

# ROOTED



Alison Morgan (pictured) writes about a discipleship course, designed to meet the particular needs of Africa, that is transforming lives in seven countries there

**I**n February 1999 I received a phone call from John Woolmer. He was taking a SOMA team to Zambia; would I like to go? My heart cried 'Yes!', followed instantly by a stern reminder from my head: 'You can't – you have three children.' It was true, I had and our daughters were not yet five years old. 'Er – thank you; I'll pray about it', I said; and duly did. The reply was unexpected: 'Who comes first, your children or me?' 'Er – well, if you insist on putting it like that, you, Lord'. 'Do you think I can't look after them?' 'Er – no, Lord'.

So I went, against Foreign Office advice, to a place called Chibwika, 20 miles from the Angolan border. From there we travelled by road through the Congo, then at civil war, to Chipili, an old mission station perched high on a hill. On our last day we woke at dawn and watched the sun rise above the wooded valley below. I timed it; it took three minutes to creep above the horizon, shedding the blood-red colour of Christ into the sky. 'In the beginning was the Word', said God. 'I have plans for these people, the people of Africa. You will be part of my plans.'

At the time, I had absolutely no idea what he meant; I just knew that my mind and soul had been pummelled and stretched by what I'd seen and heard, and that doors had opened somewhere deep inside me. Nine years later, I find myself the editor of a discipleship course for Africa called *Rooted in Jesus*, published by ReSource and offered to Anglican dioceses in Africa through the ministry of SOMA. It all seemed to happen by accident. 'Can you write us a discipleship course based on *Matthew 28:18-20* and *2 Timothy 2: 2?*' asked Stanley Hotay, the diocesan missionary in our link diocese in Tanzania. 'Can I pass this on to my friend Mark?', asked my former lecturer Adrian Chatfield, Mark being the bishop of Niassa in Mozambique. 'Do you have anything for teaching discipleship?' wrote the Zambians. *Rooted in Jesus* spread by word of mouth from one diocese to another, at just the rate we could manage to train and send teams to introduce it. It's now in use in 14 languages in seven countries, and we are looking at invitations from

two more; we estimate that there are something of the order of 2,000 *Rooted in Jesus* groups in East Africa, with some 20,000 members.

## Why it is needed?

Approximately 40% of the current population of Africa is said to be Christian, and numbers are increasing all the time. But many Christians have little or no education, and most have no access to a Bible. They are often taught by lay evangelists or catechists with little theological training. The result is that while enthusiasm is great, understanding is limited. In many areas witchdoctors remain the primary providers of healthcare and conflict management, and oppressive social and religious practices are still followed. Corruption, tribal conflict and genocide dominate the lives of millions. In many places the Church is the only functional institution; and yet it is starved of both the material and spiritual resources it needs if it is to fulfil its calling. Existing western materials fail to address the particular needs and challenges of the African context, and as yet there are

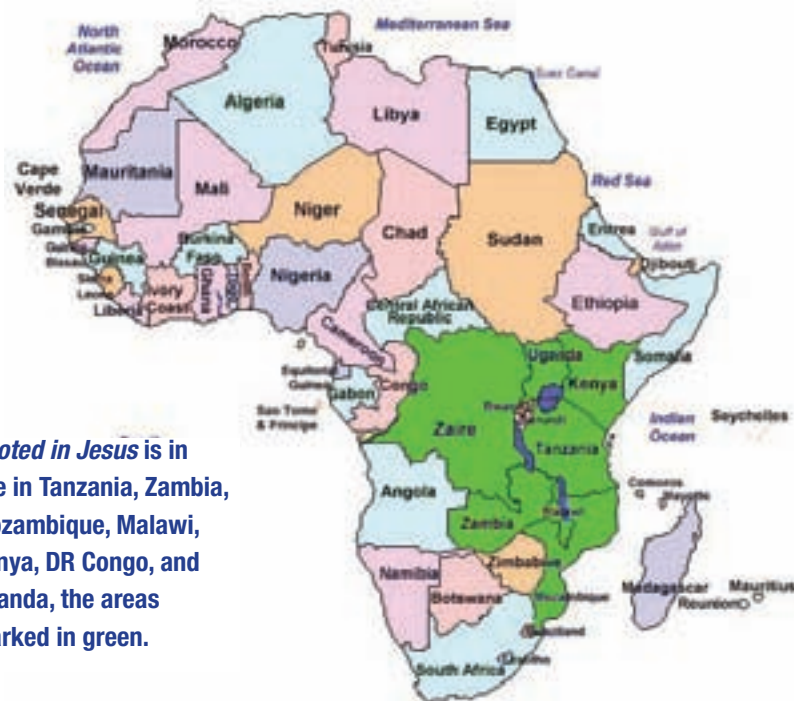
# in Jesus

## Long term aims

Changed lives, changed churches, changed communities:

Ordinary lay Christians equipped for ministry as disciples of Jesus  
Key people raised and trained for future leadership within the Church

Political and social stability in a continent suffering corruption, religious or tribal conflict and genocide



*Rooted in Jesus is in use in Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Kenya, DR Congo, and Uganda, the areas marked in green.*

few locally developed ones. It's hard, in these circumstances, to find out how to be a disciple of Jesus.

Our response to Stanley's request was *Rooted in Jesus*, a two-year course on faith and discipleship, taught interactively by a leader to a small group of between five and 30 people. The leader needs to be literate; no one else does. Time is spent in discussion, worship, and prayer, and each lesson covers a different topic, summarised by a memory verse. Topics range from the foundational – 'Who is Jesus Christ?' to the practical – marriage, work, alcohol. Participants are introduced to the work of the Holy Spirit, and many bear witness to powerful experiences of forgiveness, healing and deliverance. Each group member is encouraged to develop an active ministry to others both inside and outside the group; and at the end of the course some become leaders of new groups so that the number of effective disciples of Jesus is constantly and exponentially increasing.

## Does it work?

In each diocese, group coordinators are appointed to support the group leaders. This is what Isaiah Chambala writes from Tanzania, after two years of working with some 100 groups:

*Not only had the Bible been regarded as a superstitious book dealt with by*

*specialists in teasing supernatural powers, many Christians have been ignorant of what the Bible says about what they have rightly believed. Lack of confidence in the Bible has led them to lose their opportunity to use their gifts. Spiritual gifts have not been exercised due to the traditional notion that the only skilled people in tapping the spirits and manoeuvring them are the church leaders. People now say that the Bible has transformed their lives. They confess that the word of God contains powers that give them confidence in the Holy Spirit to share with others about their new experience in the Lord. They have the courage to say verses from the Bible to prove what they believe.*

## Transformed lives

Last year we were privileged to return to Tanzania, where the first groups have now completed the course. We met with the group leaders and asked them what they had found. As they poured out stories of deepened commitment and transformed lives I was overwhelmed by the changes in them since they first began in this ministry. They stood taller, more confident; they

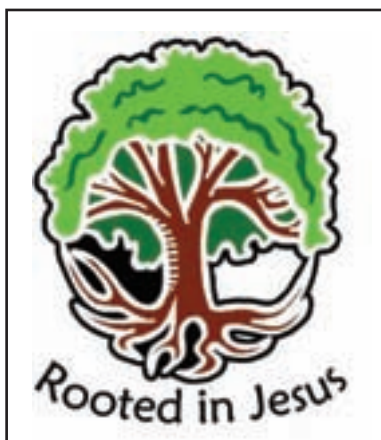
had stuck at the task, unpaid, through periods of hardship and famine; and here they were with smiles of joy on their faces. What advice did they have for new leaders in other countries, we asked. Two things, they said. First, realise that this is a calling on your life. Second, know that God is powerful and that the Holy Spirit is with you. It was a humbling experience.

## Jacob Lihhima

group coordinator, writes

**I cannot forget the testimony of one brother from a group in the parish of Logoeti. His testimony is that he had bad habits, but now he really thanks God. Before he started hearing the teachings of *Rooted in Jesus* he left his wife to be with another woman. He really tormented his wife and gave her no money and abandoned his children so that they were no longer able to go to school. But after learning about the word of God he cried and decided to return to them and to take back his wife and to totally leave the other woman behind. Now they live with great joy because Jesus has turned their lives around and he reigns and is the shepherd in their lives.**

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## Being disciples

For our part, being involved in this work of first being and then making disciples has been an astonishing and faith-building exercise. It's not easy – two weeks in remote rural Africa sounds fun, but it's not exactly a holiday. Travel is exhausting and sometimes dangerous, facilities limited, food not always forthcoming, and the needs of the people infinite. Many of the

### Simon: 'Now I have peace'

**Before to receive my life to Jesus I had one big problem, my problem was anger. Every day I was quarrelling with others and my wives, but since I started to learn the Word of God and to repent this sin I feel free. Now I have peace and joy to all and my friends they wonder as well and my wives trust that real Jesus has power and all of them are in SOMA group.**

coordinators also travel long distances, often by bicycle, to visit groups, taking precious time away from the need to grow food for their families. And yet they write of the faithfulness of God, and of their own spiritual growth. This is Isaiah again:

*From these and many stories I am made rich in the Lord. And that's why to me this coordination has been a way to serving the Lord that much I am myself getting blessed and encouraged, and my spiritual life is being challenged and made strong. I can say that through this I am balanced between my theological education and my spiritual practical life.*

Most *Rooted in Jesus* teams are now made up of people from both the UK

## A long road by bike

At Chibondo I only met the Priest and the Deacon. When I arrived I found the church leaders, who came for *Rooted in Christ*, had been sent away, for they had not enough food to stay for the two days. And I was late by a day because I had to come from Nchelenge, pass home and take something to use (mosquito net). And I had to hire someone, a watchtower member, to cycle me on both his bikes. I had to hire two bicycles, one to carry my bag and the man and one to carry me. The road was long and tiresome and in some place sandy. **Cornelius Chalwe, Zambia**

and from Africa. And as so often, we come home with the sense that we are not the givers but the receivers. Sharing this journey of discipleship with our brothers and sisters in Africa brings healing from the preoccupations of Western materialist values, and fills us with renewed determination to live authentic and obedient lives - lives which will make a difference. If the people of rural Africa need our help in their spiritual journey, so most certainly do we also need theirs. **r**

*Rooted in Jesus was written by a team from Leicester made up of clergy, teachers and people with experience of working in Africa and edited by Alison Morgan and Stanley Hotay. Rooted in Jesus is published by ReSource and offered to Anglican dioceses in Africa in partnership with SOMA UK. For more information please visit [www.somauk.org](http://www.somauk.org) and [www.alisonmorgan.co.uk](http://www.alisonmorgan.co.uk) Sample*

## About the photographs

**The photographs were taken by Alison Morgan during *Rooted in Jesus* conferences in Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia.**

### about the writer

**The Revd Dr Alison Morgan** is ReSource's thinker and writer, and a member of the Council of SOMA UK. Alison travelled to Zambia in 1999 with John Woolmer, Martin and Cesca Cavender, and Laurie White. Since then she has led teams to dioceses in Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia.



**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. *Matthew 28: 18-20***