

“God Our Mother”

1 John 4:7-21 & Psalm 139:1-18

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Prayer for Understanding Everpresent God we thank you for your word the Bible, pages filled with a holy message and sealed with a kiss from heaven. Speak to us now. Let the supernatural take hold of us for there is love, truth, hope, peace, forgiveness, and life in your holy love letter to us. Amen

1 John 4:7-21 NLT

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much God loved us by sending Jesus into the world so that we might have eternal life through Jesus. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent Jesus as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and God’s love is brought to full expression in us. And God has given us the Holy Spirit as proof that we live in God and God in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the God sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. All who declare that Jesus is God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in God’s love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face God with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced God’s perfect love. We love each other because God loved us first. If someone says, “I love God,” but hates someone that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And God has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.”

Psalm 139:1-18 NLT

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!

From time to time I enjoy putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Once on a solo retreat on a cold rainy day, I found a Ziploc bag with puzzle pieces. It was a challenging puzzle made even more difficult, because I had no idea what the jigsaw puzzle depicted. Yet this made it more fun as every piece revealed a little more of the scene. The result was I truly saw more--the details, the things in the background and foreground. I was more driven to complete the puzzle so I could enjoy the full picture.

God has infinite facets. Our attempt to characterize God is like the jigsaw puzzle. As we go through life, we glimpse different facets of God. None of them fully reveal God, yet each reveals a facet of God. God tells us to not fixate on a particular facet for so long that we are unable to see the other facets of God. Every person and every experience is shining with a different facet of God making our characterizations of God more complete.

God realizes that we are unable to comprehend all God's facets that's why when Moses asked God at the burning bush, "What is your name?," **"God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'"** God spoke to the Israelites **"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."** This is a warning against trying to characterize God too precisely, a warning against putting God in a box or limiting God by fixating on only one facet of God. God is abundantly greater than any one facet can portray.

It is fine to enjoy one facet of God as long as you do not turn it into an idol by focusing on that facet alone thereby dismissing the other infinite facets of God to be experienced and enjoyed. We need to balance depictions of God, such as Michael Angelo's depiction of God as a white man, with other facets, such as a Black woman. The book *The Shack* describes God as a beaming African-American woman, who engulfs her children in her arms, who lifts us up and twirls us around as God repeats our name over and over followed by I love you. God smells like flowers. God exudes love that is warm, inviting, and melting. God is three persons, so *The Shack*, depicts God is a small, distinctively Asian woman who gently gathers our tears. This facet of God shimmers in the light as her hair blows in all directions without a breeze. It is easier to see her out of the corner of your eye than to look at her directly. The third person of God, completing the Trinity, appears as a Middle Eastern man, a laborer with a tool belt, gloves and a sawdust covered plaid shirt. His features are pleasant enough, but not particularly handsome—not a man who sticks out in a crowd. His eyes and smile bring light to everyone.

God is beyond gender. And yet, we can glimpse God through all that is good, joyful, and loving in every person, of every spot on the gender spectrum. In celebration of Mother's Day we will explore God our mother. The intimate, resilient, compassionate, healing, forgiving, gracious, and empowering love of mothers reveal a beautiful facet of God. I realize some of you have never meant your mother and some of you have a bad relationship with your mother. If this is your situation, then think about people who love you with mother like qualities. All earthly comparisons and descriptions of God are limited, flawed, and woefully inadequate. God is perfect and no one on earth is perfect. God is beyond personhood, and yet each of us is created in the image of God and reveals a unique facet of God.

Sallie McFague writes: "No human love can be perfect, but parental love is the best metaphor we have. Parent—Mother—All of us have the womb as our first home, all of us are born from the bodies of our mother, all of us are fed by our mothers. What better imagery could there be for expressing the most basic reality of existence: that we live and move and have our being in God." All metaphors are limited, just as our language, art, music, and experiences are all limited. That is why if we are going to know God, we must appreciate many different facets of God.

In honor of mothers think about the best qualities of mothers. Take all that is loving pure, good, and comforting and piece together a facet of God. If negative images come to your mind, place them aside and let God's grace dissolve them away.

There are numerous scriptures that reveal God's maternal facet. Theologian Dan Migliore points out: "the Bible depicts God as a mother who gives birth to, feeds, and comforts her children. Jesus describes himself as desiring to gather the people of God together like a mother hen who gathers her brood under her wings."

In the psalm you just heard the psalmist describes an intimate and eternal bond of love between the one who creates, gives birth to life and the one who is born. God is intimate and attached to us. God knows us like a mother who is infinitely attentive and attune to her child. There is no place God's maternal love cannot reach,

no heaven, no hell, no distance, no light, no darkness. Even the worst forms of human alienation are not beyond God's love. There are no limits to God's love.

God's maternal intimacy with us is portrayed as neither aloof nor domineering. God does not coerce or ever give up on her children. God's love makes room for human growth, freedom, and expression even if that also means making room for human arrogance, sin, and destructiveness. Not control or manipulation rather patience, steadfastness, and everlasting love are the qualities scripture attributes to God's intimate attachment to her children.

Related to God's maternal intimacy is her resilience. A loving mother is profoundly vulnerable and experiences heartbreak along the way. To give birth, to nurture, to give freedom, to let go, all while loving steadfastly is risky and calls for resilience. God loves us, her children. God sees us bent on paths of destruction. God warns and cajoles often without success. God becomes heart broken. God feels rejected, misunderstood, and frustrated and yet God never gives up on anyone. God will love us all back into the family of God.

God said, **"When Israel was only a child, I loved them. I called out, 'My child!'—called them out of Egypt. But when others called them, they ran off and left me. They worshiped the popular idols, they played at religion with toy gods. Still, I stuck with them. I led them. I who taught them to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I rescued them from human bondage, I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. But they never acknowledged my help, never admitted that I was the one pulling their wagon, that I lifted them, like a baby, to my cheek, then I bent down to feed them."**

In spite of the heartbreak we cause God, our mother, she is resilient in her love for us. God waits for opportunities to heal and restore us. God even endures our accusations that she is abandoning us, when we run from God.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed: **"But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' God replied 'Can a mother forget the infant at her breast, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.'"**

God's maternal facet reveals intimacy, resilience, and compassion full of forgiveness. The word describing God's compassion in the Bible has its root in the word "womb". To feel compassion for someone is to feel empathically connected to them as a mother does for her child that she once carried in her womb. Mothers have a profound tendency to feel with, and for, as well as being forgiving of their children.

The prophets and Jesus used maternal imagery to convey the expanse of God's compassion and forgiveness. Isaiah explains the heartbreak and lament of God for her children as they rebel and hurt one another and themselves. God's response is **"Comfort, Comfort my people," says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and that her sins are pardoned."**

Beyond that God will fulfill her promises even though her blessings will never be earned or deserved. Isaiah concludes: **"Peace and prosperity will overflow Jerusalem like a river," says the Lord. Her children will be nursed at her breasts, carried in her arms and treated with love. I will comfort you as a child is comforted by their mother."**

Jesus full of maternal, compassionate forgiveness looks beyond our violent self-destructiveness. Jesus said, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings, and you were not willing!"**

The sweep of the Bible reveals four recurring maternal aspects of God. God is healing, forgiving, empowering and loving. I am blessed to have experienced all of these through my mother. I remember how talking with my mom soothed and healed wounds. God's healing is much more powerful as God will heal every wound including the wound of earthly death with eternal resurrection life.

My mom was forgiving and empowering. As a youth, I hated to study. Mom forgave all my complaining and rebellion and kept finding things in me to celebrate. She was creative, finding new ways to study. She often made my studies into a game. My mom's constant loving empowerment has enabled my education and the vast majority of my accomplishments.

Many mothers echo God's healing and forgiveness through even mundane tasks. Kathleen Norris wrote, "I find bread-baking to be a hands-on experience of transformation, and during the quiet times when dough is

rising, I often sit and write, aiming for transformations of my own. As for laundry, I might characterize it as approaching the moral realm; there are days when it seems a miracle to be able to make dirty things clean.”

Healing, forgiving, empowering and loving are also revealed in Benjamin West’s mom. One afternoon, his mother had to go out, so she left young Benjamin with his sister Sally. He found some bottles of ink with different colors and told his sister, "Sally, I’m going to paint a picture of you!" In creating the masterpiece, Benjamin made a mess of things, leaving blotches of ink on the table and all over the floor. When his mother came home and found the mess, she forgave it. She looked past the mess to the paper with the picture of Sally where she saw that Benjamin was a painter. She empowered him saying, "Benjamin, you have painted a beautiful portrait of your sister," and then she kissed him. Many years later, the famous artist Benjamin West said, "It was my mother’s kiss that made me a painter."

God kissed each of us with the gift of life and kisses us with talents. Jesus came to show us forgiveness and empower us with the Holy Spirit. All of us are God’s children. God sees past the clutter and mess of our life and cherishes and celebrates our unique beauty and talents.

God has infinite facets. The intimate, resilient, compassionate, healing, forgiving, gracious and empowering love of mothers reveals a facet of God. Savor God as our mother as you celebrate mother’s day.
Amen