

NOT ANOTHER MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE STUDY GUIDE

Historically, Mother's Day has been the least attended Sunday of the year in the Tree of Life Family. That's normal across the UK. I think it's because there are a lot of people who really struggle with mother's day. Mums don't want to be told how to be great mothers when the laundry is piled up on the dining room table and the dishes need doing and the children are running all over the place. Dads think a mother's day sermon has nothing to do with them, so they send their wife to church to become a better mum and stay at home and clean the car. Young people do not want to be told "honour your mother", they know everything at their age.

Some people have lost their mothers this year, some people love their mums but their mums do not make it easy for them, some people are desperate to be mums but have not found the right man or there are other issues. No matter what, the potential to cause grief when talking about mums is huge.

Mother's Day sermons are notoriously awful. Sentimental tripe that leaves some women feeling smugly self-satisfied, while others leave licking their wounds! So, although the point of today in the calendar is encouraging everyone to be grateful for their mums, and love their mums, and say thank you, at the same time, there are women who do not have children and really want to, there are others that have lost children. There is no one size fits all.

And the truth is even if you are a mum and love your children, being a mum is tough. It is hard work, you will not always get it right, your child will not always be perfectly behaved, your house will not look like a show home all the time. But sometimes we feel like we have failed if it is tough, we feel we have failed if we do not do the job with 100% brilliance 24/7. Well, maybe it is not that we have failed, but our expectations are wrong.

So, as a pastor, my job is to bring us back to the Word of God, and help us understand the Word in context. You see what the world says a mother should be like is not important, what religion says a mother should be like is not important. What matters is what the Word of God says.

I. YOUR HIGHEST CALLING IS NOT TO BE A MOTHER (or FATHER)

That is a bit of a radical statement. I listened to a few Mother's Day sermons this week, a few of them were men saying, "I am a pastor, that's a high calling, but the highest calling of all is to be a mother, the greatest job of all".

Now I am not saying mumming is not important – it's really important, you are shaping lives! Anything that shapes lives is important, because people are important, and little people are the most important people.

But if I say the highest calling of all is to be a mum, what am I saying to those of you who are not mums, who will never be mums, who will never be wives. What am I saying? I am distorting the truth about humanity.

Listen carefully: YOUR HIGHEST CALLING IS TO BE A DAUGHTER OF THE KING – men, a son of the king. Your highest calling is to be connected to JESUS, to let HIS LIFE, HIS LOVE flow into you and through you. That's the highest calling.

Read Mark 3.14. Even the apostles of the Lamb, their highest calling was not preaching or casting out demons. Their highest calling was to be with Him, to fellowship with Jesus. Every single one of us, our highest calling is to rest in Jesus.

Read Genesis 1.27-28. Before it tells us to be fruitful, it tells us that we are in the image of God. Before we go off and become mums and dads, our higher calling is to rest in the fact that we are in the image of God.

Until you rest in His image, you will never be fruitful the right way.

- If you are a mum, REST IN HIS IMAGE
- If you are not a mum, REST IN HIS IMAGE
- If you have lost your mum, REST IN HIS IMAGE
- If you still have your mum, REST IN HIS IMAGE
- If the word mum makes you want to vomit, REST IN HIS IMAGE

YOUR HIGHEST CALLING IS TO REST IN HIS IMAGE AND REFLECT HIM TO THE WORLD. That's who you are. Your highest calling is not mum, not dad, certainly not apostle, businesswoman, pastor, elder – it is IMAGE OF GOD – disciple of JESUS – child of the LIVING GOD.

Now obviously Genesis 1.27-28 includes having babies – I can see that – the human race will not last long without mums and dads, but it is not the FIRST or the HIGHEST CALL. Jesus was never a dad, Paul was never a dad, Mary and Martha were not mothers. Lydia was a businesswoman who was not married and did not have any children. She served the ministry faithfully. Being fruitful is not just having babies, there are other ways to be fruitful.

2. THERE IS NO SINGLE BIBLICAL PATTERN OF MOTHERHOOD

Sarah waited until she was incredibly old to have a child. Mary had her children as a teenager. Neither was wrong, neither is the pattern for anyone. There is no set pattern that we must follow. Mothers can have all sorts of different ways of mothering, all different ways to run the household, there is no one way to do things. We need to celebrate that every mum is unique, and that God has designed you to do things in a way that no one else has ever done before.

Hagar became a mother due to an affair with a married man. The dad sent her off with a bottle of water and a loaf of bread. But she still made sure "God was with the boy as he grew up" (Genesis 21.20). That is not the pattern, but she was still a mum!

Leah and Rachel had to share Jacob, but they raised the twelve tribes of Israel. Not a pattern, but still mums!

Jochebed hid her baby illegally for three months, put him in a basket, and then pushed him down to a princess to get her to look after him. That's not a pattern to follow, but still a mum!

Mary gave birth on her own, wrapped her baby all by herself, in a stable, surrounded by animals, with shepherds turning up. Not a pattern to follow, but still a mum!

How you ended up being a mother, what your circumstances are, what is going on around you – none of that can stop you deciding to be a godly mum. The problem is if we try and use any of the individual mothers in Scripture as a set pattern we will not measure up and cannot fit into that situation.

Now there is one passage of Scripture that is used as a pattern for being a mother, and it is amazing how the church holds women to it in a way that has condemned and bruised many women. I am sure all of you are aware of the chapter I mean, and I am sure some of the women reading this study have been asked before “are you a Proverbs 31 woman”. But sadly, we have not thought this through, because we have in the West a very piecemeal approach to the Bible. We find individual verses and stand on them, which is not a problem, but we should at least read them in context first and try and place those Scriptures in a context.

So, let us examine Proverbs 31 in the light of this, and start at the beginning. Read Proverbs 31.1. These are the sayings of King Lemuel about his mother. So, whoever King Lemuel is, his mother is the original Proverbs 31 woman. So, we look up Lemuel in Strong’s Concordance and it tells us it is “a symbolic name for Solomon meaning the king God spoke to”. Which means the original Proverbs 31 woman was Solomon’s mother, Bathsheba.

I am sure we all know the basic history of Bathsheba. She slept with a man who was not her husband, she was the kind of woman who bathes naked on her roof. She lost her first child and was David’s third of eight wives (maybe more). Her first husband was a Hittite, which you are not supposed to marry! Bathsheba is not a pattern for any mother. Now, there are principles in Proverbs 31, just like there are principles all throughout Proverbs, but if you are patterning your life on Bathsheba and want to be the next Bathsheba, you need help!

Now, think about this: Proverbs 31 is the last chapter of Proverbs – a book all about wisdom. The virtue of the virtuous woman comes from wisdom, comes from her fearing the Lord, building good friends, saying good things – we don’t start there, and use it as a check list, we start with the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – and you start to relate to God, let those things flow out of you as wisdom grows, as you feed on the book.

Bathsheba started off in a mess. She did not have the traditional nuclear family, she was not a textbook mother, she started off bad. She started off foolish, but she developed in wisdom, she grew and increased, she became more precious than rubies – because she started to fear the Lord and develop wisdom. And it took her years to do it.

When someone starts being a minister, we don’t hold them up to Peter in Acts and say “did you see 3000 people born again”, how many cripples have you healed, how many trances have you had – how many times has the Holy Spirit fell on people when you preached. That’s an unfair thing to do to a new pastor. Rather, we start with Peter in Matthew – did you manage not to get called satan by Jesus today? Well done, that’s a great first day of pastoring!

When someone starts living for God, we don’t expect them to know everything. And when a woman becomes a mum she does not start off at expert level. She does not start at the end of the book!

So, to hold up Proverbs 31 as an example when it is the culmination of the book is just unfair. Let me set you free today! Women, get in the Word – that's a must and as you do, you will flow into being, grow into being someone who is "clothed with strength and honour", "looks well to the ways of her household", "stretches out your hands to the poor". You will get there but start out with fearing the Lord and desiring wisdom.

Another truth that will help you mother (or father) is this:

3. GOD LOVES YOU MORE THAN YOU LOVE YOUR CHILDREN

You must realize this. When you are struggling to be the Proverbs 31 woman, remember all the principles are in it because they reflect God. You are in the image of God, and everything in the Bible reflects God. When God gives Ten Commandments and says "Do not lie", this is because God does not lie. When God says, "She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31.12) that is because God brings you good and not harm every single day. God daily loads you with benefits (Psalm 68.19).

The more we realize that God is good to us, the easier it is for us to reflect that grace and goodness to our children. Now, somewhere where realizing that the principles reflect God is so powerful to us is slightly later in Proverbs 31. Read Proverbs 31.21.

Now that is a good principle for being a good mother – your children should be clothed well and appropriate to the weather. But do you know the Bible tells us something about God, it tells us that He clothes us greater than Solomon (Matthew 6.29-31). Solomon was clothed well by his mother, but that is nothing compared to how well God will clothe us. He is on your side when it comes to providing for your family.

Are you wiser than God? If the wisest woman in the world ensures that there is no fear of snow because she clothes her children with scarlet, how much more do you think God clothes you?

But if we dig a little deeper into this verse, we find a powerful truth that will change your life forever. The Hebrew word for scarlet is "tola", which is the word for a very specific kind of worm. Today, it is called the crimson grub. It is remarkably rare. In the ancient world, only kings were allowed to have them, it was illegal to kill them and you needed a licence to touch them. Their blood was a unique red, the most beautiful red you have ever seen. The worms were crushed, and their blood was used to make a dye only royalty could wear. Only the royal family in ancient Middle East wore scarlet. In other words, the children in Proverbs 31.21 were clothed as well as royals. That is the power of wisdom.

When the female crimson worm is ready to lay her eggs (which happens only once in her life), she climbs up a tree or fence and attaches herself to it. With its body attached to the wood, a hard crimson shell forms – a shell so hard and so secured to the wood that it can only be removed by tearing apart the body which would kill the worm.

The female worm lays her eggs under her body, under the protective shell. The larvae hatch and they remain under the mother's protective shell. The baby worms feed on the living body of the mother worm for three days. The mother worm then dies and her body excretes a crimson or scarlet dye that stains the wood to which she is attached and her baby worms. The baby worms remain crimson coloured for their entire life.

In biblical times, the red dye excreted from the Crimson Worm was used in the High Priest's robe for the red colour and probably for Ram's skins dyed red in the covering of

the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Uses of this red dye continue today. The worm's body and shell, while still red and attached to the tree, are scraped off and used to make what is called "Royal Red Dye." The remains of the Crimson Worm are also today used in medicine that helps in regulating the human heart.

What does that mean for how God clothes us? Read Psalm 22.6. Psalm 22 is a Psalm about Jesus. It is a prophetic Psalm all about his death and resurrection, and it contains this phrase "I am a worm, not a man".

Now in Hebrew, Psalm 22.6 does not use the normal word for worm, but it uses the word "tola", a very specific reference to the crimson grub. Jesus Christ on the cross because our crimson grub. He was crushed by your sins and my sins, and the blood of the worm clothes us in the garment of kings. That means as the family of Jesus we never need be afraid of the snow. We never need to be afraid of the storm, because we are clothed in the blood of Jesus, our crimson worm. He poured our His blood and washed us red – red-clean. His blood gives us life and clothes us. We are surrounded by Him, and no plague will come near our dwelling (Psalm 91.10).

Spurgeon said the following about the crimson grub:

"There is a little red worm which seems to be nothing else but blood when it is crushed. It seems all gone except a blood-stain and the Savior, in the deep humiliation of His spirit, compares Himself to that little red worm. How true it is that 'He made Himself of no reputation' for our sakes! He emptied Himself of all His Glory and, if there is any glory natural to manhood, He emptied Himself even of that! Not only the glories of His Godhead, but the honors of His Manhood He laid aside that it might be seen that 'though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor.'"

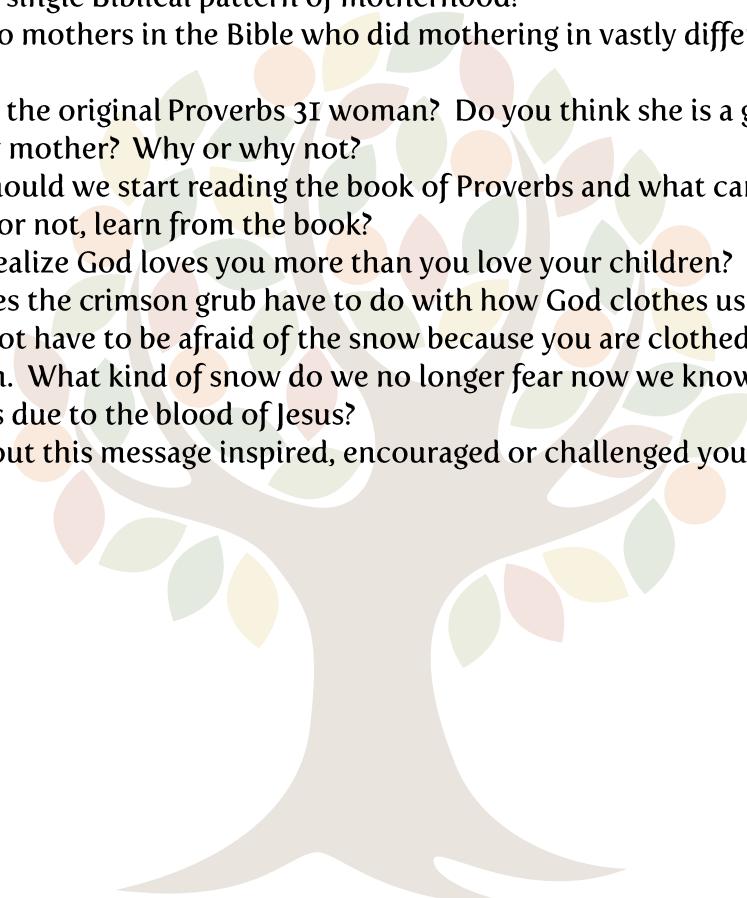
"He became poor." What an image! Jesus became a worm, a lowly worm. He was crushed for our sakes and He poured out His red blood—the blood that washes us clean. The blood that gives us life. Jesus Christ, went to the cross as a crimson grub, got crushed by your sins and my sins, and His blood clothes us in the garments of kings. That is the true clothing of scarlet. That's the true clothing God gives His family, and you can give it to your family. You need to as a good mother (or father) teach your family that they never need be afraid of the snow, because we are clothed in the blood of the worm.

And because Jesus has clothed us, we can be confident He will empower us to clothe our children. Because Jesus has loved us, we can be confident He will empower us to love our children.

All of us can grow in wisdom, all of us can grow in an understanding of God's love. All of us can take a step forward to be a better mum, wife, husband, father, son, daughter, Christian. But in all of it, never forget, Jesus Christ has already accepted you, already clothed you in royal robes through His death and resurrection.

NOT ANOTHER MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

- I. 1. What historically has been the least attended Sunday of the year at Tree of Life?
2. Why do you think that is? Have you ever missed a Mother's Day service, if so why?
3. What is your highest calling?
4. Have you ever thought something else, whether ministry, or mothering, or making money, was your highest calling? If so, what were the effects of that misunderstanding?
5. What does it mean to rest in the image of God?
6. Is there a single Biblical pattern of motherhood?
7. Name two mothers in the Bible who did mothering in vastly different ways to each other.
8. Who was the original Proverbs 31 woman? Do you think she is a good role model for a new mother? Why or why not?
9. Where should we start reading the book of Proverbs and what can all of us, mothers or not, learn from the book?
10. Do you realize God loves you more than you love your children?
- II. 11. What does the crimson grub have to do with how God clothes us?
12. You do not have to be afraid of the snow because you are clothed in the blood of the worm. What kind of snow do we no longer fear now we know we are righteous due to the blood of Jesus?
13. What about this message inspired, encouraged or challenged you the most?



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