

SESSION 3:

**NEW CREATION
LIFE IN CHRIST IS
THE NEW NORMAL**

REVIEW

Welcome to Session 3 of *Missional Motherhood*! Let's begin by reviewing your homework from last week.

With Colossians 3:1-4 in mind, how would you answer someone who asked you, "How do you do what you do?"

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

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? How would a correct understanding of the image of God transform the way your culture views motherhood?

What is Christ's purpose for our thousands of little "deaths-to-self" each and every day as we go about our work of making disciples?

Do you agree with the phrase, "God won't give you more than you can handle"? Explain. How does 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 speak to this?

If you are willing, share with the group a time when you suffered, were comforted by Jesus, and were then able to minister to others out of that Christ-shared comfort?

WATCH

Use the space below to take notes on the Session 3 video.

A series of horizontal blue lines for taking notes, consisting of 20 lines.

DISCUSS

Use the following questions to debrief the teaching from the Session 3 video.

Explain Seasonal Obsessive Disorder. Do you ever suffer from it? Describe your life when that happens.

What did Gloria mean when she said, "The missional vision of our motherhood, with its sights set on the return of Christ, reminds us that we are all currently in the season of life"?

How does understanding your permanent position of being "in Christ" change the way you view the season of life you are in right now?

Some of the Jews in Jesus' day would have been happy to simply be rescued from Rome. Is there a "Rome" in your life that distracts you from waiting for your ultimate deliverance? Explain.

Name one area of weakness in your life that serves as a witness to others because Christ uses it to show His perfect power.

CLOSE

Lead each person in your group to choose a partner. Direct the pairs to pray for one another about how God would use them—weaknesses and all—in the lives of their children, friends, family, and neighbors to shine the light of Christ.

ONE

In the Session 3 video, I laid out a defense of why new creation life in Christ is our new normal. It's the eternal season of life that all Christians are in. And this season of life in Christ colors and informs and empowers every temporary season of life we will ever experience.

For the next two weeks we're going to step back to take in the panoramic view of another theme that shows up throughout the whole Bible. It's a sweeping theme that appears in every genre and in many familiar passages. This theme seems to illuminate the tapestry of God's big story with a peculiarly beautiful light. It is unique. In my experience of talking with people from different world religions, I haven't heard anyone mention anything similar to this amazing work of God.

We'll take what we see in this big picture and zoom in to apply it to our motherhood. So just by way of reminder, here are two helpful application questions to keep in mind as you complete your personal study:

How does this truth show me where motherhood fits into God's mission?

How does this truth strengthen my faith for the everyday ministry of motherhood (raising children, discipleship, service) that God has given me?

I'm so excited about this theme, because I've seen God bear tremendous fruit in my life as I grow in my understanding of it. And so, without further ado, the theme we're looking at this week is the priesthood.

What are your first impressions of this topic?

I imagine the answers will vary depending on the religious backgrounds and life experiences of everyone in your group.

We see shadows of Christ throughout the theme of the priesthood, both in the Old and New Testaments. Beyond the shadows, we see Christ Himself, our "great high priest who has ascended into heaven" (Heb. 4:14, NIV). Understanding priests and priesthood requires explanation from Scripture because many world religions have priests, and even in broader Christianity there are misconceptions about the subject. However, biblical priesthood is distinct and has tremendous bearing on our missional motherhood.

What are some examples of priesthoods (formal or functional) that you see in your community and culture?

We're going to dig into the big story of the Bible this week, focusing specifically on this topic in order gain clarity, receive encouragement for our mothering ministry, and adore the person of Jesus Christ. Let's go back to the beginning, shall we? In Genesis 1:26-28, we find the foundation for our priestly work. We remember that God created man and woman in His image, giving us dominion over the earth and a charge to multiply image bearers to fill the world He created. In the next chapter of Genesis, we see a more detailed account of the creation of humans.

READ GENESIS 2:15. What two tasks did God give to Adam?

God walked among His people in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), fellowshiping with them until they broke that fellowship through their rebellion against Him. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, all their offspring would be enemies of God, born into sin, and unable to please Him.

How does sin frustrate our nurturing work?

How does this frustration hit close to home for you?

Generation after generation of sinful, work-frustrated, image bearers were born. Sin multiplied as the image bearers multiplied, and then God cleansed the earth with a flood (Gen. 6–9). Remember that the survivors were not cleansed of their sin, however. Then, the people gathered to use their God-given skills and abilities to build a monument to exalt themselves. However, God judged their arrogance and pride, scattering and dividing them at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Following this action, God chose an elderly couple to be His people. God made Abraham a promise: “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2). The Abrahamic covenant clearly reiterated that God had not abandoned His plan to use men and women in His mission to the world, and that He would choose to use whomever He desired.

This truth leads us to examine our own hearts. As women who work hard to serve others day and night, we tend to forget that we have this opportunity because of God’s mercy to us. From the children underfoot or away at school to the ladies we disciple and witness to in the workplace and community, our nurturing work is a gift. We all have a need to repent of our feelings of entitlement. We do not deserve to be used by God. We do not deserve to be ambassadors of Christ in our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, or generations. We do not deserve to be given spiritual gifts with which to serve the church. We do not deserve to be included in God’s mission to the world, period.

Yet, it pleases Him to include us.

Take a moment right now to sit in awe of God’s kindness to you—that He would save you, give you a mission, equip you for ministry, and surround you with people to serve on Christ’s behalf. Journal your reflections in the space below.

Abraham didn't deserve to be chosen to be a blessing to the whole world. He and his sons lived and died in faith, believing God's promise even though they didn't receive (in their earthly lives) the things they were promised. Instead, they saw the promises fulfilled by faith "and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

While they lived as slaves in Egypt, the nation of Israel multiplied. Then God delivered His "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22-23) out of slavery through doorways covered in blood and through walls made of sea water. Once the Israelites were on the other side of the Red Sea, something significant happened. God called Moses to meet with Him on Mount Sinai to tell the people what His plans were for them. This was "mission rebooted," but not like anyone had ever seen before. We'll pick up at that part of our story in the next personal study session.

TWO

You have probably heard the saying, "God does not have a Plan B." It sounds trite and truncated, but it is true.

I'm about to ask you a series of really personal questions, and you may not feel ready to share with others what you are feeling and thinking. If that's the case, then you don't have to write anything down, but ponder your answers in your heart.

Do you ever wish you were someone else or lived a different life? Perhaps you have resented how God made you or how He didn't make you? The children or family He gave you or didn't give you? The people you are called to serve or wish you were called to serve?

If this is or has been your struggle, take heart; you are not alone. In fact, we see similar struggles in the Bible. God knows the dissatisfaction and discontentment about our sinful humanity, and He still has compassion on us. Just as He has no Plan B for His mission to fill the earth with His glory, He has no Plan B for our individual lives. He is pleased to be glorified through us even when we are not pleased to be who He made us or live in the circumstances He has orchestrated.

What happened at Sinai is a colorful illustration of God's deliberate, unfailing plan to fill the earth with His glory through His people. A nation of former slaves who were homeless and weak set up camp at the foot of the mountain. Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. And would you believe what God said?

READ EXODUS 19:3-6. Remembering Israel's history, what was the nation like when God delivered them from Egypt?

What did God say He would make the nation to be?

What did God say would be Israel's responsibility?

Considering Israel's earlier actions, how likely were they to be obedient to God's call? Explain your answer.

Wow. God came to commit Himself to a bunch of grouchy-pants complainers and turn them into an entire kingdom of commissioned priests. But when the people heard the thunder and the trumpet and saw the smoke and clouds, they shrank back from letting God speak to them (Ex. 20:18-21). Later, we see where the people were to remain at the foot of the mountain, while the priests and 70 elders went a short distance up the mountain. Then Moses went on alone up Mount Sinai to meet with God and receive God's good Law for the people (Ex. 24). Afterward, "Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do'" (Ex. 24:3). Moses performed a blood ceremony with the blood of sacrificed animals and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex. 24:8). And there you have it—a covenant between Yahweh and His people.

Can you relate to the Israelites who didn't want to meet with God and were terrified to let God speak to them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation? Why or why not?

Can you relate to the Israelites who were optimistic that they would obey "all the words that the LORD has spoken"? Why or why not?

For the next 40 days and 40 nights, Moses was in the midst of the swirling smoke and consuming fire of Sinai as God wrote down His commandments on tablets of stone for the peoples' instruction. On that mountain, Yahweh revealed to Moses the things He planned to use in order to facilitate His relationship to His people. He is I AM, the Holy One of Israel. He gave Moses instructions for His tabernacle and the ark. Wait. What? His tabernacle? A dwelling place for God among men? Yes, that's right. This good news must have shocked the people to their core.

READ EXODUS 29:42-46. What was God going to do at the tent of meeting (tabernacle)?

What was God going to do to the tent of meeting?

What was God going to do to Aaron and his sons?

What reason did God give for dwelling among the people of Israel?

God would walk among His people again! In His mercy, our holy God ordained a way that He might dwell among His now fallen people without compromising His utter holiness. That means was the tabernacle. We, who have the indwelling Spirit now, should sober our hearts in wonder at this. How easily we forget. How presumptuous we often are. "God is with you!" we quip, and indeed, God is with us. But His presence among us came at a price that none of us could have paid.

Are you certain that God is with you in your motherhood? What difference would it make today if you were absolutely certain, beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is with you as you make disciples in your home, neighborhood, and this world?

THREE

Do you remember what Adam's two tasks were in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15)? Theologian G.K. Beale has pointed out that those same two Hebrew verbs from Genesis 2:15 appear together elsewhere in the Old Testament.¹ In Numbers 3, God commissioned Aaron and his sons as priests to serve in the tabernacle, and He commissioned the tribe of Levi to be the priestly tribe. There are priestly duties that go along with this special role; it was no mere ceremonial figurehead. You don't just wear the religious garb and put a new business card in your wallet. Being a priest meant there were corresponding job duties and ministries.

READ NUMBERS 3:5-8. What tasks did God give to the priests?

The verb translated *work* in the Genesis 2:15 passage is the same as the verb translated *minister/serve* in the Numbers 3:5-8 passage. Likewise, the verb translated *keep* in the Genesis 2:15 passage is the same as the verb translated *guard* in the Numbers 3:5-8 passage.

What was Adam's work?

What was the priests' ministry/service?

What was Adam supposed to keep? Why?

What were the priests charged with guarding? Why?

It looked like everything sad was becoming untrue for the Hebrews. Their backs, bent over from generations of slave labor, began to straighten. They were on their way to the land God promised them—at last! God told them repeatedly, “And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12). It looked like everything from that moment on was going to be different.

But their hearts were still turned in on themselves. Time and again, while they trekked across the desert, they grumbled against God, the One who had rescued them, and quarreled against Moses, the leader whom God had appointed. Half of Exodus could be hashtagged #smh (“shaking my head” for non-Twitter folks). What happened in a wilderness far, far away (well, not far at all from where I’m writing right now!) seems to us like an obscure historical incident. Regardless of where you are living, though, this scene hits so close to home it’s not funny. God feeds us with bread from heaven and water from rocks, but we’re not happy unless we have whatever it is they have over there. Our hearts need renewal.

Have you felt like parts of your own walk with God could be hashtagged #smh? That God would be delighted to use you in ministry except for _____?

God is faithful to His name even though we are not! How have you seen the Lord work in and through you despite your weaknesses and failings?

Take a moment right now to thank God for His kindness to you and repent of any sin that He graciously brings to your mind.

This is the reality that we, our children, and our neighbors face. Apart from the saving grace of God, we are prone to wander from Him. When my child grumbles against me, I can sympathize with her because I, too, know what it feels like to question God’s authority in my life and grumble against His wisdom. When my neighbor does not appreciate the truth I share with her about God, I can sympathize with her because I, too, scoffed at God before He changed my

heart. We are powerless to save our children and our friends. And because we are powerless, we call on the One who is all-powerful and mighty to save. We pray that light would dawn in their hearts. "Let Your light shine into darkness, Lord!" We pray that the Spirit would open their eyes. And we pray that the Lord would incline their hearts toward Him when they see Him. We pray they would not make excuses for themselves and their sin, but that they would repent and cast themselves on the mercy of our loving and forgiving God who sent His Son to pay for our sin on the cross.

Write down the names of five non-believing friends or family members whom you want to pray for more regularly and talk with about Christ.

I encourage you to ask the Lord to help you in this endeavor. I've often prayed this: "Father, my spirit is willing but my flesh is weak. Help me pray for this person—lead me in prayer for them often. Make me bold to speak to them about You."

How are you planning to follow through with your desire to pray for others and share Christ with them?

As we discussed in the previous homework, we need heart renewal if we are to live lives that are pleasing to the Lord. Without God's gracious drawing of our hearts, we are all prone to wander from Him, not to Him. The entropy of our hearts is like the state of the living room on a day when the kids are off from school. It just naturally tends to get messier, not more orderly. We need to be changed from the inside out.

As a consequence of his own rebellion against God, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land with the remnant of God's people. However, before he died in the wilderness, Moses gave final instructions and warnings to this new generation. Foreseeing the days when they would repeat the sins of their parents, Moses prophesied that God would scatter them in exile. (See Deut. 28–29.)

MISSIONAL MOTHERHOOD

Recall Israel's calling in Exodus 19:6. What were they supposed to be and do?

But what did their king lead them to do generations later, according to 2 Chronicles 33:9?

Not only did Moses prophesy the people's deportation from the land, but he also foresaw how the Lord God would mercifully bring them back from the places to which they would be scattered (Deut. 30:1-4). From among all the peoples of the earth and even "if your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you" (Deut. 30:4). This gathering of God's people would be global in scope, and their restoration would be comprehensive. Just look at what God promises next.

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:5-7. Now flip forward a few pages to read God's promise in Deuteronomy 30:6. Compare these two passages. What is the same? What is different?

We cannot compare that promise to any promise made to us from another person, even if he or she has the best of intentions to follow through on big plans. God's promise is what you would call a "game changer." Because God always keeps His promises, and this promise addresses our deep need for permanent, spiritual renewal, we can have hope for tomorrow and grace for today.

Take some time in prayer right now to praise God for His unfailing commitment to finish the good work He has started in us individually and corporately as His blood-bought people.

1. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

FOUR

We need hope for tomorrow and grace for today. We need God to change us from the inside out if we are to be Christ's hands and feet and mouthpiece in the world we live in. The prophet Jeremiah took up this theme in what scholars like to call the "Book of Consolation," a unique set of four chapters (Jer. 30–33) which speaks to a breathtaking, unprecedented, future restoration. He prophesied in the last days just before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C., but there were other "last days" on his mind—the last days in which we are now living post-Easter. In the middle of the Book of Consolation is God's announcement of a new covenant.

READ JEREMIAH 31:31-34. Name the differences the Lord describes between the Mosaic covenant and this new covenant.

God is going to write His law straight onto human hearts. That is amazing! Every single person who is included in the people of God will truly know Him. God will forgive our iniquity and remember our sin no more. This is worth repeating and rephrasing for ourselves a hundred times—what grace we have been shown through Jesus, the One who established this new covenant!

Here's how I have rephrased Jeremiah 31:31-34 to teach the concept of the new covenant to my children and non-believing neighbors: God made a new covenant in which our sins are wiped away from His memory, and He gives us new hearts that are inclined to love Him back because His Spirit lives in us. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross makes this happen for anyone, regardless of their ethnicity.

Let's look at one more Old Testament passage about what this new covenant entails.

READ JOEL 2:28-29. On whom will God pour out His Spirit? Will any believers be excluded for their age, gender, or economic status?

NOW READ ACTS 2:1-47. What events take place in this passage? How was Joel's prophecy fulfilled?

In the new covenant, we have become a kingdom of priests! This is distinct from the Mosaic covenant days, where only priests and prophets taught the people (and of course, parents taught their children about God's law—see Deut. 6:7). With God's law now written on our new, circumcised hearts, not only do we have a saving knowledge of God by His grace, but we all have an empowered role to pass on this gospel to others through evangelism, discipleship, and missions. God has made us a priesthood of believers. This is far too wonder-filled for us to dream up on our own.

Along with this priestly status, we have corresponding privileges and responsibilities.

READ ACTS 1:1-11. Who is featured in this text? What are they doing (just a brief summary)?

What did Jesus say was the promise of the Father (vv. 4-5)?

What did the disciples want to know in verse 6?

Recall what you have already learned about the prophecies of the restoration. What might the disciples be looking forward to?

How did Jesus answer their question (v. 7)?

Write out Acts 1:8 in the space below.

What kind of power was Jesus referring to?

There is a kind of déjà vu going on here. The disciples had heard that phrase, "you will be my witnesses," in their readings in the Old Testament. And now they're hearing it applied to them, of all people!

LOOK UP ISAIAH 43:10-12. What did Yahweh say His people will know and bear witness to?

There is no place excluded from the regions that Jesus included in Acts 1:8. When He said, "to the end of the earth," there is really no way around the all-encompassing reach of such a statement. Jesus really was claiming to be God. He really was announcing that His disciples are His [i.e., God's] witnesses. And He really was claiming that His dominion includes the entire world.

READ DANIEL 7:9-14. Daniel had been given a vision of the heavenly throne room and the future that is to come. What he saw and heard absolutely boggles the mind. Who is present in this vision?

Zooming in on verse 13, "one like a son of man" is presented to the Ancient of Days. This One is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God. He is the Son who became God incarnate: Christ Jesus.

MISSIONAL MOTHERHOOD

According to verse 14, what is given to Jesus?

Who serves Him?

What is His dominion like? What is His kingdom like?

Given this description of Jesus' dominion and kingdom, what kind of confidence and encouragement can His servants have as they serve Him?

How can this particular vision of the risen Christ change the way you see your mothering ministry right now?

How can this particular hope "globalize" the way you see your mothering ministry? Do you see how the work you do has potential to impact the world? Explain.

In John's apocalyptic vision in Revelation, he saw and heard that Jesus Christ has successfully fulfilled every promise of God, including the promise to make for Himself a kingdom of priests and a holy nation! Look at these amazing verses.

READ REVELATION 1:1-6. What has Jesus done?

Because of what Jesus has done, what does He deserve?

NOW READ ALL OF REVELATION 5. What has Jesus done?

Because of what Jesus has done, what does He deserve?

*From where do the "kingdom and priests" in Revelation 5:10 come?
(Hint: Look at verse 9.)*

These people who were ransomed for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation have been made a kingdom of priests, a strikingly beautiful, multi-colored, pan-ethnic people. Their role, as the text says, is to reign on the earth as a kingdom of priests to God. Finally.

Theirs is the privileged position of seeing God face-to-face as Moses did, a privilege that even the high priest, Aaron, was never given. "They will see his

face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). The kingdom of priests will serve God in eternity, reigning forever and ever (Rev. 22:5). And by "their foreheads," He means "ours"—all those who are repenting of their sin and calling on the name of Jesus to be saved.

How does this vision of the risen, ascended, and exalted Christ cast out any fears you have about:

- *the sacrifices you are making in your mothering?*
- *the temptations you are facing to present the ministry God has given you?*
- *the suffering you are anticipating or experiencing as you serve others?*