

God As Mother

Learning from the mother language in the Bible

Summary: Today, we are giving thanks to God for the gift of mothers and the mother-like nurture that many people show to others in their lives. So, let us then consider together a variety of biblical texts that explore mothering images for God.¹

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Introduction

Jokes by and About Mothers

The *Scary Mommy* website claims that “mums are way funnier than dads (just don’t tell him that)”.² I’m not sure I believe that claim, so let’s test it out with a few mum jokes...

Daughter: “Mum, I need my personal space!”

Mum: “You **came out** of my personal space.”

You know you’re a mum when you understand why Mama Bear’s porridge was too cold.

Daughter: “Mum, what’s it like to have the greatest daughter in the world?”

Mother: “I don’t know dear, ask your grandmother.”

Silence is golden ... unless you have kids, that is, then silence is suspicious.

You know you’re a mum when picking up another human to smell their butt isn’t only normal, but necessary.

Why is Mother’s Day before Father’s Day?

So the kids can spend all their Christmas money on mum.

I think we’ll just have to agree to disagree on whether mum jokes are funnier than dad jokes, but on this Mother’s Day, I will err on the side of caution.

Manliness vs. Femininity

I am currently reading a book by writer Jack Donovan, who rose to prominence for his contributions to the Manosphere, a collection of websites, blogs, and online forums promoting masculinity, misogyny, and strong opposition to feminism, to varying degrees.

The book of his I’m reading is called, *Fire In The Dark*, and it explores the common themes found in the masculine myths and stories from all of the world’s religions.

While I find his analysis quite compelling and informative, he has a clear bias against Judeo-Christianity, which is shown by his complete lack of reference to it.

That is not entirely surprising, I suppose, since my own research into the Greco-Roman conceptions of masculinity of Jesus’ time has shown that, while his behaviour would have been understood then as quite manly, Jesus’ death was most unmanly! For the torture of

crucifixion was specifically oriented toward humiliating and unmaning its victims; thus, it served to thoroughly demean and disempower Jesus, to ultimately feminise him.

So, Donovan is probably repelled by Christianity because he sees it as not conforming to the type of masculinity he promotes and sees in other cultures or religions.

When we look at the writings contained in the Bible, we see how masculine language and images are often used to help us understand our Lord's nature and work, yet there are many places where feminine language and images are used. In this way, especially in the NT, the biblical authors both emphasised the conformity of Christian values with Greco-Roman values, even as they challenged those values in other very significant ways.

What & Why?

Today, we are giving thanks to God for the gift of mothers and the mother-like nurture that many people show to others in their lives. So, let us then consider together a variety of biblical texts that explore mothering images for God.

Explanation

Passages in Isaiah

We find in the prophecies of *Isaiah* two passages containing mothering images for God:

As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you, and you will be comforted in Jerusalem. (*Isaiah 66:13*)

While Jesus made it clear his friends are free to refer to and interact with God as our heavenly Father (Mt 6:9; cf., Ro 8:15), we should not therefore neglect interacting with God as our heavenly Mother too!

Mothers are more stereotypically associated with the raising of daughters, yet sons too need the unique parenting style of a mother for his holistic development.

Each one of us needs to be comforted, even to the point of being carried or cuddled in a mother's arms. We should not shy away from receiving, nor giving, tender care, and the biblical writers want us to know we can receive such from our creator God.

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you. (*Isaiah 49:15*)

Isaiah also wrote that God would never forget us. He knows each of us intimately, like a mother knows her own children (cf., Mt 10:30), and cares for us to the same degree.

Yet, while we may have experienced neglect or abuse at the hands of our mothers, the biblical writers want us to know we will only ever receive faithful, tender care from our creator God, who will never forget us or lack compassion.

A Passage from Psalms

Even that most biblical manly man, King David, apparently wrote that in God's presence, he was quiet and at peace, trusting his God like a child safe in his mother's loving arms:

Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child. (*Psalms 131:2*)

To David, by faith, he understood the tender care of God to be like that received by a child from his mother. This is the image of a child who is no longer fed directly by his mother, yet continues to return to her for comfort and the stability of her love.

There are, and will be, many times in life when we don't feel protected nor provided for, when we feel as if we don't know who is for us or against us. In times like that, whether they be real or imagined, we know we can return to our mother for a comforting hug.

That same comfort, provision and protection is experienced by those who trust God and place their faith in him.

A Passage from the Gospels

As I've already mentioned, Jesus was a quintessential Greco-Roman man. Yet we find an example, in his teaching, of when Jesus spoke of himself as a mother, longing to wrap his arms around us:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! *(Matthew 23:37)*

The tender care of our Lord is such that he yearns to protect us from the forces, circumstances and situations that threaten to overwhelm or oppress us, even when those are our own doing, the results of our own ignorance or negligence.

In this passage, Jesus knew the sociocultural circumstances of the time would lead to the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem and the violent quashing of a Jewish revolt. Knowing this suffering was coming, he yearned to protect the people of Jerusalem, yet this suffering would be caused by their own attitudes and behaviours.

Our Lord knows our heart and knows the consequences we suffer because of our previous sin and ongoing mistakes, yet allows us to learn, even as he yearns to protect, just as a mother hen would for her chicks.

A Passage from the New Testament

The apostle Paul wrote about his missionary ministry and likened his work to that of a nurse who looks after those in her care:

Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nurse nurtures her own children. *(1 Thessalonians 2:7)*

The tender care of our leaders in the Church should be like that of a mother, who acts as a nurse to others, with compassion and skill in her duties, but does for her own children out of love.

A mother has every right to make demands upon her children, in light of her own suffering endured, yet she does not (or should not); nor does our creator God. So neither should we for each other.

While not as plentiful as masculine language and images, the scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit are not limited to these, but include feminine language and images, even likening our God and our Lord as a mother.

Application

In these passages, God is likened to the best of mothers and mothering, so this presumes we know what are the best practices for mothering attitudes and behaviour inherently.

Since our creator God is perfect in his nature and works, epitomising truth, goodness and beauty, then any likeness to a mother (or father, for that matter) would be the perfect representation of such. So, if our creator God provides such provision and protection, comfort and care, as does a mother, and does so perfectly, this then begs the question: Why don't our mothers, or we ourselves, always do such?

To celebrate mothers and mothering is not to deny the times when we fail or when circumstances rob us of our mothers, but to acknowledge our hurt can be balanced by joy. As you strive to be a mother, or care like a mother, seek to do so as our God does, follow Jesus' example.

Let us keep in mind all the ways our God is like a mother to us, as much as like a father. And as the best possible parent, let us follow Jesus' example, in his perfect revelation of God, that we too may be the best parents and role models we can be, as we love our families and lead others in our spheres of influence.

Conclusion

Let us conclude by praying for mothers and those who have cared for us like mothers. Let us pray for those carrying hurt and needing comfort, for those needing provision and protection...

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 Find more humour from the *Scary Mummy* website at <https://bit.ly/3MIQk8I>.