

Flourishing

LESSONS FROM THE OLIVE TREE

CHRISTINE CAINE

SAMPLE

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*But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God,
I trust in God's faithful love forever and ever.*

PSALM 52:8

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To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: Because of Your goodness, I, too, am like a flourishing olive tree in Your house; I trust in Your faithful love forever and ever (Ps. 52:8).

About the Author



Christine Caine is a speaker, author, and activist who has been serving the local church globally for over 30 years. She and her husband, Nick, founded the anti-human trafficking organization, The A21 Campaign, which works at the local, domestic, and international level to end modern-day slavery. They also founded Equip & Empower, a ministry that is mobilizing people everywhere to live on mission for Jesus. Propel Women is an initiative of the ministry dedicated to coming alongside women all over the globe to activate their God-given purpose. The ministry has also planted three life-giving Zoe Churches in Europe that are not only bringing the Gospel to the region but also serving the most vulnerable through humanitarian outreach during times of crisis.

Christine is the best-selling author of more than a dozen books and studies, and you can tune into her weekly podcasts or television program to be encouraged with the hope of Jesus wherever you are.

How to Use This Study

Flourishing: Lessons from the Olive Tree includes two major parts: *Group Study* and *Personal Study*. Both are essential to meaningful time with God and the people in your group.

GROUP STUDY

Gathering regularly with other Christians is a steady rhythm for everyone's flourishing (Heb. 10:25). This is an environment for worshipping God together through time in His Word. Therefore, each week begins with time together in a group setting. The Group Study includes four components:

Watch

Take notes on the page provided as you stream the teaching videos. See the note in green for more about your videos.

Discuss

Carefully written questions and comments are provided each week to reflect on the teaching. This time of discussion is typically led by someone while group members follow along in their workbooks. Since groups will have different needs, dynamics, and time constraints, use each guide as a tool, not a checklist.

Feel free to follow the Spirit, using any of the recommended questions that fit naturally into your conversation, skipping any that don't, and adding comments or questions of your own, to facilitate a meaningful interaction with the material and with other group members.

Grow

Within the discussion guide, questions for deeper reflection and application are provided. The goal of this study is spiritual growth, not just in knowledge but in life. If time is limited, don't skip this important part of the Group Study. We cannot flourish without putting into practice the things we are learning.

Pray

Open and close your Group Study with prayer. Before watching the video, simply ask the Spirit to open your hearts and minds to what God's Word has to say to you during your time together. A suggested prayer is provided to conclude your time together.

TEACHING VIDEOS

Streaming video access is included with this study.

Each week has essential teaching for the group session. Most groups will choose to watch the teaching videos at the beginning of their time together. However, it is an option to watch the videos before gathering, allowing more time for discussion. Either way, the videos are a vital part of this discipleship resource.

Follow the steps on the last page of this workbook to access your Flourishing teaching videos.

PERSONAL STUDY

Another vital part of a flourishing Christian life is the steady rhythm of daily devotion. This resource includes five days of content to be completed individually between times together as a group. Each week includes four days of study and one day of reflection—both formats are designed to take around 30 minutes to complete:

Days 1–4 include reading, questions or prompts, and a prayer. These days are more robust than what you may find in something like a typical devotional. The daily studies take you deeper into the weekly themes.

Day 5 is unique. You'll conclude the week with a day of guided prayer and journaling.

DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE: WEEK 7

Finally, it's important to note that the final week of this study is unique. Rooted Network is committed to experiential learning at every stage in the disciple-making journey. Flourishing concludes with a prayer experience during Week 7.

You will share a meal together in your final gathering. This time will be full of olive-inspired dishes as well as food and drink to pair with them. Plan for everyone to provide something for this fun time of fellowship.

Another way to enhance this final experience is to exchange recipes. Inspiration and instructions can be found on page 198.

Eating together is a key part of this experience, much like sharing a meal was an act of deep fellowship in biblical times, but the emphasis will be on prayer.

Introduction

Only the sea itself seems as ancient a part of the region as the olive and its oil that, like no other products of nature, have shaped civilizations from remotest antiquity to the present.

LAWRENCE DURRELL, *PROSPERO'S CELL*

“And here, on the west side of the Erechtheion, we have the ruins of the Pandroseion. There would have been a wall to our left and an entrance about where we’re standing. And directly in front of us is the sacred olive tree . . .”

It was the summer of 2022, and I was standing in the ruins of the sanctuary for Pandrosus high atop the Acropolis where I’d taken a group of friends, and together we were listening to our tour guide. Well, at least all my friends were. I’ll admit, after the first hour, and it not being my first time to climb the Acropolis, I was starting to fade. Still, being Greek and being in Greece, I wanted my friends to experience the most Greek thing Greece has going—the Parthenon.

Growing up in a big, crazy, Greek family in Australia, we had images of the Parthenon all throughout our home. I daresay Mum had a replica of it on the end of the mantle that never moved, not even when baby Jesus and the entire nativity set was brought out at Christmas and sprawled across it. Of course, I would choose Jesus over the Parthenon any day, but as a child, I never would have suggested we move Mum’s replica or any of the other Greek icons scattered throughout our house paying homage to the homeland and its ancient treasures.

Designed 25 centuries ago, the Parthenon stands tall against a sky that’s often as blue as the Greek flag—or the Aegean Sea—both of which are breathtaking to me. Though constructed between 447 B.C. and 438 B.C. as a celebration of the Hellenic victory over Persian invaders during the Greco-Persian Wars, it has always served as a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena Parthenos—the namesake for the city of Athens.¹ To architects throughout history, the Parthenon has been called the most perfect building ever built.² Though it survived the first 600 years in its original state, it went on to see 3400 years of conquests, bombings, reconstructions, and preservation work.

But none of its classical architecture captured my attention that day. What left me in awe was the sacred olive tree. I had been coming to the Acropolis for decades, since my first trip to Greece in 1987, and never had I really paid attention to the sacred olive tree. You certainly can’t miss it once you’re at the top. Amidst a sea of sand-colored marble, stones, pebbled walkways, and ruins, it stands green, vibrant, and flourishing. And yet, somehow, I’d missed it.

Wandering over to the information plaque, I found myself absorbed in reading about the sacred olive tree. According to Greek mythology, the tree was a gift from Athena herself. When she and Poseidon competed for the patronage of the city, she struck the ground with her spear, and the initial sprig of the olive tree sprouted.³ Of course, the tree that had me mesmerized was not that tree, but as legend has it, every tree that has stood there can be traced back to the original tree. In fact, the most recent planting was placed there by the American School of Archeology in 1952, after they saved and harvested a four-foot branch from the previous tree that endured destruction during World War II.⁴

What resilience. What strength. What extraordinary ability to not only survive and grow but to thrive and flourish. All alone. Atop one of the highest points in Athens. I have always loved olives, olive oil, and everything made from olive oil, and though I love olive trees and have two in my front yard, never had I been more captivated than I was in that moment. With one tree. And never had I felt God nudging me to study a tree. The olive tree.

Once I was back home, I began to read everything I could find about olive trees—their fruit, the products made from their wood, their enemies, their medicinal properties, and how to grow and care for them. I sought to settle, once and for all, their origin, secretly hoping they really did originate in Greece. Of course, that's what I'll always believe, but no doubt the Spaniards and the Italians will argue the point.

I was amazed at all I learned. Did you know there is a World Olive Tree Day? It takes place November 26. Who knew? And did you know that Olive trees have been depicted in art throughout history? They've been the subjects of Claude Monet, Henri Matisse, and Salvador Dali. One of my favorite works of art is *Olive Grove*, part of a series of olive tree paintings by Van Gogh from 1889. I found references to olive trees in poetry, songs, movies, and historical writings. In *The Odyssey*, an ancient poem attributed to Homer, the description of two olive trees is used to convey a sense of reassurance letting the reader know of the legendary Greek King Odysseus' safety.⁵ I found songs from the 60s, and films about justice and political films using the olive tree as symbolism throughout. I even found a made-for-tv rom-com called *Love Under the Olive Tree* that's all about olive oil making. I'm not saying I watched it all the way through, but I was amazed at all the ways olive trees have been depicted in the arts—and I love olive oil. I often joke, but I don't doubt it for a minute, that Mum put it in my baby bottle. After all, we were Greek! I remember Mum adding it to recipes, rubbing it on her hands, coating squeaky hinges, and dousing our salads, cheese, and bread with it. Thanks to Mum, we ate olive oil in everything and on everything. I'm sure her obsession with olive oil is why, to this day, I can't get enough.

Included in my vast research was every biblical reference to olive trees, olive oil, olive branches, and olive anything. To my delight, there were plenty! I found that God obviously likes olives and olive trees, and not just because He made them. Together, we are going to discover the beauty, grace, strength, and importance of the olive tree, and its relevance in our lives. We are called to thrive and flourish in every season of life, to be resilient, strong, and able to endure—all qualities we'll discover in our study of the olive tree.

I'm excited to dive into Scripture with you and uncover the deep truths hidden in the olive tree. After this study, you will never look at another olive tree the same way again. Let's get started!

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Cole". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the name, there is a horizontal line that starts under the "C" and ends under the "e".

WEEK 1



Rooted in God's Presence

To preview the Week 1 video teaching, go to:
experiencerooted.com/flourishingsamplevideo



Scan the QR Code or visit experiencerooted.com/flourishingvideos to stream the Flourishing teaching videos. Instructions to access for the **first time** can be found on the last page of this workbook.

GROUP STUDY

Watch _____

Record your thoughts during the teaching video for Week 1, *Rooted in God's Presence*.

Lined area for writing notes.

Group Discussion

In Psalm 52, David addresses a man who has wronged him, Doeg. After recounting the wickedness of Doeg toward him (52:1–4), David still declares, “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God, I trust in God’s faithful love forever and ever” (v.8, ESV). Writing these verses on the run, being slandered and mocked, and hiding in caves because Saul wanted to kill him, David still saw himself as an olive tree.

In the Bible, the olive tree symbolizes life. Though not tall or stately, olive trees are long-lived, dependable, and resilient. They display permanence and endurance while flourishing in the worst conditions. In fact, the word *green* in verse 8 means “flourishing,” a word often used in other translations.

Even if we're not in physical danger, I imagine we can relate to the chaos in David's life in Psalm 52. We have all experienced disappointment, disillusionment, discouragement, betrayal, loss, grief, false accusation, misunderstanding, or trauma.

Read Psalm 52:4–9

You love any words that destroy, you treacherous tongue!

This is why God will bring you down forever. He will take you, ripping you out of your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

The righteous will see and fear, and they will derisively say about that hero, “Here is the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, taking refuge in his destructive behavior.”

But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God; I trust in God’s faithful love forever and ever. I will praise you forever for what you have done. In the presence of your faithful people, I will put my hope in your name, for it is good.

PSALM 52:4–9

Is there any chaos in your life or sphere of influence right now? Describe how it makes you feel.

David shows that in Christ we can experience outer chaos without having inner chaos. Explain this in your own words.

When David said he was like a green olive tree, his deliverance was still in his future. But he was so confident that he was already singing his future thankfulness. David knew God would deliver him because He had done it before. Trust in God's future faithfulness is rooted in gratitude for God's past faithfulness.

How has God been faithful to you in the past?

We, too, can be like a green olive tree in the house of God. We can flourish in difficult circumstances if we remain in the presence of God. We can trust in God's faithful love forever.

GROW

Consider these questions as they relate to what you've seen and heard today.

What did you learn from praising God in a hard season?

How did God use that season to draw you to Himself and to others who also struggle?

PRAY

Father, I'm so grateful that You have made me to be like a green olive tree, able to thrive in every season of life. Help me remember that You are always with me. Give me the courage and strength to continually praise You all the days of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



WEEK 1 | Rooted in God's Presence

PERSONAL STUDY

The steady rhythm of daily devotion is a vital part of flourishing in your life with Jesus. Set aside time this week to really dig into God's Word. Each day, open yourself up to the Spirit's work in your heart and mind. Then, prayerfully reflect on the beautiful truth He is revealing during this season of new growth.

DAY 1

Rooted and Resilient

DAY 2

Strong and Sturdy

DAY 3

Shelter and Protection

DAY 4

Beautiful to Behold

DAY 5

Guided Prayer and Journaling



DAY 1 Rooted and Resilient

At a restaurant in Riomaggiore, Nick and I wanted to celebrate. I had just crossed hiking the Cinque Terre Trail in Northern Italy off my bucket list, and we hiked it all in one day. We had left early from Monterosso, making our way south atop the coastal path, winding through villages of colorful buildings and cobblestone streets, along seaside cliffs, up hewn steps, down a steep hillside, across ancient stone footpaths and new walkways over rocks and waves. For centuries, villagers have farmed the terraced hillsides with gardens, vineyards, and—my favorite—olive trees.¹ Under their canopy, I touched the leaves, rubbed the bark, and imagined my favorite smell—olive trees ready for harvesting. I marveled most at how they clung with roots to the terraces while reaching for the sky.

Every olive tree has both a thick taproot and shallower roots that span out in every direction. The strong taproot anchors the tree, while the shallow roots run wide and stabilize it. Such root systems draw water and nutrients, allowing olive trees to flourish in dry places. They are naturally drought resistant,² and can even regenerate after frost, fire, or disease. For example, a severe frost in Tuscany once destroyed many healthy olive trees, but in the spring, new shoots appeared and grew into fruitful trees.³ Such trees can live 500 years because of their hardy root system.⁴

If the Bible says we're to be like olive trees, then what are our spiritual "roots" supposed to be like? One idea can be found in Deuteronomy 29:18: "Be sure there is no root among you bearing poisonous and bitter fruit."

Root can be a noun or a verb.⁵ We plant something by rooting it. When that plant anchors itself in the ground, we say it has rooted.⁶ To be rooted is to be "firmly implanted."⁷ Spiritually, to grow and mature in Christ, we need to be rooted in Christ.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude.

COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

An olive tree with strong roots grows green and bears olives. Similarly, when we are rooted, we bear fruit spiritually.

What thoughts or feelings do you have about what Jesus says about fruit below?

"My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples."

JOHN 15:8

Growth, maturity, and fruit require strong roots in Jesus. Without them, I would starve of the nutrients I need to grow in Christ, unable to stand firm during the storms of life.

Read the following verses and write what the Word says about this.

JEREMIAH 17:7-8

MARK 4:17

With all of this in mind, even as we grow deep spiritual roots, at times we must uproot what is not producing good fruit in our lives (Eccles. 3:1-2). Jeremiah confirms there are times "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10).

In my life, I experienced major trauma as a result of being abandoned at birth, adopted, sexually abused, and marginalized because of my ethnicity. I had to uproot deeply painful things that controlled my life for years—things like shame, rejection, fear, bitterness, offense, and insecurity. I also had to deal with the fruit of those roots with the Word, working with a Christian counselor, and learning new patterns of behavior. None of it happened overnight, but rather over the course of years.

Are there painful roots that you've pulled up? What were they and how did you pull them up?

As Jesus continues to heal you, what else can you identify that still needs to be uprooted?

Ask God to help you identify your part in uprooting such things, and write your thoughts here.

DAY 1 Rooted and Resilient

Hebrews 12:15 commands us to "make sure" that no wrong root of bitterness springs up. This principle and practice of *making sure* applies to any wrong root.

Take a few minutes to reflect. How can we make sure that the wrong roots aren't growing?

Being rooted in Christ and strengthening our roots, we become resilient like the olive tree. We can grow and thrive, even in the hard places. We can flourish in every season of life. So, let's keep going and learn more about why David said he was like an olive tree!

PRAY

My prayer for you today is based in Ephesians 3:16–19.

I pray that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through His Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

DAY 2 Strong and Sturdy

When my girls were younger, someone gave our family season passes to Disneyland. We loved it, except for the lines. We all seriously disliked the waiting, especially Sophia, my youngest who would grow restless, thirsty, and overheated. Thankfully, Disney started offering a service called FASTPASS, where we could make reservations and skip to the front of the line.¹ It felt miraculous to us all!

No one likes waiting in lines. Not at the supermarket, a department store, a concert, or the movies. Especially in a world that feels like it moves faster every day. But not everything in this life was meant to happen quickly. Some things were designed to take time . . . for our good. I found this truth again studying the olive tree. The olive tree grows slowly, and while most produce olives in the first three to four years, it can take up to ten years for an olive tree to mature and produce olives.²

What's more, in the years before yielding olives, an olive tree grows in unseen ways, making it strong and lasting. The wood from an olive tree is tightly grained and dense, hard, and dry. Olive wood is harder than oak.³ It has a rich caramel color and straight grain, along with a fruity scent. The trunks can grow twisted so it isn't often harvested for lumber. Yet the wood itself is still highly sought after.⁴ Woodworkers and artisans appreciate olive wood, having used it since ancient times to build many things. In my travels, I've discovered olive wood furniture, kitchen utensils, fruit bowls, chess sets, and nativity carvings.

With all this in mind, what items do you find in the following verses?

1 KINGS 6:23, 31-33

NEHEMIAH 8:15

The olive tree's slow growth is what makes it strong and sturdy. So it is with our spiritual strength. Isaiah 28:10 tells us we grow a little here and a little there. We can't fast track our growth process—spiritually or physically.

Jesus entered earth as a newborn and He grew. We don't know in great detail what Jesus' life was like on a daily basis as He grew . . . as a toddler, a little boy, a preteen, a teen, then as a young man. We do know He preached in the temple when He was 12 (Luke 2:41-50), and we know He started His earthly ministry at age 30 (Luke 3:23).

Jesus couldn't have leapfrogged from being a preteen to adulthood, so how did He grow between the ages of 12 and 30? He obviously didn't skip 18 years of His life. Read the following verses and list the ways the Bible says Jesus grew.

LUKE 2:40, 52

I love how Luke wrote that Jesus “grew up.” Isn't that what we're supposed to do? Not only physically, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally, intellectually, relationally, socially, and financially? We're called to mature, which is what the Bible calls our growing process, and that's what we often call it too, isn't it?

In Greek, the word *grew* comes from the same root word as increase. It is used to measure many things, including the maturation process.⁵ Jesus matured. He increased. He grew internally while He was growing externally. We might easily glaze over how Jesus matured, especially if we're familiar with these verses from Luke, but I don't want us to miss the depth of what God has for us.

Read the following definitions of *wisdom*, *stature*, and *favor*, and then answer the questions that follow. I want us to see what they can teach us about growing strong and sturdy like an olive tree.

Wisdom is knowledge, insight, good sense, judgment, and the ability to discern qualities and relationships.⁶ Perhaps it connotes the practical side of Jesus' teaching, so simple and direct, but it could also include a deeper knowledge of mission and God's purpose of salvation. Ultimately, God revealed His wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:24, 30).⁷

Stature usually refers to the height of a person, and sometimes figuratively (Ezek. 17:6; 19:11). It was used to show the weakness of humanity and the need to rely on God (Matt. 6:27; Luke 12:25). It was also used as a measure of the maturity of the Christian (Eph. 4:13).⁸

Favor is gaining approval, acceptance, or special benefits. There is a close association between favor, grace, and mercy, which are sometimes used to translate the same Hebrew and Greek words such as *hēn* and *charis*. Favor with God depends on His good pleasure and is often extended in response to prayer or righteous living (Gen. 6:8; Ex. 33:12–13; Ps. 84:11).⁹

Considering these definitions, can you think of ways you can grow in wisdom, stature, and favor?

WISDOM	STATURE	FAVOR

There's something else I don't want us to miss from Luke 2:52—Jesus kept growing; He didn't stop. He kept a posture of growth.

Read and reflect on the following verses. Circle any words that stand out to you about how we remain in a posture of growth.

But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

EPHESIANS 4:15-16

Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.

HEBREWS 5:12-14

Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

HEBREWS 6:1-2

If you were to summarize all these verses, what would you say is our role in our personal growth?

When I gave my life fully to God, I began growing. I worshiped in community—in church. I read the Bible. I memorized verses to renew my mind. I prayed and kept a notebook of my answered prayers. I kept a journal of what I was learning, thinking, and desiring. All of that made me feel closer to God and encounter Him.

What spiritual disciplines do you practice to keep yourself growing in Christ? Put a star by any from this list that you practice consistently.

Daily Bible reading

Prayer

Worship

Times of silence and solitude

Honoring a Sabbath

Being a part of a healthy local church community

Expressing generosity

Participating in acts of service

We must recognize that we have an active role in our growth while we also know that God doesn't leave us on our own to grow. (If you want to *dig deeper*, consider the next few verses about how God works to help us grow: Philippians 2:13; John 14:26; Galatians 5:22–23.)

Growth in God is so good, and He is always helping us. But that doesn't make it easy. Growing is rarely easy and often painful. It involves stretching spiritual muscles, doing what we've never done, or going where we've never gone. It involves trusting God when we'd rather avoid anything that feels like another risk—especially after we've been wounded.

When I think about how uncomfortable growing can be, Romans 5:3–5 comes to mind. Paul's words encourage me to keep growing even if there are growing pains. Read these verses and summarize them for yourself.

I have consistently found that we need to grow to where we need to go, and slow growth produces the character we need to get there. Our character is the backbone of our purpose. So, even when it's uncomfortable, let's commit to practicing our spiritual disciplines—growing slowly, consistently, and intentionally. Let's be like the olive trees God has called us to be!

DAY 2 Strong and Sturdy

PRAY

My prayer for you today is a declaration based on 2 Peter 1:3–9, that you may keep growing in your faith just as steadily as an olive tree.

His divine power has given you everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. By these He has given you great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 3 Shelter and Protection

Carrying a lawn chair out to our front yard, I picked a spot to sit where I could fully take in the front entrance to our home since I wanted to freshen up the look of it all. Before I could, two squirrels scampering across our lawn captured my attention. Chirping and squealing, they were chasing one another, leaping between our olive trees, going around in an upward spiral. I couldn't help but laugh as they ascended the olive tree, disappearing into the top of the canopy.

I began to think of how our two olive trees not only provided shade for me, but also a safe haven for birds, squirrels, and more. To me, they are beautiful trees, but to birds and squirrels and critters too small for me to see, they are a world of biodiversity.

All around the world, olive groves and their environment foster an ecosystem where a number of species coexist.¹ Olive farms can support up to 200 wild plant species, 90 vertebrates, and 160 invertebrate species per every two and a half acres.² Can you imagine? From quail to partridges to sparrows to hoopoe, birds build their nests in the trees and take food for their survival. Squirrels and lizards are equally at home, along with raccoons who love eating olives.³ A grove of olive trees supports and protects an entire ecosystem.

In the same way, God created an olive tree to provide shelter, protection, and safety for animals, He created us for community so we could experience the same—and then offer that same security to one another.

Let's start with understanding how God protects us. Write out the following verses and meditate on what these promises mean for you.

PSALM 46:1

NAHUM 1:7

Psalm 91 speaks of God's protection as both rescue from and refuge in the midst of attack. I have turned here over and over when I have felt bombarded by the attacks of the enemy. We can forget that we are in a spiritual battle when life is easy and comfortable, but one phone call or incident can quickly remind us of a very real enemy.

Write out the following verse that shows us who our adversary really is.

1 PETER 5:8

I have had to lean into the protection and shelter of God many times. I could tell you about a text from Sophia's school about an active shooter, a problem with our plane's landing gear 10,000 feet in the air, a call with a cancer diagnosis, terrorists bombing a building where I had just spoken, and paralyzing fear from betrayal and heartache. Many times, I have not only read and prayed Psalm 91 but have slept with my Bible on my nightstand open to Psalm 91. I feel sure you have your own stories to tell, too.

Can you write about a time when you knew that you experienced the protection of God—either by Him rescuing you out of an attack or providing refuge in the midst of it? He could have protected you physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or relationally because His protection is for every facet of our lives.

How did it make you feel to know He was looking out for you?

We all prefer to be rescued from any attack, but *refuge* is protection, too. An olive tree provides shade from the sun in the heat of the day. Shade is defined as “shelter.”⁵ Have you ever been outside when a storm seemingly came out of nowhere and drenched you? Didn't you run for shelter right away? And didn't it provide protection? I remember during the pandemic when we all had to “shelter in place.” I've also known what it's like to be under the threat of a tornado and to shelter in place. Maybe you've experienced that, too.

The first verse of Psalm 91 says, “The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty.”

I take comfort in knowing that when the spiritual “heat” beats down on me, I can run to the shelter of the Most High. I can take refuge in His shade by dwelling in His shadow and being covered under His wings (Ps. 91:1, 4).

When I need to run for shelter, I often run to . . .

- The Word of God
- The People of God
- The House of God
- The Worship of God
- The Place of Prayer with God

How has God provided protection when you have run to the Word of God for shelter?

How has your community in Jesus helped when you have run to them for shelter?

God has called us to be like olive trees. Olive trees provide shelter for plants and animals, and we can provide shelter for others by being generous, a source of comfort, and as we help them learn how to rest in God's care.

DAY 3 Shelter and Protection

How does God want to use you, as a Christ follower, to provide shelter for others this week? Before answering, read the following verses.

Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

PHILIPPIANS 2:4

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

Through the years, I have had the privilege of hearing, comforting, and encouraging many of my sisters in Christ. I've found I can provide shelter both by keeping confidence and by speaking God's truth and encouragement. The next time someone comes to you seeking such shelter, be like the olive tree that they need. Be the place of shelter to them that God is to you.

PRAY

As we close our time together, I want to encourage you to run to God, the Most High, and take refuge in His protection. As I do, I am praying parts of Psalm 91 over you. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, as olive trees, we choose to live under the protection of You, the Most High. We dwell in the shadow of You, the Almighty. We say concerning You, the Lord, that You are our refuge and our fortress, our God in whom we trust. Because You have Your heart set on us, we know You will deliver us. You will protect us because You know our names. When You call out to us today, we will answer You. We trust that You will be with us in any trouble. You will rescue us and give us honor. You will satisfy us with long life and show us Your salvation. You will help us be a source of protection for others. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

DAY 4 Beautiful to Behold

Closing my eyes and taking a deep breath, I inhaled as much of the sweet smell of the olive tree blossoms as I could. The local farmer knew exactly what words to wrap around the beautiful aroma: licorice. Nick and I were with our girls and had taken a day trip to the countryside so I could see the trees in bloom. In the grove, the fragrance was so strong, it was all I could smell. Up close, each flower bloom was tiny, no bigger than my thumbnail, showcasing four petals with a yellowish-orange center, changing the trees for a few weeks from silvery green to snowy white. The flowers are actually little fruiting shoots called inflorescences, originating at the axil of a leaf.¹ The axil is where the leaf sprouts from the stem. Each inflorescence holds 10–30 flowers, depending on the cultivar,² with the hope that as many flowers as possible will produce an olive.

I was lost in the beauty of the olive trees and I couldn't help but think of the scripture that says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed" (Gen. 1:31). The farmer said that all olive trees make beautiful flowers, but with 500 cultivars of olive trees, not all flowers look the same. David wrote, "I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God" (Ps. 52:8), but he didn't specify which cultivar of olive tree. How did he know what kind of olive tree to be like? If you're laughing, I understand, but this is how my mind works.

In a world with as many as 500 cultivars, God said to be like an olive tree, but He didn't specify for me to be like an Arbequina, Coratina, or a Picholine. He didn't say to be like a Kalamata, Manzanilla, or Amfissa. He didn't say to be like a Gordal Sevillano, Mission, or Nicoise. He just said for me—and you—to be like an olive tree. All olive trees are beautiful, whether young and not yet flowering or a bit older and producing fruit for the very first time, whether tall and straight or short and bushy. Some trees have leaves that are lighter at the top of the tree than those at the bottom.³ Some are silvery-green year-round. Some are longer, some are flat, and some are curled. Some trunks grow quite straight, while others fan out as they age, thick and twisted.

So, what kind of olive tree am I to be like? Could it be that God wants me to be like the kind of olive tree He made me to be? Could it be that He doesn't want me to try and be like some other kind of olive tree?

Psalm 27:4–6 says, "I have asked one thing from the Lord; it is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord and seeking him in his temple."

How do we behold God’s beauty? We can reflect on Him and His truth and praise Him for who He is. We can also see His beauty in creation, walking in a grove of olive trees in bloom, or along a beach at the endless ocean, or hiking a summit and taking in the 360-degree view.

Read Psalm 19:1–6. How do you see God’s beauty by looking around at what He has made?

In Hebrew, the word *glory* is *kavod*, and in Greek, *doxa*.⁴ The glory of God can be defined as brilliant, radiant beauty,⁵ the weighty importance and shining majesty that accompany God’s presence.⁶ It can be described as the manifest beauty of His holiness or the infinite beauty and greatness of His manifold perfections.⁷

Look up the following verses and write what they say about God’s glory.

ISAIAH 6:3

PSALMS 72:19

If God's glory—His infinite beauty and shining majesty—fills the earth as Isaiah 6:3 and Psalm 72:19 describe, then can we see it? Feel it? Experience it? Record your thoughts.

We behold God's beauty by looking at—and meditating on—who He is.

We behold God's beauty by looking at—and meditating on—what He has made.

But there are other ways still.

When I first gave my life to Jesus fully, I could feel His transforming power begin to change me. I could feel His beauty begin to overtake the places in my life where I needed healing and wholeness. Scripture shows us that God's beauty is reflected in Jesus and His work on the cross.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4–6 and describe how Jesus brought His beauty to your internal world.

God made us in His image to reflect His beauty (Gen. 1:27). He made us to be like olive trees who bloom for all to see and enjoy, but I'm not sure we consistently live like this is true. Our world is obsessed with youthfulness and physical attractiveness on magazine covers, in films and television shows, on runways, and in reality shows. Collectively, we spend billions to achieve the images created by media rather than the image created by God. We've focused on age and aging instead of growing ageless as God intended.

Have you really thought about what it means to be made in God's image? How does understanding that truth affect the way we process the world's pressure to meet its standard of beauty?

We are made in God's image, and He is beautiful. So, we are too. Every one of us wants to be beautiful and feel beautiful. God has called us beautiful from the beginning of creation, of our lives, and of when we became clothed in Christ (Gal. 3:27).

Read the following verses for clues about how God sees us as beautiful. Then use the chart to record how God created you to be beautiful versus how we often define beauty.

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart."

1 SAMUEL 16:7

Those who look to him are radiant with joy; their faces will never be ashamed.

PSALM 34:5

Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord will be praised.

PROVERBS 31:30

"And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these."

MATTHEW 6:28-29

"My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples."

JOHN 15:8

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:10

Don't let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

1 PETER 3:3-4

HOW GOD CREATED ME TO BE BEAUTIFUL	HOW I OFTEN DEFINE BEAUTY

DAY 4 Beautiful to Behold

We know from 1 Samuel 16:7 and 1 Peter 3:3–4 that God sees far more than we see in the mirror. He looks at our hearts. He's called us to be like olive trees, and He says that our beauty will be like the olive tree.⁸

There is a beauty that comes with being a follower of Christ, isn't there? When you think of a beautiful Christian, what attributes come to mind?

PRAY

God gave us beauty to behold. He made us beautiful to behold. Now, how do we take that beauty to our world?

Heavenly Father, show me how to take the beauty You gave me to behold and the beauty You placed inside of me to my world. Show me how to see like You see, to see others the way You see them. Help me to clothe myself the way You clothe me, with grace, goodness, holiness, righteousness, kindness, gentleness, tenderness, and love, that others will benefit. Help me to be like an olive tree, flourishing with blossoms, beautiful to behold. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 5 Guided Prayer and Journaling

*But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God,
I trust in God's faithful love forever and ever.*

PSALM 52:8

When I've walked through an olive tree farm in full bloom, or right before harvesting the olives, I've wanted to linger more than ever. I've wanted to take in the beauty, the fragrance, the breeze, the sunshine, the peace that seems to envelop me. In that moment, I want to stay as long as possible and soak in all I can.

When I linger with God, I feel much the same.

To *linger* is to "stay in a place longer than necessary because of a reluctance to leave."¹

Have you ever spent time with God to the point you were reluctant to leave?

Today, I want you to experience God's words differently than usual. I want you to posture yourself to hear from the Holy Spirit, to be less analytical, and settle yourself down to sit with Him. Let God's Word wash over you. Open yourself to what He might want you to feel, hear, see, and know.

We will do this every week on Day 5. We'll be making space to slow down and sit with the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26, Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things and remind us of all that Jesus said. I know for me it's better if I give myself time and space to stop and listen. To linger such that I'm reluctant to leave.

We are going to listen for God's leading and respond to what He wants to direct us to. I understand sitting and listening might be hard at first, particularly if you're not accustomed to sitting still at all. But it will be valuable and life-giving, I promise.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." This is a practice that I want you to grow in until you feel reluctant to leave.

As we begin, let's start with this question: "God, what is one thing about the olive tree that You want me to take to heart?"

Next ask: “God, what is one verse You want to speak to me about from this week?”
Write down that scripture here.

Now, I am going to encourage you to read aloud the verse you just wrote several times emphasizing a different word in that verse each time.

For example, when I do this with Psalm 52:8, here is what I do. I read it aloud several times with the emphasis on each word in sequence. For example:

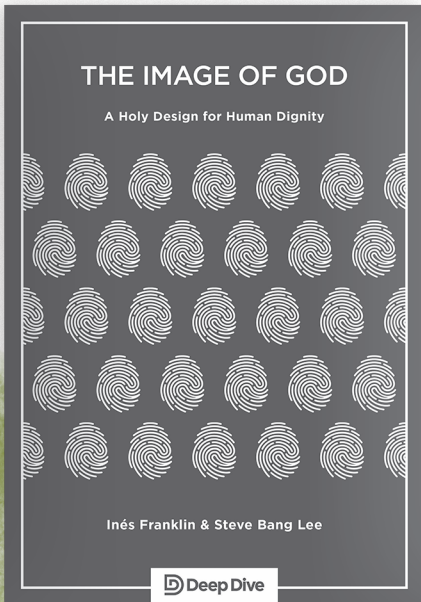
- **But** I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God . . .
- But **I** am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God . . .

Journal about where God is drawing your attention and any insight He gives you.

Finish your time by thanking God for His presence, His speaking, and all the ways He is at work in you to make you like a flourishing olive tree.

SAMPLE

WHAT SHOULD I STUDY NEXT?



THE IMAGE OF GOD

Everyone is created in the image of God and worthy of love and respect, yet we sometimes struggle to see others in this way.

The Image of God is an 8-week group-discipleship experience, from Inés Franklin and Steve Bang Lee, built on the same discipleship philosophy as the *Flourishing* study. Through *The Image of God*, you'll gain a beautiful, biblical understanding of human life, dignity, and worth, rooted in God's original design for His beloved people.



ROOTED

The Rooted Experience is a 10-week small group journey designed to create powerful, church-wide rhythms of discipleship. Built around the 7 rhythms of a disciple, Rooted creates intentional discipleship experiences that will help you, and others in your church, cross over from knowledge of the Bible to experiences with God.

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1 Scan this QR Code or visit experiencerooted.com/flourishingvideos



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