

Knowing God as Father and Mother
Learning to Rest in God's Strength and Compassion
Isaiah 66:13

My goal in this series is to help everyone understand who God is as revealed in Scripture.

We began this series two weeks ago when we saw how the Bible teaches us, very specifically, that God is Spirit and is not gendered. What that means is: When you say, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven," you're not saying that God is a man as we would know a human father—for God is spirit. He is, however, like a good father to you.

In a similar manner, when you speak of Christ being your husband, the idea in Scripture of you being the Bride of Christ is simply emphasizing that the Spirit God who is invisible, the creator of the world, is to you like a good husband is to his wife.

I showed you, that in the Word of God, Scripture reveals that God has *both* masculine and feminine attributes.

In other words, when you refer to God, you only know Him when you understand that both the male and the female reflect the full-orbed image of God. When God created man in the Garden, He said, "It is not good." It's the only time He said that in the act of creation. It is not good. Then He created the woman and said, "It *is* good."

And the reason is the revelation of who God is, is not fully seen or understood until both the man and the woman are seen as image bearers of the invisible Creator—God.

My goal in this series is to help young men who are growing up in a culture where women are viewed as sex objects to set the cultural mind-set aside and to view women the way Scripture calls us to view them: image bearers of God.

When we get through with this series, I would like men, who are married, to see and view their wives as equals because that's who our wives are—*equals*.

Likewise, I would like for all of us to understand that it is false when some agnostics—some people who don't like Christianity—say, "Well, those Christians and their Bible ... all they want to do is keep women suppressed." It is only in Scripture, only in the revelation of who God is, do you *ever* get a hint of the beauty and significance of the personhood of women. That's the goal of this series.

Last Sunday, I showed you that when God became one of us, when God came to earth—Emmanuel, it's what we're celebrating this Christmas. When Jesus, the Anointed One, came Colossians says, "In Him all the fullness of the deity lives," which means: Though Jesus Christ was physically a man, the full-orbed image of God was in the Son.

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So, in Jesus the Anointed One, you have the perfect blending of the masculine and feminine attributes of God. Jesus calmed the storm with His power, but He sat beside a prostitute and gave her a drink of water and words of life to her soul.

You see Jesus serving meals to His disciples and then raising Lazarus from the dead. So women, if you want to know what it means to be the ideal woman in terms of character—look to Jesus. Men, if you want to know what it means to be an ideal man—look to Jesus; because you only know God when you see the full-orbed image of the feminine and masculine characteristics of God.

It's another reason why, men, hear me, don't fall into the silly trap that some evangelical conservatives are setting that put you into a box. You've got to look a certain way, act a certain way, be a certain way; and no Christian man can ever show emotion, no Christian man can ever be tender—don't fall for that trap. Look to Jesus. And you'll see how a Christian man can be: strong, but meek; controlled; strong; tender and kind.

Likewise, women, don't let anyone put you in a box telling you you've got to be a certain way. By nature, physically, you may be weaker than the male, but the full-orbed character of God lives within you. When you're a believer in Jesus Christ and you can have strength, wisdom and leadership just because of the image of God is within you.

My goal in this series is for those of us who believe the Bible but come to the place where we see the equality of genders in terms of personhood and significance.

Sure there are differences, absolutely there are differences—there will always be, but there's an equality because we *dually* and *equally* bear the image of God.

Now this morning, we're coming to a time when we're going to view what the Scripture says regarding God, revealing Him as both *Father* and *Mother*. If you're like me, and you believe the Bible from cover to cover, which I do; I believe even the footnotes and the maps. The Bible is my standard; it's my cannon.

When I hear somebody refer to God as Mother there is a tendency within me to kind of shrink back. The reason is ... throughout history, at least for the last half-century there have been theological liberals, people who have denied the atonement of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, how a man or a woman is saved by God's grace, through faith in the death of Jesus Christ.

There have been liberals who deny all of that, who try to picture God in a certain way. One of the things that they'll do is they'll represent Him as feminine or as a mother and so we will shrink back because we don't hold to their theology. However, we've got to be careful here—remember the old proverbial saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water"?

In other words, in your resistance to liberal theology, be careful that you don't deny the Word of God itself because that's our standard— not the traditions of men, or the politics of this world. Our standard as believers of Christ, is the Word of God.

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Now what does the Bible say about God as Mother? Isaiah 66, verse 13, “As a mother comforts her child so I the Lord will comfort you.”

I know you’re probably reading that and saying, “Amen, I believe that. Yes, pastor I believe that. God is like a mother, but that text says *He is like a mother.*” Yes, absolutely. Just like He’s *like* a father. But He is not a man nor a woman. He is spirit. He is *like* a mother.

And so when you think of your Creator God, when you think of the invisible Spirit God who formed you in your mother’s womb, you can think of Him like a mother.

This is a little foreign for us in the West, but it’s not for other Christians, particularly African Evangelical Christians.

Dr. George Kumi, a wonderful evangelical leader in Africa, says this about his culture, “Father–Mother God is the name used by my people for the invisible God of the Bible.”

Dr. Kumi was raised in a Christian home and in a Christian school where he was taught the following Catechism, listen to it: “*God is neither man nor woman.*” Sound familiar? God is pure spirit.

The respective perfections of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God; those of a mother and those of a father. John Calvin, probably the greatest commenter on Scripture of any man that has ever lived, other than maybe John Gil—my favorite. John Calvin in his commentary on Isaiah says this, “God has chosen to liken Himself to a female and we are the fruit of His womb.”

Now for those of us who have been steeped in Scripture, for those of us who are familiar with the way Scripture represents the invisible Spirit God. We’re not bothered by that, but in our culture and because of our upbringing and other things that have happened, we have lost sight of God’s nature as mother because we don’t talk about it.

We don’t view Him as mother, we don’t experience Him in intimacy like that and so this morning what I want to do is help you. Don’t shrink back. Listen to what I am saying and see if the Scripture doesn’t support it.

Let’s begin.

I want to tell you why it is important to see God the way Scripture reveals Him and one of the ways He is revealed is as our mother.

One of the reasons it’s important to do that is because the Scripture *itself* portrays God as our tender nurturer in *both* Testaments. If you only view God as a father and your experience with an earthly father is that he was strong and powerful, a man in authority, unemotional and so on; then when you speak of your God as Father you may stay at a distance. But when you begin to understand that the Scripture reveals your Spirit God to you as Mother as well, then you’ll come close for His nurturing.

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Let me show you what I mean.

In the Old Testament God is revealed as our nurturer in a very specific fashion. In the Old Testament God is called *El Shaddai*; this is a very feminine name. The word *El* is the Hebrew word for God. *Shaddai* is the Hebrew word for breasts. So literally, this name for God, *El Shaddai*, in Hebrew means: God with breasts or the breasted one.

Now, in English, our English translators have taken this Hebrew name and they have translated it as *God Almighty*. You probably hear the name God Almighty as a curse word, but sometimes you will come across this name in Scripture. Again, if your view of God is only a God with masculine attributes you may think to yourself, 'God Almighty He is King of Kings; Sovereign God; who will "zap" evil ones; he sits on His throne and rules the universe and what have I to do with this King?'

But when you understand that the English name "God Almighty" is based upon the very feminine name *El Shaddai*, God with breasts; then you begin to see and understand that the Bible portrays God as one who nurtures, and God is not only "King of Kings" —He's your *nurturer*.

Let me show you what I mean.

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, chapter 49, in verse 25, listen to what God says, "I am God your Father who supports you, the almighty (the Hebrew word *Shaddai*) who blesses you with blessings from the skies above and from the deep sea below. Blessings from breasts, *shadayim* and the womb."

The biblical writers had no problem mixing metaphors of gender when they spoke of God because they saw both masculine and feminine attributes within the invisible Spirit God. Now this isn't just in the Old Testament. God is presented this way to us in the New Testament as well.

For example, in the Apocalypse, that is the revelation of Jesus Christ, when John the Apostle sees Christ in all of His Glory. In Revelation, chapter one, verse 13, John sees the Warrior King, and says this, "His breasts are gird up with a golden girdle."

Now if you're reading this in the English translations, you will see the word *chest* there because the English translators had a very, very difficult time putting the word breast there. They couldn't understand *how* Christ could be portrayed in His Glory as having breasts. Well, the way He could is because the Lord, the invisible Creator God, portrays *Himself* this way.

In other words, the Warrior King, seen by the Apostle John, is like a tender mother to His people.

What this means is: For those of you who didn't have the privilege of growing up in a home where you had a tender, loving, affectionate relationship with a mom, who fed you at her breast, you're not missing anything because your God is that to you.

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Now, He's also *King*. He's also strong and powerful, but both masculine and feminine attributes are seen in God.

Which leads me to a second point ... listen very carefully; strong Christian homes and churches *require* this feminine characteristic of nurturing. Now, again, it is present within men who come to faith in Jesus Christ because the Deity lives within us.

It's the life of God and the soul of man through faith in Jesus Christ and so you can get a man who comes to faith in Christ; he can be the most tender, gentle man you've ever met. He will allow his emotions to be revealed. He will weep as Jesus wept, he will serve as Jesus served.

This evangelical conservative notion that a man's got to look a certain way within Christianity—it's so foreign to Scripture. You've got to look like you're from Alabama with a full beard and be strong—if you're that way that's ok, but please understand, guys don't let anybody put you in a box! *God lives within you* and you let Him be seen.

Likewise women, same thing ... physically you're weaker than the male ... that's because in your body you're reflecting God in His nurture and His care for His kids. Oh, but you've got the life of God within you as well.

And just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't be strong. Just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't be a leader. Just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't be powerful.

Embrace who you are and follow the leadership of God in your life. In Ephesians 5 what you'll see is that when you get a home where men and women understand who they are in the life of God in their souls then they submit one to another and they are serving one another.

It's not about who's going to rule over whom. It's all about who's going to serve whom. Oh, this is what Christian living is all about.

I love John Piper. I love what he writes; I've read him for years. My good friend Sam Storms is a very close friend of John Piper. Sam fills the pulpit for John Piper when John Piper is away and you know, it's like every preacher, theologian, pastor, there are some things that John says that I disagree with. Ultimately, my standard is the Word of God, as is yours. You should never accept what any preacher says just because they say it. Search it out for yourself in the Word of God.

John Piper, at the 2012 Desiring God Conference said this about Christianity, and I quote, "God gave Christianity a masculine feel." No, God gave Christianity a masculine *and* feminine feel because only in *both* do you see the full-orbed image of God.

Remember when the apostle Paul went to the church at Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians 2, in verse 7. Remember what he said? He says of his care for the Christians there, "We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children."

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When a church or home has only a masculine feel, the image of God is shattered. But when you get a church and a home where you see the equality of men and women and you celebrate the differences—you rejoice because both men and women reflect the image of God. Then you begin to see that the more we grow closer to the image of Christ, the more we understand that you don't separate people on the basis of gender. You enjoy people on the basis of gifts and anointing and you serve one another out of the fullness of who you are.

Men you embrace your wives as equals, and you rejoice in who they are and you learn from them. You see that part of being a man is that you bear the image of God and when the fullness of God comes within your life some of the characteristics that you see in your wife you not only rejoice in—you imitate it. So, you stroke the face of your kids when you put them to bed. You tenderly give them a kiss. Yes, we might consider that a feminine characteristic, but it's part of who God is and you celebrate it.

And for those of you who grew up in a home where you had a dad, who sat on his throne, who ordered everybody around and who abused you, who said, "I am the dad and I'm in charge and I'm in control. You do what I say, because I said it."

Then when you think of God, you view Him as *your* dad—*don't*. Your dad shattered the image of God. He shattered it for you. See that your Heavenly Father is far different than your earthly one.

Likewise, those of you that had a mom that has rejected you, you never could please her, you never could measure up...

I'm sure that as more things come out about the home life of the murderer in Connecticut [Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting], who knows what, is going to be said regarding a fractured relationship between mom and son—I don't know.

You can't blame the mom. The son, in his anger ... you know what his problem is? He never knew God. Because if you ever get to the place where you know God, then everything that you may be missing in life, you find in Him.

I close by showing you this: When you begin to understand that this is the way that Scripture reveals God, then intimacy with God is developed as we grasp attributes that He possesses as *both* Father and Mother.

Here's what I mean: I look at how my wife loves our kids—*that's the way my God loves me*. I look at that affection and that love and I say to myself—*that's the image of God*.

Guys, I know many of us grew up in a home where, you don't show that. Don't be boxed in like that. If the spirit of God begins to move in your heart to write a tender letter to your child; to give your grown child a hug and to express your love; don't think of yourself as in a box. Don't think you've got to act a certain way that culture says that a man acts. You follow the leadership of the spirit of God and you watch the power of God move in your relationships.

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Listen to this text: “I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. Israel put your hope in the Lord—both now and forever.”

What I want you to understand this morning are these three things:

If you had a fractured home, a mom or a dad who raised you in an environment of abuse, but you’ve come to know Christ: take heart Christian! Your Heavenly Father is as tender as the most nurturing mother. He’s the God with breasts.

Take heart Christian! Your Spirit Creator is as loving as the most affectionate mother. Yes, He’s King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but He represents Himself to you as a female and “you are the fruit of His womb” Isaiah says.

Take heart Christian, as you come to know the biblical revelation of God you will be strong and you will take action.

In the coming two weeks, what I am going to show you is *how* an understanding of God as Spirit, possessing masculine and feminine attributes, brings you healing and strength.

Next Sunday, I believe, when you begin to grasp this and what it means to your soul; you will come to a place of healing. Then the following week I’m going to show you how to take action in your home, in the church and in society.

Do you know what the answer for the problems caused by our sex-crazed culture is? It’s seeing women as bearing the image ... of God. Wow.

I’m going to show you how this relates to how you treat women in every area of your life. Women we’re going to help you see that this means that there is a dignity and a strength and a personhood that is equal to every man in your life.

So, I hope at least after this study this morning, when you reflect on your relationship with God through faith in Jesus, the Anointed One, who *came* and *died* for you and *rose again*; when you reflect on your God you see Him as both father and mother. When you hear an African–Evangelical Christian pray Father–Mother God, thank you for your grace, thank you for your kindness, you don’t shrink back because you see the full biblical revelation of your God.

If you don’t know Him this morning, it’s not about religion, it’s not about your performance; it’s about coming to know Him through your trust in Him. He came. He died. He rose to nurture you; to suckle you; to be to you the father and mother that you need.