Second, God's Word Has Been Tested and Proven True (vs. 139–142) - *"Your promise is well tried."*

Third, God's Word Gives Us Life in Trouble and Anguish (vs. 143–144) - *"Give me understanding that I may live."*

- It may be that trouble has found you.
- Maybe there's something going on in your life this morning that you simply cannot understand.
- Maybe somebody has disappointed you.
- Maybe you feel overlooked.
- Maybe you feel small and despised.
- Maybe you're grieving.
- Maybe you've been asking God why.

*Tsadhe* doesn't tell you to pretend none of that hurts. It tells you where to stand while it hurts.

*“Righteous are you, O LORD” (v. 137).*

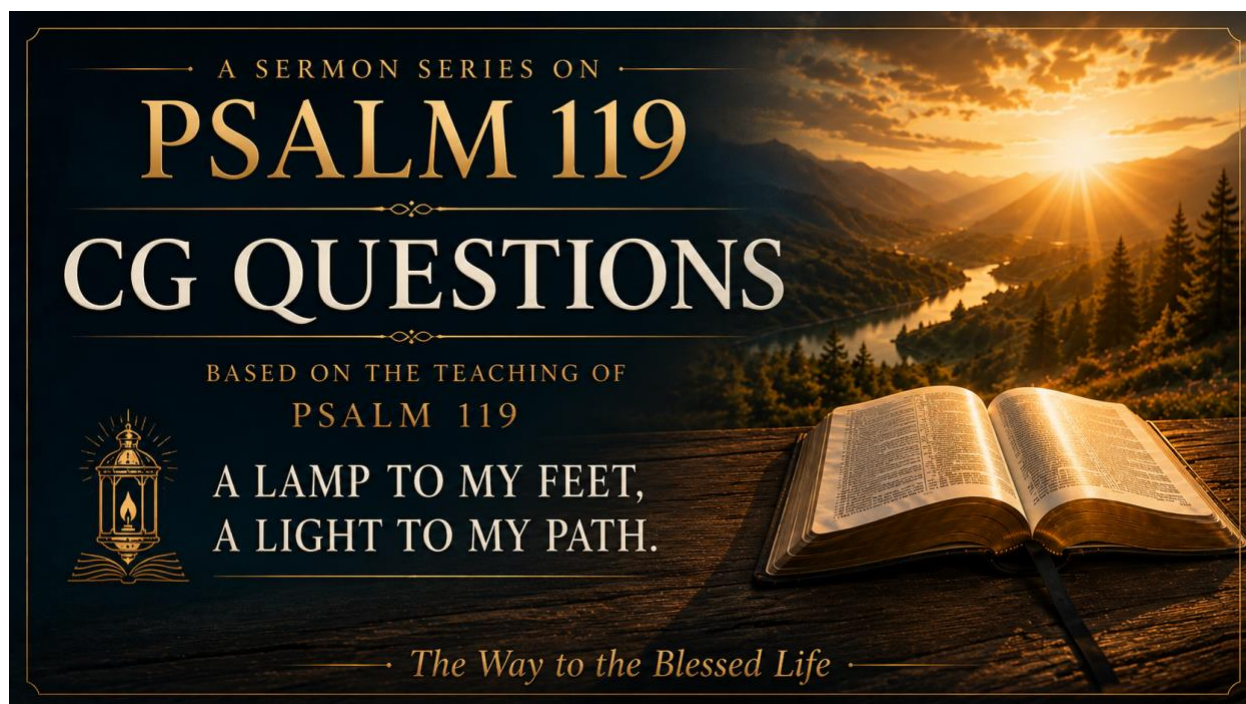
Start there. Before you begin with what you don’t know, begin with what you do know.

- God is righteous.
- His Word is right.
- His promises have been tested.
- His Word is true.
- His commandments can still be your delight in anguish.
- And His Word can give you the understanding you need to live faithfully today.
  
- You may not understand your circumstances.
- You know the character of your God.
- You may not know what tomorrow holds.
- You know the One who holds tomorrow.
- You may not know how God is going to work everything out.
- You know what He has already done at the cross and the empty tomb.
- And if God kept His Word there, you can trust Him here.
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So I think the whole movement of Tsadhe can be remembered very simply.

- 1 - God is righteous.
- 2 - His Word is right.
- 3 - So we can trust Him, even when life feels wrong.

And while you do, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the perfectly righteous One, whose perfection makes up for everything lacking in us.



**Observation**  
**What does the text say?**

1. What words related to righteousness and truth are repeated throughout vs. 137–144?
2. What does the psalmist say about God and His Word in vs. 137–138?
3. According to vs. 139–141, how does the psalmist respond to his foes, God’s promise, and being “small and despised”?
4. What unchanging truths about God and His Word does the psalmist affirm in v. 142?
5. What two experiences does the psalmist bring together in v. 143, and what does he ask God for in v. 144?

**Interpretation**  
**What does the text mean?**

6. Why does the psalmist begin with “Righteous are you, O LORD” before describing what is happening to him?
7. What does it mean that God’s promise is “well tried” in v. 140, and how does the picture of metal refined by fire help us understand it?
8. Why is the psalmist’s refusal to forget God’s precepts significant when he feels “small and despised” in v. 141?
9. What does v. 143 teach us about how trouble, anguish, and delight can exist in the same heart?
10. Why does the psalmist end by praying, “Give me understanding that I may live” rather than simply asking God to explain or remove his trouble?

**Correlation**  
**Where else does the Bible say this?**

11. Read Deuteronomy 32:4. How does Moses' description of God help us understand the confession in v. 137?
12. Read Romans 4:18–21. How was God's promise tested in Abraham's experience, and what did Abraham learn about God's faithfulness?
13. Read Isaiah 53:3 and Philippians 2:8. How does Jesus help us understand the psalmist's faithfulness while being "small and despised"?
14. Read Matthew 26:38–39. How does Jesus in Gethsemane show us that genuine anguish and faithful trust can exist together?
15. Read Mark 8:31 and Luke 24:6–7. How does the resurrection demonstrate that God's promises have been tested and proven true?

**Application**  
**How can God use this to conform me to Jesus?**

16. When life feels wrong, are you more likely to interpret God through your circumstances or interpret your circumstances through what you know to be true about God?
17. What promise or truth from God's Word has become more precious to you because you've had to lean on it during a difficult season?
18. When you feel overlooked, unappreciated, or "small and despised," how are you tempted to seek the approval of others rather than remain faithful to God's Word?
19. What "trouble and anguish" has found you recently? How can God's Word remain your delight while that trouble is still present?
20. Where do you most need to pray this week, "Give me understanding that I may live" (v. 144)?