



Rooted in Jesus - South Sudan 2022

What is Rooted in Jesus?

Rooted in Jesus is a course designed to help Christians grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Many people come to believe in Jesus as Saviour but are not helped to live as authentic followers of Christ. In many African nations, the church has very few resources and limited training available to enable good pastoral and discipleship ministry.

Rooted in Jesus is a series of study guides that anyone with a Bible and basic reading skills can use to start a small group to learn together about the Christian faith and what it means to be a Christian believer. It is normally introduced to a Diocese by way of a four day conference, with ~100 individuals nominated to receive training. A small team from the UK, working alongside a local co-ordinator(s) brings ministry and training that attendees can then share with family, friends, and neighbours back home. There is often an opportunity for a follow-up conference a year later to reinforce teaching and to encourage wider adoption of Rooted in Jesus small groups.



The UK team sharing a meal together in Juba

Our trip was led by Mike Cotterell, a veteran leader of numerous Rooted in Jesus teams. Joining him was AJ, an old friend who had prayed for many trips previously, and Leslie a new-comer to Rooted in Jesus.

We were joined in South Sudan by the Rooted in Jesus Co-Ordinator of Wanyjok Diocese, Luka Lual. He was an excellent addition to the team and the four of us bonded together well in our short time serving together.

Where in South Sudan did we go?

Our three week trip took us to three dioceses within the internal province of Northern Barh El Ghazal - Nyamlel, Aweil, and Wanyjok. It was a first time conference in Nyamlel and follow-up conferences in

South Sudan



Gifted a (live!) chicken from the Sunday School at Nyamlel Cathedral

the other two. We flew from Heathrow to Juba via Addis Ababa and stayed there for two nights. We would have liked to have kept moving sooner, but there were challenges booking the internal flight to Aweil. This did give us an opportunity to acclimatize to the heat and see a little bit of Juba, including seeing the White Nile, one of two main tributaries of the Nile!



Nyamlel Diocese

In Aweil, we were joined by Luka Lual, our local team member, and Peter Garang, Bishop of Nyamlel for the 90 minute drive to Nyamlel.



Bishop Peter introducing us to local political leaders,

We had a wonderful 4 day introductory conference. The joyful singing that would spontaneously erupt as well as opportunities to spend time with local children playing games and doing a short teaching afternoon were standouts in our time here. We were encouraged by a thriving Mother’s Union and many young people who were keen to learn more about Jesus. The teaching went well in this very young diocese and there were many

encouragements in our conversations with clergy and laity alike.

Teaching took place in St. Peter’s Cathedral, built by Samaritan’s Purse, as well as in the shade under trees. Alongside equipping new group leaders with Rooted in Jesus material, the programme included ministry sessions of Bible teaching and prayer as people met with the Lord and sought renewal through the Holy Spirit.

On a rest day, we visited a nearby bridge with many displaced people living along the side of the road. There had been serious flooding nearby and people had to relocate as they waited for the waters to subside. Conditions were difficult and many lived off fish from the river. They continued with dignity through it all. Some of the displaced people were Christians who came to Sunday worship at the Cathedral instead of their usual church.

We left Nyamlel uplifted and praising the Lord on Sunday afternoon, having opened the Word in a service of worship at the Cathedral and a nearby local church. One of our services went on for nearly 4 hours! Numerous speeches and plenty of lively sung worship!

Aweil Diocese

Our journey from Nyamlel to Aweil (town and Diocese) was uneventful in local terms - having to stop and weave our way through herds of cattle, long stretches of dusty tracks with bumps that mean I’m unlikely to complain about potholes in British roads ever again, and seeing many people walking for seemingly endless miles in the baking hot sun.

Aweil Diocese was different in the many ways you would expect from a town in comparison to the rural areas of Nyamlel and Wanyjok. Our time there was also much shorter. We arrived on Sunday late afternoon, the conference ran from Monday morning through to Wednesday and we were off again before dark.

Nevertheless, the conference went well. Numbers of attendees were lower than expected and seemed to fluctuate, but the teaching went well and feedback was good.

Our accommodation was very different too! A



We were reminded of home with regular tea breaks. Here with Canon William and deliciously toasted peanuts!

newly constructed diocesan guest house, assisted with funding from Christians in America, was opened earlier this year. This meant electric lights and (cold) showers! Also internet at Diocesan HQ during breaks in teaching. We even found out who the new British PM was... only 6 days late!

Given the quick turnaround, there was no time for extra-curricular activities before the drive to Wanyjok diocese. The roads had been damaged by flooding and repaired just in time for our journey, but even then we drove through lots of water!



Wanyjok Diocese

Our time in Wanyjok diocese was a brilliant final stop to the trip. The conference largely took place under a huge tree Christians have been gathering under for many years. Situated next to a local church school, we regularly had school children coming by to see what was happening. Once again,



Sung worship under the huge tree in Wanyjok

our gathered times of worship were punctuated by the lively demeanour of the older women who often led the way in joyful song and dance.

The Bishop, as in Nyamlel, was heavily involved in the conference and took many opportunities to speak and to teach all those gathered together. Our local team member, Luka, is the Wanyjok co-ordinator for Rooted in Jesus and so we are confident that the teaching and resources will have every chance of having a lasting impact in many churches and groups in this area.



Street preaching!

We stayed in the half-completed Bishop's house and were very graciously provided with warm water each morning and evening to wash with. We had opportunities, both here and at Nyamlel, to get to know the young people who served us and the

older women who cooked for us. In a society where it felt somewhat expected that women and children would always be at the ready to serve, it felt an important contribution on our part to not just receive their kind service, but to occasionally push against local protocol and to take part in serving, even as we worked hard to acknowledge and express explicit thanks to those who served.



Thanking the ladies who cooked for us!

I had an opportunity on one of the afternoons to walk to the market with one of the ladies. Up until that point, we had spent most of our time in the shade and regularly topped up with water. When I got back from the one hour round trip, I was spent! The heat really was something else.

After the conference ended, we had some slower days before we began the journey back to the UK. On the Sunday, we preached at Sunday worship and then Bishop Joseph took us on a short road trip in the afternoon. We visited the area near his childhood home, including the dusty ground he learnt to write his ABCs on, and the river he had to cross (swim) to get to school. At the bridge, a crowd gathered and Mike took the opportunity to use the river and bridge in an impromptu preach on how Jesus comes to save, and then the Bishop and Provost briefly played some football with kids on the street! We taught at the cathedral Bible School on Monday and some secondary students on Tuesday. How different their education is to the UK!

Our journey back home to the UK was spread over multiple days. There were some moments of concern and anxiety, but as with every step of the whole journey, the Lord provided and guided our way.



Highlights and Prayer Points

Unity of the Church

One of the great standout encouragements for me was the joy of worshipping with other Christians. In so many ways, our lives were completely incomparable. Yet we were united in the ways that truly matter - our common need for a Saviour and the life-changing joy of being a child of the Living God. Our teaching and ministry took place within the context of prayerful worship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and so we were family together in the presence of the Lord.

Our paths crossed for a very short time, but we were very much aware of our certain hope of eternity together. Praise the Lord!

Young people and Education

Many children and young people have very few opportunities. With limited and uncertain resources, many families cannot afford to send their children to school with any consistency year on year. Education can easily become an idol, but it is also such an important tool for the development and growth of individuals and communities. This includes limited opportunities for Christians to learn and grow in their Christian life. Many cannot read or, including church pastors, only have basic literacy. It can be hard to engage with the written Scriptures! For this reason, central to Rooted in Jesus is the teaching of memory verses.

Food, Water, and Money

Limited access to agricultural knowledge and



One of many water pumps equipment restricts how much food they can produce locally. Although there are water pumps (many installed by NGOs), there aren't enough and many have to walk a significant distance to access them. Proverbs 30:7-9 has been on my mind a lot.

Many Christians, including Pastors all of whom are unpaid, spend the vast majority of their time working to provide for their family's daily needs. In the case of Pastors, we heard stories of those who did not have money to send their children to school and who were slandered for not properly parenting them. Pray that the Lord would, in His wisdom and might, provide enough for their daily needs.

Music and Singing

Sung worship has always been an integral part of Christian worship and is very much the case in South Sudan. This was often only accompanied with a drum, but don't for a moment think that the sung worship was therefore dull or lifeless. It served only to highlight the joyful melodies produced by the voices of God's people. Bishop Peter of Nyamlel was particularly keen to use the conference as an opportunity to teach (and correct!) songs for churches to sing. It was understood that



Playing with local children during a break

singing is a great act of worship and also of discipleship as our hearts and minds are instructed in the ways of the Lord.

God of the Church

Above all, we praise the Lord that the Church is growing throughout the world. The Good News of Jesus is for all humanity and the Spirit is at work bringing the Word of God to every people, tribe, and nation. It is good for Christians across the world to serve one another, but even as we do that we must not fall into the trap of thinking that 'the West' swoops in as a heroic saviour. No. We are simply servants of the Head of the Church, who is always at work for the flourishing of the sheep of His pasture.