



## CHAPTER 2:

# What Makes a Mom?

Motherhood is under attack.

- About half of the public—46% in a 2009 Pew Research Center poll—say it makes no difference that a growing number of women don't ever have children.
- Only nine percent of teenagers say that they definitely plan to become parents in their early adult years.
- Roughly eight in ten women say it's harder to be a mother today than it was 30 years ago.

You may not have realized that a war has been raging over the issue of motherhood, but I bet you've felt battle-weary. Is motherhood for you? Is parenting a worthwhile use of your life? Maybe you're a mom who is caught in the crossfire between your desire for purpose and the bombardment of negative messages about motherhood. Yes, you're a mom and you love your kids, but the endless stream of dirty diapers, discipline hurdles, and battles over

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bath time leave you feeling unsatisfied in your role. That dissatisfaction is magnified by the culture's message that having a career is the path to lasting fulfillment.

How are we supposed to feel about motherhood? And when it comes to defining what makes a mom, whose voices should we listen to?

To answer those questions we have to track how motherhood has been defined through the years. Revisiting history helps us trace the roots of our own struggle to define motherhood.



**OUR CULTURE LOVES** the idea of motherhood, but when the baby shower is over, the clear message is that putting your talents, time, energy, and passion toward mothering is a mistake.



When we look at the big picture, the problem starts to come into focus. The bottom line is that our culture loves the idea of motherhood, but when the baby shower is over, the clear message is that putting your talents, time, energy, and passion toward mothering is a mistake.

My friend Cindy put it this way: "Our culture has a split per-

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sonality. We often put mothers on a pedestal during pregnancy thinking, ‘Oh, how sweet and precious’ with visions of lullabies, coos, and baby firsts. But under the surface we feel sorry for the mom to be and think of the sleeplessness, dirty diapers, tantrums, and basic upheaval.”

How did we get here? When did the idea that motherhood as a high and holy calling start to unravel? Pop in your favorite Beatles CD and let me take you back to the 1960s. Let’s look at a little idea called feminism.

You may remember the feminist movement from your American history textbook. It’s a campaign that conjures images of women rallying for equality while burning their bras in the name of change. Their mantra became: “Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.”

Good stuff, right? As women we want equality, we want opportunities, we want our God-given value to be recognized.

But hidden in the message of feminism is a heap of lies about motherhood. While the headlining message of the movement makes sense, the subtle undertones about marriage, motherhood, and what it means to be a woman don’t line up with the truth found in God’s Word.

The tidal wave of feminism began when Betty Friedan started asking questions about the role of women. Friedan looked around and concluded that women were unsatisfied. After interviewing these unhappy women, she decided that in order to find happiness, women needed to have a serious career. She promised that meaningful work would fill a vacuum in women’s hearts and that they would be fulfilled.

In her bestselling book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan

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confronted the value of motherhood and dared to ask a question you may have asked yourself.

“The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even herself the silent question—‘Is this all?’”

Doesn't part of you want to scream, “Yes!” Don't the mundane tasks of motherhood seem unfulfilling on the surface? Isn't there a corner in each of our hearts that secretly nags, “Is this all there is?”

## Speaking Our Bitterness

The feminist revolution began as a grass-roots movement intentionally constructed to pounce on women's unfulfilled longings. Their methods may surprise you. What eventually became huge rallies of women screaming for equality started in living rooms, under the guise of raising awareness.

This technique can actually be traced to the revolutionary armies of Mao Tse-tung in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Mao's armies would host “speak bitterness meetings” where they allowed women and peasants to vent their frustrations at being downtrodden. The meetings caused bitterness to rise and anger to spread like wildfire. The downtrodden began to revolt. Thanks to the resulting chaos, Mao Tse-tung could take over villages with very little resistance.

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The Feminist Movement used the same strategy. The leaders gathered small groups of women in living rooms and asked questions that provoked and revealed bitterness over the roles of wife and mother. The leaders took something very personal and made it political, promising to create the change that would lead to lasting contentment.

That may feel like a history lesson (don't worry; there won't be a quiz), but I bet you've held your own speak bitterness meetings on the subject of motherhood. I'd guess some days you've wondered if motherhood is a barrier to your happiness. Most of us have. But more than 50 years after the feminist revolution, it's clear that we can't find the answer to our dissatisfaction by writing off motherhood.

After all, where has feminism led us?

"Marriages have broken down. Families have broken down. Children are un-parented," explains Mary Kassian, author of *The Feminist Mistake*. "And instead of seeing the value of nurturing the next generation and the value of pouring our lives out for others, women now believe unless they are being self-fulfilled and having their lives mean something out there, they will not find fulfillment and happiness."

Motherhood has taken a huge hit, but has the vacuum that Friedan noticed been filled as a result?

"I think, if anything there's more frustration . . . because the dream promised fulfillment and satisfaction for women, but it hasn't delivered," Kassian notes.

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### Looking Elsewhere for Answers

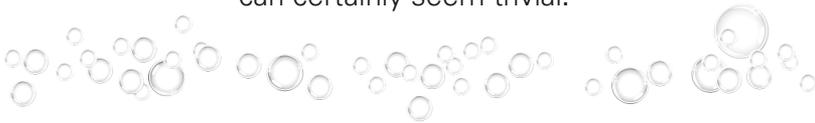
Relegating motherhood to the bottom of your priority list isn't the answer. And as it turns out, culture's claim that motherhood is the crux of your longings doesn't hold water. But what can we do with the frustration we feel as we parent? How do we answer Friedan's original question, "Is this all?"

It's a fair question. After all, the tasks of motherhood can certainly seem trivial. How you answer that question in your own heart will determine the trajectory of your mothering journey, but the answer usually doesn't come the first time you hold your baby in your arms.



**"IS THIS ALL?"** is a fair question.

After all, the tasks of motherhood  
can certainly seem trivial.



Perhaps that's why Paul took the time to address women about the ins and outs of establishing a home. "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine . . . Older women likewise are to . . . teach what is good, and to train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure,

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working at home, kind and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” (Titus 2:1,3-5).

What did Paul say about loving our children and working in our homes? These are skills that must be taught! And what curriculum should we use? The solid doctrine found in God’s Word.

Did anyone else just breathe a massive sigh of relief?

I don’t know about you, but I often find myself flailing because motherhood doesn’t happen as naturally as I imagined it would. When my baby refuses to nurse, when discipline doesn’t work, or when my marriage sags under the strain of raising children, I really start to wonder why mothering is worthwhile.

But Paul lets us off the hook. By urging the church to teach women how to mother by using God’s Word, he reveals that great mothering is learned and not intuitive. The answer to our longing isn’t to ditch mothering or to let our frustration eclipse the satisfaction that can come from raising the next generation. Rather, it comes by doing the hard work of seeking God’s truth on mothering, and making the countercultural choice to pursue motherhood as a high and holy calling.

Listen carefully to what I am not saying. I am not saying feminists were only slightly off and that motherhood—not career—is the secret to filling the vacuum in our lives. Motherhood for motherhood’s sake won’t leave us any more fulfilled than working just to work. But understanding your God-given purpose and embracing that purpose does lead to fulfillment. Knowing God’s truth and putting it into practice is the only way to fill the void.

With that in mind, let’s ask Friedan’s questions again.

Is it just housework, or is it service?

Is it just PB&J, or is it worship?

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Is it just a carpool, or is it a mission field?

Is it just raising kids, or is it living out a God-given purpose?

These are important questions—questions the culture will tell you are old-fashioned and reverse progress. They're also questions the Enemy is doing His best to steer you away from.

After all, Betty Friedan wasn't the first to ask, "Is this all?" It's a version of the same question the serpent hissed to the first woman in the Garden of Eden. The account reminds us where the battle over motherhood is really being waged:

The serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate" (Genesis 3:4-6).

The lie was, "You're missing out on something, girl!"

The implication was, "What you have now isn't enough."

The question Satan really dared Eve to ask was, "Is this all?" And Eve started to wonder, "If I nibble on this apple, will I find something more satisfying?"

It's easy to point our finger at the feminists, but the heart of this issue goes back to the beginning. The battle to embrace motherhood has always been raging and, just like in the garden; the stakes have always been sky-high.

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**“FEMINISM AS A** political movement is actually less than two hundred years old, but feminism actually goes all the way back to the dawn of time, right to the garden of Eden, where one woman decided that God’s boundaries and definitions for her weren’t good and that she could go get what she wanted. And there was a man standing right by her who passively let her do it. The seeds of feminism lie in all of our hearts; they lie in my heart, they lie in everyone’s heart, because the seeds of feminism are ‘I want what I want, I want to define how I want it, and I don’t want to give God the glory.”

—CAROLYN MCCULLEY



Pastor and teacher Alistair Begg once said, “The place of a mother is so vital. Get it right and we have great hopes. Get it wrong and we have great fears.”

This is why the Enemy has set his sights on motherhood. That is why embracing motherhood as a calling is not a battle easily won. Recognizing these stakes should motivate us to pick

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up the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word (Eph. 6:17), and to fight for this vital role.

Maybe you feel as if you've nibbled on a rotten apple yourself. Maybe you've always known that the culture's path to fulfillment is a dead end, but you're still wrestling with how to live motherhood as a God-given calling. Maybe you're still not convinced that motherhood matters but are willing to put the issue through the filter of God's Word.

Wherever you are on the journey to embrace motherhood, I hope you'll join me in the battle. I hope you'll decide that God's plan for motherhood is worth fighting for and that understanding God's plan for you as a mother is worth some work.

## Truth's Power to Liberate

Think back to those "speak bitterness meetings" used so powerfully by the feminists and Mao Tse-tung's communist armies and consider this: bitterness isn't the only source of power. Dissatisfaction isn't the only catalyst for change.

What if our liberation isn't found in voicing bitterness and letting it negatively shape our hearts but in seeking God's truth and encouraging one another to be transformed by it? What if by embracing God's plan for who we are as women we find true fulfillment, purpose and freedom?

I believe it's possible, and it starts with taking Paul's advice from Titus 2 to study motherhood, letting God's Word be our teacher.



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### Discussion Questions

- 1.** For the moment we are pretending a discussion question is here.
- 2.** Three to five discussion questions will be at the end of each chapter.
- 3.** They will be questions that will probe the reader to apply the author's words.
- 4.** They will also help the reader seek God's guidance.
- 5.** We will try to come up with a more creative title than "Discussion Questions."

