



the mosaic experiment

Bringing Old Testament Practices Out of Retirement

Wendie Brockhaus / Lucas Cole / Padraic Ingle / Brian Schafer



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dawning of the new beard

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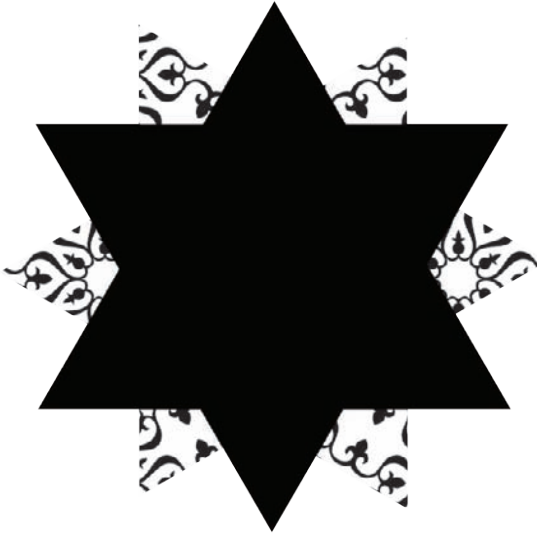
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Bringing Old Testament Practices Out of Retirement

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The House Studio, Kansas City, Missouri



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We would *never*
put an introduction in a book

Mo·sa·ic / mō—'zā—ik

1. of or relating to Moses; writings attributed to him **2.** a surface decoration made by inlaying small pieces of variously colored material to form pictures **3. awesomeness in a book**

One day during a House Studio coffee break, we were talking about the sudden overgrowth of hipsters . . .

Which led us to talking about a web site called Whiskerino (whiskerino.org), consisting of a bunch of guys who document their unruly beard growth . . .

Which led to us talking about how Moses would have been an epic candidate for Whiskerino . . .

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Which led us to talking about how weird it is that Christians often pretend like the Old Testament doesn't exist . . .

Which led to this book.

We're sure you see how it all correlates.

Facial hair, compelling as it may be, isn't the only reason we started this project.

See, we're slightly over (bored to tears with) small group curriculum that tells us all the "right" answers and sums up our faith in five bullet points. We don't think following Christ is clean or cute. We refuse to fill in any more blanks. And it feels a little redundant to meet once a week just to sit, talk, and eat fruit pizza . . . until next week when we will inevitably do it all over again, give or take the dessert. (But preferably *give*, right?)

Even so, the snarky deconstruction thing is way overdone—criticism doesn't accomplish much by itself. Instead, we wanted to spend our energy on creating a different way for faith communities to engage the Good Text and one another.

We call it uncurriculum, but you can call it whatever you want. (See definition 3 at the beginning for suggestions.)

The Mosaic Experiment is a book that revisits some of those ancient, Old Testament practices that are still relevant to kingdom living in the twenty-first century.

Truth is, there's a lot we don't get about the first half of the Bible.

(Granted, we haven't exactly aced the second half.) But it all matters for some reason. I mean, who picks up a book and starts reading from the middle? There's something important about those first few chapters—character development, for instance. Like, who is this God who is fine to go by “I Am”? And what is he up to in the world?

This book is called *The Mosaic Experiment* because all of its themes are found in the first five books of the Bible—the Pentateuch.

Some smart people say that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Other smart people say he didn't write the whole thing. We don't know because Moses didn't come to us for his publishing. (Probably went with Zondervan, and we're only slightly bitter.)

“Mosaic” also seems to fit in an artistic sense. (See definition 2 at the beginning.) The themes you'll find in the next few chapters are meaningful, yet eclectic—just small pieces of a much larger picture: pilgrimage, altar building, scapegoats, cities of refuge. They aren't the only themes in the Pentateuch, maybe not even the most important. And we know we don't own the market on which OT rituals stay or go, but these are just a few that grabbed our attention. You know, turned on the lights for us.

Something to be aware of—the Pentateuch was written in the pre-modern era during a time when people used narrative not only to remember and pass on important truth but to engage imagination. It's a collection of writing genres that include mythopoetic (Genesis 1-11), folk narrative, law, poetry, etc. So to approach these writings with a scientific, modern mindset may work against you. Moses wasn't trying to establish a religion or leave behind secret formulas for righteousness that we would later have to decode.

A lot happened in the first five books of the Bible. Beginning with Adam

and Eve in a garden and ending four books later when the tired Israelite nation is finally ready to cross into their promised land after a small 40-year detour. Everything in between is a matter of us getting to know a holy and untamed God who proves he will stop at nothing to be in covenant relationship with humanity.

From a cosmic and local creation account to a cosmic and local redemption account, we imagine hearing it all straight from the mouth of Moses—our musky, old grandpa who seems to know a good sweater vest when he sees one and can tell a story like no one else.

Maybe it goes without saying, but we think vintage is making a comeback.

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We know you hate directions. But you can always tear this page out and find your own way through the book.

it's plain and simple.

1 Read and discuss a chapter.

2 Each person choose one of seven experiments to carry out . . . or make up some of your own.

3 Journal your thoughts on our pages. (Why else would we give you so much white space?)

4 Share your stories with the group next week.



the
garden

Genesis 2:15

Adam was the first farmer. Before any improper fruit eating or fig leaf clothing, the first human was commissioned to look after his very own backyard. And yet it's a lot easier to think of something like working the earth and tilling soil as punishment (a prehistoric sitting in the corner) for Adam and Eve's huge disobedience. God did say, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:17b).

But let's rewind.

God wasn't trying to correct anything when he told Adam to work and care for the earth. It was his original intention for the first human to "go green" before there was any such thing as sin or disobedience in the Garden. **"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).** For God, humans looking after the environment was one part of picture-perfect creation.

This is how it was supposed to be.

Since the very beginning of the story humans were set apart from other animals or plants. God made us to reflect his creative image so we might fill the earth, be responsible for it, reproduce, and subdue it. The whole idea of being intricately and actively involved in the creating process—it's central to our humanity.

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But there's one big problem at this point. Since the beginning we've chosen our own way, which makes it impossible for us to get in on God's vision—even on matters of good ecology. Our sin has resulted in a very different garden than the one God had imagined.

Now we find ourselves in a world of factories and fast-food, and very few of us actually work or care for the earth in any capacity. Where once

people lived by the rhythms of the natural world (for example rising and retiring with the sun), we can now go weeks without venturing outside of our artificial environments.

Urbanization and technology have given us more efficient ways of unplugging from creation and our original source, the Creator. We're disconnected.

The implications are huge. Not only does the earth suffer under our neglect; we do too. Our struggle to connect with the very thing God gave us to sustain our lives—the earth—inevitably disconnects us from him even further . . .

And there's more to the story. We see throughout the Old Testament that the Hebrew word for work or serve (*avad*) is from the same root as the Hebrew word for worship (*avodah*). God's desire for humans to care for creation isn't just about saving us from pollution and processed foods; it's also rooted in his desire for us to be in a worshipful, reverent relationship with him. To serve God's creation is one way to worship him and see him revealed.

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When God told the first humans to work and care for the earth, he had a huge, beautiful picture in mind—not to act unilaterally but as a partnering God—so that humanity could join in on the creative work. Maybe you don't have a farm, or even a backyard for that matter. You're not exempt from the call to be a creative caretaker for this place. It's not like God is commanding you to go around hugging trees. Though let's be honest, there are a lot of worse things that could happen. God is asking that we use our creativity, energy, and time to look after the proverbial—or perhaps not so proverbial—Garden. It's right outside our door.

earth's
crammed with
heaven,
and every common
bush a fire with
God; and only he
who sees takes off
his shoes,
the rest sit round
it and pluck
blackberries

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Romans 8 talks about how the created world is waiting (groaning) in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed, in hopes that it will be liberated from decay. What does this mean for us? Does liberation (for both us and the earth) come during this life? Or only in the next?



Maybe you live in an urban jungle, or don't have the option of working outside. Do you feel disconnected? Why or why not? How can you live in a way that doesn't leave you disconnected?

warning: your treadmill will talk smack.

Regular at a gym? Try an outdoor workout this week. Hike. Run. Walk someone's dog. Jump some rope. We don't care, just as long as you get some fresh air while you do your elevated heart rate thang.

Pen, say hello to paper.

Where the Wild Things *Really* Are.

Many good things have come out of the ole' community camping trip. So many good things, in fact, it would be impossible for us to give you examples. But just trust us, it will be awesome.

Drop a line.

Hold the double on the Whopper.

We enjoy a nice juicy burger ourselves, and yet consuming excessive amounts of meat is harmful to the environment and depletes the world food supply. So this week begin to cut back.

Consider this from the online magazine *GOOD*: “A study in *New Scientist* magazine reported that the production of one kilogram of beef produced as much greenhouse gasses as three hours of driving. The greenhouse gas emission of animals was calculated by considering the production and transportation of grain, as well as the methane emissions from animals.

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If you're eating meat say four or five times a week, at 300 grams a go, there is 1.5 kilograms in a week. If you gave up that meat, you'd be decreasing your emissions by the same amount of 4.5 hours of driving.”¹

Tell the page what you think.

word drop: eco-commons (people will think you're so smart.)

This experiment will require group collaboration. Get a master list going of original or recycled (pun definitely intended) ideas that can make you greener individuals and a greener faith community. Here are some thoughts to get you started: composting, carpooling options, recycling programs at home and church, etc. We expect you'll be able to come up with some pretty cool ideas to share with us.

White spaces are meant to be filled, says us.

Kind of like Super Wal-Mart, only the exact opposite.

Support your local farmer by making a trip to the farmer's market. As a way of planning ahead, ask questions about which produce you can expect throughout different seasons. By eating locally and seasonally, you cut back on the energy and emissions wasted in transport. Not to mention the fact that you'll be strengthening relationships with those in your community.

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Do tell.

No pressure. (Your shower is such a drain on the rest of us.)

Last year, UNICEF announced that humans need about five gallons of clean water a day to survive. The average per capita water use in the United States is 151 gallons per person per day—more than any other country in the world.²

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A few good methods of reducing your water waste include: purchasing a low-pressure shower head, drinking from the tap rather than bottled waters, reducing coffee intake, lowering usage of lawn sprinkler systems, etc.

Watch this video for more ideas!
good.is/post/this-is-a-turn-off

Save the ink industry. (Write things down.)

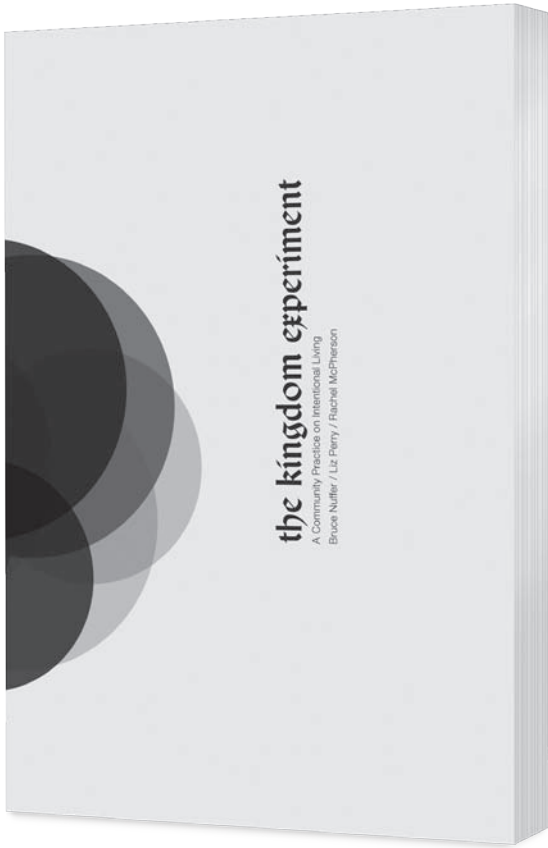
garden is the new grass. — says us the experts

We know your yard looks nice, but grass doesn't do much in the way of producing sustenance. Start a small community garden and plant a little extra so you can give it away to a local homeless shelter, rescue mission, or your hungry looking neighbor.

Word. (that's right, we know slang)

Create your own experiment.

Push a pencil.



the kingdom experiment

A Community Practice on Intentional Living

thekingdomexperiment.com



dawning of the new beard

who begins reading a book from the middle?

Or fast-forwards through the first half of a movie?

And yet as Christians we have often skipped straight to the New Testament because we think the Old Testament is dry, dusty and outdated.

but the truth is, the old testament is a living narrative of the same fierce and holy God who is changing us today.

The Mosaic Experiment revisits some of the ancient practices that are still relevant to kingdom living in the 21st century—pilgrimage, scapegoats, cities of refuge, and a few others are a picture of what it looks like when

old truths and current culture collide.

RELIGION / CHRISTIAN LIFE / SPIRITUAL GROWTH

the **HOUSE** studio
Design by Arthur Cherry

