

A Psalm of Creation

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Psalm chapter 8, verse 1. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars which you have set in place, what is man that you're mindful of him? Or the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned him with glory and honor. [1 : 13] You have given him dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, also the beast of the field, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the pass of the sea.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! May God bless the hearing and preaching of his word.

Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I grew up humming and singing whatever I learned.

I picked up the violin and piano before setting aside lesser instruments for the guitar. I sang in the choir when it was cool.

I jammed in bands throughout high — just kidding, just kidding. I jammed in bands throughout high school and college, but after becoming a Christian 22 years ago, in a few weeks, my love for music changed when I saw it as a gift from God.

[2 : 26] I began to love God and didn't love music less. I began to love it more. I began to love music more, not because I still found my identity in it, but because it was able or helped me express my newfound identity in Jesus Christ.

I'll never forget, all throughout high school, I was a somewhat of a fan boy of the band Radiohead, which they thought would be very uncool to have fan boys. I was never able to get tickets. Then in the summer of 2001, one of my friends won a lottery for four tickets to a show in Chicago. In God's mysterious grace, this band that I loved for six, seven years, I was born again six days before the show.

Finally was able to go see this band, see Tom York in person, hear his voice, and it was a great show. It rocked. But I realized that night, my favorite music was not Radiohead, but worshiping God with the people of God.

So too, King David is like that. We see that all throughout the Psalms. He said, I rejoice when they said, let us go to the temple. Let us go and gather with the congregation of God.

[3 : 44] Let us praise him. Each of the Psalms were written to help us praise God. But if we were to begin reading the Psalms at chapter one, we would realize that this Psalm, this Psalm 8 is the first all out song of praise in the whole book.

It's obvious from the beginning, Psalm 8 doesn't begin with a cry or a plea or a prayer. It begins with praise. How majestic is your name in all the earth?

The refrain introduces us to the theme of this song, the unrivaled power of God. The Lord, our Lord is majestic.

He's impressive. He's the millions of galaxies creating, Grand Canyon making, Lord of all. And all that he has made displays his unrivaled awesome power.

This Psalm is one of the precious Psalms given to us to teach us how we are called to praise as creatures of God. For that reason, before we leave Genesis 1 through 3, I wanted to pause to be

drawn into the wonder of what God has made and our role of praising him as his creatures.

[5 : 02] Though this Psalm is about the unrivaled power of God, it has a provoking message for us. It's, as we'll see in a few moments, it's filled with tension. It's a Psalm carefully crafted to help us reflect on who God is, his greatness, his power, his unfathomable works in all creation, but also who we are, his creatures, his people.

It's carefully crafted to help us reflect on how we're called to live. In a word, where we're going is, let our all-powerful God be exalted and let us serve him in heartfelt awe.

Let our all-powerful God be exalted and let us serve him in heartfelt awe. The points are going to be these tensions that we're going to come up against.

The first one is the power of your weakness. The power of your weakness. You know, this is the type of Psalm that it seems like David wrote it beneath the stars, but the first place he turns is not what God has worked, but how God continues to work.

If we went back through the Psalter, after five straight hymns talking about and bemoaning evildoers roaming this fallen world, the psalmist announces that evildoers are not overcome by our might, but by our weakness.

[6 : 26] Look in verse 2. He says, out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes to steal the avenger, or the enemy and the avenger.

Now, all the smart guys say this is a difficult verse. It revolves around the babbling of babies. Now, babies and infants are so cute and cuddly.

I noticed one of my kids running after one that just came in this morning, one of the new babies in this church that seem to be being birthed every day. But no one except mom listens when they coo. Yeah, no one's trying to decipher. What's he trying to say? Yet the Lord says that babies stand up strong against evil and stop evildoers.

You have established strength in the mouth of babes and infants. If you remember, Jesus referenced this psalm, this very verse on Palm Sunday.

[7 : 30] So if you remember that story, Jesus was entering Jerusalem, and they all, it's called Palm Sunday because they threw palm branches before him. He was riding on a donkey like a king from Zechariah, when he's coming to reign. So they threw these palm branches before him, and he walked in Jerusalem.

Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the son of David. And then he went into town, and he started, you know, they were happy with him. They quickly got angry with him.

He went in, and he turned over tables, and he drove out the money changers, and the righteous leaders became angry, and they said, who's this guy think he is walking into our temple? throwing stuff over.

But the children continued to cry out, Hosanna, the son of David. And Jesus said, out of the mouth of infants in nursing bays, you have prepared praise.

That's our verse. The point is, it's not the religious leaders who see Jesus for who he is. It's the children.

[8 : 34] Charles Spurgeon once said that children are the best distinguishers of character. If you find someone your kids are afraid of, you best be afraid of them too. Not that that's the main point of what Jesus used at, but it's not those who are in power that see Jesus for who he is, but those who are out of power and weak.

This brings out an important biblical principle, and one of our tensions, that though weak, God often uses us in our weakness to display his power.

Though weak, God often uses us in our weakness to display his power. I have a new hero. Several years ago, I read a story about a six-year-old boy named Bridger that went viral.

Bridger was walking with his little sister when a dog charged his sister. Bridger stood in front of her and was attacked by this ferocious dog instead.

After being bit on his head and down his face, he grabbed his sister's hand to keep her safe, quote-unquote, as they ran away. This six-year-old boy, Bridger, ended up with 91 stitches and hours of plastic surgery, but his honor was intact.

[9 : 57] So many people applauded Bridger's courage. Captain America gave him a call. The point I'm trying to make is that Bridger's sister was not delivered by the long club of her father or the louder bark of a bigger dog.

She was delivered by the courage of her little six-year-old brother. That's the way the Lord works so often.

The Lord does not work in the way we think. The Lord chooses to work with the weak, the lowly, and the despised. When the Lord was looking for an ally behind enemy lines, he sent spies to the prostitute Rahab's house.

His strongest defense is not political power or popular prominence. His greatest asset is not earthly wealth or worldly wisdom. His most fit ambassadors are not those without a past or those who color in the line.

Why? Because the Lord's greatest resource is not human strength or talent or wisdom. His greatest resource is himself. The Lord needs no prop, no lights, no supporting cast.

[11:11] The Lord needs no help. He's not served by human hands as though he needed anything. He gives all humankind life and breath and everything, Paul reminds us. Not only that, it seems like the Lord likes to work with those who would hurt his popular image, those who would damage his cause, those who've blown it, those with a reputation so that all would see that it rests on him.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is when the apostle Paul is converted on the road to Damascus. He sends Ananias, one of the disciples, to go talk to Paul. He's like, no, I'm not going, don't you remember who this guy is?

He was a murderer. He was a persecutor of the church. He had Stephen laid to rest at his feet by stones. He said, I'm not going to talk to this man.

The Lord said, well, he's changed now. And who did the Lord use in the most powerful way? The apostle. The same is true for us. Your neighbor doesn't need someone bolder to move in next door. Your neighbor needs you with all your fears to show up and tell what Jesus has done for you. Your children don't need a mistake-free dad.

[12:27] What they need is a dad who owns his mistakes, teaches them how to walk through them. You don't have to cover up the mistakes in your life to be useful to the Lord. It's precisely how he has worked through you in those things that make you non-ignorable in the world.

But there seems to be another point this early in this psalm. Seems like the psalmist may be whispering, we must become like children to really see the power of God. This verse, I think, placed at the beginning of this psalm about the power of God functions like an invitation.

If you will humble yourself, you will see. If you will humble yourself, you will gain true knowledge and insight. If you humble yourself, you will walk in true power.

Everyone must duck their head to get through the wardrobe. So too. We must duck our heads and bow like children to see the power of God.

Point two, the wonder of your insignificance. Tension number two, the wonder of your insignificance.

[13:36] Ever laid under the stars tracing the constellations with your finger? Pulled out that little app that shows you, what are these constellations all around me? That's what David is doing in this psalm.

It seems to be written not in an assembly of gathered people but out laying on the grass looking up. And look what he says. He says, when I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars which you have set in place, set in place, what is man that you're mindful of him or the son of man that you care for him?

After the sun sets and the hustle of the day stops, a hush falls over all the earth as the stars shine and speak. Nations come and go, kingdoms rise and fall, generations come and pass, but all that the Lord has set in place shines and speaks day after day and night after night.

He begins, look, in 1b, he says, you have set your glory above the heavens, but you have set the heavens, the stars and moons, in a place so that we might see.

The heavens are yours. The moon is yours. The stars and the planet are yours. All of it is the work of your fingers. others. Now, God has no hands.

[14:58] That's not what he's saying. He worked it. What he's saying is all of it is but child's play. Orion's belt, that's just tossing the ball in the backyard.

It's just playing in the sandbox. Have you ever been drawn into the wonder of a star-filled sky or drawn into the wonder of creation?

Last Sunday, our community group went up to the hills of Tennessee that I love so much. We found this swimming hole back above Bald River Falls and the clock seemed to slow down as soon as we got out of the car and the noise of the hustle and bustle grew more and more faint. I climbed in this swimming hole, the field, the exquisiteness of just cold water and then we graduated. Some of the kids found it first but we found this little rock that you would slide down of, you know. It didn't take me long to be appealed to go slide down this rock and we'd slide down this rock. You know, I'm all of 200 pounds but I'm sliding down this rock and you would slide down and as soon as you plunge under the water right after you came out to the rock, almost like you're trying to get back up.

[16:09] and you pop back up is so exhilarating. Floating down the river feet up looking at the world going, what is this world that God has made?

I can laugh like a seven-year-old boy in a stream in a swimming hole. That's what David is being brought into. This world's unbelievable.

But what does David realize underneath the stars? John Calvin once said, creation is a theater for the glory of God but what's on the theater?

Night after night. What's on the real? Like, what is on the big screen? What is creation trying to say? Well, night after night, day after day, the seemingly endless array of stars and mountains and planets and creatures are saying, it's not about you.

It's all about God. It's all about displaying His unrivaled power. All of creation is, if I can put it this way, proclaiming your insignificance.

[17:22] Notice, David does not, or he says, what is man that you're mindful of him and that you care for him. Notice, he's telling us that we're called to see in this all of creation how insignificant, unimportant, and unnecessary we are.

Notice, he doesn't say, I must be so beautiful and worthy for God to do all this for me. He says, who are you?

Why did you make all that? Why are you mindful of him? Even the word man here is used to underline the deep sense of insignificant and unworthiness David feels.

He says, you are great and powerful, but I am weak and frail and failing. It's hard for us to get a sense of our insignificance because we live in a culture that pushes us to celebrate how great we are.

One author tells a story of driving home one evening listening to a broadcast from August 15, 1945. The author was listening to a broadcast from August 15, 1945, a broadcast celebrating VJ Day.

[18:36] That's called Victory in Japan Day when the Allies secured victory in one of the most brutal wars. The broadcast included many of the celebrities of the day.

Frank Sinatra, Cary Grant, Bette Davis, and others humbly expressing their gratefulness that the war was over. Bing Crosby opened the broadcast saying, well, it looks like this is it.

What can you say at a time like this? Celebrate? All you can do is thank God it's over.

Later, he continued, today is a day of deep down humility. The nation seemed to agree. Yes, there were celebrations, sailors partying in San Francisco, New York littered with confetti, but the joy was marked by a deep sense of humility.

We escaped this most brutal war in two theaters. The author said he finished the broadcast in the driveway, then he went inside.

[19:50] He turned on a football game. It was a short pass to a wide receiver for a two-yard gain. The defense immediately tackled the wide receiver and then celebrated.

Look what I did! Two-yard gain! I stopped him! He said, and I quote, it occurred to me that I had just watched more self-celebration after a two-yard gain than I had heard after the United States won the war.

He continues to describe how our culture has shifted from a culture of humility to one of self-promotion and pride. From a culture that claims I'm no better than anyone else to one that announces, look at what I did!

Look at how special I am! My child's on the honor roll or whatever it is. That's why it's so hard for us to get a sense of our insignificance as creatures.

The first thing you need to see to see God is not how beautiful, worthy, and bright you are. First thing you need to see in order to really see God is how insignificant, unimportant, and unnecessary you are compared to Him.

[20 : 57] Psalm 8 is inviting us to let that self-importance drain out like air from a balloon.

Inviting us to learn true humility. Humility is not thinking less of yourself as if getting down on yourself is the answer, but it's also not thinking more of yourself as if saying you're beautiful or worthy or lovely or whatever is the answer.

Community, humility is thinking of yourself less because you finally see the greatness of God. But David continues, though insignificant, God cares for us and sets His affection upon us.

Everything is for God and His glory. You're insignificant, unimportant, and unnecessary, yet God thinks of you, cares for you.

Look at verse 4. This is the wonder of wonder and the collision of this tension. When I look at the heavens and the work of your fingers and the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is manful that you're mindful of Him?

[22 : 08] Or the Son of Man that you care for Him? David seems to stumble into these truths like, oh my goodness, what in the world mindful here means to remember?

We say out of sight, out of mind and it's true but never with the Lord. That's what He's saying. You're mindful. He never forgets you.

He remembers you. He keeps you in His eye. He knows your name, your address. He knows your family. Care though, mindful of you, care takes it a step further.

Literally, He visits you. He takes notice of you and intervenes. He comes to you. These two words carefully underline His initiative. He is mindful and He cares.

The tension is saying something profound at one and the same time. It untangles all the trappings of worldly significance that you're worthy because of who you are or what you've done.

[23 : 06] There's no significance in those things but at the same time it fills us with a deep sense of true significance that He is mindful of you and cares for you not because of who you are but because of who He is.

The wonder that He wants you to see is not what you bring to the table but His overwhelming greatness that He takes notice of you and is mindful of you.

It shifts the ground of wonder from what our culture applauds, who we are, what we have attained, what we possess to what we are in Christ. He's mindful of you and cares for you.

He knows you. Is there anything better than that? All the things of this world without that are dust and ashes.

Karl Barth, one of the most important theologians of the last hundred years, he wrote many, many books. I've heard it said that what will Karl Barth be doing in the first millennia of heaven?

[24 : 28] And the joke is he'll be finishing his church dogmatics. On earth, he was only able to complete 9,000 pages and 31 volumes.

But he was very distressed because he was far from done. In 1962, after a lecture at the campus of the University of Chicago, Barth was asked if he could sum up his whole theology in one sentence. This is Karl Barth, you know, the 9,000 pages guy. And he said, and I quote, yes I can. And the words of a song I learned at my mother's knee, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

What a summary. You could say the same thing from these verses, from all that God says from these verses. Everything about you is tailored to this goal of finding the wonder of being known and loved by God.

You live under the stars. Ever thought about it? You live under the stars so that every night when you look up, they're up there. And they're saying something to you. You're stamped in his image.

[25 : 37] You speak, you think, unlike any other creature. You're on his mind. You're the object of his care. You are continually before him. The Psalms say, Isaiah 40 says, he's numbered all your days.

He's at your right hand. You are known and loved by him and he wants you to know him. The wonder, the wonder of our insignificance.

Point three, the potential of your toil. The potential of your toil or your labor, your work.

We come to this last tension here. After reminding us of our insignificance and our weakness, David takes us back to Genesis 1 where we've been and you see how this is, this is a hymn of creation in so many ways.

He takes us back to see something incredible. Look at verse 5. You're mindful of him. You care for him. Yet, you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings.

[26 : 42] More like God than like earth. crowned him with glory and honor. Men and women are created in the image of God after remembering five days of creation.

David ponders the sixth day. Pondering all that God has done in creation. Man and woman as we've learned of the pinnacle of God's creation.

God takes frail, failing flesh into his hand and stamps it in the likeness and the glory and the honor of God. He makes man a little lower than the heavenly beings.

He stamps him in his image unlike all of creation and after he rejoices and says it's very good. Underneath the stars David sees what this means.

Not only is this great God mindful of him, not only does he care for him, but this great God has given him the awesome privilege of living for him and filling the earth with his glory.

[27 : 40] I love the way this psalm takes it out. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? What does it mean to be, is it that we're intelligent? Is it that our capacity to learn and trust or relate or write computer code or something like that?

No, the image of God is more foundational and that's what gets in the right direction. Look in verse 5. You made him a little over the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

This crowning gets in the right direction. In the past, in the ancient Near East and the old world, archaeologists have unearthed a life-size image of an Assyrian king and on the statue it said, in the image and likeness of this Assyrian king.

It is believed that he set up statues all throughout his empire. So what the word of God is helping us to see that God has done the same thing with us.

we're placed or made in the image of likeness of God not merely because we think or not merely so that we can think or speak or do any of these things. He created us in his image and likeness so that we might be kings and queens in this world to rule for him and to announce that this world belongs to him.

[28 : 55] We could say it like this, though unimportant, God calls us to live for his glory in all we say and do. Though unnecessary, unimportant, God calls us, calls you to live for his glory in all you say and do.

That's what the psalm breaks out after that. Look at verse 6-8, you've given him dominion. That's a kingly word. You've given him, you've given him control, you've given him a position and authority over creation, over the works of your hands.

You put all things under his feet, all the sheep and oxen, all the beasts of the field, all the birds of the heaven, the fish of the sea and Teleco River as well. Whatever passes along the pass of the seas and the rivers you placed under man.

That's another way of saying what we heard in Genesis 1, be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over all that God has made.

Humankind is created in God's image and called to work and served to bring order and dominion to the chaos of this world to fill it with the glory of God.

[30 : 10] this psalm is calling us to realize the wonder of what he's called us to as his creatures. But we can see the purpose of God with clearer eyes.

If you would, turn with me to Hebrews chapter 2 where this psalm is picked up. Hebrews chapter 2 we all know the rest of the story.

We spent two weeks in Genesis 3 so we know that we've turned away and fallen short of the glory of God. We failed to fulfill the commands to be fruitful and multiply and make dominion.

We failed to worship God and begun to worship other things but the book of Hebrews tells us that this psalm is about someone else as well. You see that in verse 2 if your Bible's like mine it has verses 6-8 indented a bit.

That's psalmate. What is a man that you're mindful of him or a son of man that you care for him yet you made him a little lower than the angels crowned him with glory and honor putting everything in subjection under his feet giving him that dominion.

[31 : 31] So we might think that's just another reference to creation and what God has given us. But the author of Hebrews is making an argument for Jesus Christ.

He said now I'm putting everything in subjection to him that is Jesus. He left nothing outside his control. At present we do not see everything in subjection to him but we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels.

This is a reference to the second person of the Trinity. And yet in the mystery of God he's made a little lower than the angels namely Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In the same way that God made us the psalmist and the author of Hebrews is telling us that God made Jesus a little lower fully God fully man the son of God possessed all glory before the foundation of the world and yet took up frail failing flesh made low made to suffer so that he can taste death for everyone so that he might bring many sons and daughters to glory so that the glory and honor we forfeited by turning away might be re-secured and restored to all who trust in Jesus. I want you to hold your Bible right there for a moment. But you know if so don't return to Psalm 8 but if we could we could find out why does this Psalm end though with a reference to our toil our work you know you think about a Psalm that's filled with the unrivaled power of God and yet it ends by talking about our work and toil well here's why the world's not supposed the world is not yet what it's supposed to be and the old film Grand Canyon an attorney gets stuck in a traffic jam and takes off on a side road to get around it maybe he had to at ways so he could get around this traffic jam his detour takes him along streets that keep getting darker and darker the music sets in more and more deserted his wise detour quickly turns into a nightmare his expensive car stalls and breaks down at the wrong side of town he calls the tow truck but before the tow truck arrived five thugs surround his car they threaten to hurt him if he doesn't give them some money threaten to bully him and beat him up you know much of the film kind of revolves around this these thugs and this interaction just in time the tow truck arrives the driver begins to hook up the broken car but the thugs say you can't leave with this car until we get our money they tell the driver you can't drive away we got a thing going on here you know you're interrupting our deal our shakedown finally the driver takes the leader of the thugs aside and said man the world ain't supposed to work like this maybe you don't know that but this ain't the way it's supposed to be

[35 : 09] I'm supposed to be able to do my job without asking you if I can and that dude's supposed to be able to wait for his car without you ripping him off everything's supposed to be different than what it is right here that's the world we live in everything's supposed to be different than what it is right here everything's not yet what it's supposed to be I love the way now we're going to move back into Hebrews 2 right here I love the way the author of Hebrews introduces this psalm and describes where we're at and what God has done through Jesus Christ it says the author says that he has put everything in subjection to Jesus Christ he's left nothing outside his control that's what the Bible says all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus yet at present we do not see everything everything in subjection to him

God has put everything in subjection to him God has placed all things under his feet yet we do not see it now this this verse will get work done if you'll take it into your life disappointment and discouragement still plunder cancer still spreads little babies still fail to make it to full term strokes still cripple death still stings why why what are we supposed to do well we don't see it yet what the author of Hebrews if he could pull up a chair to us this morning he would say I know what you feel that things must be going out of control that this world must be going over the road over the guardrails into the pit well he's saying no no no all things are in subjection to him but you just don't see it yet so when it strikes the author would say you just don't see it don't be alarmed don't be dismayed don't be snared by fear and self pity and anger and bitterness don't be taken out by these things oh I hate those things don't let it happen you just don't see it yet but he would say sitting from his hair you do see this one who is made like you in every respect yet without sin you do see how God exalted him not to a throne on earth but to a throne on the cross so that he might rule over sin and death and for sinners rescue them from the sting of death forever that's what you do see so hold on to what you do see when you're gripped by what you don't see and until everything's the way it's supposed to be we have a job to do I think that's why that ends like this we must gather we must sing we must pray we must care we must labor we must serve we must proclaim the gospel of free grace that's what I proclaim to you this morning I cannot unpack all of what you do not see but I can declare with absolute certainty that there's an empty tomb because there's a risen savior and he came to deliver you from sin and death so he might deliver you to himself to restore relationship with God and to a place where everything is right all you have to do is come to him by faith and he will be yours a work and service of the crescendo of this hymn because worship does not yet fill the corners of the earth

John Piper said it helpfully missions is not the ultimate goal of the church worship is missions evangelism the ministry of the church exists because worship doesn't missions is a temporary necessity but worship abides forever one day soon the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea as Habakkuk prophesied until it does we have work to do that's what I invite you to take up on a sunny day in May 1780 the Connecticut house of representatives was in sessions the delegates were doing their work in the natural day of the light night then something happened suddenly right in the middle of the debate there was an eclipse of the sun and the delegates found themselves in darkness now this was before you had weather apps and alerts that told you this was going to happen some delegates thought it was the second coming of Christ a great clamor broke out people began to adjourn people wanted to pray people wanted to check on their families you never know who was raptured while you were in session they wanted to get ready for the coming of the Lord but the speaker of the house had a different idea he rose and spoke in wisdom and good faith and he said and I quote we are all upset by the darkness and some of us are afraid but the day of the Lord is either approaching or it is not if it is not there's no cause for adjournment and if the Lord is returning

I for one choose to be found doing my duty I therefore ask that candles be brought in I love that may God help us to live the same way let our all powerful God be exalted let us bow continually and heartfelt all serving him and heartfelt all let us pray father in heaven we cast ourselves onto you there is a river that makes glad the people of God that God is in the midst of her set the Lord at our right hands therefore we will not be shaken but we pray that you would work in and through these tensions and through this psalm and through your people that we might be a people that long for you to come long for you to put everything under subjection so that we can see and yet a people on a mission until then taking up our work and labor for your glory we pray all these things in the mighty name of

[42 : 43] Jesus Christ our Savior Amen Amen You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander Lead Pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee For more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at