



Spiritual Mothering

THE TITUS 2 MODEL FOR
WOMEN MENTORING WOMEN



Susan Hunt

FOREWORD BY GEORGE GRANT



“I read this book about twenty years ago as a new Christian. Longing for a spiritual mother, I found Susan Hunt discipling me from these pages and stirring my heart to pour out to others what she had poured into me. I followed her example set forth in this book as I began to understand the importance of discipleship in the Christian life. Grounded in Scripture, wed to the local church, specific to women, personal, wise, hopeful, and engaging—this book will be both a ready reference for your discipleship of women and an encouragement to both young and old as you strive to live for God’s glory.”

Kristie Anyabwile, wife of Thabiti Anyabwile, Pastor, Anacostia River Church, Washington, DC; mom of three; discipler of women

“I do not know of anyone better qualified to write a book on spiritual mothering than Susan Hunt. This is a subject she has been passionate about and has modeled for many years. Susan has been an older woman in my life, and her example has encouraged me to embrace the calling of pouring my life into women of the next generation. No message could be more relevant, more needed, more rewarding, or more Christ-honoring for Christian women of all ages.”

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, author; Radio Host, *Revive Our Hearts*

“In my thirty years of ministry, one of the most heartbreaking and eye-opening revelations I’ve had is that so many women have never experienced intentional discipleship through their local churches. I was poured into very consistently for four years when I was a university student through a campus organization, which laid the foundation for my spiritual life and ministry. How I would have loved for older women in the church to disciple me with that same intentionality and passion! *Spiritual Mothering* enters into the void with hope, practical teaching, and rich biblical encouragement for women of all ages to be nurtured in life-on-life relationships for the sake of the gospel. I am excited for Susan Hunt’s updated resource, which is filled with the timeless truth of God’s Word.”

Ellen Mary Dykas, Women’s Ministry Coordinator for Harvest USA; editor, *Sexual Sanity for Women*

“Susan Hunt is committed to declare the glorious deeds of the Lord to the next generation so they will set their hope in God (Ps. 78:1–7). This commitment shines through the pages of *Spiritual Mothering* as Susan helps another generation fulfill this gospel mandate. This book is a gift to the church, filled with tender wisdom that flows from a life in fellowship with God and others. *Spiritual Mothering* will encourage and challenge you to grow in your relationship with the Lord so that you give yourself to the next generation.”

Stephen T. Estock, Coordinator, PCA Discipleship Ministries

“I praise God for the wisdom of Susan Hunt. Through this book, she spiritually mothered me and many of my seminary friends from afar. In these days when the world tells women to follow their hearts, here we have a clarion call to follow Jesus. I’m excited to see this book get into the hands of more young women who need to be encouraged in their calling to make disciples of the nations.”

Gloria Furman, wife of Dave Furman, Pastor, Redeemer Church of Dubai; author, *The Pastor’s Wife* and *Missional Motherhood*

“Twenty-five years later, these truths are more than mere words to me, for I have seen their shape worked out in my own life and the lives of countless women. One of my greatest joys has been witnessing the cultivation of a culture that encourages gospel friendships between older and younger woman to flourish. These truths have yielded not just healthy women, but more importantly, healthy churches.”

Karen Hodge, Women’s Ministry Coordinator, Presbyterian Church in America

“I first read *Spiritual Mothering* almost twenty years ago. After years of ministry, I am more convinced that this book should be read by every woman seeking to invest in other women. Susan Hunt wisely unpacks Titus 2 with theological precision, practical application, and faithful encouragement. I recommend this book in the hope that Susan’s words will spur us on to share Jesus—woman to woman, generation to generation, so that the entire church will be built up and strengthened, all to the glory of God.”

Melissa B. Kruger, Women’s Ministry Coordinator, Uptown Church, Charlotte, North Carolina; author, *The Envy of Eve*

“You can tell by her smile and her countenance that Susan Hunt is the kind of older woman any wise younger woman would want to have as a mentor. This book is a classic.”

Bob Lepine, Co-Host, *FamilyLife Today*

“Susan Hunt has been a spiritual mother to thousands of daughters, including me. If you want to learn from a woman who has blazed the trail, you should immerse yourself in this classic!”

Mary A. Kassian, Professor of Women’s Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*

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WOMEN MENTORING WOMEN

Susan Hunt

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Throughout the book, names and details of a few women and their stories have been changed to protect their privacy.

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To my granddaughter,
Mary Kate Barriault,
with the prayer that
God will raise up women of faith
who will spiritually mother her generation.

We will . . . tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done . . . that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

PSALM 78:4, 6-7

Titus 2 Discipleship Resources

Any woman reading this book can begin to reach out and develop spiritual mother-daughter relationships, but I encourage you to use this as a group study. The Titus command is given to the church. It can best be implemented in the church through a Word-driven women's ministry. Below are three additional resources to enhance your study of the Titus 2 Mandate:

Titus 2 Tools

This booklet includes 3 resources:

- A Leader's Guide for *Spiritual Mothering*
- Suggestions and models for developing a Titus 2 discipleship ministry
- Materials to train Titus 2 leaders

Women's Ministry in the Local Church

Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt

This book gives foundational biblical principles for a women's ministry in the church. There is a chapter on Titus 2 discipleship.

Women's Ministry Training and Resource Notebook

This loose-leaf notebook includes a leader's guide for *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* as well as many ideas and resources for a women's ministry.

All may be ordered from: 1-800-283-1357; www.cepbookstore.com

Contents

Twenty-Five Years Later.....	13
Foreword.....	21
Introduction.....	25

Part 1

THE MANDATE

Julie’s Story	33
1 Our Reference Point	35
Jerdone’s Story.....	47
2 A Life-Purpose.....	51
Jane’s Story.....	63
3 The Command	65
Barbara’s Story.....	79
4 The Curriculum	81

Part 2

THE MODEL

Karen’s Story.....	97
5 A Nurturing Relationship.....	99
Leslie’s Story	111

6	Encourage and Equip	113
	Diane's Story.....	123
7	To Live for God's Glory.....	125

Part 3

THE METHOD

	A Daughter's Story	137
8	The Ministry of Encouragement.....	141
	Georgia's Story.....	155
9	The Power of Acceptance.....	157
	A Daughter's Story	169
10	The Cornerstone of Forgiveness.....	171
	Mariam's Story	187
11	Comfort the Comfortless	189
	Penny's Story.....	201
12	Staying . . . and Separating	203
	Acknowledgments	219
	Appendix: Helper by Design	221
	Notes.....	229
	About the Author.....	233

Twenty-Five Years Later

Twenty-five years ago the gospel imperative in Titus 2:3–5 reached out and grabbed my heart.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Titus 2:3–5)

Spiritual Mothering was my attempt to encourage and equip women in God’s church to embrace this magnificent mandate for women to disciple women. Now, at seventy-five, I resonate even more with the words of Elizabeth Prentiss, the nineteenth-century author of *Stepping Heavenward*, who wrote to a friend: “I’m ever so glad that I’m growing old every day, and so becoming better fitted to be the dear and loving friend to young people I want to be.”¹

When it was decided to publish a revision of *Spiritual Mothering*, the kind people at Crossway asked what changes I wanted to make. It had been several years since I actually read the book. My initial passion for the Titus mandate has intensified, and my vision has expanded, so I expected to trash the original and write a new book. What happened as I read truly surprised me—what I said twenty-five years ago, I still want to say. However, Titus 2

is so much bigger, bolder and more beautiful than I realized at the beginning of this journey, so I want to give greater clarity to the book by placing it more intentionally in the larger context of covenant, calling, commission, church, and culture.

The Context of the Covenant of Grace

Titus 2 is part of the Gospel Story. Plucking it out of the context of the whole of Scripture is a minimalist approach that usually reduces it to a formulaic description of what women are supposed to do.

The Glorious Gospel Story is the Good News that the Sovereign, Triune King of the universe enters into a relationship with his people. How could such a thing happen? It took a *covenant*.

Covenant is a compelling idea. Covenant is the storyline of the grandest of stories, a story that began before the beginning of time when God chose us in Christ to be his own (Eph. 1:4), that exploded into time and space when God created us in his image (Genesis 1), was scandalously lost when our first parents rebelled (Gen. 3:1–7), was graciously restored when God promised a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15), was gloriously fulfilled when the Word became flesh (John 1:14), and will reach its spectacular consummation when we hear “a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev. 21:3).

Covenant is a promise that stretches from Genesis to Revelation: I will be your God, you will be my people, I will live among you (Gen. 17:7; Ex. 6:7; Deut. 29:10–13; Jer. 24:7; Zech. 8:8; John 1:14; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:1–5).

Unless we understand this meta-narrative of Scripture, our understanding of each part will be diminished. No story, person, instruction or command stands alone. There is a perfect unity that is breathtaking because, according to Jesus, it all tells his story: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted

to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

In *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church*, Dr. Ligon Duncan and I explain:

“The covenant of grace is the sovereignly initiated arrangement by which the Triune God lives in saving favor and merciful relationship with His people. Because we are in union with Him, we are united to His other children. So the covenant of grace defines our relationship to God and to one another. It orders a way of life that flows out of a promise of life. To realize this is to think and live covenantally. Complementarianism gives the relational framework for men and women to live out their covenantal privileges and responsibilities. The complementarian position acknowledges that God created men and women equal in being but assigned different—but equally valuable—functions in His kingdom and that this gender distinctiveness complements, or harmonizes, to fulfill His purpose.”²

Titus 2:3–5 is a covenantal concept. This covenant responsibility flows out of our covenant relationship with God and with one another. Women training women is one way we cultivate a culture of covenant life in God’s family.

The Context of the Calling of Biblical Womanhood

A covenantal perspective puts Titus 2 in the context of creation, the fall, and redemption. It reaches back to the beginning when “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

The man and woman were created equally in God’s image but designed for different functions. The man was created first and given the responsibility of headship. God gave definition to the woman’s function when he said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18).

Man's aloneness was not good because he was created in the image of the Triune God. The man needed one who was equal, but different, so that the complementarity of their relationship could reflect the unity and diversity of the Godhead.

Woman's helper design is fascinating. The Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, is often used to refer to God as our *Ezer*.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
(Ps. 46:1)

Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.
(Ps. 54:4)

For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. (Ps. 72:12)

You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me. (Ps. 86:17)

Ezer is a strong, relational, nurturing, caring word. Woman was uniquely designed to nurture community and to extend compassion. Community and compassion are characteristics of covenant life in God's family. The helper design is intrinsic to our femaleness. It transcends specific roles but permeates every role. (See Appendix, page 229, for more on our helper design.)

You know the story. The man and woman sinned against God. Everything changed—except God. His love created them and his love reached out to them in their fallenness. They listened as God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

In this first revelation of God's covenant of grace he promised a Redeemer who would free them from sin and death and give them life. Adam responded to this Good News with a stunning statement of faith, “The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

Eve means life-giver. Because of her rebellion the woman be-

came a life-taker; because of God's redemption she was named life-giver. This redemptive calling is not just biological. Every redeemed woman has the capacity to be a life-giver in every season, situation and relationship. Eve's name points to the life-giving gospel of sovereign grace.

Titus 2:3–5 is so much more than a list of virtues and behaviors. It is a description of a life-giver. It's not an exhaustive description but a reminder of our creation design (helper) and redemptive calling (life-giver).

The Context of the Commission

Before Jesus ascended he commissioned his church to “make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always” (Matt. 28:18–20).

One of the things we are to teach is that he created us male and female and assigned us some gender-specific roles. Not all discipleship is to be gender-specific. Not everything we do is gender-related. But there should be some opportunities in the life of the church when men teach men what it means to be a man, and women teach women what it means to be a woman. If the church is silent on this topic by default we will absorb the world's perspective of gender.

Dr. Ligon Duncan explains:

The distinction between male and female is something that is part of a human's (and especially a Christian's) being a bearer of the image of God. Think about it. Our God is one and yet eternally exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our triune God is both equal and distinct, the archetype of the true individual and true community. Mankind, without living out the God-given distinction of male and female, relating to one another as God intended them to relate, cannot give adequate expression to this aspect of what it means to be created in the image of God. This truth needs to be explained and understood in the discipleship of the local church.³

Redeemed females—single, married, young, old—are the only ones who *can* show and tell the beauty of God’s creation design and redemptive calling for women because we are the ones with the resources—God’s Word and his Spirit—to motivate and empower other women.

The discipleship model described in Titus 2 is one way we obey Christ’s Great Commission. It is a way we give the legacy of biblical womanhood to the next generation. And wonder of wonders, he has promised his Presence—“I will be with you.”

The Context of the Church

Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Letters because they were written to teach the young pastors how to have strong, healthy churches. It is noteworthy that there are five passages in these letters that specifically mention women. The principles regarding women’s ministries in the church that emerge from these passages are instructive.

1. 1 Timothy 2:9–15 Ecclesiastical submission (women’s ministries should be under the oversight of the male leadership of the church).
2. 1 Timothy 3:11 Compassion
3. 1 Timothy 5:1–16 Community
4. Titus 2:3–5 Gender-specific discipleship
5. 2 Timothy 3:1–9, 14–16 Scripture

It takes my breath away that these principles correlate with God’s creation design and redemptive calling of women. What he created and redeemed us to *be* is what we are to *do* in his church. (Note: These five passages are explained, and the principles are applied, in *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church*.)

Titus 2 is one part of a biblical apologetic for women’s ministry in the church. It is a strategy to equip women to think biblically about submission, covenant community and compassion, and the authority of God’s Word, and to train them to be life-givers. It is

a vibrant, reciprocal way for women—regardless of age and stage of life—to care for, encourage, and love one another.

The Context of Culture

Over lunch with our twenty-year-old grandson I asked: “What area of faith and life is your generation most tempted to question and compromise?” Without flinching he replied, “Sexuality.”

Gender confusion and the aggressive hostility to gender distinctiveness are rampant. It is odd that in this toxic environment some are saying that women’s ministries have served their purpose and are irrelevant.

A college woman’s question underscores the timeliness of Titus 2 discipleship: “How can I think biblically about my womanhood when I am constantly told that independence is power, to determine my own destiny, pursue my own dreams, and that gender distinctiveness is just a social construct?”

My answer: “Go to the women’s ministry in your church and ask godly women to speak the truth of womanhood into your life as a counterpoint to the lies you are hearing. Ask them to spiritually mother you.” I truly believe my answer is right. I believe Titus 2 is a strategy God has given the church for one generation of women to “tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done” (Ps. 78:4), and one of those wonders is that he created us male and female. But her question unnerved me because I wondered—is her church equipping women for this holy mission?

Titus 2 is always relevant because it is always counter-cultural and counter-intuitive to obey God’s Word. Now is a time to intensify our emphasis on women discipling women.

My Prayer

As you read this book I pray that it will spiritually mother you and equip you to spiritually mother other women.

It is an understatement to say that mothering is sacrificial; so

is spiritual mothering. Why should we make such an investment? Paul answers this question in Titus 2:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (vv. 11–13)

The gospel is the motivation. Jesus *appeared* in grace and he will *appear* in glory. Between his two *appearings* we are to make disciples and teach them to obey what he commanded.

The gospel is also the power for such a humanly impossible mission.

[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (v. 14)

Jesus is redeeming his people. *Jesus* is purifying his bride. The outcome is not our responsibility. We are to make disciples. We are to help get the bride ready. And regardless of the results in another woman's life, our obedience will ready *us* to meet our Bridegroom.

Titus 2 is a holy privilege and a sacred responsibility for daughters of the church. It is a life-giving ministry that flows out of the life of Christ in us.

Foreword

This is a book of vision. Don't get me wrong, it is emphatically practical, eminently readable, and immediately accessible. This is not another tome of ivory tower stuff. It is sane, sound, and sensible. Even so, its most notable feature is its unswerving vision of what the church can be—and indeed, what the church ought to be.

Sadly, vision is a commodity in rather short supply these days. In all too many cases it has been supplanted in modern ministry by mere mechanical formulas or lowest common denominators. A tidal wave of steely and institutional pragmatism—driven along by the fierce winds of marketing concerns, demographic data, bureaucratic models, and corporate efficiency standards—has very nearly engulfed the sensibility for passionate vision in the church. This is especially true in women's ministry, where the tides of time and circumstance seem to roil in a perpetual storm of turbulence and confusion. And “where there is no . . . vision, the people [perish]” (Prov. 29:18).

But a reassertion of vision—a steadfast Biblical vision—can calm those raucous waters. It can still the stormy sea of theological ambivalence. This book has grown out of that kind of vision.

For decades now, Susan Hunt has modeled for the church what a true disciple should be. She has demonstrated, in both word and deed, that such a vision of faithful service is the only vision that can adequately meet the pressing needs all around us. In this book,

she shares with us the detailed inner workings and underpinnings of that vision.

Susan gently and skillfully reminds us that there are no quick fixes, no magic formulae, and no instant cures for the ills of our time. There is no easy way to effectively equip women to grow into maturity in Christ. Instead she says that the very essence of women's ministry—and in fact all ministry—is interpersonal. It is women mentoring women. It is older women caring for younger women—teaching, nurturing, and encouraging them. She draws on a wealth of Scriptural material to illumine the righteous and venerable tradition of people actually investing themselves in people—rather than in programs, projects, or perspectives.

That is truly visionary. And, it is oh so needed in this angst-ridden world of ours. Nearly a century ago, the great Theodore Roosevelt issued forth with a clarion cry:

Do we see as we ought to see? Do we see the warrior witnesses round about us—or are we like the servants of Elisha, purblind and incognizant of the battle raging in our midst? Do we see the Savior before us—or are we like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, obsessed and possessed by our own concerns? Do we see—or are we casting about in darkness, flailing with sightless eyes? With what encumbrances have we ballasted the Gospel of grace with our lack of vision? Surely the Kingdom of Righteousness does not lack for resources. Surely the church is not bereft of ingenuity. Surely the just have bounteous opportunities. Yea and indeed, the single and solitary need—of the hour, the day, the epoch—is vision: the vision to see, the vision to do, and more, the vision to be Lord of the Harvest, give us we pray: great men, great women, and great families. Lord of the Harvest, give us we pray: vision—the vision of gallant greatness.

This book is a response to just such a cry. To it I can only add my heartiest amen.

It is hard to believe it has been a quarter-century since I first read this remarkable book. I remember very well the day I pored over the thick stack of pages sitting on my desk, thinking: “This is important. This is fantastic. This just *has* to be published.” It’s not just that the years have flown by. Rather, it is the bracing realization that as fresh and relevant and needed as the book was then, it is even more so now. Thus, I am so very grateful to Susan, to Crossway, and to the Lord for the enduring legacy of this little book. May its impact be magnified all the more over the course of the next twenty-five years.

George Grant
Franklin, Tennessee

Introduction

For several years I had a suspicion that Titus 2:3–5 contained exciting principles and implications for women. I had theories about the benefits of older-women/younger-women relationships, but I had few contemporary examples that validated my theories.

My husband was pastor of a wonderful church, but it consisted primarily of young families. Even though I was only in my late thirties to late forties during that time, I was an “older woman.” The three or four older women who came into our fellowship gave me occasional glimpses of what I thought Titus 2:3–5 should look like, but then I would hear of an example that contradicted my theories.

In my work as a consultant for the Women in the Church ministries for our denomination, I frequently had calls from pastors telling me about tension between the older and younger women in their churches. I knew that it should work because God said to do it, but I had no models to show me how these relationships should work. The commentaries which I searched for more information seemed to slide by that portion of Scripture with little comment except that God said older women should teach younger women—and I already knew that!

But why wasn't it working in individual relationships and in churches? What were the missing pieces? What did older women and younger women need to know to obey this command? My growing conviction was that the Titus principle held something

rich and wonderful for women, but how to make it happen was fuzzy.

Then I came face to face with what Titus 2:3–5 looks like in action. My husband went on staff of a church that has a rich blend of older and younger people. Since one of his responsibilities was evangelism, he asked me to begin a weekly Bible study for women that could serve as an outreach to our community and as a vehicle to help new women in the church develop friendships. The first week, I was stunned when many of the older women in the church appeared with their Bible in hand and an eagerness to be a part of this new program. I was expecting, and had prepared for, six or seven young women who had been visiting the church. Now sitting before me were women in their sixties and seventies whose knowledge of and experience with the Holy One far exceeded my own. I had to do some mental gymnastics, and some quick praying, to adapt. How do you teach women in their twenties and women in their seventies and everything in between!

Soon I realized that God was giving me an opportunity to “prove him right” regarding the Titus principle. But I also realized that I had to help the women build bridges across the generations. We had to learn to relate on a deep level. We had to learn how to learn from one another. A turning point came when I felt led by the Lord to teach a lesson on marriage. But Lord, I argued, how can I do that when so many of the women in our group are widows? I know the younger women need it, but won’t it be too painful for the widows?

As I continued praying, the answer became clear: The widows are your most valuable resource in teaching this lesson. Equally clear was the knowledge that I couldn’t expect the widows to see themselves as a resource—that would be part of the teaching process.

So I began the lesson by sharing my questions to the Lord and his answer to me. Then I asked the older women, including the widows, to freely share their memories and insights with

us. During the small group discussion times, these wonderful older women opened their hearts to the younger women. When a younger woman said, “How can I possibly go home and complain about dirty socks on the floor after hearing these women share their precious memories about their husbands,” I knew that I had seen the Titus principle work.

And I have seen it grow and deepen in many practical ways. Months later, when the group was sharing the benefits of older-women/younger-women relationships, the younger women talked of the many things they had learned from the older women. But again I knew we had experienced what God desires when the older women talked of how they had learned from the younger women. They particularly talked of how they had learned to communicate more openly and to share their feelings with the younger women.

My observation is that the combination of younger women who are teachable and godly older women who are willing to open their hearts gave us the privilege of obeying the Titus mandate.

These older women in our Bible study are my heroines—they have made a deep impression on my life. I would like to tell you about one of them who epitomized all of them. Of all the women, I have chosen this particular one because just last week she was transferred from the church militant to the church triumphant, and I have spent a lot of time since then reflecting on her life.

Mrs. Elizabeth Scott, known affectionately as “Miss” Elizabeth, was 76. She was a quiet, humble woman who did not have a high-profile ministry, yet the church was packed for her funeral. The hundreds of people who attended were deeply moved by her death. I was particularly struck by my conversations with the



The combination of younger women who are teachable and godly older women who are willing to open their hearts gave us the privilege of obeying the Titus mandate.



women. I thought that Miss Elizabeth was my special encourager—my personal fan club—my cheerleader. Since knowing her, I have had more confidence to assume responsibilities because I knew she was in my corner praying and cheering me on. What astounded me was that it seemed as if every woman there had the same relationship with her! She had done for them what she had done for me—yet it had been done in such a quiet way that we each thought we were her special project.

I simply could not believe the women who talked about their families being invited to a meal in her home, or those who told how she had invited them to our church, or how she had been the first person to greet them when they visited the church, or the women who talked about receiving cards and telephone calls from her.

As I have contemplated the power of her life, I have also been struck with what she did not do. Gossip, complaint, and criticism had no part in her life.

Miss Elizabeth loved the young women in the church. We often heard her say, “I’m so thankful for our young women. They are the ones who will carry on.” Although we have decided that none of us can fill her shoes, we are determined to collectively work together to fill the huge vacuum created by her death. She showed us what women in a local church should be. She left us a precious legacy.

At her funeral, my husband read Proverbs 31. A reverent awe fell over the congregation as each verse was read because we realized that here was an accurate description of this godly woman. Other Proverbs 31 women, such as Elisabeth Elliot and Edith Schaeffer are also my heroines; however, they are “comfortable” heroines because I can excuse myself for not measuring up to who and what they are. As I stand before the memory of Miss Elizabeth, I feel some discomfort because I have no excuse. But I also feel challenged because what she was and what she did, any Christian woman can be and do. She had no extraordinary gifts

or circumstances. She simply loved Jesus and lived each day for his glory. She imitated him by serving those around her.

Her son expressed it well: “No verbal defense could ever validate the gospel like Mama’s life of love did.”

She was what I want to be: the essence of a spiritual mother. It is because women like Miss Elizabeth have been willing to enter into nurturing relationships with younger women, to encourage and equip them to live for God’s glory, that I have had the privilege of seeing Titus 2:3–5 in action. My theories have not only been validated, they have also been expanded beyond anything I could have imagined; I now have a passion to see the Titus principle operative in the lives of Christian women.

Part 1

The Mandate



But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

TITUS 2:1-5

Julie's Story



I went to the Health Care Center with the idea that I was going to encourage some of the elderly patients. It happened the other way around. I was the one who was encouraged because of time spent with a wise woman of the Lord.

I had never met Mrs. Johnson, but conversation came easily. Soon she told me that she felt there was no purpose for living anymore, and she wished the Lord would take her to himself. Then our conversation shifted to the Lord. As we talked about his faithfulness and his sovereignty, Mrs. Johnson agreed that since she was still here, the Lord had a reason for it. She began talking about her gratitude for God's care throughout her life. She told me how she had become a Christian and changed her lifestyle, and how she had prayed for her husband and her mother for many years and then seen the Lord work in their hearts and draw them to himself.

As she told story after story of God's working in her life, I was reminded of God's faithfulness to his people. I saw in Mrs. Johnson a loyal and obedient servant, one who had humbled herself in order to give God the glory in her life. As I listened, I became aware that I had discovered a treasure: A present-day godly role model of Christian womanhood that is a rarity in this day and age. As she spoke of her husband, she exhorted me to love my husband. When I told her I was excited about having children and that I

wanted to stay at home with them, she beamed and told me that was the most important thing I could do. What unusual advice to receive in this illustrious, modern age! This was an encouragement to me, a young woman seeking to please the Lord in a society that says “fulfill yourself” and “demand your rights.”

An hour had passed, and Mrs. Johnson apologized for talking so long. She seemed surprised when I told her what a blessing she had been to me.

What a pity that this godly woman, with a lifetime’s store of wisdom, lives a lonely and secluded life with no one even acknowledging, much less benefiting from, her treasure of knowledge. When I left, we were both smiling. She had been of value to someone, and I had gained precious wisdom. A simple Biblical principle had been put into practice, and God had blessed it. The Titus principle tells older women to train and encourage younger women. Too often today, older women are an untapped resource in our churches, while younger women are searching for Proverbs 31 women whom they can emulate. God’s answer solves both problems.

Julie Garland
St. Louis, Missouri

Our Reference Point

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . .
how often I have longed to gather your children together,
as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

MATTHEW 23:37

The teenager was unmarried and pregnant. She had experienced incredible emotional highs and lows during the last several days. As she stood at the front door of an older woman relative, she wondered what her reaction would be. She knew what rejection felt like. She remembered her fiancé's reaction and the events which caused him to change his mind. Would her friend reject her?

We don't know what emotions were swirling inside Mary as she raised her hand to knock on the door. But we do know that less than five minutes inside that door, she experienced a joy and confidence unexpected in one so young. Only a few moments in Elizabeth's presence and Mary burst into a magnificent song of praise to God, recorded for us in Luke 1:46–55.

What happened between these two women is the essence of spiritual mothering. When women do for other women what Elizabeth did for Mary, I believe we will see young women burst forth in lives of praise to God. And that is the goal of spiritual mothering.

The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* gives the following definitions:

mother: a female that has borne an offspring. A female who has adopted a child or otherwise established a maternal relationship with another person.

mothering: to give birth to . . . to create and care for; instigate and carry through. To watch over, nourish, and protect.

Based on this definition, my working definition for the spiritual mothering relationship is this:

When a woman possessing faith and spiritual maturity enters into a nurturing relationship with a younger woman in order to encourage and equip her to live for God's glory.

Please note that giving birth biologically or being of a certain chronological age are not prerequisites for spiritual mothering.

Our Model for This Relationship

Though powerful examples, Elizabeth and Mary are not the ultimate reference point for spiritual mothering. "In the beginning God created" is both a fact of history and a principle for life. God is the source of life and the model for living life. A proper approach to any situation or topic begins with God. To use God as the reference point for the topic of spiritual mothering is not an attempt to feminize God. It is simply an attempt to relate all of life to him.

God's relationship with his people forms the pinnacle for the spiritual mothering concept defined above. Nurturing his people

through his Word and by his Spirit, the Triune God enters into a covenant relationship. He is both the source and the sustainer of physical and spiritual life. One Hebrew name of God, *El Shaddai*, provides a window for us to understand how he relates to his people.

The traditional translations of Scripture have consistently rendered this name “Almighty.” But to appreciate its full flavor, it will be helpful to examine its Hebrew roots. *El* is a shortened form of *Elohim*. It sets forth the might, the strength, and the excellence of God. *Shad* is the Hebrew word for breast. *Shaddai* pictures God’s fullness or bounty, his tenderness, his generosity, his desire to nurture us and make us fruitful. In one name, God’s attributes of might and tenderness are brought together!¹

Another dimension of this nurturing relationship is described by the prophet Isaiah:

Can a woman forget her nursing child,
that she should have no compassion on the son of her
womb?
Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.
Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands
. . . (Isa. 49:15–16)

In this passage, God encourages believers not to lose hope in the midst of difficulties and gives us a message of comfort. John Calvin noted the Lord used the comparison to a mother’s love to convey his anxiety about his people, a love “so strong and ardent, as to leave far behind it a father’s love.” He goes further in declaring he would never forget his children for his love “is far stronger and warmer than the love of all mothers.” Calvin concludes with this: “In a word,



When women do for other women what Elizabeth did for Mary, I believe we will see young women burst forth in lives of praise to God.



the Prophet here describes to us the inconceivable carefulness with which God unceasingly watches over our salvation, that we may be fully convinced that he will never forsake us, though we may be afflicted with great and numerous calamities.”²

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord again used the mother metaphor:

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her,
 all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
 all you who mourn over her;
that you may nurse and be satisfied
 from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
 from her glorious abundance. . . .

I will extend peace to her like a river,
 and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip,
 and bounced upon her knees.
As one whom his mother comforts,
 so I will comfort you;
 you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;
 you . . . shall flourish like the grass. (Isa. 66:10–14)

This passage is a discourse on true and false worship. It is designed to warn and fortify true worshipers for the grief they will endure from the hypocritical worshipers. Though the immediate context is to the Jews upon their return from captivity, the prophecy also looked ahead to the establishment of the gospel church and the terror God would bring upon the enemies of that church. In order to assure the true worshippers of his deep affection and protection, the Lord compares himself and the church to a mother. The person who experiences this motherly affection and protection rejoices and flourishes.

And then in the New Testament we have the piercing pathos of the words of Jesus as he looked over Jerusalem:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37)

Jesus unabashedly displays his compassion and tenderness for those who had rejected him. He uses the illustration of a hen to explain his intense desire to protect them. Whenever danger approaches, a mother hen quickly gathers her chicks under her wings and sits on them. Even if the impending danger threatens her life, her chicks will be protected. The respected preacher John MacArthur, in writing about this passage, said: “The Lord’s illustration depicts his great tenderness. He didn’t speak to Israel merely in theological terms; he spoke to the people in a personal, intimate way. He wanted to give them security.”³

Our Capacity for Mothering

The name *El Shaddai* and Scripture surely give value to mothering, but they also imply a capacity for mothering that has been given to women. Biological birthing is not the activator of this capacity; women who have never given physical birth still have this mothering capacity and can exhibit mothering characteristics.

The development of this mothering capacity is affected by instinct and learning but is hindered by sin. When the Holy Spirit produces faith in a woman, she becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). A dramatic result of her newness is her even greater potential for the development of this female capacity. The Christian woman not only has a new Pattern, she has a new Power.

As a woman’s growing desire to imitate God produces obedience to his Word, she develops mothering characteristics. Our femaleness gives us the capacity for mothering; our faith produces certain characteristics of mothering. Some characteristics we see

from the Scriptures are strength, excellence, tenderness, generosity, desire to nurture, comfort, compassion, affection, protection,



The Christian woman not only has a new Pattern; she has a new Power.



and sacrifice. These characteristics are relational—they simply will not allow a person to be an isolationist. The possession of these characteristics creates an intense desire to nurture and to be nurtured. The results in the recipients are security and fruitfulness. They will flourish like grass.

Consider the relationship between Ruth and Naomi—an impressive illustration of spiritual mothering. In this Old Testament story, we see two women who had bonded! Naomi must have done something right to have elicited such commitment from her daughter-in-law.

When famine struck Israel, Naomi, her husband, and their two sons moved to Moab. The sons married Moabite women. After the deaths of her husband and sons, Naomi decided to return to Judah. She encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their mother's homes; however, Ruth chose to remain with Naomi. At this juncture in the story, Naomi appears to be hopeless and bitter, yet Ruth insisted on following her. Why was Ruth so determined to follow a seemingly hopeless, bitter woman?

Apparently Ruth had seen the real Naomi. It was unacceptable for an Israelite to marry a Moabite, yet Ruth must have felt Naomi's acceptance. Ruth must have heard of Jehovah and seen the reality of him in the life of Naomi's family. Perhaps she observed the hope that sustained Naomi through the death of her husband and sons. This reality of Naomi's faith caused Ruth to tenaciously cling to her. When Ruth says, "Do not urge me to leave you . . . Where you go I will go. . . . Your people shall be my people, and your God my God," you feel her determination to be identified with the God of Israel (Ruth 1:16). The bond between

them was their common commitment to Jehovah. These women had the same reference point.

They returned to Israel. Ruth worked in the fields. Naomi remained at home. Naomi was probably too old for the physical work, but each night she encouraged and equipped Ruth—a fundamental principle of spiritual mothering. Often younger women tell me that the older women in their church aren't willing to spiritually mother. I ask them to elaborate. "We've asked them to teach our Bible study so that we can learn from them and none of them are willing." My reply is, "You're asking for the wrong thing. You're asking them to go out into the fields rather than encourage and equip you to go." Ruth was willing to listen to Naomi's advice and to follow her instructions—she was teachable.

Ultimately Naomi's emptiness was changed to fullness. Ruth married Boaz and they had a son. When Ruth's baby was born, the Israelite women said to Naomi,

Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him. (Ruth 4:14–15)

Indeed, this son did become famous throughout Israel. He was the grandfather of David, and Ruth's name appears in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

An older woman cultivated a nurturing relationship with a younger woman. The younger woman was willing to listen and to heed the advice, though sometimes it must have sounded strange. And the result was that these women are bound up in the very life of the Messiah.

In the spiritual mothering story at the beginning of this chapter, Julie Garland told of meeting Mrs. Johnson in a nursing home. As the two women talked, Mrs. Johnson expressed feelings of uselessness. She could not understand why she was still living. She saw

no purpose or hope in her life. Then Julie asked questions about her faith, and simply rehearsing the goodness of the Lord in her life refreshed Mrs. Johnson.

Since Julie told me this story a year ago, I recently received an update. Julie and Mrs. Johnson have become close friends. Julie visits her once a week since Mrs. Johnson has no living family. She spent Thanksgiving with Julie and her husband. “I am expecting a baby in June,” writes Julie. “Mrs. Johnson is encouraging me to be a godly mother. She never had children of her own and is very excited about the baby. On my last visit, Mrs. Johnson had some exciting news. The night before she led her roommate to the Lord! I talked with this new believer and she had a good understanding of the gospel, which is no surprise with Mrs. Johnson as her teacher.”

Mrs. Johnson’s words to Julie were these: “I believe this is the reason God has kept me alive this long!”

Mrs. Johnson will be eighty-five on her next birthday, and she is currently discipling her roommate and continuing to spiritually mother Julie.

Julie and her husband will graduate from Covenant Theological Seminary in May. Julie has received a wonderful education in the seminary classrooms, but I suspect she would agree with me that the lessons she has learned in Mrs. Johnson’s room have been just as valuable.

A simple visit to a nursing home—something anyone can do. And yet the lives of two, and now three, women have been enriched.

Our Need for Mothering

Countless women today long to be nurtured. They want the love and acceptance of a mother or a mother-substitute. They want to feel the warmth and security of an older woman’s approval. And countless women of faith throughout the world today are the embodiment of these and other virtues that equip them to nurture younger women. But they don’t know how to do it.

The eighteenth century poet and historian, Matthew Arnold, said: “If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely and simply for the benefit and good of mankind, it will be a power such as the world has never seen.”⁴ I agree. But the problem is that women will never come together purely and simply for the benefit and good of others because of the self-centeredness of our sin nature. The what’s-in-it-for-me mentality forbids such selflessness. However, Christian women, because of the power of grace, can overcome their self-centeredness. Christian women can manifest the other-centered virtues that characterize spiritual mothering. In fact, I would restate Matthew Arnold in this way: If ever the world sees a time when Christian women shall come together purely and simply to encourage and equip other women to live for God’s glory, it will be a power such as the world has never seen.

I am deeply impressed by the excellence of Christian women around the world whom I have had the privilege to meet and/or observe. These women believe God’s Word is the only infallible rule for faith and practice, and they are committed to living out God’s truth in the daily occurrences of their lives.

These women believe in and live by prayer. Their social consciences have been shaped by God’s truth, and they are committed to making a difference for Jesus in this generation. They believe that the church is the bride of Christ and have committed themselves to serve him through their local fellowships.



Christian women are committed to making a difference for Jesus in this generation.



These women stand in stark contrast to the image of womanhood that is being flaunted today. As I observe these women, I wonder if perhaps we are on the verge of seeing their power unleashed—the power of grace in the lives of godly women influencing families, churches, communities, our nation, and the world—influencing not with clenched fists, but with open arms.

I believe with all my heart that there is the potential for a revival of faith and virtue among women. If Christian women begin to fathom the power of our God-given capacity, develop these God-honoring characteristics, and nurture younger women, perhaps we will see the fruit of righteousness flourish in women in our decade.

We have clearly been given the model for spiritual mothering. The command is just as clear:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Titus 2:3–5)

Jesus tells us that those who love him will keep his commandments. What he commands us to do, he enables us to do. Join me as we explore how women of faith are to obey this command.

A BIBLICAL VISION OF WOMEN'S DISCIPLESHIP—FOR THE FLOURISHING OF THE CHURCH AND THE GLORY OF GOD

“Grounded in Scripture, wed to the local church, specific to women, personal, wise, hopeful, and engaging—this book will be both a ready reference for your discipleship of women and an encouragement to both young and old as you strive to live for God’s glory.”

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SUSAN HUNT is a mother, grandmother, pastor’s wife, author, and the former director of women’s ministries for the Presbyterian Church in America. Hunt has written a number of books, including *True Woman* and *Big Truths for Little Kids*.

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