

God is Larger than Language – Mother's Day 2026

The first time I heard God referred to as "she" I did a double take - looking around to see if anyone else heard that pronoun change.

She?

I knew, logically, in my mind, that God is beyond language. I knew, in my soul, God created and creates all genders. I knew we are all made in the image of God - the whole range of who we are - which is way more than fathers. I knew Paul walked through the Pantheon - the temple to all gods - and declared the altar to the Unknown God was the altar to THE GOD who made all that is. THE GOD who imagined genders! And I knew in Christ there is no longer male or female, Greek or Jew, free or slave. Jesus reminds us Creator God made us all and loves us all and we are all a reflection of God.

But to hear someone say, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. She leads me beside still waters for her namesake..." It was jarring. It felt dangerous; heretical; like we were being un-Christian.

And I liked it.

I liked it because changing God's pronoun forced me to think about my belief that God is beyond language, beyond genders. It made me confront a rough spot in my theology and practice... I said I believed God was more than father... but I actually thought of God as male, HE - father – exclusively... unless I was intentionally trying to draw to mind motherly images.

And so, like Jacob-Israel, I wrestled. I wrestled my mind's eye image of God.

When I was being truthful with myself... I thought of God as the old man with white skin and whiter hair sitting on a throne in the clouds. And that is God - but my theology says God is also a baby girl with black skin and blacker hair in a swaddling blanket on earth.

And that's the mental disconnect. When I was praying the Lord's Prayer – I wasn't picturing speaking to a baby girl... but that throned man. Again, which isn't bad, but when it becomes our exclusive default... we lose sight of the image of the God of All who appears in all, looks like all, and is made known to us in the common deeds of sharing food and helping each other out.

In seminary, I was taught a single "she" carried the weight of a hundred "he's" when referring to God. So if we used "She," don't return to "She" until 99 other "He" references are used. Otherwise, the service will feel too feminine.

It was said as an honour - you, woman, carry the weight of 99 men!

It felt like I was being told to be smaller for the comfort of men.

It felt like God was too fragile to handle more than 1% femininity. And that Christians are too fragile to know our God as beyond our language, gender, and concepts!

So I began to intentionally build in my head other images of God I can turn to as easily and comfortably as elderly white haired, white robed man on a throne in the sky.

Here are female images scripture offers:

A mother bird sheltering her chicks.

Ruth 2:12 May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!”

Psalms 17:8 Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings,

Psalms 57:1 To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave. Be merciful to me, O God; be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by.

Psalms 91:4 he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and defense. (Look at this cool verse that is both male pronouns but a female bird activity!)

Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

As a mother bird challenging her chicks to fly

Deuteronomy 32:11-12 As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the Lord alone guided him [Jacob/Israel]; no foreign god was with him.

As a protective mama bear and ferocious lion (female lions do the hunts.)

Hosea 13:8 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them.

As a human mother in labour

Isaiah 42:14 For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant.

Deuteronomy 32:18 You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.

As a human mother comforting a child

Isaiah 66:13 As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Hosea 11:4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

As a perfect mother who won't forget us, perhaps as birth mothers have done

Isaiah 49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these might forget, yet I will not forget you.

As a woman

Psalms 123:2 As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until we have mercy upon us.

Luke 15:8-10 “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

As Wisdom, Sophia, The Holy Spirit, and Advocate

Wisdom in scripture is personified as a woman in Proverbs. Wisdom in Greek is the feminine word sophia. Some early Christians combined the writings about Holy Wisdom and sophia with Jesus' promise of the advocate, the intelligent and wise one who would stand by us. So the Holy Spirit Advocate and Sophia Wisdom became understood as one. A female noun referring to the godhead. (Ever heard of the Hagia Sophia? Hagia means holy! Now you know where the name of the cathedral comes from.)

Proverbs 1:20-33 Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks...

Proverbs 3:13-18 Happy are those who find wisdom and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

Proverbs 7:4 Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend,

Proverbs 8:1 Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out...

Wisdom explains how she was present for all creation. I especially like verses (29-31) when the LORD marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, playing before him always, playing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Proverbs 8:11 For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

I collected these images in my mind, and tried them out, visualizing who I am speaking to and with when I pray, “Dear God...” or “O Lord...” or “Our Father...”

I like the image of God the Protective Mama Bear. What images speak to you?

I am challenged by thinking of God as a woman in labour. What image challenges you?

For me, God as a girl seems missing. Although perhaps Proverbs 8:31 could be God's Wisdom as a girl. What images do you notice are missing?

May Holy Wisdom Sophia, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit be in you guiding you to new ways to encounter our God who is unknown, and known, who is male, and female, and both and neither, who is present and distant, who is within and outside of time, who is within but also among us. **Amen.**

Scripture Readings..... May 10, 2026 – for Little Current United Church.

Acts 17:22-31

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely spiritual you are in every way. ²³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one ancestor he made all peoples to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we, too, are his offspring.'

²⁹ "Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

John 14: 15-21 The Promise of the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words. **And may they awaken in our hearts**

