King David agrees. In Psalm 145, David describes all the ways that God is *dope*. Observing the Lord’s character and God’s awe-inspiring mighty works, David (and ultimately all of God’s creation) offers enthusiastic, joyful praise to God. “I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever” (v. 1). David promises to bless God every day and to sing God’s praises forever (v. 2). He asserts: “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; [God’s] greatness is unsearchable” (v. 3).

**God’s character.** David outlines some of the characteristics that make God great, and for which we should offer praise. God is good and righteous (v. 7). God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (v. 8). God is just and compassionate (v. 9). Our God is renowned for these characteristics (v. 7) which God shares “over all that [God] has made” (v. 9). Thus, concludes David, “All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you” (v. 10). God’s people will speak of God’s glory and of God’s eternal kingdom, making known to all peoples the wonder and mercy and love and great deeds of our God. Just as God’s kingdom is everlasting, so shall God’s fame and our praise endure “throughout all generations” (v. 13a).

**God’s works.** But these exceptional attributes are not all that David praises. God is also “faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds” (v. 13b). What God says, God will do for God is true to God’s word. God backs up those words with mighty deeds of power and love. God supports the weak and lifts the downtrodden (v. 14). God feeds the hungry (v. 15). God provides for every living thing (v. 16). God upholds justice and offers gentleness (v. 17). God hears and is near when we call on God (v. 18). God saves those who put their trust in him (v. 19). God watches over those who love him (v. 20). For all these traits and all these works, God is to be praised.

**I believe.** What is interesting, here, is that David lists God’s qualities and works but offers no explanation. In other psalms, David mention specific events where God intervened, like the flood or the Exodus; but here, David states these qualities of God as self-evident truths in which we are invited to rejoice. Without validation for these claims, David simply says, “this is what I believe about God.”

This is an important assertion in our modern age where competing voices vie for our attention and our loyalty. It reminds me of an old Peter, Paul, and Mary song called “Hymn.” The person in the song remembers going to church as a child. Now, as an adult, he speaks to God about visiting some Sunday services. In some churches, the singer says, “They talked a lot about You / And they spoke about Your giving.” When they passed the offering plate, there was just enough time for the singer to write a note, “And all it said was I believe in You.” Further on, the song mentions hearing conversations “where they mentioned Your existence / And the fact that You had been replaced by Your assistants.” Invited to comment, all the singer said was, “I believe in You.”

I suspect the man in the song would resonate with David’s descriptions of God in Psalm 145. This psalm says a lot about God, but this psalm is not a study in church doctrine or a quest for more understanding. This is not a plea for God to save or feed or to be more self-revealing. This is simply a way of saying, “I believe in you, and I will praise you!”

**Our witness**. Today, you are being asked to say what you believe and to whom you will give your praise. Saying that you believe in God is enough to make you a child of God. Saying that you believe God’s Son Jesus died to forgive your sins and rose again to offer you new life is enough to guarantee a place in God’s kingdom. Saying that you believe that God’s Holy Spirit is working in you is enough to get you started on a life of discipleship.

Such statements are an important starting point, but they are not the whole of Christian faith and life. The Christian life is about serving one another, and using our gifts and talents to help the people whom God loves (which is everyone). It is a lifetime commitment, forever and ever, and it is a life that often runs counter to the values of the world. The Christian life is tough, and it will demand our whole selves, 100% of the time; but this kind of life is what the apostle Paul calls “the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

In other words, the God who is *dope* (excellent), calls us to live and love as God does, following the model of Jesus Christ, relying on the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit to be as *dope* as God. Finding out how you can serve this Dope God throughout your life is your mission. That mission will take different forms for each of you. That mission will take you to different places where you will encounter different people. That mission may even surprise you.

Near Tacoma, WA there is a worshipping community called Dope Church (no kidding!). Dope Church’s mission is to reach out to their neighbors who struggle with addiction, poverty, and exploitation. Every Saturday, Dope Church members meet in a motel room in one of the worst parts of the city, an area known for high levels of poverty, sex trafficking, drug activity, and addiction. Part of Dope Church’s mission is to “build trust with [people] through faithful, loving presence right where they are, in their best moments and their darkest hour. We pray as the Holy Spirit knits us together as family we will experience hope, healing, and whole-life transformation. Dope Church is a…place for the most broken people in our city to belong and hear good news…the community of Dope Church exists to love and show grace freely, in the knowledge that Jesus’ grace and good news truly do change lives.”

One member shared the story of meeting “a man who was disoriented and ashamed. He had been high since Monday (this was on Saturday) and was coming down. He needed to get back home to Bremerton (40 miles away) and didn’t know what he was going to do. He had no money and when we asked him if he had eaten anything he said he had some candy that morning. We took him to get a sandwich and just sit with him to hear his story. We told him about the gospel, about Jesus’ fierce love for him, the sacrifice made on the cross, how this gift God offers us free and doesn’t require anything from us, not even getting clean and sober. His jaw literally dropped. He had never heard this before. He truly couldn’t believe that a God who was perfect and holy could possibly offer his son to redeem his people and not ask for something in return. Grace was too much for him to understand.”

God’s grace is too much for any of us to understand. But God’s grace is at the heart of Psalm 145, a self-evident truth for those who can say, “I believe in you.” God’s grace is what transforms lives, changing hopelessness into hopefulness, and turning negative things into positive things. Our God is *dope*! Love and serve this most-excellent God well!

Prayer: O Lord, how awesome You are! We are so grateful for this day when we can take a step deeper into our relationship with You. We thank You for loving all of us enough to send Your Son into the world, not to condemn us; but that through Him, we might be saved. Lord, we give You our hearts, our minds, and our souls for these things belong to You. God of Grace, you knew us before we were born. You called us at Baptism to be witnesses of your love for us in Christ. Prepare our hearts and minds today to welcome the gifts of your Holy Spirit, that we may become everything you desire us to be as your sons and daughters in Christ. We make this prayer to you in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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**God is Dope!**

Confirmation Sunday, May 16, 2021 Psalm 145

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

It was just about three years ago, at the beginning of 7th grade confirmation class, when I heard a truly profound description of God’s character. We discussed the limitations of our language and how inadequate it is to sum up all who God is. I asked the students to describe God in a single word. They said that God is love, peace, joy, creativity, and forgiveness. All terrific answers! Then one student (let’s call him William!) said: “God is dope!” Not being cool or hip or up to date on the latest urban slang, I did not know exactly what that meant. Was this student saying something good or bad about God?

So, I did a little research. The word “dope” comes from the Dutch word *doop*, meaning a “thick sauce,” something akin to gravy. *Dope* can also be an insult, describing someone who is foolish. Think of Dopey in Disney’s 1937 film classic *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Like the Dutch sauce, Dopey was thick and often a little sticky. Know what else is thick and sticky? Opium, referred to as *dope* in the 1880s. *Dope* became a slang term for drugs in the 19th-20th centuries, especially morphine, cocaine, heroin, and marijuana (“smoking dope”). *Dope* spread into the hip-hop lexicon when clean-living rapper Spoonie Gee cautioned us: “You better look alive, not like you take dope” (*Spoonin Rap*, 1979). In the 2000s, a *dope* is someone drugged out and a *dope city* is a neighborhood where drugs are prevalent.

Now I was getting worried. Did this student mean that God is thick and sticky? Or that God is foolish? Or that God is whacked out on drugs? I dug deeper into the etymology of this word, and luckily, fortunately, gratefully found one more definition.

In the 1980s, rappers used the word *dope* to mean “excellent.” The process of turning a word with negative connotations into positive ones is called “inversion.” Like saying that something is “bad” or “sick,” both meaning “very good.” *Dope* means anything that is good in life: great news, a cool skateboard trick, a nice sports car, a stylish pair of shoes, etc. So, I was getting the idea that this student meant to say something good about God. God is excellent! It turns out, as far as words go, *dope* is a pretty dope word to describe God!