

# The DNA of the Lord

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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](http://TrinityGraceAthens.com).

! Psalm 117. This is the Word of God. Praise the Lord!

All nations, extol Him, all peoples, for great is His steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord! May God bless the hearing and the preaching of His Word.

What is the eighth wonder of the world? That's what I'd like to know. Over the years, historians have identified the seven ancient wonders of the world.

[ 1 : 13 ] More recently, the seven modern wonders of the world, which is not too modern because it includes the Colosseum in Rome. But when I was a seventh grader, we were asked the question, if you had a chance to identify the eighth wonder of the world, what would you say it is?

I said, the eighth wonder of the world is my little brother. In proving why the eighth wonder of the world was my little brother, I wrote an essay for my seventh grade class on what my little brother Macaulay was like.

I explained how at the age of 10, he's three years younger than me, he was a relational magnet. I detailed how he was comfortable in his own skin and how easily he was able to make friends.

I included how he was a natural salesman. I told the story of one time my older brother and I were playing in a tennis tournament. Macaulay, then six years old at the time, was there with my parents watching.

And unbeknownst to them, he slipped out of the bleachers and began selling the free programs for a few dollars of cash.

[ 2 : 34 ] My dad found him at the back of the line selling programs. And I wrote an essay defending him to my class, why Macaulay Alexander is the eighth wonder of the world.

I wanted the world to know about him, to learn about him, and to get an idea of what he was like. So much of the Bible is written, not just for us to know things about God, but to know what God is like.

What is his character? What are his reflexes? What animates his heart? What does he love? What does he hate? And this morning we come to a psalm calling us to praise God for what he's like.

As we've gone through these past six psalms, we've been urged to praise God for his works and his word, for his greatness and his grace, for his salvation and his deliverance.

But this psalm urges us to praise God for who he is, to praise God for what he's like, to praise him for his character. It is a short psalm, the shortest psalm in the Bible.

[ 3 : 49 ] So I should have no trouble coming under time today. It is a simple psalm also. You see in verse one, it just includes a call to praise. Praise the Lord, all nations.

Extol him. You're saying the same thing twice. Praise him. Worship him. And then it says, telling us, so a call to praise. Then verse two is a cause for praise.

For great is his steadfast love toward us and the faithfulness of the Lord endures. Forever the cause is clear. For great is the Lord. But these things, the steadfast love of the Lord and his faithfulness are not just nice things about God.

They're powerful truths that run throughout Scripture uncovering who God is, what he's like, what drives all his plans and purposes for his people. And so this morning they reveal, even more than anything else, they reveal that God is unimaginably gracious.

Unimaginably gracious. And that's what Psalm 117 is calling us to do. And so this morning we're going to take a little bit of a zoom out picture of Psalm 117 to trace these themes throughout Scripture, hopefully land us in a place where we can appreciate all that they're saying in the Old

Testament, most importantly, in Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 07 ] You know, many Psalms fill us with gratefulness, thinking how kind of God to be gracious to me. This Psalm is driving towards something else. It's driving towards adoration, thinking what kind of God would be gracious to me.

In a word, praise the Lord, he gives more grace than you can imagine. Praise the Lord, he gives more grace than you can imagine. And so we're unpacking his unimaginable graciousness in three points.

The first is the foundation of God's unimaginable graciousness. The foundation of it. And if you would flip with me to Exodus 33, that's going to help guide us through this.

Before we dive into this verse, before we dive into these attributes of God, these aspects of his character, we have to scroll back. We have to move back in our Bible.

You know, much of the Bible, like I said, is seeking to show us what God is like. And the first major revelation of what God is like is in Exodus on the mountain to Moses.

[ 6 : 18 ] If you're not familiar with the story, we covered it a couple weeks ago, but God led his people out of slavery in Egypt with a strong and outstretched arm. God led them to the mountain.

He told Pharaoh, let my people go that they might worship me. So God led them to this mountain so that they might worship him. So he gathered them at the base of the mountain. He said, I want you to worship me there.

I want you to meet with me there, but you cannot touch it. Don't touch the mountain. Then God came down on the mountain.

There was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud and a loud trumpet. The mountain was wrapped in smoke. And Exodus 19 says, the mountain, the foundation of the world is set on the mountain.

The mountain began to tremble in the presence of God. Then God called Moses up, the leader, representative of the people on the mountain to speak with him.

[ 7 : 16 ] God called Moses up on the mountain so that he might speak to him and reveal the Ten Commandments. God gave him laws about justice and mercy, priests and sacrifices. God was telling them how they could continue to be his people, and yet he could continue to be a holy God that didn't lash out and take them out.

But you know the story that people got tired of waiting. More than that, they decided it would be a whole lot easier if they had a God who wasn't so terrifying and holy, so mysterious and hidden in the clouds.

They decided that it would be easier if they had a God they could hold on to. A God made just for them. And so they had Moses' brother Aaron make for them a golden calf.

Not yet 40 days after being delivered through the Red Sea and watching Pharaoh's men drown, they began to worship an idol.

But the focus is not on their idolatry. Psalm 115 hits idolatry very well. The focus of our passage and where this passage continues to go is God's response.

[ 8 : 36 ] Now after the Lord tells Moses, so God's up on the mountain speaking to Moses, he says, hey, down there they just played the fool. You know, they just did something really dumb.

And so the Lord tells Moses that they made a golden calf and began to worship him. And then Moses, and the Lord says to Moses, my wrath will soon consume them. I'm going to give them what they deserve.

And that's what we would expect of the God of Sinai, the God who comes down in thunder and lightning, a thick cloud and a loud trumpet. But Moses begins to press him further. And there's a conversation between Moses and the Lord.

Moses says, why are you angry? What will the Egyptians say if you bring us out here to strike us down? What about Abraham and Isaac?

What about your promises to Jacob? What about them? Then the Lord says, I won't consume them, but I'm not going to go with them.

[ 9 : 36 ] And Moses continues pleading with him. I wish we could trace every line of what he's pleading, but we can't. The Lord finally, shockingly relents.

The Lord turns from his anger. Now, it's hard for us to feel the force of this moment in Scripture. We have the rest of our Bible in our hands.

We have the rest of the story, but Moses did not. More importantly, many of us grow up a lot like Lindsay with his assumption that God will forgive. We take for granted his willingness to forgive.

One French philosopher went so far as to say, God will forgive. That's his job. But Moses would not have understood that at all. We might not be that bold.

We often live with the assumption that God will always forgive. That's one thing we can count on, but Moses did not and does not share that assumption. Moses knew their fate was sealed.

[10:36] Moses knew what they deserved. This is the God who's a consuming fire, who says, stand back from the mountain. Take your shoes off, who speaks with thunder. And then he says, I will not consume them.

And yet I will go with them. It reminds me of Peter. You remember Peter with the Lord when the Lord walks up on Peter and he's out fishing and he's been fishing all night. The Lord says, drop the net on the other side where you've been fishing all night and see what you catch.

And he pulls up all these fish. And immediately Peter, you know, we love Peter because he's the first one out of everything. And he just jumps out of the boat, swims ashore, falls on his feet and says, depart from me for I'm a sinful man.

What kind of God would be gracious to me? And so Moses is stunned and floored. Look in Exodus 33, 18. He says, after that, he says, please show me your glory.

Please show me. Now Moses was not saying, give me some goosebumps, you know. Let me have an experience. Moses was saying, show me your glory. He said, I don't understand you.

[11:53] I don't understand how you could be so good and so forgiving. Show me more of you. Show me who you really are. Show me your glory.

And look at how the Lord responds in Exodus 33, 19, second half. He says, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

I'll be gracious to whom I'll be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Now that's a bit unhelpful at first glance.

Off-putting, like withdrawing a handshake. When someone reaches out a hand, he's asking to see who the Lord is. And the first thing the Lord says is, I'll do what I want to do. What he's saying is, the first thing you must know about me is that I show grace and mercy when I want.

The first thing you must know about me is that I am completely free. Just like we read a couple weeks ago, Psalm 115, 3. The Lord is in the heavens. He does what he pleases. I am God. I do what I please.

[13:06] The Lord is saying to Moses, very important for us to hear, it's great that you prayed. It's great that you pleaded for me to change my mind. But that is not why I have given you grace and mercy.

I have not given grace and mercy because anything you have done or anything you will do, the Lord is saying my grace is not like backyard football.

There are a few things worse for an uncoordinated kid like myself than waiting to be picked in backyard football. And that's what we can begin to think.

That's kind of the way the Lord works. He kind of sizes us up and sees if we're a good addition to the team, a good free agent to add. But that's not the way the Lord is. God's grace is not like that. God does not look at anything you've done to decide whether to be merciful and gracious. If he did look at anything you have done, even your response to the gospel with your free will, grace would no longer be grace.

[14:04] And even worse, God would be a legalist. God is not, grace is not a prize for the wise, a reward for the do-gooders, or a blessing for the obedient.

It's a free gift to the undeserved. And it can only be a free gift if God is sovereign and free to give it to whomever he pleases. So the foundation of God's unimaginable graciousness that we're called to praise in Psalm 117 is sovereign freedom.

His sovereign freedom. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. This is not the God that you can control.

I will have mercy on him. I have mercy. Paul takes up this very verse to defend divine election in Romans 9, when he says, So then, it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

Romans 9, 16. J. Gresham Machen said, The very center and core of the whole Bible is the doctrine of the grace of God.

[15:25] The grace of God, which depends not one whit upon anything that is in man, but is absolutely undeserved, resistless, and sovereign.

You probably have some questions in your head that I don't have all the time to unwrap, but you get the idea. The very first thing God reveals to Moses is that God is sovereign and free.

Point two, the fountain of God's unimaginable graciousness. The foundation, now, the fountain, the foundation of God's unimaginable graciousness is his sovereign freedom.

If that is all we knew about God, we should be filled with terror. Because it would be easy to paint him in some pretty harsh terms in the way he relates to the world.

But that is not all that we know. The story continues. The Lord invites Moses after the people sin with the making of the golden calf.

[16:32] The Lord invites Moses back up onto the mountain where he reveals what he's like. And this passage in Scripture is truly spectacular. It's the fullest revelation of who God is in the entire Old Testament.

It is completely unique. There's nothing like it in all of Scripture. The Lord tells Moses to bring a new set of tablets because he's going to renew the covenant.

And then the Lord descends. Look in Exodus 34, verse 5. The Lord descended in a cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sins, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. And Moses quickly bowed his head to the earth, toward the earth and worshiped. The Lord is revealing what he's like.

[17:51] The Lord's revealing to Moses what he's going to continue to be like. He begins, The Lord, the Lord, nowhere else in Scripture is the divine name repeated.

The Lord, Yahweh, the Lord, the Lord, calling attention to not just truths about him, but to who he is in his essence.

And the Lord continues and describes himself. It's here that we have to keep this context in mind.

Moses knows who the Lord is. He saw him in the burning bush. He said, I am who I say I am.

Lord, Moses knows the Lord is Yahweh. What Moses doesn't know is how this God could be gracious to the guilty. What Moses doesn't know is how this God will respond when they fail again.

Again, and the Lord is telling him that at his core, what drives all his plans and purposes is an unimaginable graciousness. He says, in effect, in these titles, I will give more grace to you than you can imagine.

[19:01] So he says, he lists out five characteristics unpacking how he will respond to their sin and failure. He says, I will be merciful and gracious. This pair of words is repeated in verse 18 and paired throughout the Old Testament.

These words describe someone quick to forgive. Someone on their tippy toes, ready to forgive, ready to help, ready to intervene at any moment.

They describe a friend who you're afraid to tell something bad has happened because you know they'll drop everything to come and help. Inconveniencing whatever's on their calendar.

That is who the Lord is. He's merciful and gracious. It continues, he's slow to anger. Not only is the Lord quick to forgive, he's slow to anger.

This word comes from a word meaning long of nose. But it's not a reference to the Lord's face. It's a reference to the length of his patience. The Lord is long-suffering.

[19:59] He's not quick-tempered. He's not short-fused. He's slow to anger. If you've ever known someone with whom you have to, around whom you must walk on eggshells because you don't know how they will respond, you know how terrifying, unsettling, and scary that can be.

Well, that thought must perish with the Lord. Amen. He doesn't smack back after repeated provocation.

He's long-suffering. This is who the Lord is. When you fail, he's merciful and gracious. When you fail, he's slow to anger. That's what he's saying to Moses.

But not only that, he's abounding in steadfast love. You saw that in our verse. A great in steadfast love. Not only is he quick to forgive and slow to anger, he pursues us with an all-in, untiring love.

This word hesed is translated in numerous ways in the Old Testament. Loving kindness, mercy, love, kindness, unending love, steadfast love, though, is probably the best translation because it captures this combination of loyalty and love.

[ 21 : 21 ] Loyalty and love. And he's abounding in steadfast love. He's great. Almost, I mean, just repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, you go and search steadfast love this week, it often comes with the, the adverb, the adjective, great, abounding.

Because it's not enough to say he's steadfast in love, he's abounding in it. Steadfast love is God's loving commitment to keep showing mercy and grace to his people no matter how many times they fail.

So verse 7 says, he keeps steadfast love to a thousand generations. Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. All three words the Old Testament uses for sin, he says he forgives. That's what steadfast love, when you fail, sin, stray, steadfast love remains. And so, he's abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Faithfulness naturally accompanies steadfast love because love that is loyal is faithful. What he's saying to Moses is when you fail, when you stumble, God keeps his promise.

[ 22 : 28 ] 2 Timothy 2 says, when we are faithless, God remains faithful. So what he's saying, the foundation, or the fountain of God's unimaginable graciousness that we're called to praise in Psalm 117 is his character.

So if, in fact, the foundation is his sovereign freedom to decide to have mercy upon whom he has mercy and to be gracious to whom he is gracious, he gives it out as a free gift, the fountain that it comes from cannot be from man or from anything that man has done.

The fountain comes from his heart, his amazingly, unimaginably gracious heart. What he's saying to Moses is the fact that I didn't strike you down after you made the golden calf is not a random occurrence.

It's not an irregularity. It's not an aberration. It is who I am. It is how I act. It's how I work. It's what drives all his plans and purposes.

It is his DNA. That's what I've titled this message, The DNA of the Lord, of Yahweh. Psalm 23 captures this powerfully.

[ 23 : 45 ] Psalm 23, 6 says, Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

We hear this word follow and we think, oh, that's great, steadfast love. It's lagging behind, cleaning up the wreckage, mopping up my errors.

But that doesn't capture what it means there. Surely steadfast love and goodness shall follow me. The follow is more active. It means to pursue. God is not lagging behind you with steadfast love. God is pursuing you with it. John Piper describes this image as a highway patrol chasing us to do us good.

[ 24 : 52 ] Imagine yourself driving nonchalantly down the interstate when all of a sudden you see the red lights flashing in your rear view mirror. If you're anything like me, that's an immediately sinking feeling.

Had too many run-ins with the police. They do good work, but they still scare me. Got in so much trouble as a kid. That sinking feeling. Well, imagine if you're in that scenario you get that sinking feeling and for some crazy reason you make the absurd decision to drive faster.

To press the gas pedal instead of the brake. And there's probably a part of us that always wants to do that too. But to press the gas pedal. You roar down the freeway then at 100 miles an hour to try to get away from the highway patrol.

And so you're racing down and he's chasing down after you. Before long your conscience that God created for you placed in your heart kicks in. You begin to feel guilty.

You remember that if you get one more ticket your insurance will climb. Your license may even be revoked for you know well running away from an officer.

[ 25 : 59 ] And that you won't be able to take that vacation with your family. Eventually your car simply cannot go fast enough and the highway patrol forces you over. You sit there trembling with fear as he walks to the window.

But as the highway patrolman gets out of the car a huge smile is on his face. He said hey man so glad I finally caught up with you.

You left your wallet at the hotel last night. And I had to get you. I had to chase you. They said to chase you down to give you your wallet back. I just wanted to give you your wallet back.

And you know what there's one more thing I gotta give you. There was a drawing this morning for the sweepstakes you registered for. Not one of those for a timeshare thing where you gotta sit and

endure the testimony.

This is a sweepstake for a vacation for wherever you want. Your choice for your family. All you have to do is call in. Well that's what steadfast love and faithfulness is.

[ 27 : 00 ] He's not a God who's cold and hurt. He's a God who's pursuing you chasing you down to bless you to show you steadfast love and mercy despite your sin and failure.

God will not stop giving you more grace than you can imagine. And so threading throughout the Bible are these twin engines of steadfast love and faithfulness that define all his relations with his people.

When the people want to remind themselves of who God is they return here. They say let's go back to Exodus 34 let's see what the Lord has shown us there.

Nehemiah 9 when they rebuild the temple they say you are a God ready. Oh you're ready to forgive gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and did not forsake the people of old.

Psalm 103 the Lord is merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Psalm 25 this will preach all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithful.

[ 28 : 03 ] I don't know how many times I have prayed that all the paths Lord this path right now is a path of steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimony.

So if we flip back to Psalm 117 he says praise the Lord for great is his steadfast love toward us and his faithfulness endures forever.

Praise him for who he's like. Yes for we praise him for his word and his works for his creation for his deliverance but we praise him most wonderfully praise him most powerfully most passionately for what he is like.

What kind of God would be this gracious to me. Point three the fulfillment of God's unimaginable graciousness.

The fulfillment did you notice that this Psalm and hopefully you're back there now this Psalm calls all nations to praise him for what he's like.

[ 29 : 20 ] praise the Lord all nations praise the Lord all peoples every tribe tongue and nation should praise the Lord for what he is like.

But that Exodus 34 was just for his people. But the Psalmist is grasping on to something incredible here and calling all people to praise him for what he's like for his covenant name.

With his covenant people beginning in Genesis 12 God makes clear that his blessings are not just for his people but for all the people of the world. On the mountain God commits to Moses to be a God who's merciful and gracious slow to anger abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness to the people of Israel and he does.

But again and again we see in the prophets especially God makes clear that his blessings are not just for his people. One of the best examples of this is the story of Jonah.

Now Jonah was called to preach in Nineveh. That would be kind of like being called to preach in Gainesville. Called to preach there the capital city of Assyria the ones that have been smacking him around.

[ 30 : 35 ] And a bitter enemy of the people of God he refuses to go and the big fish swallows him. Jonah comes to his descents and decides to go. When he arrives in Nineveh he barely even starts to preach.

Nineveh's big city barely even enters the gates. Starts preaching the whole city repents. All these wicked Assyrians repent. Jonah gets angry and look at why he gets angry.

Look at Jonah 4.2. He prayed to the Lord and said oh Lord is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? That that is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish for I knew that you I knew it I knew you were going to be like this you're God gracious gracious God and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster that relenting from disaster starts to trace to the prophets because this God who's so great somehow is going to find a way to relent from disaster for all people and so he does with the wicked people of Nineveh but the fulfillment of God's unimaginable graciousness does not come until Jesus Christ the gospel of John begins very dramatically in the beginning was the word and the word was God and the word was with God in the beginning then it tells us of the son of God the second person of the Trinity became man and in doing so unveils all that

Moses wanted to see look in John 1 which we had for you he says and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth for the law was given to Moses grace and truth came to Jesus Christ no one has ever seen God the only God who is at the father's side he has made him known now in that little cluster of verses there's lots of comparisons between Exodus and Jesus between Moses and the Lord Jesus Christ and he says we have seen his glory that's what Moses prayed to see right please show me your glory well we have seen his glory no one has seen God John 17 or 118 says the only God who's at the father's side he has made him known Moses did not see God but Jesus Christ has made the invisible God known so we've seen him but notice the verses in the middle the Lord was given the law was given through Moses grace and truth through Jesus Christ those words are repeated from verse 14 we've seen his glory glory is of the only son from the father full of grace and truth these words grace and truth are John's translation of steadfast love and faithfulness that is what

John is saying the Lord this one Jesus Christ is steadfast love and faithfulness so the fulfillment of God's unimaginable graciousness to his people is Jesus Christ he is full of grace and truth he is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness and from his fullness we all receive grace upon grace not merely by the appearance of him on the earth but because he pays the penalty for sin once for all so that all we who know him might know and know now and forever grace Jesus Christ full of steadfast love and faithfulness who wraps us up into a covenant tighter than the covenant he made with Moses a covenant sealed not with the blood of bulls and goats but with the blood of Jesus this grace is for everyone

[ 34 : 35 ] John 1 just a few verses before that he says the true light which gives light to everyone what's coming into the world he came to his own that means his own people the Jewish people his own people did not receive him they're the ones who hung him on a tree but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God and so we offer you Jesus Christ an old story from Scotland a man named Samuel Rutherford he was preaching and like most preachers wanders around a bit may land on may find a good pearl here and there he was preaching one morning and got to the gospel of Jesus Christ man stood up in the back and said hold ye there minister hold ye there in so many ways that is our desire to hold you there because the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord is revealed most clearly and most wonderfully in the Lord

Jesus Christ who who who is rich but became poor so that for your sakes you might become rich that you might have life in his name and have forgiveness in his name and so come to Jesus and receive mercy and grace to help in your time of need so praise the Lord he gives more grace than we can imagine praise the Lord all nations extol him all peoples everybody in this room wherever your background is you can extol the Lord for how he's revealed himself in Jesus Christ for great is his steadfast love toward us and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever let us pray father in heaven we offer ourselves completely to you we thank you for how you have revealed yourself father we might often assume that it is your job to forgive but the word of scripture is better though it wasn't your job you took it upon yourself to forgive not by sweeping things under the rug but by driving them into the hands and feet into the soul of Jesus

Christ cancelling the record of sin and debt stood against us with its demands nailing it to the cross forever we thank you we praise you we rest in you this day in Christ's name 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