

**As a Mother Comforts Her Child**  
**Isaiah 66:10-14 (5/14/17)**

*As a Mother Comforts Her Child*—that’s our sermon title today, and I lifted it straight from the Scripture passage we’ll read in just a moment from the Prophet Isaiah. Before we read our text, however, I want to ask you a question.

How does this phrase, *As a Mother Comforts Her Child*, make you feel? Does it bring back any good memories? Do you feel warm inside when you hear it? Well, this is surely what God intends.

As a child, when you fell down and skinned your knee, who did you run to? I don’t know about you, but I ran to momma. And what’s more, our children ran to Pam. I knew, and they knew, where they would find the most comfort!

As dads, we try. We do the best we can at being comforting: but it’s just not the same as how momma does it!

There are plenty of places in the Bible where God is referred to as Father. We know about many of these, and this is an important image of God that we have in the Scriptures: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” For most of us, that’s a good image—one that we use often when addressing God or speaking about Him. God is our Heavenly Father.

But as we’ll soon see, this phrase, “*As a Mother Comforts Her Child*,” is also about God. It’s a Biblical image of God as well—just not one that we hear or use as often. Sometimes, though, the Bible paints a motherly image of God, as it does in our Scripture today, taken from **Isaiah 66:10-14**. Let’s take a look:

**<sup>10</sup> “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her,  
all you who love her;  
rejoice greatly with her,  
all you who mourn over her.**

**<sup>11</sup> For you will nurse and be satisfied  
at her comforting breasts;  
you will drink deeply  
and delight in her overflowing abundance.”**

**12 For this is what the LORD says:  
 "I will extend peace to her like a river,  
 and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream;  
 you will nurse and be carried on her arm  
 and dandled on her knees.**

**13 As a mother comforts her child,  
 so will I comfort you;  
 and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."**

**14 When you see this, your heart will rejoice  
 and you will flourish like grass;  
 the hand of the LORD will be made known to his servants,  
 but his fury will be shown to his foes.**

This is all about God being *like a mother* to us—not a father this time, but a mother. Look at verses 11 and 12: Dads may "carry" their little ones... and even "dandle them on their knees," but we don't "nurse" them—simply not equipped for it!

No need to quibble over that, though, because in the very next verse--verse 13--Isaiah spells this out for us. God says, "As a *mother* comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

As you know, God is called Father throughout the Bible—and I'm all for that. It's not a good image for *everybody*—but for those of us blessed to have had good, loving fathers, it's a great image for God. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name..."

So God as "our Father" is well-established—and it's an image dear to the hearts of many of us. But here in this passage, Isaiah makes a beautiful comparison between God... and mothers.

As it turns out, friends, our fatherly God is also "a motherly God." And that's an excellent image for God as well—again, for most of us. There are some important aspects of God's nature that would simply be left out, in fact, if there were no references in Scripture to God as "mother." Here are some examples:

**1.** First of all, this "motherly image" speaks to us concerning God's **creativity**. Just a few verses earlier in Isaiah, the prophet speaks of a woman giving birth to a child. He then compares this event to God birthing his people--forming them, calling them, and delivering them from captivity into freedom.

Moses used the same analogy when he told the Hebrews, "...you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deuteronomy 32:18). So Moses also spoke of a motherly God, a "birthing" God.

There is something incredibly awesome in the presence of a mother giving birth. She's participating with God in the act of creation in ways, men, that we'll never experience—a fact that we're often reminded of, of course—but, fellows, we're really better off just leaving this to the ladies and being thankful!

But again, birth is an amazing thing—to witness! Granted, easy for me to say! We men do get that, ladies—but you just keep on reminding us anyway. We're men—we can take it!

Related to this, sometimes I have the opportunity to talk with fathers-to-be who, along with their wives, are attending childbirth classes. I can sympathize with them--been there and done that!

You watch a couple of those films and hear the birth process described and you're not at all sure you want to go through with it--not even with your wife! But I always encourage these dads-to-be to stay with it, take the classes and be there when that new little person comes into the world. Been there and done that three times, and there's nothing like it!

In that delivery room, you find yourself overwhelmed by a sense of being in the presence of the miraculous. The place becomes holy ground. Maybe that's the real reason we have to take off our shoes when we go in! It's a holy place.

I'm glad that it's not still done the way it once was--mom in the delivery room... and dad in the waiting room. I heard about one expectant father who had a particularly nervous night pacing the floor as his wife went through labor and delivery.

It was such a long night. He must have walked the floor back and forth a 1,000 times. Finally, after several hours, the nurse came out and said, "Congratulations, Mr. Smith, you have a beautiful baby girl."

To this, the weary father replied, "Oh, thank goodness it's a girl. She'll never have to go through what I've been through tonight!"

You know, it hasn't been many years ago that medical science was not as advanced as it is today. Many mothers died in childbirth. Preachers would wax eloquent about how we should appreciate motherhood on the basis of how mothers descended into the very "valley of the shadow of death" to give us birth. That was true; and it still is really.

But this also says something to us about God... because—think about this—that's what God did in order that that we might be born anew. God descended into the valley of death through His Son Jesus Christ in order to offer us eternal life.

He went to the cross to deliver us from sin's power. By His mighty acts of grace and forgiveness--a true labor of love--we are made new creatures, and we experience new birth in Him.

So, do you see now how motherhood speaks to us of God's physical and spiritual creativity? First, He gives us life--birth. Then, God gives us new life—also called "new birth"--through Christ Jesus, His Son.

**2. Let's take this a bit further. This maternal image of God speaks about God's nurture. Verse 11 of Isaiah 66 reads: "For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance."**

God's nurture of his people is like a mother's milk providing nurture for her child. We find this same comparison elsewhere in Scripture. In the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy, God is portrayed as a mother eagle who helps her young eaglets leave the nest.

First, she stirs up the nest. With her mighty claws she reaches in through the fluffy down and pulls up the thorns which are part of the underlying structure of the nest. This, of course, causes the nest to be an uncomfortable place for her little eaglets.

Then the mother eagle pushes her young out of the nest. They fall toward the ground, fluttering, unable to fly; so she swoops down under them and catches them. She then repeats this process over and over until they can finally fly on their own.

There's a lesson for human mothers in this story. A good mother doesn't want her young to go on being dependent on her forever, so she prepares them for a life of independency. Nurturing her young, teaching them by example, and training them in the important matters of life—this is what good parenting is all about!

I remember with gratitude a lesson my mother taught me. It concerned my attitude towards others--especially how I should see and relate to those who are different from me.

There was a boy in my home town—I'll call him Tommy. He was different from the other children, and we all knew it.

He didn't start out that way; but when Tommy was young, he developed a high fever that lasted for several days. The doctors didn't know if Tommy would live.

He did, but he was never quite the same. There was brain damage, resulting in awkward body movements, slurred speech, and—worst of all--he drooled—couldn't help it.

You know... children can be rather cruel to those who are different. Adults—though usually more subtle—they can be cruel, too. In fact, that's often where the children learn this stuff.

As you can imagine, most of the other kids kept their distance from Tommy... and he knew it. He felt it.

Guess what *my* Mom did, though?!? Every so often, Mom would take me over to Tommy's house, or she would invite Tommy over to our house... to play... with me.

And you know how I felt about that? I didn't like it! It felt like some kind of cruel and unusual punishment—the other kids didn't have to play with Tommy. So I resisted doing it at first.

But that didn't do any good, because—if you can believe this-- Mom didn't give me any choice in the matter. She didn't ask me if it was okay to do this.

And you know what? In time, I grew to accept Tommy for who he was, and to really count him as a friend.

And what's more, I am convinced that it's because of that friendship with Tommy that today I am better able to love and accept people who are different from myself, whether those differences relate to age, or race, or education, or economic status, or politics, or creed, or any of the other things that can cause our prejudices to become hyper-active.

That doesn't mean I never have to struggle with prejudice; but I'm thankful that through mom's persistence, accepting the differences in others is easier. That's just one example of the kind of nurture that produces growth.

God is like a good mother--like that mother eagle who wants those eaglets to grow and mature and become all they're created to be. And like any mom who knows there are certain values she wants to instill in the lives of her children—and who understands this is far too important to be left to chance.

A fellow pastor told me about a woman in his congregation who had gotten to know a woman in their community who was Muslim. She told her new friend she would be away on Sunday because her son was involved in an out-of-town baseball tournament.

"On Sunday?" the Muslim lady asked; "but isn't that your religions' holy day?"

"Well, yes," she said, a little concerned about where this could lead. "But my son loves his baseball, and that's when they're having the tournament, so..."

"I see," she replied; but then asked, "but what are you teaching your children?" Good moms and dads ask those questions. They take seriously the ways in which they are nurturing their children.

God sent His Son Jesus into the world not only to reveal what He's like, but also to show us what we can be like at our best. Becoming our best selves, our most mature and responsible selves, simply means growing in our likeness to Jesus Christ.

Through His grace and love, God nurtures us toward maturity. He's so much like a good mother...as she nurtures her children.

**3.** And, finally, this image also says a lot about God's **tenderness**. Listen again to our text:

"For this is what the Lord says: 'I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you...'" (12b and 13a).

Jesus, who taught us to refer to God as Father—and even "Abba," Daddy--also gave us a beautiful "mother-image" when He compared Himself to a mother hen.

To the people of Jerusalem, Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not" (Mt. 23:37).

How sad it is when a mother's love is disregarded. But how much sadder when it's God's love that's rejected, when it's His eternal tenderness and care that's refused.

Surely the heart of God is often broken by the disobedience and ingratitude of His children—just, my friends, as mothers' hearts are sometimes broken by the thoughtless actions of their children.

That's the thing about love—whether God's love...or a mother's love. It's risky. Loving someone is always a risky thing to do.

By its very nature, love takes a chance on getting its heart broken. But if love is genuine—and a mother's love usually is—it just keeps on loving anyway.

Out of love for her children, a mother will accept and forgive, while continuing to nurture her children and sacrifice for them—so much like God, friends. That's why we often see something of God in the lives of our mothers.

That's not by accident. It's by design! When mothers do these things, they're simply being all that God created them to be. And the rest of us... get to enjoy this blessing.

Thank you, God. And thank you, mothers. Together, you make a great team!