

**St Ebbe’s Headington**

**Parent Support Group**

*These talks were written with love for everyone who attended.*

I hope you enjoy looking back through them and you are able to celebrate all you have achieved being a Mum/ carer during this difficult time.

Spring Term

**Jan- May 2021**

**Week 1 - You are fearfully and wonderfully made.**

Rather than do a story for the babies in this slot, I thought I might actually give us a thought from the Bible which I hope might be helpful for us all at this time. If you think this doesn’t work and a story for the kids would be better, do tell me or Paul. This group is here to offer **us** support and we need it now more than ever.

I know it’s tough as a parent with a baby all day long, especially when it is your first and you haven’t got a clue what you are doing. Keeping them entertained, dealing with the crying, irregular naps, nappies, **repeat** and having limited adult company.

Yes, their smiles, noises and them trying new things is wonderful. You wouldn’t change them for the world. But it can often feel lonely... especially when you haven’t had time to make local friends who are around during the day because so many of the normal groups have been closed.

Maybe you, like me, had dreams of what maternity leave might be like, going into coffee shops, play dates, swimming, exploring Oxford with your baby and all of that is now closed to us for the time being. Maybe, like me, you sometimes feel guilty for finding it hard, and you think of those working in the hospitals right now, or those more at risk of Covid. How scary that must be.

I suppose in that and with all those feelings, I just want to share with you a thought that helps me. The Bible says:

**‘You are fearfully and wonderfully made’.**

It’s a line from the Bible’s song book - the Psalms.

**‘You are fearfully and wonderfully made’.**

You might feel lonely, you might feel like you can’t do it sometimes, you might feel like you can’t keep going. But do you know what - **you are fearfully and wonderfully made.**

Maybe you have experienced the truth of that already, as you became pregnant, and gave birth. *How did my body do this?*

Similarly, as a Mum, when you are at your lowest, they cry, and you think you can’t do another night-time feed. Yet somehow, and you **really don’t know** how, you do it.

*‘You are fearfully and wonderfully made’.*

That word ‘fearfully’ is an interesting one. The original word in Hebrew - ‘yare’ - is basically used to sum up that feeling you get when you walk into a massive church, like St Peter’s in Rome, or when you are at the top of a snow-covered mountain and because of its beauty and magnificence you just say – wow.

Here it is saying when you think of **your** body, the right response to just say – wow.

Our bodies, and the **strong** spirits God has given inside our hearts to care for our children are amazing. God has made us resilient creatures, that can do tremendous things, even under adverse circumstances or pressure.

You are amazing. What you are doing as a Mum is amazing. What you are giving your baby is amazing.

**You are fearfully and wonderfully made.**

**Week 2 - What will the heavens tell you?**

I don’t know about you, but since the first lockdown I have been spending extraordinary amounts of time outside. Shotover, Bernwood Forest and of course, our favourite Bury Knowle park.

Maybe like me, you go to the same park for your daily exercise and see the same faces there. That man with his Labrador, the Mum with 2 kids, one always on a pink scooter. You might not know their names, but you certainly recognise their faces!

Sometimes I go to Bury Knowle and I think, *I can’t believe I am here again!* Particularly if it’s raining or it’s a really cold day. I drag myself and Elanor out because I know it’s good for us and it will help her sleep but really, in any other situation, I wouldn’t be going outside.

I get frustrated - when will indoor play dates be back on? I can’t wait to let Elanor play in a **warm** sitting room with other babies while I drink a cup of **hot** tea on a sofa and have a chat with a friend!

So, I suppose the verse from the Bible I want to share with you today that speaks into this is again another one from the book of Psalms, the Bible’s song book.

**‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.’**

The word ‘heavens’ there is referring to the sky. When I walk around Bury Knowle I don’t often look at the sky, partly because at this time of the year, it is often just grey! But this verse encourages me, maybe I should do that? Maybe I should take a look at the sky and think about its beauty, whatever the colour?

Maybe you are better at this than me, but I’ve never been someone who takes time to listen to the birds or tries to see all the different colours in the autumn leaves. I am just busy thinking about life, friends, problems, things I need to do.

But I suppose this verse says that when we look at nature or the ‘sky’, the sight can actually help us to see something bigger and more profound - like who God is.

**‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.’**

Even if you don’t believe in God, I think the principle is still there and true for everyone. Nature and its beauty can lift our minds and even our hearts. I suppose that is something mindfulness taps into. We have been given so much to enjoy.

That crystal effect frost makes on the morning grass, that cute puppy being daft in the park, the comical squirrels and the way they dash around, the sound of rain pattering on the trees. There is so much I could go on and on about.

Lockdown is rubbish but at least we do all still have the world outside to enjoy. I know it’s not the same as a cup of tea inside but hopefully nature can help raise our spirits.

**‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.’**

So I hope that this thought might encourage you this coming week, whatever park you spend time in. What will the sky tell you?

**Week 3 - How long?**

I have a verse from the Bible today that I think we will all instantly sympathise with.

**‘How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
    How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I take counsel in my soul
    and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?’**

We are **all** asking ‘**How long’** until the world will go back to as it was? ‘**How long’** until I can share my baby with my relatives again? When can my Mum, Dad, sister or brother hold her? **How long** until we can have people round our house, and we can go out to activities, as the world used to be?

That phrase ‘**How long’** seems to be something everyone in our country is asking right now.

This verse I have just read you is from the book of Psalms, which was originally a song book. All of these poems were meant and are meant to be sung.

There is huge catharsis in singing. I don’t know if you have ever experienced that before? The emotional release as you just pour out frustrations into song? I think, sadly, that is probably why so much great music came from the gospel songs of the African American people. As they suffered as slaves and laboured, they poured their sorrows into beautiful melodies… Here is a famous one you may know.

‘*Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen; nobody knows my sorrow. Nobody knows but Jesus*

*Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, Oh, yes, Lord*

*Sometimes I'm almost to the ground, Oh, yes, Lord.’*

So that is our song of today: ‘**How long.’** **How long** will it take for things to change so we can go about our lives freely once again?

Can I encourage you to perhaps sing about it? I know that is a slightly strange thing to say, but singing can be really beneficial, as you release your emotions. If you believe in God, pour out those frustrations to him. The Bible, and the songs in it, would encourage you to do that. He is a God that understands and cares.

If you don’t believe in God, music is still a powerful tool at your disposal, and it is a gift for us all to use. Have you ever heard ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ by U2? It’s on this theme: ‘**how long must we sing this song?’** says one of the lines in the lyrics, as Bono mourns the troubles in Ireland.

In a way I find it bizarrely comforting reading a psalm from the Bible that asks, ‘How long?’ It is comforting for me to know Jews and Christians have been singing this song for **thousands** of years asking the same question as us - **how long**? Different generations have faced their own crises and asked, ‘How long Lord?’ ‘When will this end?’ We are not alone in feeling this way.

**Week 4 - Your love is amazing.**

I would like to use the Bible today to encourage you in the same way I did in my first talk. I want you to hear how amazing all things you are doing are.

The Bible would support this view. In the book of Isaiah, in the Old Testament, God is described as a mother.

*‘As a mother comforts her child,
    so will I comfort you.’*

The Bible says that God comforts his people in the same way a mother comforts her child. I hope it’s heart-warming for you to know, regardless of the fact if you have a faith or not, that the work you do as a mother is seen and held very highly in the Bible. In fact, it is described like the work God himself does with his people and the heart he has for them. He is like a mother.

I was thinking about this, and I’ve come up with two reasons why I think it might be helpful for us to hear how valuable our work is.

**1) Our work is hard to do.**

Imagine the situation: it is 3am, you have been up twice already, and the baby is crying for another feed. Your partner is back at work, so you don’t really feel like you can ask him to take over. You have given all you have got to this little baby emotionally and physically and you burst into tears. We’ve all done this right? Very few jobs work the sort of hours a Mum to a young baby does - 24/7.

Moreover, often our work is mundane and repetitive and that is even without lockdown! Our work is difficult, so please hear how amazing it is, all the things you are doing for your baby. The Bible would go as far as to say you are being like God, in how you love and cherish them. Giving up your own life and freedoms, so your baby can flourish.

The second reason we need to hear this encouragement is

**2) Our work is vital**

Just imagine if we didn’t do this work? There has been lots of talk about key workers during the pandemic and it is nice the way various groups have been recognised for their contribution to society. But please know we are key workers too. Without the work we do, our babies quite simply would die, and without our love they wouldn’t grow up to be heathy adults. We all know love is vital to a child’s development. It may feel like another nappy or another feed or another load clothes covered in sick to clear up. But really, society can’t function without parents loving their babies. And our work **is love** and it is vital, even if it is mundane and we can’t wait for our maternity leave to finish!

What you are doing as your baby’s carer is fantastic. I know how hard it often is, as well as the joys. It takes courage, perseverance and self-sacrifice. And that’s not even including the pregnancy and labour you went through for them.

Lockdown has made things harder as well because we can’t rely on our relatives or activities for respite, as we would do in normal times. So, what you are doing is incredible. In fact, it is so incredible that in the Bible, even God himself is described as a mother! Your love is amazing.

**Week 5 - We all need a friend.**

Last week, I talked about how hard our work often is but also how vital it is.

Today I want to talk about friendship. Because our job as a Mum is often difficult, but really it would be a lot easier if we didn’t have to do it alone, as we are doing at the moment!

The Bible verse I have picked that speaks into this is in a letter called Galatians. Paul, the author, is giving a command to a group of Christians that he is writing to. He says,

*‘Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ.’*

*Carry each other’s burdens*.

What does it mean to carry someone’s burden? In the dictionary, one definition of a burden is a heavy load that you carry. The thing about helping to carry someone else’s large heavy load or bag is you have to get close to them to be able to help. You can’t carry someone else’s burdens from afar!

Sometimes our burdens will be physical ones, like needing to move house, and sometimes our burdens will be emotional, like the distress that comes from a traumatic birth. Paul is telling the Christians they must look out for those around them, I suppose, like Jesus does - maybe that’s why he also says ‘*in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ*’?

Even if we don’t have a faith, this is true just as much for us. We all need friendship. We all need people to help us with our burdens. And I think the pandemic has suddenly shown us this.

We have been thrown into a situation where we can’t see others easily. We can’t have friends in our homes and we can’t give people hugs. We are all, to a certain extent, isolating, so we can stop the spread of the virus.

Of course, we have technology and I am so grateful for this. But we have all been there, you are chatting to a friend on the phone and your baby drowns out their voice! It is just not the same as being in the same room. We can’t have respite in the same way, hand our baby to someone else, while we get a moments peace. We are not meant to live as islands. We need help from others. Especially when you are a Mum and help from others can be so vital.

I suppose that after this pandemic ends, we need to remember that lesson. Friendship and our local community are important. Often, we can just be like ships in the night, going from work to home, work to home. But actually, it is worth investing in those around us, carrying each other’s burdens. Like with the heavy bag, you have to get close enough to someone to be able to share their burdens. Life is so much better when we do this. We need each other, we all need friends.

This is why I am so grateful for this group and the friendship you have all given me during this time. It doesn’t take much to be a friend. I mean, all you really have to do is just listen to someone, but your friendship has been so valuable. So thank you for the friendship in this group. And thank you for being the sort of people who try to carry each other’s burdens. We all need a friend.

*‘Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.’*

**Week 6 - A kind-hearted woman gains honour.**

Before Christmas, during these slots I used to read out a story for the babies. We changed the format in January, instead to give a thought for us Mums. We just felt that lockdown was difficult for all of us, and we needed some words of encouragement. The babies couldn’t understand the story any way! So, this is what I have sought to do in these little slots. Encourage you in your amazing work with your baby.

I have used the Bible to do this. I know we aren’t all Christians here, and we don’t all believe in God. And that is fine, this is not a Christian group. But I hope as you have come, you have found that the Bible can give you some uplifting words, whoever you are, whatever you believe. This group is here to offer support for **all** of us.

The thought I want to bring to you today is from the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is a little book in the Bible that gives a series of wise sayings.

One of these wise sayings is

*‘A kind-hearted woman gains honour.’*

I think everyone in this room is kind-hearted. You get up during the night for your baby, you feed, dress and clean them. You put your life and freedoms on the line, so they can thrive. This is the essence of being kind-hearted.

No one may see all the hard work you do for your baby, except your partner. It may not be glamourous, and you won’t get an Oscar for it or get to walk down a red carpet. But the Bible is clear.

*‘A kind-hearted woman gains honour.’*

Your work has great honour. I looked up the word honour in the dictionary and it means ‘high respect, great esteem.’

Do you remember how much everyone honoured Captain Tom Moore for all the money he raised for the NHS? He received a great amount of honour. He even got made a knight by the queen.

Your kind-heartedness will receive honour too. Maybe you have already seen that already. In that knowing look get from an older lady at a supermarket? Or the way people give way to you on a bus? People around you, know how hard you are working for your baby and they naturally respect you. They know you are being kind-hearted. Every Mum is kind-hearted in what she gives up for her baby. And everyone here with a lockdown baby I think is particularly special - many of you had to be in a hospital on your own at times, you have to persevere with the monotony of no groups and limited support. I know March will feel like a long month.

What you are doing right now is incredible. Every feed, every nappy, every walk which you don’t want to go on but you do it just so they can sleep. It might feel monotonous but please know your work is incredibly honourable.

*‘A kind-hearted woman gains honour.’*

**Week 7 - Be careful what you think.**

We started this group before Christmas, as way as offering support to parents in lockdown. We stopped babies who are walking coming in January because the infection rate was so high, it felt like the appropriate action. We are thankful today to be able to welcome back those of you with walking babies under 2. I know you too have missed not be able to meet up with friends indoors.

For those who have come back or are new to this group, after the songs, we’ve started, instead of a story, offering a ‘thought for the carers’ to help give us a boost for the week ahead. I know sometimes the weeks with our children can feel very long and, without all the normal activities, we do sometimes need encouragement to keep going! I know how hard you are all working and how monotonous it often is.

I have used the Bible to do this. I know we aren’t all Christians here, and we don’t all believe in God. And that is fine, this is not a Christian group. But I hope as you have come, you have found that the Bible can give you some uplifting words, whoever you are, whatever you believe. This group is here to offer support for **all** of us.

I would like to use a letter from the New Testament, written by St Paul, to encourage us today.

*‘Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—****think*** *about such things.’*

Paul here is telling the Christians he is writing to, to work on their thought life.

We all know the power of our thoughts. When we think certain things, it can really play on our emotions. The relationship between our thoughts and our emotions is not like the way water runs down pipes in our house. Instead, our thoughts are like the way blood flows through our veins in our body. What we think about, affects how we are and how we feel. Our thoughts permeate everything about us.

I know we all have had reasons to feel down recently. We haven’t been able to see our family, friends, and for the most part we have been stuck inside our houses. But, if the Bible is right, we do need to work on our thought life.

*‘Whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.’*

As far as we are able, let’s try and think about good things this week. Things that give you a lift. It could be a book or film you enjoy. Or maybe it is just seeing the daffodils coming out in the park, signalling the arrival of Spring. It might even mean watching less news if it makes you feel anxious.

*‘Whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

What we think affects how we are and how we feel. We have lots of reasons to think about things that could get us down at the moment. But let’s take care of our thought life, let’s look after ourselves.

*‘Whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.’*

**Week 8 - Your strength is incredible.**

We started this group in the November lockdown, as a way of offering support to parents and carers. Being a new parent is difficult and lockdown has made this harder. For those who are new to this group, after the songs, we’ve started offering a ‘thought for the carers’ to help give us a boost for the week ahead.

I have used the Bible to do this. I know we aren’t all Christians here. And that is fine, this is not a Christian group. But I hope as you have come, you have found that the Bible can give you some uplifting words, whatever you believe.

The verse I would like to use today to give you some encouragement is from the book of Proverbs, in the Old Testament. The book of proverbs contains a series of wise sayings, and this one is about the ideal woman.

*‘She sets about her work vigorously,*

*Her arms are strong for her task.’*

Strength is a highly commended quality in the Bible for a woman. The woman in this proverb works vigorously, her arms are strong because she has been working so hard.

And gosh I know how strong all us here have been during lockdown. And not just the physical strength it takes to feed your baby all day and night but also emotional strength. I have mentioned this before but many of you have been in hospital for periods on your own, either for scans or after having given birth. At the most vulnerable time of your life, you have found strength to do that alone. That is incredible.

You have found strength to keep going with feeding your babies, caring for them, even when many of you haven’t been able to introduce your babies to their nearest and dearest and you have so many hours to fill at home. That takes real strength.

For those of you with older toddlers, as well as being lovely, we all know they can be tricky at times. They run around, we spend all day keeping them out of danger, we try to find ways to entertain them and fill the hours. At times they tantrum and we keep going. This too takes strength.

*‘She sets about her work vigorously,*

*Her arms are strong for her tasks.’*

I look round this room and I admire each of you for your strength. The way you are a carer of your little ones, in this very strange and challenging time. What you are doing is incredible.

*‘She sets about her work vigorously,*

*Her arms are strong for her tasks.’*

**Week 9 – What helps me with my worry (Lucy Lobo)**

This morning I’d love to share a little of my own experience--and how the Bible helps me. Throughout my pregnancy, Rafaela was measuring small. We went to the JR for fortnightly scans. I found this a worrying time. They couldn't work out why and she ended up being born by c-section at 37 weeks because of risks to her life.

All through pregnancy and being a mum, I’ve found lots of things make me worry. I’ve been really grateful for this group as talking to other mums has helped!

But I’ve found an unlikely source of help...looking out my window at home. I can see a big oak tree and have enjoyed watching all sorts of birds perching in the branches. I’ve seen blackbirds, blue-tits, chaffinches, goldfinches, robins...and I’ve found that’s really helped me. I’ll tell you why in a moment...

Becoming a mum is amazing for so many different reasons. But with so many new experiences, so many changes, I worry a lot! Maybe you do too.

Our babies are constantly growing and changing, each phase has its own unique challenges which we have to adapt to. Is my baby sleeping enough? Are they sleeping too much? What about me? Am I sleeping enough? I’m NEVER sleeping too much! How will I have enough energy for tomorrow?

So easy to worry. So, why has watching those birds helped me as a new mum with my many worries?

Jesus speaks into my experience of worry with really beautiful and calming words. He says...

***‘Do not worry...Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?’***

This was written by Matthew, a friend of Jesus and eyewitness to His life. Jesus saying--Do not worry.

But I find I do worry. It feels like I’m thinking about things, churning them over in my mind again and again, most of the time I’m not even consciously doing it! Motherhood is a huge responsibility!

But Jesus tells us that God is at work looking after the birds, and flowers too. Looking after all those things that He’s made in His world - and that’s true for all who belong to Him. That’s on offer to us...and it’s something I’ve experienced.

***‘Look at the birds of the air...your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?’***

God, who made the birds, provides for them, He feeds them, He cares for them.

*We are so much more valuable than birds. You are valuable to God, you matter.*

That’s why I find watching the birds helps me not to worry. God provides for and cares for them. So, I know He provides for and cares for me, too.

**Week 10 - Your baby is special!**

I have been a teacher for 6 years now, and in my short career, I have never taught the same child twice. Every child has their own quirks, likes, dislikes and personality. We can see variety in nature too. You have probably already heard this, but every snowflake is unique. They may be small, but they are each beautifully complex, each with their own design.

I would like to share with you a verse from the Old Testament, in the Bible’s song book, the Psalms. The author of the song is singing praises to God as he reflects on the complexity of his body.

*‘You made my whole being.*

*you knit me together in my mother’s womb.’*

The songwriter is just amazed at what God has made. ‘You have made my whole being,’ he says! God knit me together. I love this image of God sitting there, knitting, forming, moulding, shaping an individual, all in a mother’s womb.

We might not all believe in God here, and that is fine, this is not a Christian group. But even so, I hope you can know, as I am sure you already do, your baby is also special, unique and precious.

Your baby has his or her own particular interests, abilities and skills, even at this young age. I was amazed at how late Elanor was to crawl, but one friend’s baby could do it at 5 months. They are all little individuals.

And actually, that is quite important to remember, especially when we are temped to compare our babies. Which I know I am prone to. We all know how it is - Gemma’s baby sleeps this many hours, why won’t Elanor do that? Mary’s baby can stand, why can’t Elanor do that?

In August, I got a little disappointed Elanor couldn’t crawl, but a friend suggested I write down her strengths and skills instead. I did that and it was really fun to remember she had her own particular abilities even at 8 months. Things on my list was the dexterity she has with her hands, the way she loves to solve problems, like putting a lid on a jar and empty bags. If you haven’t done that before, it is a really lovely thing, even at such a young age noting what they are good at and like - what is unique to them. They come with *their* own personalities and gifts. Which we will see more and more of as they get older. We have to enjoy them as they are, not as what they are not!

That is why I love this psalm, it reminds me of how we are all created as individuals, each precious, each unique.

*‘You made my whole being.*

*you knit me together in my mother’s womb.’*

I hope this thought might give you a boost for the week ahead, as you spend time with your precious and unique baby.

**Week 11 - Mary’s humility and service was beautiful, so is yours.**

Being a Mum is often mundane and it is often repetitive. How many times have we done the washing? Changed a nappy? Fed our babies?

Our work isn’t glamorous, and it’s not the sort of thing that gets written about in newspapers. But I hope today I can encourage you in how beautiful the work you are currently doing is.

This isn’t a Christian group but the example I want to share with you today, to give you a boost for the week ahead, is Mary - Jesus’ mother. We’ve all heard about her, some of us may have even dressed up as her! I did once to a Christmas work party when I was heavily pregnant, the bus driver was a bit shocked!

But I think that whoever you are, whatever you believe, the example of her life is very beautiful.

Here are some words that Mary is quoted to have said in Luke’s gospel.

*‘My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful*

*of the humble state of his servant.’*

I really want to focus on that word ‘humble.’ Mary was incredibly humble. She knew she wasn’t powerful, or famous, or great in the eyes on the world. And in many senses, Mary was a nobody. She was most likely a teenager, she had little if any education, she was poor, she was a woman in a society that treated women as 2nd class and she lived in a time when her country was occupied by enemy forces.

But she was humble and for that she will always be remembered. She looked after Jesus and raised one of the most influential people who has ever lived. Her work was repetitive, just as ours is, and often boring. She changed Jesus’ nappies, rocked him to sleep at night and fed him. But her life and her love will never be forgotten. People across the world celebrate her life and work, even today.

Raising children is hard work, but it has huge impact. Every kiss, every cuddle, every game and walk, all helps to form a whole human being. Mary is a wonderful example of that.

There are reasons people really love pictures of the Madonna and her child. It is a picture of such beauty and humility.

And in your own way, we all here are like Mary too. We are humbly serving our babies, trying to give them our best, even in difficult circumstances.

*‘My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful*

*of the humble state of his servant.’*

Mary’s life, showing her humility, was truly beautiful and so is yours.

**Week 12 - We do a big job!**

This past week I have been reading a really lovely book called a ‘Mother’s Heart’. It is my go-to book whenever I feel despondent about being a Mum. I wanted to share with you one of the paragraphs in it because if it encouraged me, it is likely to encourage you too.

Jean Fleming, who writes this book, says about motherhood…

*‘I enjoy the breadth of the challenge. The task of mothering can be as broad as I make it. Consider the endless variety of jobs a mother may do: teacher, nurse, dietitian, psychologist, chauffeur, trainer, disciplinarian, seamstress, baseball coach, interior decorator.’*

I think often when we are on maternity leave, we can think, oh I am just feeding and looking after my baby. I work hard but *really* I do nothing all day. Mothering may be different to our workplace jobs, it is quieter and the pace isn’t as fast (well when you have one anyway). But don’t be fooled, being a Mum really does take a huge amount of skill. We can forget this and that is why I really like the paragraph above.

For those of us who have started weaning here, we are all dietitians! We make meals for our baby so he or she can explore various and food and flavours.

Some of us are real doctors and nurses here, but even if you aren’t, having a baby does get you quickly used to doing first aid. Since having Elanor, I have become au fait with calpol, how to sooth sore gums, rashes, treat constipation and how to unchoke a baby (yes that did happen and was scary!).

Some of us with older ones have even had to cope with their tantrums and teach them the meaning of ‘no’. This can take patience on our part, and also an ability to ‘read’ our babies. Disciplinaries and amateur psychologists.

Have you researched prams? Car seats? Decorated your baby’s room with a budget? Read endless Which reviews and got advice from others about the best baby-kit. None of these jobs happen without skill.

There is a passage in the Bible that also talks about an exemplary woman, in it she too does many many jobs.

***‘****She selects wool and flax
  and works with eager hands.
She gets up while it is still night;
  she provides food for her family
She considers a field and buys it;
  out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.**She sets about her work vigorously;
  her arms are strong for her tasks.
She sees that her trading is profitable,
  and her lamp does not go out at night.
She opens her arms to the poor
  and extends her hands to the needy.
When it snows, she has no fear for her household;
  for all of them are clothed in scarlet.’*

Being a Mum might be different to our previous jobs and the jobs we go back to, but don’t be fooled, our work as carers isn’t any less skilled or any less valuable just because it isn’t paid. I hope the quote from the book I shared and these Bible verses can encourage you in how valuable and skilled your current work is. Being a Mum is a big job.

**Week 13 - You are a woman of influence.**

Last week I talked about what a big job it is we do being a Mum or carer. This week I want to encourage you that you are **a woman of influence**. Sometimes it can feel when we are on maternity leave, we are doing very little, and our work is basic. And I hope this quote I am going to share with you will show you that is not the case.

It’s from the same book I shared with you last time, ‘A Mother’s Heart’.

Jean Flemming writes, *‘The aspect of mothering that excites me most is knowing I am making a permanent difference in my children’s lives. I am a woman of influence. I impart values, stimulate creativity, develop compassion, modify weaknesses, and nurture strengths. I can open life up to another individual. And I can open an individual up to life. When I read my child a story, I am doing far more than entertaining him. I am expanding his world with language, words, thoughts and imagination.’*

I really love this quote because it helps me to try to treasure every moment I have with Elanor. And even in the simple things like reading her a story, or showing her squirrels, I am stimulating her creativity. When I set boundaries for her, I am helping her to have values, and modify her weaknesses and develop her strengths, even at this young age. I am currently training her not to bite or hit. I think this is a valuable contribution to society!

One day Elanor will grow up, and the work myself and my partner Leon have done, even in her early years, will help her to be the adult she turns out to be. We all know how profoundly we have been affected by our own mothers and fathers. We wouldn’t be the people we are without them. And now too, the baton has been passed on to us, and we are women of influence for our sons and daughters.

Last week I shared verses from the book of Proverbs in the Bible about an exemplary woman. And at the end of this poem it says,

*‘Honour her for all that her hands have done,
    and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.’*

As we raise our children, as we are these women of influence, our hands do many things. Nappies, constant feeding, walks, reading stories, singing songs, opening up our children to life. The Bible says that women like this should be ‘honoured’. Honour her for all her hands have done.

You are a woman of influence. Regardless of whatever you think about the Bible and Christianity, I think it is true for everyone - the work your hands are currently doing is honourable. You are influencing your little babies’ life and helping them to grow up to be a healthy adult. How amazing and beautiful is that!

*‘Honour her for all that her hands have done,
    and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.’*

You are a woman of influence.

**Week 14 - Your baby is made in the image of God.**

During this slot, I normally give a short talk to encourage us for the week ahead in our role as parents and carers. This is not a Christian group, but I use the Bible to do this, because I think the Bible can be inspiring whoever you are and whatever you believe, even if you don’t have a faith at all.

All of us as Mums and carers know how special our babies are. We love their smiles, their laughs, their curious ways. Simply put, it’s hard not to love your baby! We all know how special they each are.

Of course, there are times our patience can be tried. When they throw their meal food on the floor, and we have to clear it up again. When they cry in the middle of the night and we don’t know why. When they throw up and we have to get a new set of clothes, the third time in the day. When they throw a tantrum. Or when we are just trying to get something done in the kitchen, and they start screaming for our attention. Our babies can try us.

I have a thought for us this week. To be honest you probably don’t need to hear it. You already know how special your baby is. Each Mum knows that.

But if you’re having a hard week, maybe it will be helpful.

It’s from the Bible. At the beginning of the Bible, when God makes the world, it says …

*‘So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them.’*

As a Christian, I believe that each human being has been made in the image of God. There is something about each of our babies that is special and shows us the image of the divine creator. But what sort of things does being made in the image of God mean?

Well, like God, babies want relationship, they want to be cuddled and to be loved. Without this affection they would die. Babies, like God, are **relational**.

Our babies are able to make **free choices**. Granted their choices are simple at the moment, which toy should I play with and where should I go. But nevertheless, like God, they are free agents.

Our babies are also like God in their **creativity**. The God of the Bible is hugely creative, in what he makes - just look at the world, from a zebra, to grasshoppers. From giant shining stars to beautiful diamonds hidden in caves. But babies demonstrate this creativity too, whether it is a finger painting, or making a mess with their food and water from their sippy cup in their high-chair - babies also like to be creative. Why else would they find messy play so much fun?

There’s lots that is similar between us and the animal world, but there is also something different too.

*‘So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them.’*

However you feel, whether it’s been a hard week so far or an easy one, whatever you believe, whether you think there is a God or not, your baby is special. Your baby is a relational, free, creative being. Your baby is amazing.

**Week 15 - Do not become weary in doing good.**

I got the idea for this talk from Lucy Lobo! The verse from the Bible I want to share with you today is from the New Testament, where St Paul says:

*‘Do not become weary in doing good’.*

I’ve chosen this verse because it is a verse that often helps me. I often feel weary or tired of doing good. I first experienced this in my professional life with teaching. By the end of term or the end of a long day, it was really hard to be consistently kind with the children, particularly when they tested my patience.

I think being a Mum has even more taken to me that place of being weary. I am sure we have all experienced it, they are crying for attention, or annoyed about something and they squeal. We can feel weary about doing the same things again and again, feeding, changing, wiping up tears and putting on entertainment. I know what she needs from me, but it is hard to give it to her 100% of the time.

This is why I really like this verse; it goes on to say:

*‘Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’*

In the day-to-day moments, we can’t see the fruit of the good we are doing. That time I managed to be patient with a child at work, or change Elanor’s nappy again with a smile - there isn’t immediate fruit from that. But this is where St Paul’s challenges us. One day we will see the fruit of every good deed we have ever done. The cumulative effect of doing good every day will produce a harvest. I don’t know what that harvest will look for you in your life…

For me, my hope is that by doing good for Elanor every day, even when I don’t want to, I hope will mean that she will grow up to be a happy, well-balanced little girl, who feels tremendously loved. (And maybe is a little less dependent on breadsticks as she currently is!).

 I hope that will set her up for her future, whatever difficult things life throws at her. Of course, it might not work out like – we all know of examples where that is the case and I can’t fully predict what the harvest or future will look like for me or Elanor. But I do know at least whatever ‘good’ I do in this life, will produce sone form of a harvest, I just have to not give up.

So that’s why I love this verse. The promise of a future harvest one day. I hope it’s helpful to you too. And I hope you can get some rest as well and, if possible, find some help from others with your baby. I think that saying, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, has truth in it. There is so much to be being a Mum and a carer. How can we possibly do it all on our own? It’s normal to get weary. It is normal to be tired. It is normal to want to give up. My Mum was a single Mum and it was a very tiring experience from what she told me about it!

But even when we are weary, know this: every good thing we are doing will have an effect, it is all worth it, there will be a harvest from all our labour and love one day.

*‘Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’*

**Week 16- Your service is incredible**

This is the last talk of the term and wow what a few months it has been! Some of us came to the first group in January. There were no teas or coffee but I was just so grateful to be able to see multiple Mums, not in a freezing cold park! This group has given me something to go to and structure to my week, when in winter the weekend felt no different to the week!

It’s been such a privilege getting to know many of you here. You have said so many kind words to me, and Elanor has really benefited from interacting with all your babies too.

The verse I would like to share today I feel sums up what I have noticed about the Mums and carers who have come to this group.

It’s a verse from the New Testament. Jesus says,

***Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.***

Jesus completely revolutionised what it means to be great. He said to be a truly great person you had to serve others. Those who are really great, are slaves of all.

That is true. People who many in society respect are often great servants, Mother Teresa, Florence Nightingale, Marcus Rashford with his school meals, Martin Luther King campaigning for civil rights, the Queen with her many years of service.

Of course, no one is perfect, and everyone has their own dark side but those who serve, often we do respect and see as great.

I have seen greatness in everyone I have met in this group. Serving their babies, even when there was very little other support, or the normal groups around to rely on. It’s is tremendously difficult having a baby, and it is even harder when you can’t see your family.

Also, when I have chatted to each of you about the jobs you do before you had your baby and the jobs you go back to, you seem to all do things that are of such benefit to society. Midwives, admin staff at the hospital, making our world more beautiful through drama productions, doctors, nurses, lawyers. Without your service in these jobs our society would not function.

I wanted to give each of you a booklet maybe as a token to remember all you have achieved in these past months, and you can go back and read through and be encouraged by what amazing Mums and carers you each are.

I have so enjoyed getting to know you all and if you can, do come back to see us on Tuesday 18th May at Church House! You are very welcome to use the car park here still, it’s just a little walk. There is the map on the back of the booklet.

Thanks for all you have given me over the past few months. I deeply respect each of you.

***Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.***