

SAMPLE

CONNECT WITH
GOD
THE CHURCH
YOUR PURPOSE



SAMPLE

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**Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011
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Made in China

CONTENTS

WEEK	TITLE	PAGE
1	WHAT IS ROOTED?	5
	The 7 Rhythms of Rooted	6
	Introduction	11
	The Story of Rooted	12
	Kenya: Change a City. Take a Continent. Win the World.	16
2	WHO IS GOD?	19
	Uganda: The Church in the Reign of Idi Amin	39
3	HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US?	41
	Prayer Experience	63
4	WHERE IS GOD IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING?	67
	Haiti: Finding Hope in the Midst of Tragedy	85
5	THERE IS AN ENEMY	87
6	HOW CAN I MAKE THE MOST OF MY LIFE? PART 1	111
	Democratic Republic of Congo: Ministering in Chaos	131
	Serve Experience	134
7	HOW CAN I MAKE THE MOST OF MY LIFE? PART 2	137
	Mexico: What is Poverty?	156
8	HOW DOES GOD VIEW MONEY?	157
9	WHY AND HOW SHOULD I TELL OTHERS?	179
	Sri Lanka: Cultural Theology	205
10	WHY IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT?	207
	About the Authors	226



SAMPLE



WEEK

1

WHAT IS ROOTED?

SAMPLE

THE 7 RHYTHMS OF ROOTED



**Daily
Devotion**



Prayer



Repentance



**Sacrificial
Generosity**



**Serve the
Community**



**Share Your
Story**



Worship

The 7 Rhythms you'll experience throughout Rooted were first modeled by the early church in Acts 2. By committing to practicing these rhythms in community, you will begin to see the type of growth and life change that goes beyond the individual to impact the whole church.

In a world marked by constant change where we are surrounded by chaos and confusion, our attention pulled in every which way, God's Word clearly lays the foundation for transformational Christian living. With our eyes set on Him (Hebrews 12:2) and our roots in the Truth of God's Word (Colossians 3:16), we can be sure God will produce the kind of life-change that will echo through His Kingdom for generations to come.

Likely you're here, reading these pages and joining in the Rooted experience because you are looking for something. Whether you're looking for connection, community, to deepen your relationship with Jesus or have some serious questions you want to explore, beginning a practice of the 7 Rhythms is where you will do all of that. Maybe you've lost sight of who God is and what He's done for you and feel like everything is out of control. Or maybe you've experienced a significant life change recently where the rug was pulled out from beneath you and you need some sort of foundation to put your hope in.

Well, this is it. This is where you step into community and commit to rhythms God established for us in His Word so that we would know Him more intimately, and through that journey, invite others to hear His story and experience the true freedom Jesus offers by knowing Him.

Throughout the next 10 weeks you are invited to practice the 7 Rhythms of Rooted grounded in Acts 2 which include: Daily Devotion, Prayer, Repentance, Serve the Community, Sacrificial Generosity, Share Your Story, and Worship. When you build the foundation of your life on solid rock (Matthew 7:24-27), that is, God's Word and His instruction for how to live it out, you will not be disappointed by the love you experience nor the ways He begins to use you.

These rhythms are not intended just for Rooted, and surely not supposed to last only the duration of the next 10 weeks. The more dedicated you are to spending time in and reflecting on God's Word, the more you actively engage in group discussions and the experiences throughout Rooted, the more likely you are to not only walk away from Rooted having learned something, but the more likely you are to take the 7 Rhythms of Rooted with you into your next chapter of life and beyond. The journey won't be perfect—no journey ever is. But the more you seek God, the more you will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29). Let this step in faith become the foundation of your walk with Jesus.

Grounded in God’s Word, the 7 Rhythms are the foundation of the Rooted experience. Each of these Rhythms was practiced by the early church in Acts 2. When we commit to practicing the 7 Rhythms in community like the early church, we see growth and transformation in both our personal lives and in our communities.



DAILY DEVOTION (Acts 2:42, 46)

Scripture is the very Word of God. Through it, He equips us with all we need to learn about Him and live a life pleasing to Him. A daily rhythm of reading, meditating on and applying God’s Word to our lives is key.



PRAYER (Acts 2:42)

One of the most important elements in any relationship is communication. Prayer is just that: engaging God in a conversation, sharing our hearts with Him, and spending time listening to His voice, both individually and in community.



REPENTANCE (Acts 2:37-39)

Jesus saves those who believe and call upon His name. Saving grace is once and for all (justification) and also a continual invitation to repent for our wrongdoings. With the help of the Spirit we take inventory of our lives, humbly and honestly confess our sin, and turn away from our sin toward God in surrender. Through Jesus’ offer of forgiveness, we receive true freedom.



SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY (Acts 2:44-45)

Giving demonstrates our dependence on God. We acknowledge that all we own has been given to us by Him. In His generosity toward us, God desires that we, too, are generous and will use our resources as a tangible way to partner with Him in His work in the world and in the lives of those around us. We are blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:2).



SERVE THE COMMUNITY (Acts 2:44-45)

We are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit to share God's love by participating in the ministry of Jesus. He has given us agency with Him to fearlessly influence our society and the world. When we serve in the world and in His Church, we impact those around us and reveal God's glory.



SHARE YOUR STORY (Acts 2:14-36)

The greatest gift we can ever give someone who doesn't yet know Jesus is an introduction to Him. Sharing our life stories is the most powerful way to show the transforming power and salvation offered through Jesus Christ. When we tell our stories of transformation, we tell the story of God.



WORSHIP (Acts 2:26-28, 46-47)

As children of God, it is important to consistently set aside time to remember what God has done, to thank Him for it, and to put Him on display as we give Him the glory. In all circumstances, we are called to practice God-centered worship.

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Rooted and the next chapter of your story. Our goal for this experience is for you to deepen your connection with God, His Church, and your purpose in the epic story He is writing through human history.

Beyond a program, seminar, or life group, Rooted is a catalyst for life-change. Rooted inspires questions, conversations, and beyond-what-is-comfortable group experiences that are designed to help you find yourself in God's story. You will begin to see God in new ways—and hear His voice in surprising places. In a world that can be fragmented, isolated, and empty, Rooted allows you to experience a different way of life as you connect with God, the Church, and your purpose. Through this experience we hope you will be emboldened to live out your calling as a radical follower of Jesus. The word “radical” comes from the Latin root “radix,” meaning “a root.” By rooting ourselves in God's Word and His truths, we have a firm foundation on which we love the world.

Throughout this workbook, we have included stories from great leaders and pastors from all over the world to broaden your perspective—and challenge your understanding of the global Church. When we listen and learn from believers around the world, we gain a deeper understanding of the whole Gospel.

Rooted is a significant commitment. We want to be up-front about that, but anything worth doing involves a certain amount of sacrifice. During this 10-week experience, you will engage in 7 Rhythms, one of which is daily devotion which will help you build the habit of being in God's Word and connecting with Him daily. This will be key as you grow in your relationship with Him and connect more deeply in community when you meet with your group to talk about what you've learned each week. You will be surprised what happens when your group gathers and begins to share honestly. As people open up and share personal stories, feelings, and questions, the Holy Spirit moves, and God reveals new truths. This is where transformation happens.

There are three additional experiences designed to deepen some of the areas we will explore. We'll pray and fast together, share our faith stories, and serve together. On top of these experiences, we'll also discuss where we are in our journey with Jesus. No matter where you stand in your relationship with Jesus at the beginning of Rooted, there is always room to move forward. For some of us that may mean deciding for the first time to follow Jesus and/or get baptized. For others it will mean letting go of the things of this world to follow His call more courageously. You will be marked by defining moments like these. After our 10 weeks together, you will join with all the other Rooted groups to celebrate the journey. Our hope is that you will continue these rhythms as your spiritual journey continues beyond Rooted.

Come with an open heart and mind, and see how God will surprise you!

The Story of Rooted

Too many of us are held captive by the “normal” and “ordinary” dreams and desires common to modern culture. Yet as followers of Jesus we are called to live a radically counter-cultural life. Radical, from the Latin root “radix” means “a root.” To live as a radical follower of Jesus is to be rooted in God’s Word and truth and live a life that reflects His. However, this is not what we always see in our daily lives. In fact, many surveys show that Christians are just as likely to embrace lifestyles as consumer-driven, self-centered, and immoral as those not professing to be Christ-followers.

American churches have traditionally relied on theological information as the primary activator for life-change. While information certainly has a place, it should not be the only way the Church invites people to participate in God’s story. Christians in the Western world know a lot of information, but don’t often experience the life transformation promised in Scripture. We know that salvation is a free gift from God—there is nothing we can do to earn it. But, being a follower of Jesus comes with a cost. As we learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, we learn we must offer Him our time, our hearts, and our very lives in order to fully embrace the extraordinary life He has for each of us.

We at Mariners wanted to create an experience that bridged the disparity between what we say we believe and how we live. We wanted something that would be experiential and transferable across all ages, stages, and even cultures.

In 2008, Mariners began a partnership with Pastor Muriithi Wanjau and Mavuno Church in Nairobi, Kenya, and we quickly learned they had a similar passion to see people encounter God and grow deeper in their relationship with Him and His Church.

During one of our visits to Mavuno, they told us about an experience their church family was going through that had been developed by Pastor Muriithi. They called it Mizizi, Swahili for “roots.” It wasn’t a Bible study, class, or program, and it wasn’t “taught” in the traditional sense. It was a 10-week journey with daily homework that each member of their church went on in community with each other. Groups of men and women would gather each week, and through a study guide and a facilitator, walk through Scripture and discover God’s purpose for them in their church family and the world. The impact of Mizizi on their church was staggering. Thousands of people were discovering for the first time that God loved them specifically and had a beautiful plan for their lives. They learned God has gifted each of them perfectly for His purposes. They learned how to pray and how to unleash the power of His Spirit. They learned about Jesus’ heart

for serving the poor, His ability to destroy Satan's strongholds in their lives, and how He wants them to steward the material resources He's given them.

When one fully grasps the fullness of God's plan for his or her life, one can't help but go out and do it. And that is exactly what was happening at Mavuno Church. People were reaching their community with the love of Jesus, people were discovering they are called to be fearless influencers of society, and their community was changing. Mavuno could hardly keep up with the growth of Mizizi because family members and co-workers who didn't go to church or have a relationship with Jesus were signing up in droves. They saw their friends and family members' lives change before their eyes, and they wanted to know why and how it was happening. The Good News was proving to be really good news when tested. It was astounding to witness.

We wondered what God might do if we brought Mizizi to Orange County.

We began to work with Pastor Muriithi to adapt the Mizizi experience to our culture while keeping the spirit of the original work. We prayed God would use it in the lives of our staff and church family, and He honored our prayers. As people moved through this experience, it became clear it wasn't the curriculum that was changing lives—it was God. People came with open hearts, expectant of what God would show them. And He did not disappoint. Relationships were mended, strongholds were broken, and people sensed God's call to go out and change their communities in ways they never thought they could.

We believe God has brought us to a place of honesty and vulnerability like we've never experienced before. We have come to a place of desperation—individually and as a church—where we say, “God, we don't know how to do this. Please do this for us and through us.” In that humility, God comes near and slices through the many facades we have constructed over the years. This has renewed our commitment to becoming authentic, transparent, wholehearted people. It was, and is, astounding to watch this remarkable shift in the culture of our church.

Since we began this journey, Rooted has been adopted into churches across the nation and translated into many different languages. As Rooted & Mizizi's impact continues to grow, we want to expand your understanding of God beyond our Western context.

Our hope and prayer is that by the end of Rooted you'll have heard God's voice and live more passionately and purposefully for Christ.

SPEAKER NOTES

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. **Acts 2:42-47**

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ROOTED COVENANT

It is our desire to promote a safe environment for sharing the most important things in life. We want to provide a place where people can reveal openly and confidently the broken areas of their lives without judgment or condemnation. We are not here to “fix” one another. We encourage openness, vulnerability, and intimacy during discussion and prayer times. In order to ensure a safe haven for personal sharing, we ask that each Rooted participant enter into an agreement of confidentiality.

Additionally, to get the most out of this experience, our hope is that you make a commitment to attend all sessions and participate in the group discussions. If you cannot be there, group dynamics will be impacted. If you know you will miss more than two group meetings, we ask that you attend a different session of *Rooted*.

I agree to attend all group meetings and keep all things shared by my group members confidential at all times.

.....
SIGNED

.....
DATE

Change a City. Take a Continent. Win the World.

Pastor Muriithi Wanjau

Mavuno Church, Nairobi, Kenya

There is a popular side-dish known as *ugali* in Kenya and Tanzania. This starchy, polenta-like food goes by different names in sub-Saharan Africa. In Malawi and Zambia, it is called *nsima* or *nshima*. The South African name for it is *pap* or *mealie pap*. Zimbabweans call it *sadza*. The funny thing is, there is no one recipe for it. If you search the Internet, you will find many entries on how to make it, and each one is different.

I believe the Church thinks the same way about making disciples. Every place of worship has a different recipe.

Some think the world is ignorant, so we must focus on teaching and education. Some churches believe the world is sick and in need of deliverance, so they focus on counseling and healing. There are churches who believe that the world is evil, and Christians must separate themselves from the rest. Some churches believe the world is lost, and people need salvation and rescue from Hell. There are churches that focus on compassion, believing the world is needy and hurting.

All of the above statements are true of our world. All of these churches are focusing on good things. But, can *good* sometimes become the enemy of *best*? Can focus on these things divert us from what is truly essential, the all-encompassing core-calling that Jesus left for His followers to turn ordinary disciples into fearless world-changers?

At Mavuno Church, we developed *Mizizi* as a first step into the spiritual journey of becoming fearless world-changers. Being a disciple of Christ is more than a 10 week journey, however. It's our life's work.

Mark 3:13 says, "*Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.*" Here, Jesus chose His disciples, engaged them in a life-transforming process, and eventually released them to change the world. He does the same thing today.

When we choose to follow Jesus, He brings us **from complacent to consumer**. In the verse above, He called out to people. In other passages in the Bible, Jesus tells parables about searching for the one lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son.

He speaks the language of our culture and calls us from our lives of complacency to a life of fullness and riches in His Kingdom. Salvation is a free gift, but it's not enough for us to simply consume the gospel. A church of consumer Christians can become a very selfish church. We can become focused on meeting our own desires. From Jesus, we learn that the next step is...

From consumer to connected. Relationships in community are key to maturing in Christ. Jesus knew this when He gathered the disciples together. They worked together, ate together, asked questions, and learned from Jesus together. It is very difficult to grow in our relationship with Christ without people walking through life with you, celebrating wonderful moments, and grieving tragic losses. We love and serve each other and our communities like the disciples did. But being connected with others in a life group will only take us so far in our faith. There must be another step.

From connected to committed. The apostles used their gifts with authority. God has gifted us uniquely as well and, as His followers, we can use them to serve our communities. In humility, we understand that we really can make an impact for God's Kingdom, that He has set a purpose for us, and that it's our charge to fulfill that purpose. But, serving is just a step towards something even bigger. The last step we learn from Jesus' example is...

From committed to compelled. In Acts 2, we read that the early Church went out, preaching, teaching, and baptizing believers and the Church grew. They were compelled by the vision given to them and by their own experiences to tell others about the Messiah. So too, we are compelled to tell our friends and neighbors that Jesus has made a difference in our lives. Matthew 28:18-19 says, *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"*

It is our responsibility to be ambassadors of Jesus in every sphere of our influence. Our identities are as believers in Him, who happen to have jobs as a doctor, or plumber, or teacher. He has placed us in those situations for a specific purpose: to reach those around us with the love and healing power of Jesus Christ, and to change that industry or vocation so it becomes an outpost of God's Kingdom influence!

When we begin to recognize that God has placed us as His agents to bring His influence into our communities and vocations, we see change. As people are attracted to a relationship with Jesus because of the way we live, families change. Neighborhoods change. Cities change. When a city has changed, it garners the attention of its country, then its continent. And, when a continent has changed, the world will notice. The world will be won for Jesus Christ.

It's a breathtaking thought to realize that God did not just create us to be born, grow up, make money, and then die. His power of transformation is available

for each of His followers who dare to live a life of fearless influence. I have seen many people embrace this truth, experience dramatic transformation in their own lives, and then take that transformation to their families, workplaces, and communities. This is the recipe for change. God created us to be world-changers!

You were born to be fearless. You were born to change the world.

SAMPLE



WEEK

2

WHO IS GOD?



WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2

DAY 1

THE MYSTERIOUS GOD

God does not come to us in nicely defined, rationally explained, thought categories. God does not fit Himself into our theological textbooks. God breaks all the rules. He is near, yet transcendent; clothed in human form, yet holy; more terrifying than can be imagined, yet compassionate; invisible, yet revealed; judging, yet merciful; sovereign, yet humble. No matter where you look, God breaks the molds. Skip Moen, Today's Word

No matter who we are, or where we come from, we each have an idea about God. It could be that you think He doesn't exist, or that He just created the world and now sits back and watches it, disinterested. Perhaps you think He is a She, or an It. Maybe for you God is the ultimate 911 service, only to be called upon in an emergency; or God is a cosmic police officer, waiting and watching to catch you break His laws. We are often inoculated with these images of God early in our lives—from our parents, our culture, or the church.

The problem is none of our images or words can adequately capture Him. The quote above makes a point the Bible reinforces again and again—our descriptions of God cannot begin to capture His majesty, glory, and infiniteness. He is holy, awesome, vast, and eternal. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways are higher than our ways. Our limited minds and finite lives simply cannot fathom the depth and breadth of God.

It is only as God reveals Himself to us that we begin to get an accurate picture of who He really is. And that revelation comes to us in three primary ways: through creation, through Jesus Christ, and through the Scriptures.

This means all we know about God comes from His revelation about Himself. We only know Him as He discloses Himself to us. Because of this, we must keep two things constantly in view. We can know God and have confidence about what He is like, and at the same time, we will never be able to understand Him completely. We know enough about God to love, revere, and worship Him, but most of God will remain mysterious and beyond our comprehension.

C.H. Spurgeon, the great nineteenth century theologian and preacher, put it this way:

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in

them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than the thoughts of God...

*But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe... The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ, and him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. **C. H. Spurgeon, The Immutability of God***

An example of this tension (knowing God yet never being able to fully grasp all of who He is) exemplifies the Christian idea of the Trinity. Central and unique to the Christian faith, is the belief that the one God has disclosed Himself eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is plurality within the identity of the one God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a belief in three gods, or of one God in three different modes or functions. It holds that within the one God there are three eternal and distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who live eternally in loving community.

We see this idea from the very first words of the Bible, where we see differentiation between God, the Spirit of God, and God's Word (spoken).

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. **Genesis 1:1-3***

The beginning of John's account of the life of Jesus echoes back to the opening words of Genesis but now adds another layer to our understanding.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1:1-5, 14***

John opens his gospel with the astounding claim: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). Notice, the Word is eternal. Before the beginning began, He already was. The Word is personal and divine, it is with God and is God. This Word—the eternal self-communication of God—became flesh, wed His deity to our humanity and dwelt (“tabernacled”) among us. “The Word” of Genesis 1 and John 1 is none other than the One we know as Jesus Christ.

Is that a little confusing to you? That’s to be expected. Scholars and theologians have been wrestling with the nature of the Trinity for centuries. However, as Spurgeon tells us above, though we may not fully be able to comprehend many aspects of God, as we search for greater knowledge and understanding of Him, our minds will be expanded, and we will come to know Him more deeply. We should always be reminded that we come to receive God on His terms, not ours. God is much bigger than any image we have of Him.



DAILY RESPONSE

- What false or incomplete images of God do you have?
- What new thoughts do you have about God?
- Write a prayer to God asking Him to reveal Himself to you.

SAMPLE

DAY 2

THE WORLD GOD MADE

“In the beginning, God...”

The Bible opens up with the four most powerful words ever written: *“In the beginning, God...”* The Bible doesn’t argue for God’s existence, it simply assumes it. Far more than a purely abstract theological textbook, the Bible tells us the story of God and His work in and beyond the world. The first two chapters of the Bible relay the story of God’s creation.

John Stott supplies another insight about this four-word opening of Genesis:

*The first four words of the Bible are more than an introduction to the creation story or to the book of Genesis. They supply the key which opens our understanding to the Bible as a whole. They tell us that the religion of the Bible is a religion of the initiative of God. You can never take God by surprise. You can never anticipate Him. He always makes the first move. He is always there “in the beginning.” Before man existed, God acted. Before man stirs himself to seek God, God sought man, in the Bible, we do not see man groping after God; we see God reaching after man. **John Stott, Basic Christianity***

Thus, we learn in the introductory words to the Bible that God is eternal and existed before His creation, and that He is the initiator of all that happens. As we continue in Genesis 1, we see how the Creator God of the universe brings everything into being, and how He values His work.

We learned yesterday that God reveals Himself to us through the Bible, through Jesus Christ, and through the created order. Over the next couple of weeks, we will look at different facets of God’s revelation to us. Today, we want to look more in depth at Genesis 1 (Mark up the passage as you read it. What do you learn about God?):

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the

second day. And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day. And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:2-25

In the story of creation, we see the power of God in action. For instance, He simply speaks the universe into existence. We see His intelligence, beauty, and order as He creates and fills each day of creation. We not only marvel at the creation, we marvel at the God who created it. Psalm 19:1 says: "*The heavens declare the glory of God!*" Then finally we get to see God's evaluation of all He has made: "It is very good." God delights in what He has made.

Everything about God's creation was "good." There was no conflict, no destruction, no disease or pollution. The Hebrew word *shalom* (usually translated as "peace") captures God's intent for creation. *Shalom* means wholeness, unity, integration, and harmony. Everything was the way God intended it to be. It is very important we begin the story here. We have often heard the bad news

about us and the world: we are fallen, sinful, and in need of rescue. While true, the Bible doesn't start there. It starts instead with a loving, incredibly powerful and majestic Creator who personally designs a universe to reflect His glory.

It was into this world that humanity was born. This was the world God made for us.



DAILY RESPONSE

- What do you learn about God from the creation story?
- What questions does this account raise for you?
- How does creation declare the glory of God to you?
- Write a prayer expressing your thoughts on creation to God.

A large area for writing, featuring horizontal dotted lines. A large, semi-transparent watermark reading 'SAMPLE' is oriented diagonally across this section.

SAMPLE

DAY 3

THE CROWN OF GOD'S WORK

The creation of human beings gets an extended focus in the Genesis account.

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. **Genesis 1:26-31***

Man and woman were part of God's good creation. They were made by Him for unique relationship and interaction with Him. The phrase "image of God" means that there are things true of God that are also true of us. While obviously not gods ourselves, we reflect certain characteristics of God's nature.

From this passage, we learn one characteristic we share with God is that we are made for cooperative participation with God in His work. God blesses people and tells them to have children and to fill the earth. He also tells them to subdue the Earth which means ruling over and taking care of it. We see an example of this in Genesis 2, when Adam (who was created before Eve) is commanded to care for creation and to name the animals God had made. Could God have done all of this better Himself? Of course. But God invited the man to bring forth all the latent possibilities in creation, and to direct them in God-honoring ways, as an extension of His authority on Earth. Our work was to reflect His—six days He worked, so six days we work; He rested on the seventh day, so we are to rest on the seventh day. He is the Creator, and He creates us to be creators. Our stewardship of creation was to mirror His care in creating it.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have

made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet... **Psalm 8:3-6**

Another major attribute we share with God is personhood. God has will, intelligence, and emotion—and so do we. The most central facet of personhood is the capacity and desire for relationship. God’s personhood (the Trinity, which we talked about on Day 1 this week and we’ll cover in more detail later) is made up of three co-equal, co-eternal, co-existing persons whom the Bible refers to as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, God has always existed as a community within Himself. And, out of the overflow of that loving and joyous community, God creates human beings in His image—made for relationship with Himself and with others.

God didn’t create us because He was lonely or bored. He didn’t create us because He needed our help. He is fully complete without us, yet desires relationship with us.

It is striking that there is only one thing in the whole creation account that is considered “not good.” The LORD God said, *“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him,”* (Genesis 2:18). This quote refers to the fact that Adam was created before Eve, and, for a period, had no other person to relate to. God judged that the alone-ness of man was not good. Though surrounded by the animal kingdom and having direct access to God, the man needed another human being to be his companion. So God created a woman, and the pair were given charge over the rest of the created world to care for it and stand as His representatives over it.

Think about this. The same God who created the universe knows each of us intimately and completely. He cares for us and loves us. He delights over us (Psalm 139:13-19), and desires a relationship with us. He creates an incredible world to live in, and then gives us the job to care for it. He takes the initiative to reveal Himself, and then leaves it to us to respond to His loving care. When we stop to really consider that, our lives can’t ever be the same.



DAILY RESPONSE

- How do you see God’s love and care for you?
- How does it make you feel to know God has given us the job of caring for the earth?
- How do you respond to the idea that God wants a relationship with you?
- How have you seen this played out?
- Write a prayer expressing your thoughts about God’s complete creation and your role in it. What are you grateful for? What are you sorry for? What are you in awe of when you look at His works?

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SAMPLE

DAY 4

WHAT WENT WRONG

Many people can agree that something is deeply wrong with our world. We only have to read a newspaper, turn on the TV, or connect to the Internet to see this play out. We not only hurt each other, but we harm ourselves in endlessly destructive ways.

Sin is a powerfully destructive force in the world. However, it's important to remember the impact is felt not only by those around us, but it deeply affects the heart of God. Sin's greatest impact is in our relationship with God. Not only do we fail to cherish and enjoy Him, but our rebellion against Him earns us the wages of sin: death and eternal separation from Him (Romans 6:23). The fact that God is holy means that He is perfectly just and cannot tolerate the destruction of His creation. God hates the sin that damages us, our lives, and our relationship with Him.

Genesis 2 ends with the man and woman in a garden, free to enjoy all of its delights, with only the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" off limits. We don't know how long Adam and Eve lived in this paradise, but the Bible records the rebellion that began to ripple outward throughout all creation.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman

you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” **Genesis 3:1-19**

The gift of freedom was given by God to both angels and human beings. For Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented a choice—whether to humbly trust God and submit themselves to His gracious rule, or to turn from Him and go their own way. We know which choice they made, and the consequences have been passed down to us.

After their disobedience, the harmony and intimacy that existed between the man and woman quickly turns to blame and shame—the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent, and the serpent slithers away. They hide from God in fear, as they begin to experience the consequences of their rebellion. Their intimacy with God is ruptured, and as death, sin, and rebellion spread out to infect every aspect of creation, the shalom that characterized God’s good world evaporates. After Genesis 3, the next several chapters record the ways in which the world becomes increasingly tainted. God’s good world (including the humans made in His image) remains, but it has been fundamentally altered.

There is not one aspect of human life that has not been affected by the entrance of sin and death into the world. Humanity had to find more and more words to describe the evils that beset them. Corruption. War. Hate. Disease. Selfishness. Greed. Deceit. Rape. Murder. Theft. Fear. Guilt.

Every relationship we were made for was fractured. Instead of intimacy with God, there is fear and hiding. Instead of intimacy between man and woman, there is shame, hurt, and a struggle for power. Even creation itself groans under the weight of human disobedience.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation

itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **Romans 8:20-22**

Instead of humble obedience to God and joyful delight in His creation, humanity became enslaved to the power of sin. Our inner natures have become bent towards evil. And the Scriptures teach that the end result of our sin is death.

Sometimes this death is the by-product of our own sinful choices. Sometimes it is the result of someone else's choice, or just living in a marred world. Often it is a combination of all three. What is certain, is that we all experience the deadly consequences of sin. And, if that's not bad enough, the Bible says that unless our sin problem is addressed, we will experience spiritual death, which means being separated from God both now and into eternity.

The good news is, that isn't the end of the story. Tomorrow, we'll see how God provides the rescue we so desperately need.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Where do you see the consequences of human rebellion in our world? In your own life?
- What kind of death have you experienced because of your sin?
- Talk to God about the pain you've encountered, or the pain you have caused due to your sin. Thank Him for allowing you to come to Him in complete transparency, knowing He loves you and wants to restore you.

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SAMPLE

DAY 5

THE BEST NEWS EVER

As we learned yesterday, none of us are able, on our own, to avoid sin and be reunited with God. The good news is our Creator quickly moves to become our Redeemer and implements a plan to deal with our sin, bringing us back into relationship with Himself. In spite of our sin and rebellion, God does not remain distant from our world, but enters this world to restore us to Himself, and set the world back to the way He designed it to be.

God begins in Genesis 12 by calling one man, Abraham, into a special relationship with Him. From Abraham comes a great nation (God's people, the Jews, Israel). Eventually from that nation comes a Savior (also called the Messiah), who is God's instrument to bring salvation to the world.

What is so amazing about the Savior is He is much more than a messenger, teacher, or spiritual leader. He is God in human form. God, Himself comes to the world as Jesus Christ and begins to reverse the curses of sin and death that have ravaged humanity since the time of Adam and Eve. He comes to the center of our damaged souls and deals directly with the disease the Bible calls sin. We are redeemed and restored by Jesus, who took sin and its consequences upon Himself.

The Bible tells us the "wages of sin is death"—we have earned it—so Jesus died to take the "wages" of sin upon Himself. He dies the death we were already dying because of sin, to give us the life we could never attain on our own. When He died on the cross, our old selves died with Him; and when Jesus rose from the dead, our new selves rose with Him. He restored our relationship with God by providing a means of forgiveness of the debt we owed. He broke the power of sin over us, so that we may overcome the evil in ourselves and in our world.

Jesus' death on the cross was the necessary means by which the root of sin and death could be overcome. Our sin and rebellion from God actually made us His enemy. This makes Jesus' sacrifice for us even more incredible.

At just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. **Romans 5:6-11**

Jesus made it clear that this path back to God was open to everyone regardless of their gender, heritage, religious dedication, guilt, accomplishments, or any other human measurement. Salvation through Jesus is a gift of grace offered to you by God. But, it is a gift you must individually receive. Being raised by Christian parents, going to church, living in America, or being a good person is no substitute for the faith we must live out each day. Now the great and epic story of God's salvation of the world can be your story too.

How do you accept Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf? Just think of your ABC's.

- A.** Admit you're a sinner. Through thought and action, you are separated from God. You are not able to bridge the gap between you and God through your own effort. "Trying harder" is not the answer, but rather acknowledging that you can't save yourself. Authentically admit this to God and allow Him to build the bridge to a relationship with you.
- B.** Believe in Jesus and what He has done. To believe in Jesus is to agree with what the Bible says about Him, and what He says about Himself. Jesus was 100% human and 100% God. He died on the cross as a sacrifice to make payment for your sins, and then rose from the dead conquering death for all who believe in Him. Baptism is our outward response and declaration of the inward decision to believe and follow Jesus.
- C.** Commit to follow Jesus. Commitment is more than a sentimental prayer or intellectual assent. Commitment is being certain that belief in Jesus alone saves you, and then living that truth. It means making Jesus your personal friend, leader, confidant, and object of worship.

It is not enough for Jesus to offer you salvation. It is not enough for you to just understand it. You must decide to take Jesus up on His offer. The ball is in your court.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Is the way of salvation, as it is explained in this chapter, what you had previously thought? If not, how is it different?
- Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If yes, how has that changed you? If you haven't, what is keeping you from doing it now?
- If you are ready to accept Jesus as your Savior, write a prayer accepting His gift of forgiveness and asking Him to be the Lord of your life. If you have already asked Jesus into your life, write a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of grace and forgiveness in your life and what it has meant to you.

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The Church in the Reign of Idi Amin

Pastor Peter Kasirivu

Gaba Community Church, Kampala, Uganda

Many people know of Uganda because of Idi Amin, a dictator who ruled our tiny country from 1971 to 1979. Idi Amin began his rule when I was only 10 and was not a Christian yet.

When he took over power, every one rejoiced because he had toppled a dictator. Little did we know that we had just received a leader who would ultimately kill more than 500,000 people.

Idi Amin began by ousting all people of Asian descent from Uganda, taking over their businesses and killing many of them. He then turned on people from the West and began attacking and confiscating their properties. He focused on Israelis especially, because he felt they had stolen the land of Israel from the Palestinians.

Amin moved from oppressing just the westerners and began a war against the Church. He decided to make Uganda a Muslim nation and began ousting all foreign missionaries. The church I was later to join had several visiting missionaries, mostly from Canada. Amin gave them 48 hours to leave the country. Not long after that time, Amin decided to close all evangelical churches, allowing only the Anglican and Catholic churches to stay in operation.

The worst times for the Church came when Amin decided to imprison all believers. One of our church members tells of the day they were in the church in the middle of a worship service and truckloads of soldiers were off-loaded at their church compound. They surrounded the church and demanded that everyone in church board the trucks. Many of them boarded after being beaten, but a few of them were able to escape. Those believers on the trucks were imprisoned for their faith. Members of our church tell stories of daily threats, starvation, and the many people who died at the hand of Amin's soldiers. The brethren survived on mutual encouragement, prayer, praise, and knowing that suffering for Christ is not a loss, but an opportunity to show their captors that God still cares, even in the midst of unbelievable pain and suffering.

Amin assigned his vice-president to see to it that these Christians were executed. No one doubted that would happen, since he had just executed the

Anglican archbishop. The day the vice-president was to sign the order for the execution of believers, he was traveling from Jinja to Kampala. He got into a terrible car accident, breaking both his legs. He narrowly survived. The focus was immediately taken away from executing the Christians and diverted to the plight of the vice-president. This was a real Book of Acts experience where Paul and Silas were saved from jail:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. Acts 16:25

After several days of no instruction from the central government, the director of the prison decided to release the Christians. The evangelical church in Uganda remained underground for the remainder of Amin's rule. In April 1979, Idi Amin was finally ousted, and for the first time in many years, the Church was free.

I have talked with many believers who lived through that time, and it has been very interesting to hear their thoughts:

They were always very alert, and their relationship to God was so deep because they had to totally depend on God for protection and provision.

The people who gave their lives to Christ were very genuine. They knew that it was not just a change of religion, but also a matter of life and death.

The church I later joined, Makerere Gospel Church, had 50 congregations around the country at the time when churches went underground, but by the time Amin left and freedom was restored, they had 400 congregations. The Church grew even under extreme oppression!

Two lessons I've learned from this season are:

1. Hard times grow us, even life-threatening ones, and will transform us into the people God created us to be.
2. God sits on the throne and is sovereign. He reigns above all rulers of this earth. He is good, but He has not promised us only peace. He has promised to be with us, even in the times when our lives are threatened.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD. Psalm 23:4-6

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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