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THE CHURCH
YOUR PURPOSE



ROOTED

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Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 (Zondervan)

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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 provokes 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: community, intimacy, and generosity. 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 the 10-week experience, you will go through various individual exercises (daily Bible and commentary reading, journaling, and prayer) and then meet weekly in your groups to talk about what you have learned. You will be surprised what happens when your group gathers and begins to honestly share. What God is doing in the group soon becomes the curriculum as the Holy Spirit moves people to open up and share personal stories and feelings. This is where transformation happens.

There are three additional experiences designed to deepen some of the areas we explore. We'll pray and fast together, share our faith, 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 getting baptized. For others it will mean letting go of the things of this world to follow His call more courageously. These kinds of defining moments will mean your life will never be the same. After our 10 weeks together, we'll join with all the other Rooted groups to celebrate the journey.

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

WHAT IS ROOTED?

WEEK 1





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 the group meetings more than two times, we ask that you attend a different session of *Rooted*.

I agree to attend all group meetings and will 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. 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 ten-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 needs. 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 moments. 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. This we learn from Jesus is...

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 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.

WHO IS GOD?

WEEK 2

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, Dean - Master's International Divinity School

No matter who we are or where we come from, we each have an idea about God. It could be you think He doesn't exist, or 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 handed down through generations.

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.

The great nineteenth century theologian and preacher, C. H. Spurgeon, puts 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**

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, He was with God, and the Word was a part of God Himself (divine). 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.

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 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. The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1)! Then finally we get to see God’s evaluation of all He has made: “It is 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. Often the Church begins with 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.

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 it 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 (Ps. 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.

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 know this is so. 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). When we understand the holiness of God, we understand why Scripture says God hates sin. Sin damages us, our lives and our relationship with God.

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

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 and bring 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 this 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. He took upon Himself our sin and its consequences, and in doing so, made a way for us to restore all that was lost through our rebellion.

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 died 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 opened 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.
- C) Commit to follow Jesus. Commitment is more than a sentimental prayer or intellectual assent. Commitment is betting the farm on the fact 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.

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 decent 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, Idi Amin decided to close all evangelical churches and allowed only the Anglican and Catholic Churches to stay in operation.

The worst times of the Church came when Amin decided to imprison all believers. One of our church members tells the story of the day they were in the church in the middle of a worship service, and truck loads 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 was 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 the church went underground, but by the time Idi 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 in the times when even 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. Psalms 23

