

SESSION 2:

**MOTHERHOOD IN THE
GRAND PLAN OF GOD:
NURTURING LIFE IN
THE FACE OF DEATH**

REVIEW

Welcome to Session 2 of *Missional Motherhood*! Let's begin by reviewing your personal study from last week.

What would you say is the goal of motherhood?

How would you define God's glory?

What is the connection between God's plan to glorify Himself and your motherhood?

How do you glorify God through your ministry to others each day?

What "mission statements" do you make each day?

How does Jesus' mission statement (Matt. 28:19-20) affect how you mother or nurture others?

How is motherhood a part of the priority of reaching the nations for Christ?

Use the space below to take notes on the Session 2 video.

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DISCUSS

Use the following questions to debrief the teaching from the Session 2 video.

Does God's big story make sense to you? Explain.

How do we see God's plan to redeem humankind from the beginning of Scripture?

Why is seeing God's big picture so important to missional motherhood?

How do you see God's heart to rescue and redeem humankind throughout the Old Testament?

How did the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ change everything?

CLOSE

Lead each person in your group to choose a partner. Direct the group members to share with their partners the name of someone who needs to better understand God's big story. Take time to pray specifically for each person.

PERSONAL STUDY

ONE

Have you ever looked at a verse from the Bible and thought to yourself, *Ha! There's no way I can do that!* Here's one that I've wrestled with over the years:

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

COLOSSIANS 3:2

At first glance, this one verse seems utterly out of touch with those of us who have to, you know, pay attention to things on earth, like chasing curious toddlers, returning phone calls, adjusting quarterly budgets, watching the pot on the stove, and shifting lanes while driving. How are we supposed to set our minds on things that are above when the things on the earth are so urgent and necessary?

Well, if we only take one Bible verse at a time and give each verse just a cursory glance, we won't arrive at any conclusions that the Author intended. To best understand the meaning of a passage of Scripture, we must understand its context.

The context for Colossians 3:2 is the rest of the argument, the rest of the letter, the rest of the New Testament, and the rest of the Bible. In other words, because this verse is in the Bible, it is not utterly out of touch, but rather, it is able to make us wise for salvation, is God-breathed, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. All this is so that we may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Colossians 3:2 is there for the good of our souls.

So let's expand the context of that verse a bit. There's a whole grand story behind Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:2, and we need to know that story in order to interpret the passage properly.

In the Session 2 video, I shared with you a super-speedy Bible overview. I had several goals in doing that, one being to help establish and/or remind us of the big picture of Scripture. When Paul wrote his Letter to the Colossians (and his other letters, too!) he often reminded his readers of the big picture. In fact, if you look for it, you'll notice the biblical writers established context in different ways—through listing genealogies, mentioning their historical time period, or referring to things past or “things to come.”

The first few sentences in Colossians 3 are a brilliant example of this big picture reminder.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

*In Colossians 3:1-4, what is Paul saying about:
The past?*

The present?

The future?

It's so refreshing to step back to see the bigger picture, isn't it? It makes exhortations like “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” resound with joy-filled simplicity and reliable sensibility. Since we have died and risen with Christ, our lives are hidden with Him, and He's coming back for us, then of course we want to (and ought to) fill our minds with thoughts of Him! Even in the midst of our urgent, earth-based tasks, our minds

can be preoccupied with Jesus—the beauty of His character, the astonishing mercy of what He’s done for us, His patient work in the world today, and the mind-boggling reality of what He has promised to do in the future.

There are no more sweeter thoughts to entertain as we go about our everyday ministry of motherhood than thoughts of Jesus and the reality that is now in play because of Him.

What are some of the urgent, earth-based tasks that tend to overwhelm your thoughts?

How does this Scripture passage refresh your perspective on those tasks?

How would you communicate this refreshed perspective to another woman who has asked you, “How do you do what you do?”

Can you think of other Scripture passages that you would like to study further, specifically investigating them in light of their larger context? Who is someone you could study with?

The reality that is now in play because of Christ is the permanent, irreversible reality in which we live. And that is a mightily encouraging thought.

How will thoughts of the faithfulness of Jesus and the exciting prospect of His future grace change the way you see the rest of your day today?

Can you think of one or two other ladies in your life who could use the same encouragement? Write them a note or give them a call.

MISSIONAL MOTHERHOOD

TWO

I think we mothers and spiritual mothers tend to feel like we are pretty central. I'm not saying that as a put-down, but as an observation of my own life and the lives of the women I know. When I say that we feel central, part of the reason is that sometimes we are, literally, central. Think of a swirling group of kindergarteners who flock to their teacher when the bell rings. Think of the young ladies who watch the doors of your church building, scanning the crowd for "her" to arrive—the older mother hen who mothers the single women. Think of the weary new moms who gravitate toward the older moms with questions, concerns, and prayer requests.

My point is this: the people in our lives know where to go for food, protection, and help. They know where to go to grow. They come to you, mothering woman, for provision. No pressure, right? Thankfully, we know that God is the One who is faithful to provide what they need. As nurturers in the middle of all these needs, we get to be the conduits of God's grace. That's what He designed us to be. So, of course, mothering women tend to feel "central."

My hope in reminding us of the big story is that we would see we are not the center of it. God is. I've prayed that you and the women you are gathering with would feel appropriately small, dependent, de-centralized, and yet, in a God-centered way, significant. God created motherhood for His glory, and that's something worth giving your life away for—a thousand moments a day in all those tiny ways, or in one final moment.

As we talked about earlier, the God who existed before time did not create anything meaningless. Women nurturing life in the face of death couldn't possibly be "just" moms. As Christ becomes the center of your life, God's pattern is played out perfectly, and His promises are fulfilled. We're going to keep pounding this drum every week: Missional motherhood is about Jesus.

Another of my prayers is that through the Old Testament overview you would see the grand plan of God to save a people for Himself, and in seeing God's heart of mercy, that your own heart would respond in worship.

Thinking back to the overview in the Session 2 video, what stood out as the major themes in the storyline?

Was there a theme in particular that really made you think of, piqued your curiosity about, or warmed your heart's affections for our great God? Explain.

How did Adam and Eve, the patriarchs, and the children of Israel respond to God when they realized (or failed to realize) that they were a part of God's big story?

What thoughts come to your mind when you think of how God has written you into His story?

Imagine a 4-year-old child has just asked you the question, "Why did God make people?" What would you say?

An exciting part of my conversations with my neighbors from around the world begins with a statement like this: "Christianity is probably not about what you think it is about." Then to confirm that statement, I ask them what they think Christianity is about. Most often they respond that our faith is just like theirs—just another way to be a good person. At this point I say, "Actually, Christianity says that none of us are good. But, there is one Man in the history of the world who was good." If they are curious to hear more, then I share with them God's big story, starting from the beginning. It may not be feasible to get through the whole story in one sitting, but you can certainly get the conversation going.

Who are the children, young women, and friends God has placed in your life who may be eager to hear this big story? What about the ones who may not be eager to hear it?

Pray that God would give you eyes to see opportunities to tell about the wonderful things He has done.

I pray that as you listened to the overview, you got a glimpse of the unified message of the Bible, and that there arose in you an insatiable hunger for it. It's impossible for us to dig deep into the whole story of Scripture during this six-session study. Therefore, if we want to see our lives transformed by the Word of God, then we need to be fed by His Word every day. And not just in little snack bites. We all know what happens when we forgo a real meal and say, "Oh, I'll just grab a little bag of pretzels for lunch." At least, I know what happens whenever I do that! I soon end up rummaging around in the cupboards for five more little snacks because I'm still hungry. Feasting on God's Word is more like an endlessly long and limitlessly exciting buffet line. You're not going to get to the bottom of the proverbial bag and be starving for more. God will feed you and keep feeding you. When we dive deep into God's Word, with the help of the Holy Spirit, transformation of our lives is certain. Everything in our lives is affected—the way we read the news headlines, the way we relate to our husbands if we are married, the way we pray, the way we mother our children, and the way we reach out to our neighbors.

Which passages in the Old Testament are you eager to study more closely? Why?

I hope that as you listened to the overview of God's story, you clearly heard Jesus' invitation to make much of Him in all of life and in all the world. Jesus is progressively reestablishing His kingdom in our world that is rife with sin and chaos—His kingdom is coming! But as busy women, the approaching kingdom is obscured by all of the details of our days and nights. Our vision is clouded

by the work of getting everyday things done every single day, putting out fires, and looking ahead to short-term goals. But all of these things are wrapped up in eternity—all of our work is meaningful because we do it as unto the Lord Jesus.

Thinking of the everyday ministry of motherhood as worship may be a new concept for some. For others, it may be an oft-forgotten fact. We all need reminders. In our first personal study time this week, we looked briefly at Colossians 3:1-4, where Paul reminded the church of the big picture. In the middle of that chapter there is a list of “ands” for us to remember to do (vv. 14-17). Paul sounded like a wise and concerned father, making sure his children don’t forget what they need to know before they walk out the front door and face the world. At the end of his list of “ands,” we read this catch-all reminder:

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

COLOSSIANS 3:17

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 THREE TIMES TO GET A GRASP ON THE FLOW OF THE TEXT. Based on what you know about God’s mission to glorify Himself in all the earth, how do all of these nitty-gritty details of Christian behavior fit into the big picture? How does Colossians 3:17 fit into the big picture?

We all need reminders! What will you do today to remind yourself (or remind a friend) of the mercy of God displayed in His desire to use our missional motherhood to glorify Himself?

THREE

In the Session 1 video, I hinted at the foundational concept that we are God's image bearers. Then, in the second video, I expanded it into a few more sentences. Now, in this personal study, we're going to look more deeply at what the Bible says about God's creation of image bearers.

Before God created everything, there were no created things. The triune God existed before and outside of His creation—perfectly happy, in perfect fellowship, and needing nothing. And then, God spoke. Out of nothing, God created everything we can see and everything we can't see. God's creation was good.

On the sixth day, God fashioned living, breathing images of Himself—male and female He created them. I know you may be very familiar with the text we're about to discuss, but refreshers are always helpful!

READ GENESIS 1. *Then read verses 26-28 three times. What stands out as distinct in God's creation of man? List 5 observations (or more!).*

NOW READ GENESIS 2 IN ITS ENTIRETY THREE TIMES. *This is a more detailed account of the creation of man and woman. What stands out as distinct in God's creation of man according to this detailed account? List 5 observations (or more!).*

COMPARE GENESIS 2:7 AND GENESIS 2:19. *What differences do you notice between the man and the other living creatures?*

This is curious, isn't it? The Creator stooped down to scoop up some earth, personally craft His own image, and animate His image bearer with His own breath. The other living creatures were formed out of the ground (Gen. 2:19), but the man, we're told, was the one in whom God breathed His breath of life. We should not think of God's "breath" as just oxygen. We breathe oxygen. But so do cheetahs, blue whales, slugs, and parakeets. Did the animals receive God's breath, too? No, they just have zoo breath. The word in Hebrew here is *ruah*, which can denote *spirit*, *wind*, and *breath* (depending on the context). To summarize the majority of the explanations given by biblical scholars, this *ruah* that God breathed into the first man is the same *ruah* that resurrected the lifeless bodies in the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezek. 37:9-10), and the same *ruah* which Jesus breathed on His disciples when He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). God's breath alone made Adam "a living soul" (1 Cor. 15:45, NASB). We are not fully alive unless the Spirit is in us. The creation account shows that it is God who gives life to our souls.

Adam and Eve were image bearers of the uncreated Creator, not of any other created thing. *Imaging* (in the verb sense of the word) is living and acting in a certain way because of the image we bear. Imaging God, then, is living in a way where we bear and reflect God's image. In layman's terms, to image something means to resemble and represent. The Reformed confessions describe being made in God's image as being like Him in His knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.¹ In addition to the "being" aspect of imaging God, Genesis describes a functional aspect of imaging God. You may have heard the term "vice regent" applied to Adam and Eve. It was like God put tiny statue-like representations of Himself in the middle of the garden in the middle of the world in the middle of the creation He made.

The image of God has been the subject of many scholarly discussions and doctoral dissertations. So, let's take it up for discussion, too! In your own words, what does it mean to be made in the image of God? (Although the Bible doesn't really give us a cut-and-dry definition, look at Genesis 1:26-28 and note the clues given in this image-bearing creation declaration. You can also read Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 for further study.)

God fashioned living, breathing images of Himself—male and female He created them. The man and the woman lived in the garden God created for them, and they were given a purpose. Their purpose was to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, multiply into more godly image bearers, and subdue the wilderness beyond the garden. In doing so, God's children would expand the dwelling place of God across the entire earth.

Based on your reflections on this passage in Genesis, what is God's revealed purpose for our motherhood?

So many things we do in our mothering/nurturing work fall under this umbrella—living by God's Word, multiplying image bearers (procreation, adoption, discipleship), and thereby expanding the dwelling place of God (ie., the Spirit-indwelted body of Christ). You could probably make a list of a thousand things that God enables you to do in this regard! But for the sake of time, just list 10.

Have you thought about those listed tasks or responsibilities in that way before? Have you ever considered that God is enabling you to do them because it is according to His purpose in creating you? Explain.

How does this view encourage you today? How will it change the way you go about these tasks and responsibilities in the future?

While we may be in agreement mentally with what Scripture says about motherhood, we all have “functional purpose statements” for our mothering work. In other words, we say one thing and we do another. “Yes, Lord! You created us for Your glory,” we agree. But we’re sinners, so we need regular reminders to walk in repentance toward God. One of the common sin struggles that nurturing women tend to have is that while we may agree that our role as nurturing women is to multiply God’s image bearers through procreation, adoption, and discipleship, we treat those ministries as opportunities to multiply our own image. We work hard to exalt ourselves through our children and disciples when we ought to labor for God’s glory instead.

Considering the selfish tendencies that cause our mothering work to go awry from God’s purpose, are there things you need to repent of? Meditate on Psalm 139, asking God to search your heart and see if there is any way in you that grieves His Holy Spirit. Ask Him to lead you in the way everlasting.

1. Westminster Shorter Catechism (WORDSearch Corp, 2003), Q.10.

FOUR

So far in our personal study this week we've reflected on God's big story as told in the Old Testament. Then, in Colossians 3, we looked briefly at God's calling for us to live according to the new creation that Jesus inaugurated through His death and resurrection. In the last section, we looked at God's design for humanity and His purpose for us according to Genesis 1 and 2.

The concept we're trying to dig into this week is how the facts of God's creation and re-creation informs our worldview, changes our minds, thrills our hearts, and strengthens our hands for the everyday ministry of motherhood. It bears repeating that we need to know about God's creation design and His new creation work in our lives through the gospel. We're pressing in to the Bible to see a distinctly Christian perspective of motherhood.

To further illustrate our need to view motherhood through a distinctly Christian perspective, I want to tell you about two of my friends. Janet* left her home country to find work, and now she works twelve-hour shifts, six days a week at the laundry shop downstairs. She lives in a one-bedroom apartment with fifteen other women. They've all moved to this city for the same purpose: to earn money in order to send it home to feed hungry mouths, to build homes, and to care for aging parents. Amy* lives in our building, and her family fled their home country just in time before their dictator was removed from power and executed. She is thankful to live in this peaceable country with her family, and she is elated that her kids can attend school without fear. I'll never forget the morning we heard that President Obama had been re-elected. I was visiting with Amy when the news was announced on her TV. She turned to me and said, "Congratulations on your country's peaceful election. Everyone can vote without being slaughtered on the way."

My friends do not know Jesus (yet). Though they feel some incentive to live for the next world, the particular afterlife they are hoping for does not exist. Day in and day out, they're just living for another day and another way to provide for the ones they love. This is a noble mission. But the mission of their sacrificial nurturing work would be radically reoriented if they understood that Christ is the

* Names have been changed.

Creator of motherhood. Motherhood is for His purposes in the world. The goal of motherhood is to exalt Him.

It is Christ's image that we are to embody as we plant the fields, judge the cases, fly the planes, organize the data, paint the paintings, feed the hungry, sweep the kitchen, pave the roads, diaper the babies, build the cities ... and resist evil. As we embody Christ's image, we point to Him. In the minutes it took you to read those few paragraphs above, billions of image bearers received God's common grace as they walked through their days. Some woke up to a new day in which the sun has risen again. Some fell asleep under a sky filled with stars, smog, monsoon rain, or dust again.

Just one of the ways we glorify God as His dependent creatures is to praise Him even as we suffer. Suffering is a characteristic of this distinctly Christian nurturing that we're talking about. Only women who are born again in Jesus can nurture life in the face of death and in the face of their own death (as He did), while giving glory to God.

When we image Christ in this way, what we are doing is supernatural ministry. We die to self for His will and His purpose to be accomplished. You may think you are laboring to give birth to that baby, or filling out that adoption paperwork, or counseling the young lady at work by the sweat of your brow. But however sweaty your nurturing work may be (and mothering others can be sweaty work!), it is the Spirit of God who works through you.

What sort of deaths-to-self mothering work have you experienced this week?

When we acknowledge that these things listed above are ultimately about who Jesus is and the purpose for which He has created our mothering, how does that change the way we think about the people we serve?

The reality of suffering leads us to question ourselves. We all tend to want to walk on the sunnier, less rocky side of the path. We think that our work is invalid or not worthwhile when we are met with hardships or difficulties. Also, the presence of suffering comes into conflict with our desire to be validated and approved in our everyday ministry of motherhood. Personally, there are times when I have felt insecure about the things I do (and don't do) for my kids, my lost neighbors, and the ladies who are my fellow church members. If a mothering task or responsibility is hard for me to do for whatever reason, then I prefer to do anything but that! Actually, in those circumstances what I really want to do is whatever I think will get me some recognition—from my husband, kids, or whomever is watching.

Do you find that you struggle with similar insecurities in your nurturing work? Explain.

These issues are addressed throughout Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, which is a heart-felt missionary support letter. Paul wanted his readers to see how God Himself was the One who had commended him to minister to them. The apostle desired for the people to support his faithful ministry to even more Gentiles. In the letter, Paul was not sinfully asking to be praised by the people he served; he was describing to them the joy they would have as they affirmed his gospel ministry. Paul wasn't confused as to what he ought to be doing; he explained the nature and goal of his service. He shared this out of his love for the people. This love resembles that of a discerning and selfless mother who sees what is good for her kids and wants her kids to embrace that good.

Let's look at the first verses in 2 Corinthians, shall we? In his introduction, Paul defended his ministry and apostleship. His readers could know he was the real deal because he was really, truly suffering for their sakes. Suffering was happening, but Paul was undaunted in his ministry.

READ THROUGH 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11 THREE TIMES. *What did God do for Paul and his coworkers as they were suffering?*

What did Paul say was one of the purposes for his suffering (v. 4)?

What is the correlation between Christ's sufferings and Christ's comfort (v. 5)?

What is the correlation between the suffering and comfort of Paul and his companions and the suffering and comfort of the people (v. 7)?

In what ways do mothers and nurturers suffer as they minister to others?

In what ways do mothers and nurturers receive comfort from Christ?

Perhaps you have heard this phrase: "God won't give you more than you can handle." Maybe a well-meaning friend even said this to you during a difficult time. How does this Scripture passage speak to this idea?

God's design for our mothering, discipling work is outward to bless others and God-ward to give Him glory. Our mothering and discipling are not inward endeavors where we work to amass approval and recognition for ourselves from our kids, husband, the church, or the world. God gets the glory, and we receive comfort from Him. As we go about the good work God has designed for us (and designed us for), we suffer many afflictions. It is out of the comfort we receive from Christ that we mother and disciple others.

Give examples from your own life of how you have suffered, been comforted by Jesus, and were then able to minister to others out of that Christ-shared comfort.

Meditating on how Paul shared in both Christ's sufferings and comforts brings us tremendous encouragement as nurturing women. There is no denying that our ministry is difficult at times and that the comforts the world offers us are useless and empty. We need Christ! And what a joy it is to see that He has designed us to not only need Him for our mothering work, but to also image Him as we labor to make disciples.

There's so much more to say about how God has created mothering to glorify Himself. I'll speak to that in the Session 3 video.