

5 Dimensions of Mothering

The grace to mother is central to any community. Communities need mothers, but what do mothers do differently? The enemy wants to hinder effective mothering through dishonouring the function and role that mothers play. It is primarily a function and role that many women play but I believe that it is important to understand the spiritual dimension of mothering as a capability beyond its gender expression. Therefore, in this message I will outline five major aspects of mothering. If you are a biological mother to someone or care for children in any way then this applies to you. In addition to this, there are mothering principles that can be extrapolated to all of us spiritually if we are going to be effective in our Christian walk. After this, I will outline what our response to mothers and motherhood should be. How we respond to mothering enables mothers to be the best version of themselves. This is crucial as the Bible has a number of guidelines for how we should relate to mothers and mothering. 1 Tim 5:1-2 ¹*Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, ²the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.* This is a powerful scripture because it shows me that there must be a way to relate to mothers. Paul assumed that Timothy knew what this was. It also shows me that if you are an older woman then you must be ready to be treated as a mother.

Let's explore these five dimensions

1. Mothers Feed

In the physiology of women there is an ability to nurse and feed their little ones. As men we can't do this. Many men feel useless when they have babies because they can wake up at night but they don't have the equipment within them to feed the baby. It is interesting how this passion to feed continues even as children get older. My kids are at that stage where they consume a lot of food. Sometimes it annoys me but for my wife it has become a project, assignment or even a mission. I can be engaged in intimate conversation with her but when they children arrive, her instinct to feed kicks in, much to my annoyance. There is something unnatural about a woman who doesn't care about what her children eat. Even if she is not the one making the food all the time, we expect a mother to be concerned about the nourishment of her family.

What is the spiritual dimension of this? We are called to feed those we are discipling. Growth in life and community only comes when there is feeding. Who are you teaching the Word? Teaching in scripture is not something limited to men.

Proverbs 6:20-21

²⁰*My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; ²¹Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck.*

Titus 2:3

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.

Titus 2:4 (NLT)

These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children

Mothers are feeders.

2. Mothers nurture and comfort

When my children get hurt they don't run to me, they go to their mother. If you struggle with showing compassion and empathy then there is something missing in your mothering. What climate have you created in your home and in the spaces around you? You are a social architect who creates climate. I often tell my wife that home is not the same when she is not there. Yes she can make sure there is food and we are taken care of but it can still feel like boarding school. There is something that comes with that mothering grace. My kids often act quite tough but if my wife has been out for some time, they begin to emerge from their caves asking, "Where's Mom? When is she coming back?" I ask them why they are asking and they don't give me a specific reason. Often the thing we remember is the climate our mothers created through their scent, warmth, cooking and care. When I reflect on my upbringing I don't always remember the exact words my mother used but I remember how I felt. I felt free to be myself around her, I felt celebrated and I felt she was interested. Isaiah 66:13 *As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.* The ability to sooth and comfort is central to mothering. We live in a society that is hardening us. The tenderness is decreasing. Many women today will tell you that the corporate world has hardened them and they don't like who there are becoming.

Spiritually when we are pastoral it can look like mothering. I met up with an old school friend and I was simply asking him questions about his life and demonstrating curiosity. At a certain point he described me as very nurturing.

3. Mothers bring forth life

The process of bring forth life involves 3 stages; receiving the seed, carrying the life and then birthing it. This is a capability we are all called to have spiritually if we are to impact the generations.

Receiving

Luke 1:38 38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. Mary had a choice, and she chose to receive the word from the angel. It wasn't easy. Have you received your calling? A calling has to be received first.

Eph 4:1

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Carrying

Ps 139:12-13

even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Isn't it amazing to reflect on the great work God does in darkness within the womb? No one can see but God is at work. It is important as a community to know how to carry God's purposes before they are revealed to the world. Just because you can't see does not mean there is no activity.

Luke 2:51

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

Mary the mother of Jesus was able to treasure things in her heart. Part of carrying God's purpose is being able to meditate on it and guard our hearts until it comes forth. When a woman is pregnant she can't just consume whatever she likes. She is guarding the treasure. There are things that God wants to birth in our community in this hour but we have to learn how to incubate these things.

Birthing

John 16:21

A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

Studies have found that the female body has a more intense natural response to painful stimuli, indicating a difference between genders in the way pain systems function. A greater nerve density present in women may cause them to feel pain more intensely than men. (2021) //riversidepainphysicians.com/

Birthing will often involve pain

The pain of birthing something is often dependent on its size relative to you.

If we are to birth things in the spirit we need to increase our pain threshold and pain tolerance.

Jennifer Graham from Penn State has highlighted: **a person's pain threshold is defined as the minimum amount of pain that evokes a report of pain. Pain tolerance means the time that a continuous pain stimulus is tolerated.**

Perhaps you are feeling discouraged because the thing you want to birth has not yet come forth. My question to you is, do you know the gestation period? Typically, if something is big and complex it has to stay in the womb for longer. Imagine being pregnant and not knowing how long you had to be in that condition. The African Bush elephant has a gestation period of about 22 months. That's understandable because it's the largest land animal. The gestation period for dogs is just 58 to 68 days. Maybe you have minimized the size of what you want to birth. The Virginian Opossum just has a 12 day gestation period. So a female can have three litters per year. But the Opossum's lifespan is only four years. Some births

are extremely painful (eg spotted hyena) because of the cub's size relative to the mother. It was interesting reading that the female Spotted hyena's level of testosterone is 3 times higher than the male's. What are you birthing? Could it be that God wants to enlarge you first before you can bring forth life? In the animal kingdom the squirrel monkey experiences a lot of pain in birthing because of the large heads of its offspring relative to the pelvis of the mother. In order to birth something in this hour the Lord wants to enlarge us and make us more aware of the gestation period. This maturity will result in more life coming forth. If we are impatient and give up we become disillusioned.

4. Mothers bring things together

In the Greek mother is the word *Meter* which is the source of something. It is the Hebrew word *Em*, which also speaks of 'strong water' (glue). The Mothers reconcile, gather and unite. In essence mothers are like glue. Many people will make this comment when they lose their mothers; "She was the one who brought us together." When you study the Proverbs 31 woman she is the central figure bringing everything together in the household; husband, children, workers etc.

Luke 13:34

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

The grace to mother is a grace to unite and reconcile. One of the things that grieves a mother is when her children are not united. God is calling us to a place of healing relationships, gathering people together and uniting them in one direction. That's a mothering grace. Those of you who are children, please know that it is painful for a mother when you and your siblings continuously fight.

5. Mothers stay

Isaiah 49:15

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

In the case of special needs children, there is a high divorce rate amongst the parents largely because of fathers leaving due to the stress. Mothers stay. I see many women returning to work from maternity leave and struggling with having to leave their child at home.

Despite all of this, today the statistics are alarming when you look at the number of grandparents looking after their grandchildren. The mothering has continued right to their old age. Often it is because of irresponsibility of their children. Mothers stay, but not in South Africa.

According to Stats SA did you know that in South Africa, about one-fifth (21,3%) of children aged 17 years and less, did not live with their parents? It may also surprise you to hear that this is against the international norm where the majority of children under 18 live with both their parents.¹ However, in South Africa, children are more often not co-resident with their biological parents. This is mainly due to labour migration of the parents as well as low marital rates of mothers.

Consequently, many children are raised by their grandparents or other relatives, especially in rural areas.

God is calling us to stay at our posts. Don't abandon the assignment God has given you. Don't abandon those that God has called you to feed. They need you. The enemy's strategy is to get us to think we are not needed and we don't make a difference. Even if they don't appreciate you, keep doing what God has called you to do.

Our response to motherhood

1. Mothers must be praised and honoured

Prov 31:28

Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.

2. Mothers will be rewarded

Jer 31:16-17

¹⁶*This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord. "They will return from the land of the enemy.*

¹⁷*So there is hope for your descendants," declares the Lord. "Your children will return to their own land.*

3. Mothers can be happy

Ps 113:9 (NLT)

He gives the childless woman a family, making her a happy mother. Praise the Lord!

4. Mothers' teachings must be taken seriously

Proverbs 6:20-21

²⁰*My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; ²¹Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck.*

5. Mothers must be looked after

John 19:26-27 (NLT)

²⁶*When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." ²⁷And he said to this disciple, "Here is your mother." And from then on this disciple took her into his home.*

6. Mothers are worthy of tenderness

Is 40:11

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.