

LET US DO GOOD

How your gifts support suffering Christians

FOOD AND COMFORT

Ukrainian believers give thanks for God's provision

FREED FROM BONDAGE

Barnabas releases another 219 brick-kiln families in Pakistan

barnabasaid



Opportunity Africa

*Sustainability
for suffering
Christian
communities*

WE WORK BY:

- directing our aid only to Christians, although its benefits may not be exclusive to them (“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**” Galatians 6:10, emphasis added)
- channelling money **from** Christians **through** Christians **to** Christians (we do not send people, we only send money or goods e.g. food)
- channelling money through existing structures in the countries where funds are sent (e.g. local churches or Christian organisations)
- using the money to fund projects which have been developed by local Christians in their own communities, countries or regions
- considering any request, however small
- acting as equal partners with the persecuted Church, whose leaders often help shape our overall direction.

WE SEEK TO:

- meet both practical and spiritual needs
- encourage, strengthen and enable the existing local Church and Christian communities – so they can maintain their presence and witness rather than setting up our own structures or sending out missionaries
- inform and enable Christians in the West to respond to the growing challenge of other religions and ideologies to Church, society and mission in their own countries
- facilitate global intercession for the suffering Church by providing a range of prayer materials
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low.

WE BELIEVE:

- in the clear Biblical teaching that Christians should treat all people of all faiths with love and compassion, even those who seek to persecute them
- in the power of prayer to change people’s lives and situations, either through grace to endure or through deliverance from suffering.

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Front cover:

A displaced
Nigerian
Christian
farmer who
received
piglets from
Barnabas Aid

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When hatred is in fashion

Jesus gave us four commands to love. The first two are from the Old Testament, the second two are uniquely His own. We are to love the Lord our God (Mark 12:30; Deuteronomy 6:5), our neighbours (Mark 12:31; Leviticus 19:18), our fellow-Christians (John 13:34-35) and our enemies (Matthew 5:44). It is easy to write, in one short sentence, but very hard to do in our own strength. We do have, however, the Holy Spirit at work in us (Galatians 5:22) and the example of our Lord Jesus Himself.

What does this love look like? Our love for God is to be a passionate, all-consuming love. We must love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength. Our love for others must be as great as our love for ourselves. Our love for those in the family of Christian believers must match Jesus' love for us, a love that is willing to lay down one's life for the other (John 13:1,34b; 15:12-13,17). Our love for our enemies must be a love that is shown in actions – doing good to them, praying for them, blessing them even if they curse us. In Jesus' words:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.” (Luke 6:27-28)

This strong and active love can be shown in anger. There is only one place in the New Testament where we are told that Jesus felt anger (Mark 3:5). It was anger created by His love for an unnamed man with a withered hand in a synagogue on a Sabbath. Jesus was both angered and grieved by the hard-heartedness of the Pharisees who did not want the man to be healed, because they saw this as working on the Sabbath. No doubt Jesus was also angry when He threw out the merchants and moneychangers in the Temple, this time an anger created by His love for God the Father (John 2:13-16). Anger can be wrong and it can lead to sin (Ephesians 4:26) but it can also be the right and loving reaction to injustice or cruelty. How much more loving to react with anger than with apathy in such situations.

Love must also show itself in tenderness and empathy. Empathy feels the pain of the other, enters into their emotions and experiences their feelings. This is the love that weeps with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Jesus Himself wept with Mary and Martha as they mourned the death of Lazarus, their brother and Jesus' friend (John 11:35). His heart was broken. He felt the pain of their loss and bereavement. He was just about to raise Lazarus from the dead, but nevertheless He wept.

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of loving one's neighbour (Luke 10:29-30), a love born out of empathy. But it is also an example of loving one's enemy, for Jews had nothing but contempt for Samaritans. The Samaritan who showed practical love to the wounded Jewish stranger, a love that cost him both time and money, was loving someone who hated and despised him.

But where is love like this to be found today? Hatred is being stirred up in headlines, social media, by politicians and by religious leaders. Peacemaking is despised, warmongering admired. Whole nations are hated for the actions of a handful of their leaders. Refusing to forgive the murderers of a loved one is now seen as the praiseworthy last great service which the bereaved can do for the one they have lost.

As Christians, disciples of our Master, Jesus, we must always seek to emulate His life, His empathy, His righteous anger when necessary, and above all else His supreme self-sacrificial and self-giving love.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO
International Director, Barnabas Aid

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Compassion in action

How your donations are helping

Strengthened and encouraged. This is what we often hear from Christians who have received support from Barnabas Aid. Thank you for making this possible. Here are just a few examples of the many ways we have recently helped persecuted and suffering Christians.

\$9,460

to provide 700 German-language Bibles



Bibles for Middle Eastern Christian refugees in Germany

German-language Bibles have been given by Barnabas to young Christians in Germany, mostly second-generation immigrants, whose parents fled to Germany from countries such as Syria, Iraq and Turkey to escape persecution.

Many of these young Christians had been requesting German-language Bibles as they know the language better than their parents' language, Aramaic. The Bibles are now used by the youth in their weekly Bible studies, held in several locations across Germany, each one attended by 50-100 young people.



Young Christians from Middle Eastern backgrounds flocked to a Christian festival in Germany, where the Bibles were distributed

Project reference: 00-362
(Bibles and Scriptures Fund)

\$11,805



North African ministry encourages converts to grow in faith

A church ministry supported by Barnabas in a North African country disciples new Christian converts from Islam and encourages them in their faith. The small team provides telephone guidance, organises fellowship meetings and supports new believers ostracised by their families and society for their decision to follow Christ.

"He helped me when I was lost and in hard times," said D, one of the converts about the leader of the ministry. "Now I am following Christ and sharing God's word with my family as well." When D has questions, he has access to mature brothers in Christ, through this ministry, who can guide and encourage him, and give him helpful resources.



North African Christian converts at prayer

Project reference: PR1620

\$33,578

to assist the school in 2024



Sudanese Christian refugee children receive gift of education

Children of impoverished Sudanese Christian refugees are receiving an education in Egypt because of Barnabas' support for a Christian school in Cairo. The majority of their parents have fled persecution and conflict in their homeland and are unable to pay the school fees. Thanks to our supporters' donations, however, even the poorest Christian refugee children can receive an education, which gives them hope for the future.

"Thank you for giving my son hope and teaching him to read and write, skills he thought he might never acquire," said a grateful parent. A young boy at the school described the school as his second home.



Sudanese Christian refugee children love their school

Project reference: PR1595

\$39,628
for Phase II



Christian victims of Jaranwala riots praise God for help

A second phase of aid has been funded by Barnabas to help Pakistani Christian families from Jaranwala who lost their homes and possessions in the anti-Christian riots of August 2023. We distributed food and warm bedding to 172 families (around 1,032 individuals) worst affected by the devastation inflicted by Muslim mobs, to help them through the cold winter.

“All praises to God who cares for us and sends us help through Barnabas,” said a recipient of the winter goods. In Phase I we provided food, hygiene kits and household goods.



One of 172 Christian families who received food and warm bedding from Barnabas

Project reference: 41-842 (Victims of Violence in Pakistan)

\$26,824



Repairs strengthen the fabric of church in Kazakhstan

The leaking roof was replaced and water-damaged walls repaired at a church in Kazakhstan with the help of Barnabas funding. The new roof is metal and better able to withstand severe winters, while a seismic belt was installed to protect the building from earthquakes.

Most of the congregation are first generation Christians, a mixture of converts from Islam and former atheists. The rise in consciousness of national identity has resulted in an increase in hostility towards Christians and the church runs activities to strengthen members in the face of persecution.



The newly repaired church in Kazakhstan

Project reference: 24-1338 (Church buildings in Kazakhstan)

\$72,890

to transport 94,000 Bibles



Bibles transported to persecuted Christians in Myanmar

Barnabas is funding the transportation of 94,000 Bibles to Christians in Myanmar, who continue to suffer violent persecution from the country’s military. We are working with a local Christian project partner to deliver the Bibles, which include a hymnal of Christian songs, to Karen Christians living in impoverished rural areas.

At the time of writing, distribution of the first shipment of 50,000 Bibles was underway and delivery of another 44,000 was due to begin. Pray that the total distribution of 200,000 will be completed safely.



Bibles being delivered by bike to Karen Christians in Myanmar

Project reference: 75-1042 (Bibles for Myanmar)

A man in a brown robe is feeding piglets with a bucket. The piglets are white and grey. The man is smiling and looking at the camera. The background is a dirt wall with some green leaves.

Opportunity Africa

Your opportunity to strengthen and sustain suffering Christian communities in Africa

“You have not just given us food and a means of livelihood; Barnabas Aid has covered our shame and restored our dignity,” said one of the displaced Nigerian Christian farmers who received piglets from Barnabas

The Church in Africa is growing. At the same time the challenges that face African Christians are also growing.

Natural disasters and weather extremes cause drought and floods... failed crops... hunger. So do diseases and pests, like the recent plague of locusts in East Africa.

War and anti-Christian violence are on the rise in many African countries. In parts of Nigeria, Christian lives and livelihoods are being destroyed by terrorists on a vast scale.

With God's help and yours, Barnabas Aid is partnering with African Christian communities to help them

become more resilient, self-sufficient and independent. We are calling this Opportunity Africa. It is a new initiative, but building on 30 years of Barnabas Aid's experience supporting a wide variety of projects to help Christians in 36 countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

The aim of Opportunity Africa is to transform suffering Christian communities in Africa through sustainability and human capacity development.

Opportunity Africa's 12 main strands — somewhat overlapping — are outlined below. From small and simple beginnings, like the examples on these pages, the projects can be scaled up, God willing, to become much larger enterprises.



“We know that African Christians have the capacity, skills, determination, and resilience to turn their tragedies into opportunities and lamentations into praises,” says Barnabas Aid’s Africa Coordinator. “They only need a little assistance, a little encouragement, and a little funding to help them grow out of dependency.”



1. Food: innovative, long-term approaches to feeding

Hunger is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa. A short-term solution is to provide food aid, and Barnabas does much of that. But how much better a long-term solution would be.

Food dehydration machines could enable communities to preserve food when there is abundance so that they have something to fall back on in emergencies. It also widens their opportunities for selling surplus food and thus making an income. Cold rooms and packing machines would facilitate a meat-processing business. Feeding initiatives like this need outside help only at the beginning; after that they become self-sustaining.

As a first step, we are enabling 20 Christian pig farmers in Nigeria to enlarge their farming capacities. These farmers lost everything when their homes and food stores were burnt down in anti-Christian attacks. They sought refuge in other Christian villages in a relatively safe area.

The farmers had already started small pig farms in their new locations, reckoning that pigs are safe from attack by Islamist militants who would not want to touch them. Now Barnabas has given them more piglets to rear.

The plan, God willing, is that the local churches will work together to develop a “meat market” with Christian butcheries. This will help the farming families sell their pork. With more animals to care for, the farmers can also employ farm hands, providing work for Christian youth in the area who struggle to get jobs. Thus the economic situation of the whole Christian community in the area will be improved.

\$132 could provide a piglet for a Nigerian Christian farmer displaced by violence.



2. Healthcare, medical needs and disabilities

There is a level of poverty at which a decent, simple lifestyle is sustainable *while health is good*. But when sickness or accident strikes, healthcare is out of reach – by reason of cost or distance or both. Also, as anti-Christian violence grows, there is an increasing number of injured or maimed Christians who need medical help.

Many poor and remote Christian communities in rural areas of Middle Belt Nigeria have no access to healthcare. Through our project partners on the ground, Barnabas Aid is providing backpacks filled with basic medical equipment for volunteers, who are also given some basic medical training. The trained volunteers then become “first responders” to general medical needs and after anti-Christian violence.

The first group of volunteers are pastors’ wives. One of them said, “This is removing the bitterness and hate and replacing it with hope and beauty.”

\$194 could provide a medical backpack, containing medical equipment, medicine and a minor-surgery kit, enabling trained volunteers to provide treatment whether for sickness or for wounds in the event of an attack.

The next stage is small clinics or mobile medical facilities to serve rural Christian communities including those with disabilities. There is a growing need for affordable prosthetic limbs for victims maimed in anti-Christian violence.

Trauma counselling for survivors of violent attack is another need, restoring them to long-term mental and emotional health. Barnabas has recently funded training for such counsellors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where violence has been ongoing for many years.



3. Economic empowerment, including for groups and churches

“We do not know you but through Christ, you have reached out to assist us... Barnabas Aid, we appreciate you so much.” These words from a Nigerian Christian widow in Kaduna State, Nigeria were followed by a chorus of “Amen!” from 59 other widows.

This was the moment when the 60 Christian widows each received either a corn-grinding machine or a sewing machine, funded by Barnabas Aid. Their husbands had been killed and their homes destroyed in anti-Christian violence, leaving them destitute. But now they have the means to earn a living and pay for basic needs and their children’s schooling.

“This sewing machine has been the only thing I have to care for my children after my husband was killed...”

“Agwaza tɪn nzit mami nsum danian nkyang na zi shiyat davwuo Barnabas Aid ani.” There are no words in English to truly express the thanks being given by another widow in the local language, Atyab. Loosely translated, it means “The Lord has removed our reproach and has given us comfort through our brothers at Barnabas Aid.”





One-off gifts of equipment to provide life-long livelihoods give the individual beneficiaries real hope for the future. But, by working with churches or other Christian groups, these small projects can also be linked together to create larger collectives. This makes possible organised marketing of the product and can help the widows' small businesses in many ways.

\$187 could provide a sewing machine for a Christian widow in Nigeria.

\$108 could provide a corn-grinding machine for a Christian widow in Nigeria.



Distribution of backpacks full of medical equipment to trained volunteers in remote areas of Nigeria



4. Education: schools and vocational training

Poverty and persecution push many girls and boys out of schooling. In Zimbabwe, some children are too weak from hunger to walk to school, or too hungry to concentrate if they do get there. In starving Tigray, northern Ethiopia, children are skipping school to search for leaves and berries to eat. Emergency food aid, or nutrient-rich ePap supplements, are short-term interventions but they have long-term, life-changing benefits because they enable children to get an education – the ultimate key to the future.

In numerous African countries, children displaced by violence have no school to go to. Here again Barnabas can help. We have funded a new Christian school in DRC for needy Christian children affected by the conflict. Some pupils are displaced, some are war orphans and some had been forced to be child soldiers.

Training in practical skills will open doors to earn a living for years to come. And the skills do not have to be

traditional ones. With support from Barnabas, nearly 5,000 young Christians in central and north-eastern Nigeria are being trained in digital content creation. Courses include storytelling and writing, spoken poetry, short filmmaking, photography, and video editing. Students are also given entrepreneurial training. Their passion and enthusiasm are huge. “You would not believe they come from devastated villages,” said the project coordinator, marvelling at how their terrible ordeals had not dulled the young people’s passion to develop their talents.

Going forward, we hope to establish evening classes for adults, including adult literacy, apprenticeship schemes and teacher training projects.



5. Energy

Most African countries are rich in sunshine. But many poor African villages have no electricity. During the hours of darkness, it is difficult to do much. Children cannot do their homework, which hinders their education. Church congregations cannot gather for evening worship or prayer meetings, so the spiritual life of the church is curtailed.

A gift of solar panels will give power to remote Christian villages for their churches, schools and community buildings. Imagine how life transforming this is!

\$132 could provide one solar panel in Nigeria.



6. Digital connectivity

Barnabas Aid is providing solar-powered internet hubs for rural Christian communities in Africa. They will facilitate communications and give access to a plethora of online resources. Access to the internet opens up the possibility of online study of many kinds, including Bible and ministry studies (see 11. below) and human capacity development (see 12. below).

Many Africans have mobile phones, even if they are quite poor, and in some African countries, such as Kenya, phones are the main way of doing many everyday transactions including shopping. These hubs will enable the phone-charging which can otherwise be a serious obstacle to overcome in remote communities.

Solar-powered internet hubs will also enhance many of Opportunity Africa’s initiatives, such as marketing for agricultural and food-processing endeavours. One hub is being used by the students of the digital content creation in Nigeria (see 4. above).



7. Water

Clean, safe drinking water is vital for the resilience of any community. Record-breaking droughts in parts of Africa make this a growing challenge. So too does anti-Christian violence. When a Christian village is destroyed, the survivors often flee en masse to another Christian village to seek refuge, which may double the amount of water needed there. That is why Barnabas funded the drilling of boreholes on church land in Chad, close to a camp of Christian refugees who had fled Islamist violence in Cameroon.

Filters, wells and storage tanks are other ways of providing health-giving clean water.

Water projects are particularly important to help women and girls, who usually have the task of fetching water. The further they have to walk to find clean water (or sometimes any water), the harder this is.



8. Agriculture

More than half the people of sub-Saharan Africa are involved in agriculture. It is a precarious way of life for persecuted Christians in 21st century Africa, whose livestock and crops are often targeted by attackers. Weather extremes also make farming more difficult than for earlier generations. But there are many opportunities to create resilience, for example, providing livestock (such as the piglets in 1. above) or better crop varieties.

- In Kasese district, Uganda, the staple foods of the Christian majority are cassava and matooke (plantain). But yields have become very low. Old varieties are still being grown, using old-fashioned methods, the soil is exhausted, and pests are a problem. More and more Christian families are struggling with hunger and malnutrition.
- Earlier this year, Barnabas provided cuttings of new higher-yielding varieties to 14,000 Christian families. The families also received training in modern ways to farm. Later each family will share the skills they have learned with two more families and give them cuttings of the high-yielding varieties, grown from their own plants.
- In Zimbabwe, we are distributing open-pollinated variety (OPV) maize seed to Christian subsistence farmers. These families grow their own food, usually just enough for their own needs. If there isn't much extra to sell, the family doesn't have much money. The hybrid varieties of maize normally grown do not breed true, so every year the farmers have to struggle to find money to buy

expensive new seed to sow. This prevents them from being self-sufficient and can lead to hunger and dependence on food aid.

With OPV maize seed, which breeds true, the farmers can keep some of their harvest and sow it the following year. They no longer have to buy seed. God willing, one gift of this maize seed can, therefore, feed a family for years to come.

\$6 could provide one 4kg pack of OPV maize seed, making one Zimbabwean family independent.

\$44 could provide cuttings of cassava and matooke (plantain) and training for ten Ugandan Christian families to grow both crops efficiently.



Malnutrition and "hidden hunger" in Zimbabwe sap the strength of children so much that they lose out on education. Deficiency diseases like pellagra can be fatal. But a daily supplement of ePap maize porridge, fortified with vitamins, minerals and soya protein, will restore them to full health and energy levels in two months. It gives them a future and a hope. In 2023 Barnabas provided 104 tonnes of ePap in Zimbabwe and Malawi – providing about 2.5 million servings for hungry Christians

What else can Opportunity Africa do to help poor Christian farmers?

- Guidance on how to market what they are already growing
- Guidance on how to bring their produce up to standard for marketing locally or for export
- Coordinating and facilitating marketing through digital media
- Start-up projects for new cash crops to sell, e.g. ginger, coffee, cashew nuts, tiger nuts
- A tractor to share between a group of farmers
- Training in new farming methods to suit new weather patterns
- Start-up projects to grow crops such as sesame seeds, acha and groundnuts to fortify maize meal and make it more nutritious





Nambam's husband was killed in an anti-Christian attack in Nigeria in 2023. She cannot return to her old village, but Barnabas Aid has provided a simple three-room house for her and her children, with some land around it where Nambam can grow food. Now they can settle and re-start their lives. Nambam says, "After my husband was killed, I lost hope. I didn't know that God will bring comfort and hope from our Christian family through Barnabas Aid."



9. Houses, churches, other community buildings

Many African Christians are homeless, especially in Nigeria where anti-Christian violence rages in parts of the North and Middle Belt and Christian villages are frequently burned down. But there are safer parts where Opportunity Africa can build simple affordable houses and create new villages for Christians displaced by violence.

Rebuilding gives the opportunity to build better. Building methods and materials can be chosen that are more resistant to attack and arson. Groups of houses can be laid out in squares for greater protection.

When a church is rebuilt, it can be a flexible, multipurpose building, serving as the village school on weekdays, with a clinic in a side-room.



10. Displaced Christians (internally) and refugees (across national borders)

Millions of African Christians – men, women and children – have been uprooted from their homes by war, anti-Christian violence or weather-linked catastrophes. They long for security and a way to feed themselves.

First they need humanitarian aid for their weary bodies – food, clothes, blankets, sleeping mats, shelter. They need pastoral care for their distressed minds and spirits. They may need medical care too. Then they need ways to earn a living. Their children need education and the healing power of a daily routine.



11. Bible training and spiritual development

We are providing theological and ministry training to build up the skills of church leaders, especially those at the grassroots.

Through The Shepherd's Academy, Barnabas supports 15 study centres across Africa, supporting students from Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Togo, Uganda and Zambia.

This is holistic training, including personal spiritual formation as well as theological knowledge. One aim is to build integrity, trustworthiness and dependability.



12. Human capacity development

Just as important as practical development, through livestock and wells and solar panels, is human capacity development. This is closely linked to the practical and academic skills training described above (see 4.)

These skills will equip children, young people and others who feel useless and of no value with expertise that gives them confidence and opens doors to useful and fruitful lives.

For leadership in the Church and in Christian communities, it will be important to develop thinking skills; expertise in planning, organisation and administration; and an ethical framework embedded in a Biblical spirituality.

Opportunity Africa – your opportunity to create lasting change for Christians in Africa

*“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially the family of believers”
(Galatians 6:10).*

This verse is core to Barnabas Aid's calling, and we are inviting you to join us in Opportunity Africa. You can transform Christian communities facing poverty persecution in Africa, strengthening and sustaining them to face whatever the future may bring.

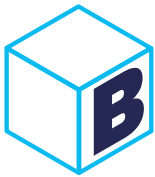
The eighth and last beatitude, perhaps the most startling of them all, is almost as long as the first seven put together. In this beatitude, Jesus changes from speaking of “they” to saying directly and personally “you”. Unlike the other beatitudes it concerns not the character or behaviour of a Christian but what is done to a Christian. It tells us of the wonderful blessings in store for those who are persecuted for Christ’s sake.

A manual for Christian living



The joy of being persecuted for Christ

Matthew 5:10–12



Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice

and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In this last and longest beatitude, Jesus emphasises how blissfully happy we should be if we endure persecution for His sake. He does not simply say, “Rejoice.” He adds, “be glad” or, in other translations, “be supremely joyful” or “exult”. The Greek word used is *agalliasithe*, meaning “to leap exceedingly” or to “skip and shout for joy”. If you are persecuted, jump for joy!

This rejoicing is mainly when the persecution is over and primarily concerns our future heavenly reward. We are not masochists; we do not enjoy the suffering itself. Nevertheless, there can be joy even in the midst of persecution. Many believers testify having felt the Lord closer to them during persecution than at any other time in their lives. This in itself is a wonderful blessing, a joy and a foretaste of heaven.

Like all afflictions, persecution should purify us and make us more like Jesus (Job 23:10). Normally this is by fine-tuning our characters (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4), but there are other wonderful and mysterious ways in which it can happen. “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus,” wrote the apostle Paul (Galatians 6:17). Persecution had made Paul like Jesus in this literal and physical way.

Believers who do not understand how helpful, even necessary, persecution is to our spiritual growth, who

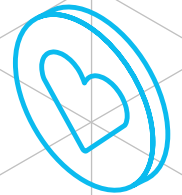
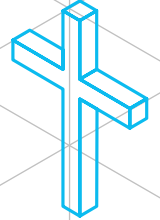
therefore try to avoid it rather than submit willingly to it, are greatly discouraged when they do experience it.

Persecution can be welcomed as an opportunity to show our loyalty to Christ. Through persecution we can join the great company of prophets, saints and martyrs. Perhaps this was the dominant thought in the minds of the apostles when, after a flogging (no small thing) and death threats, they left “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:17-41).

We can even dare to rejoice because our own suffering might make it easier for other disciples to follow Christ faithfully. We may have been inspired to endure by the thought of the believers who have gone before (Hebrews 11:12-38 and many more examples in the 2,000 years since that list was written). If we endure faithfully, we can likewise become an inspiration for others.

When we recognise that persecution is a precious gift, some of us, living in countries where physical persecution is unlikely, may wonder wistfully whether the bliss of the eighth beatitude could ever be for us. Jesus, however, mentions what could be called “verbal persecution”: insults and false accusations. There are very few believers, even in Christian-majority societies, who do not experience some kind of verbal attack if they are committed disciples of Jesus.

Jesus Himself experienced both insults and false accusations, and we know that we should expect the same treatment that our Master received (John 15:18-21). Paul writes of the persecution endured by the apostles:



When we are cursed, we bless ... when we are slandered, we answer kindly. (1 Corinthians 4:12-13)

Praise God that He understands the pain and harm that can be caused by cruel or destructive words. Praise God that Jesus graciously affirms that, if we endure this because we are His followers, it puts us in the company of “the prophets who were before” and will bring us the blessing of the kingdom of heaven.

Persecution is a gift, a privilege, an opportunity, a glory. We do not seek it out but accept it joyfully when it comes.

In this beatitude, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus prepared His disciples for persecution. Later He reminded them:

... you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings ... (Matthew 10:17-18)

The hatred and persecution will become especially intense in the End Times: “Everyone will hate you because of me” (Luke 21:17).

At the Last Supper, He warned:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:18-20. See also John 16:1-4.)

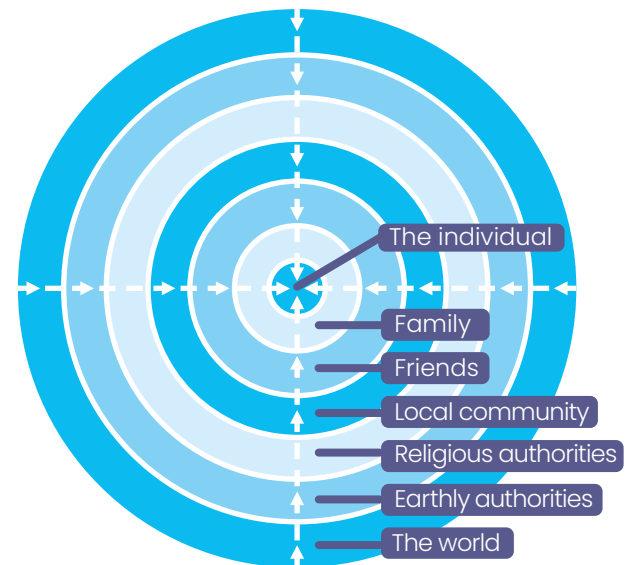
The Apostle John wrote: “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.” (1 John 3:13)

Nowhere does the New Testament suggest that religious liberty or freedom of conscience is to be the norm for Christians. Those who happen to live under governments which uphold these principles are the exceptions. If we take seriously the Beatitudes, this earthly freedom is not a blessing but perhaps even a hindrance to our spiritual growth and our relationship with the Lord.

When Jesus promised His followers freedom, He was speaking of freedom from the control of sin and Satan, not freedom from the control of governments (Luke 13:12-16; John 8:32-36). The same message is repeated in the epistles (Romans 6:7,18,20,22; 8:2; Galatians 5:13; Hebrews 2:14-15; 9:15; James 1:25; 2:12; 2 Peter 2:19) and Revelation (Revelation 1:5).

The New Testament does not promise religious liberty. Let us expect persecution, prepare for it and jump for joy when it comes.

We can look on the main sources of persecution (as described in Matthew 24 and Luke 21) as a series of six concentric circles, bearing down on the individual at the centre.



1. The outermost circle, enclosing all the others, is hated by **the world**. It is demonic opposition, for “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). That is why our choice to follow Jesus always results in suffering of some kind. We have wrenched ourselves from Satan’s control and he is trying to get us back, whether by temptation or persecution. Spiritual battle will be our experience for the remainder of our days on earth (Ephesians 6:12).
2. Inside the circle of spiritual rulers and authorities is the circle of **earthly rulers and authorities**: the governments, bureaucracies and security forces of the countries of our planet. These, the structures of the world, are ultimately under Satan’s control, even if they have godly believers serving within them. Much persecution of believers through the centuries has come from this source, whether in ancient Rome or modern Eritrea.
3. Within this circle are the **religious authorities**. All across the world today, Christians are suffering at the hands of extremists of other religions. For example, Islamic religious authorities set the agenda in Iran, resulting in severe restrictions on Christian ministry and the harassment of many individual believers through arrest, imprisonment and various other penalties.

4. Inside this is the circle of the **local community**, sometimes stirred up deliberately by those in circles further out (Acts 6:12). Many anti-Christian riots in Pakistan are deliberately fomented by a nearby mosque. Jesus would not have been crucified if the people of Jerusalem had not shouted for it, persuaded to do so by the Jewish chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:17-25). The Jewish leaders in Thessalonica deliberately started a riot, trying to target Paul and Silas (Acts 17:5).

5. The fifth circle is a Christian's own **friends** who can become their enemies. "If I had a gun, I would be the first to shoot you because you believe in Jesus Christ. I would put a gun to your head," said a Kyrgyz Muslim when he discovered that his best friend "Marat" had left Islam to follow Christ. Perhaps Marat found comfort remembering that Jesus Himself had been betrayed by one of His close group of friends.

6. Even **family** members can become persecutors. This is the sixth circle. When, as a teenager, I decided to leave Islam and follow Jesus Christ, my mother gave me a stark choice: if I continued a Christian, I could no longer be her son. She threw me out of the family home, and I lived for some time on the streets of London. This desperately painful rejection by loved ones is suffered by many who leave another religion to become a disciple of Jesus. I am very thankful to the Lord that my mother took me back again after a while, and some years later my parents both became Christians. But some converts are never received back into the family circle. Their relatives may murder them. Jesus prepared us for the possibility of having to sacrifice our family relationships, if necessary, for Him (Luke 14:26).

The world, which is under the control of the evil one, is the ultimate source of persecution, which we experience as hostility from secular authorities, religious authorities, local community, friends and even family.

How should Christ's disciples respond when persecuted?

First, we must check the reasons for our persecution. The promise of this beatitude is not for every persecuted person, but specifically for those who are persecuted because of righteousness (v.10) or because of Jesus (v.11). It must not be because of our foolishness, insensitivity, arrogance or hypocrisy. (See also 1 Peter 4:15.) The promise is for those who are persecuted for being like Christ their Master (John 15:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:12). Holiness can create hostility.

Occasionally, God will send us suffering as a response to a specific sin in our life, to bring us back to Himself. So we must also check to be sure this is not the cause of the persecution.

If our persecution is because of our Christ-like righteousness, then we need not try to understand anything more about the reason for our suffering. It is enough to know that we have been entrusted with a precious gift that will purify us and glorify Him.

Our first response is to **stand firm** in the faith, even though many around us may fall away (Matthew 24:9-13; Luke 21:19). Our greatest comfort and strength will be the knowledge that our beloved Master was also persecuted and has promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20).

If others are persecuted with us, then, we should **encourage each other to stand firm**. Pastor George Orjih was amongst a group of Christians kidnapped by militants in northern Nigeria in 2009. George was eventually killed because he refused to convert to Islam. But a survivor told how George had spent his time in captivity: singing, praying, and encouraging the other Christians to be faithful even unto death if necessary. One recalled, "While we were lying there, tied up, George turned to me and said, 'If you survive, tell my brothers that I died well, and am living with Christ. And if we all die, we know that we die for the Lord.'"

We must **pray**.

- We can give thanks for the honour of suffering for Christ and that we are being prepared for our future eternal inheritance.
- We can pray for ourselves and for any persecuted with us, that our faith will not fail (Luke 22:32). We can ask the Lord for perseverance and endurance. We can pray that we will grow more like Jesus through what we are experiencing.
- We can pray for our persecutors (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-28; Romans 12:14). Stephen's dying prayer was: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:60).

We must, like Jesus, **refrain from retaliating** against our persecutors (Matthew 26:50-53). If we are to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), we cannot hurt them. In 1782 in Gnadenhütten, Ohio, a group of indigenous American Christians were targeted by a group of white colonist militiamen. The militiamen easily took prisoner the trusting Christians, then told them they must die. In their pre-Christian days, the indigenous Americans had been warriors and would have energetically defended themselves. But now, being Christians, they simply requested time to prepare themselves for death.

Then asking pardon for whatever offense they had given, or grief they had occasioned to each other, they kneeled down, offering fervent prayers to God their Savior – and kissing one another, under a flood of tears fully resigned to his will, they sang praises unto him, in the joyful hope that they would



soon be relieved from their pains, and join their redeemer in everlasting bliss.¹

We must love each other as we suffer together for Christ. We are one Body. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26; Hebrews 13:3). If it is possible, we can care for persecuted members of the Body in practical ways. We can also help them psychologically and spiritually by encouraging them to stand firm (James 5:10). Persecuted Christians often feel alone, forgotten and worthless. We can remind them that they are precious and honoured in the Lord's sight (1 Peter 2:9; John 10:27-29), that their lives still have a purpose (1 Peter 2:9), that the purpose might even be to witness to their persecutors (Matthew 10:18). As they anticipate future ordeals we can remind them that the Holy Spirit will give them the words they need (Matthew 10:19). If there is no way to communicate, we can still help them by praying for them.

The most important response to persecution is to stand firm in the faith. We should also encourage those persecuted with us to stand firm, love and care for them as we have opportunity, be thankful and prayerful. We should love and pray for our enemies and not retaliate.

The New Testament was written during a time of persecution and much of it by believers who were being persecuted. But Peter's first letter is one of the books that particularly focuses on persecution. The first set of action points occurs in 1 Peter 1:13-17. Having encouraged the Christians to see persecution as something to rejoice in because it would purify their faith (1:6-7), as something brief and fleeting (1:6, compare 2 Corinthians 4:17), and having reminded them of their salvation and glorious heavenly inheritance (1:4-5,9) and of Christ's own sufferings (1:11), Peter then urges:

prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct (1 Peter 1:13-15 NRSVA)

From this we learn that our ability to persevere under persecution will depend very much on our thoughts. Therefore, we must prepare mentally for persecution. This preparation involves the habit of resisting temptation, and the habit of strengthening our faith by reminding ourselves of His promises and fixing our eyes on eternal realities (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Later Peter revisits these themes (1 Peter 4:1; 5:10). He also re-emphasises the need to be alert and vigilant: some people fall away because pressure comes upon them in gradual increments and they hardly notice what is happening and how they are letting down the Lord (1 Peter 5:8).

Peter sets an example of thankfulness as a way to find peace in the midst of persecution. Whatever happens to us, we can always praise God our Father for the incarnation, atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the new birth which He has given us; and the sure hope of heaven (1 Peter 1:3-4).

We will not find peace in persecution by applying reason. We will find it by faith. We know through faith that our sufferings are not meaningless, and that, in God's mysterious purposes, they will bring Him glory. But usually we do not know how and must be content to wait trustingly for that knowledge until the next life. For the duration of this life, we cling to the knowledge that our sufferings, especially our sufferings for Christ, are neither random nor pointless. They are spiritual food, oxygen and medicine, which we need in order to grow in Christ-likeness.

We can prepare for persecution by developing faith-filled, disciplined minds and eternal perspectives.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director, Barnabas Aid

1. John Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians*, Philadelphia: M'Carty and Davis, 1820, pp.318-319. Heckewelder (1743-1823), born in England, was a Moravian missionary in Ohio.

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Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!

Barnabas frees total of 2,023 Pakistani Christian brick-kiln families from debt bondage

“I never thought I would pay off my loan in its entirety, but now that Barnabas Aid has done so, I literally bow down to my Saviour God for thanking Him.”

These are the grateful words of husband and father Ibrahim, from just one of the 219 Christian families newly released by Barnabas Aid from bonded labour in Pakistan’s brick kilns.

It brings to 2,023 the total number of brick-kiln families whose lives have been transformed since Barnabas stepped in to begin freeing them from their debts in 2017.

This is a “miracle”

Ibrahim, who lives in a one-room house with his wife and son, gives thanks to Barnabas supporters for meeting his total accrued debt of \$933.

“Having someone completely unknown come to me and pay off my loan is a miracle for my family and myself,” he explains. “We will always be grateful.”

Brick-kiln workers are low paid, and their work is subject to weather disruptions, making it hard for them to meet their families’ basic needs during the rainy season.

If someone falls sick or another family crisis occurs, they have to take a loan from their employer, the brick-kiln owner.

Interest on the loan is then deducted from their wages and repayment can go on for years, even generations. The families have to subsist on reduced wages for as long as the debt remains. While they have the debt, they are bonded to the brick kiln,

unable to leave and get another job. It is almost like slavery.

Couple doubly blessed

“God has answered me and my family’s prayers that He sent Barnabas Aid to our village and pulls me out from the curse of loan from my brick kiln,” says Rashid.

He took out a loan to pay for medical treatment for his wife Rafiya. Thanks to the success of the lengthy treatment, Rafiya was able to conceive and learned she was expecting their first child just as Rashid heard that Barnabas was going to repay his debt of \$1,899.

“I have no words to thank my Lord Jesus Christ who not only blessed me with a child but also freed us from the heavy burden of the loan,” says Rashid.

“Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!” he adds, referencing 2 Corinthians 9:15.

Rashid now receives his wages in full and is able to save a little money for the family’s future. Moreover, he has money to pay for milk to feed his son Adan.

“I pray every day for Barnabas Aid and its team that God use them abundantly for the glory of His name and that they can reach the unreached,” he says.



Rashid and Rafiya with their son Adan

Freed from repayments worry

Sanwal had to take out a loan after he had an accident at work and had to take time off from his labours in the brick kiln.

Even when earning again, he struggled to meet the daily needs of his wife Razia and daughter Kajal while maintaining the loan repayments.

“I was so worried because I couldn’t repay my loan amount back regularly. Therefore my loan amount increased every passing day,” he explains.

Sanwal was overjoyed when Barnabas paid off his debt.

He is also thankful to Barnabas for building a Christian school nearby where his daughter receives a free education.

“I want to express my gratitude to Barnabas,” says Sanwal, “and my sincere prayers are being sent to the entire team.”

Project reference: 41-1356 (Freeing bonded Pakistan brick kiln workers)



Sanwal and Razia with their daughter Kajal

That people may know!

1 Kings 18:37

The Sacrifice of Elijah Before the Priests of Baal
[Royal Collection Trust - painted by Domenico Fetti c.1621-22]



Our culture today is obsessed with winning. Nothing plays more into this than the classic feel-good story where the ending surpasses all expectations that one had at the outset. Many love the story of the underdog who overcame all the odds and emerged victorious. Today's secular

society is so desperate for that story. They'll take real life events and adjust them with "based on a true story" caveats so that people are sold with its authenticity, all while blurring the lines between fact and fiction, reality and perception. They start out seeking to enthuse, encourage, engage; but very soon lose their footing on the slippery slope of entertainment.

Despite this sensationalist, secular desire of storytelling, humans are still inspired by stories depicting the possibilities of making a difference when no one else has the courage to. God knows that about our hearts and minds. It is at the root of how He communicates to us through His Holy Word, and how His Son communicated to people when he walked the earth – through parables.

One of the most effective collations of factual inspiration that we have at our disposal is the Old Testament, setting out real events that showcase a real God.

Introducing – Elijah, Ahab, and the prophets of Baal

The account of events recorded in 1 Kings 18:16-40 is one of those depictions that showcases an actual "against all odds" story that we need reminding of today. Elijah, incensed by Ahab and his family abandoning God's commands, challenged the prophets of Baal to a duel. A battle of the "gods" at Mount Carmel.

After 450 prophets could not demonstrate any existence of Baal, despite having home ground advantage, the right to go first, and having occupied most of the day's play, it was now up to the lone prophet of The Almighty to reveal reality.

While Elijah prepared for his turn, and just before the Lord demonstrates His power and might before the prophets of Baal, Elijah utters these words in 1 Kings 18:37: "Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God..." Elijah understood what this was about. Do we?

Everything in this story that Elijah seeks to demonstrate is that everything is entirely about God, that He is God, and that He is the only God. To demonstrate this effectively to the people at Mount Carmel Elijah demonstrates three things that we need to remember:



1. God always wins

Elijah, already confident of the Lord's victory, did not just spring into action the minute the prophets of Baal failed. Instead, he first sets up an impossible scene for those present. He builds an altar with twelve stones to represent the tribes descended from Jacob. He saturates the wood, offering, and altar with water. We're not talking a light sprinkle of water here – Elijah made sure that water entirely filled the trench around the altar. So confident is Elijah in God's ability to win that he even makes it interesting for those witnessing to think it's impossible. But the fire of the Lord consumes the offering. Against all odds.

Elijah does all this, already knowing that when God does reveal Himself on the day there will be no doubt, not even in the minds of the enemy, that He is Lord. We too need to have this confidence exhibited by Elijah. As John writes in 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” We have every reason to display Elijah's confidence when we know that God always wins. It is humbling that our persecuted family often demonstrates this unwavering faith too. They know God always wins, and we should have that same faith – a faith that stirs up a confidence within us to live a life boldly that displays the truth. God always wins.

2. The enemy is always outnumbered, even when they're not

Though common sense would dictate that 450 is more than 1, Elijah showcases a confidence here that disregards the size of the opposition. When you understand whose side you are on, and accept the reality of who God is and the truth that He always wins, the size of the enemy will never be a calculation or consideration when deciding to act or not. This was passed well onto Elijah's successor, Elisha. In 2 Kings 6:16 Elisha, without hesitation, assured the servant witnessing the city being surrounded by the King of Aram's army that, “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” One could forgive the servant if he questioned Elisha's maths when comparing the two of them

against a whole army. But just like Elijah, Elisha knew that there is no one greater than the one true God. No enemy, no obstacle, no trial is greater than God. In understanding this, one also must understand that it is not about whose side God is on, but more about whose side we are on. The story is always entirely about God. He is the main character. The central theme. The opening scene and the end credit. When we surrender to that, we come to understand the power of God in Him always winning and never being outnumbered.

3. Faith pleases God

When you read the account of Elijah's response in 1 Kings 18 you will find that Elijah does the necessary, but God does the impossible. Elijah acts in faith to prepare the altar, drench the offering and wood, encourage the people, and then lead them in prayer. But it was God who did the impossible. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith for us as being “the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see”. The author further confirms in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith “it is impossible to please God”. Nothing about Elijah's actions made sense. They were illogical. Contrary to basic science. Even absurd. This was most assuredly the view that the 450 prophets of Baal had. But for Elijah it was a natural response in serving God. His acts of faith pleased God. There are no doubt times when your actions, in pursuit of serving God, will appear as nonsensical to others. That's okay. The only thing that really matters is what pleases The One who always wins, who can defeat any enemy, and who is pleased by the faith displayed in those who serve Him. Through the ministry of Barnabas Aid we have the privilege to participate in these acts of faith as we witness God do the impossible. What a journey and a witness! May you be encouraged by this story of the “underdog” Elijah as he journeyed close to the God who always wins, who is never outnumbered, and who forever will be pleased by our obedience through faith. To Him be the glory.

*“Answer me, LORD,
answer me, so these
people will know that
you, LORD, are God...”*

NOEL FROST

Chief Executive Officer (Global), Barnabas Aid

Food, comfort and hope for Ukrainian Christian refugees



Svitlana, her son and mother appreciated every single item given to them by Barnabas

In desperation Irina gathered up her young daughter Lilia and fled through the fields as shells fell around them. There was no designated safe route for civilians to escape the fighting in the heavily contested, occupied region of Ukraine where they lived.

“It was a harrowing experience,” Irina recalls. Mother and daughter had already endured many months of shelling huddled in basements and bomb shelters with neighbours. At night all the children, including Lilia, experienced panic attacks.

“We simply couldn’t bear it any longer, especially Lilia,” she said.

Irina and her daughter fled across the border to neighbouring Moldova. One of the poorest countries in Europe, Moldova is sheltering more than 113,000 Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Barnabas funds food and hygiene parcels

The majority are without an income and are living with host families or in accommodation centres. They depend on their savings and on humanitarian support to cover their basic needs. Their situation is made worse by high inflation.

Barnabas has been helping a church in the Moldovan capital Chişinău as it

offers comfort and spiritual support to Ukrainian Christian families.

We have provided funding for 1,950 food parcels, containing staples such as pasta, rice, flour, breakfast cereal and cooking oil, for the church to distribute to Christian refugees most in need.

We have also provided 1,000 hygiene packs, including basic essentials like toothpaste, shower gel, soap, detergent and toilet paper.

Each family has a unique story

Most of the refugees who seek the church’s help are women and children who, like Irina, tried to stay in their home areas as long as possible, until the shelling became more than they could bear. Men between the ages of 18 and 60 are not allowed to leave Ukraine.

“Each family has its unique story, challenges and problems,” explain our church partners. “They have their own experiences dealing with the war and their losses.

“Some of them struggle to find work in Moldova and, for those who do, the income is often meagre, making it difficult to meet all the family’s needs, including food, housing, clothing and more.”

They add, “There are many children and they all yearn for simple human warmth and understanding. When they

come to us, we see in their eyes that they desperately want us to share their sorrow and experiences, walk even a short part of their journey with them, providing support and comfort. We are grateful we can do that.”

Our partners thanked Barnabas supporters for funding the food parcels and hygiene kits for refugees. “This assistance allowed us to see them all on a regular basis, to speak to them about God, His love and His care for us all.”

An answer to prayer

The food and hygiene items were an answer to prayer for Katerina who has very limited means to provide for her ten-year-old daughter Masha and six-year-old son Evgeniy.

Katerina took the heartbreaking decision to leave her husband and Ukrainian homeland because of the strain the constant shelling was having on her children, especially on Evgeniy who developed nervous tics.

Evgeniy’s nightmares continued in Moldova and he regularly woke in tears. She noticed, however, that he calmed and the tics subsided when she began making thread dolls with him. Now she runs an arts and craft class to help other withdrawn and fearful refugee children.

“Weaving dolls serves as art therapy for them and for Katerina it brings joy



Irina and her daughter endured months of shelling



Aid funded by Barnabas was an answer to prayer for Katerina

and hope,” said our church partners. “She is contributing to the future of the younger generation of Ukraine.”

Svitlana fled Ukraine at the start of the war with her five-year-old son Misha and her 73-year-old mother. They appreciated “every single item” in the food and hygiene parcels, said our church partners, adding, “They have to be very careful with their money, thinking twice about buying even the simplest basic necessities of food items.”

Misha particularly cherished the children’s Bible in Ukrainian that they gave him. “We were pleased to serve one more family and touch them with God’s love through providing for their spiritual and physical needs,” said our partners.

Escape from terrifying past

Irina knows that there is no going back to the life she once enjoyed with Lilia in Ukraine. Their home was submerged when the Kakhovka dam burst in June 2023, destroying everything they had left behind when they fled Ukraine a year earlier.

She thanks God, Barnabas and our local Moldovan church partners for the support she and her daughter have received. “The time we spent with you allowed us to momentarily escape from our problems and forget, even if just for a little while, the terrifying past. Thank you.”

Christians in Ukraine give thanks for aid “miracles”

“Thank you to all our brothers and sisters for all you send us ...These are miracles for us. God bless you for everything you do.”

These are the words of our church partner who distributes aid generously donated by Barnabas and food.gives supporters to Ukrainian villagers living in conflict zones.

We have sent 16 containers with food.gives and medical.gives aid to Ukraine in the 12 months to February 2024.

The contents included thousands of filled food.gives boxes, pallets of tinned food, supplies of baby milk as well as dried vegetable soup mix and dried fruit from the USA.

There were also hygiene supplies such as bandages, bars of soap, toothpaste and sanitary towels, plus clothing.

Stoves and firewood delivered

Items donated through medical.gives included crutches, walking sticks, leg braces, walking frames and blood pressure monitors.

In addition, Barnabas has supplied 228 families with wood-burning stoves to provide heat for cooking and warmth for their homes.

We have supplied 31 larger stoves sufficient to warm a church hall or basement where people shelter.

We have also supplied Christian families with 240 tonnes of firewood.

“We thank you very much,” added our church partner. “You are coming to us and help us so much with such necessary items like stoves, wood, food and sanitary aid.

“Thank you for everything. God bless you all.”



Ukrainian Christians living in the ruins of their bombed village, close to the frontline of the war, receive food.gives boxes full of much-needed supplies. Aid was distributed swiftly because of the constant danger of renewed shelling



Ukrainian Christians gather up firewood provided by Barnabas



Ukrainian Christian children look through their family's food.gives box



Ukrainian Christian children with much-needed supplies delivered through food.gives

Two Christian brothers acquitted of Jaranwala “blasphemy” charges

PAKISTAN

Judge Mohammad Hussain cleared Christian brothers Umar Saleem (known as Rocky) and Umair Saleem (known as Raja) of all charges on 29 February at the Anti-Terrorist Court in Faisalabad.

The brothers’ arrest on 16 August sparked widespread violence. They were accused of various charges following the Jaranwala riots in August 2023, during which at least 24 churches were set on fire, and the homes of more than 100 Christians were burned, looted or vandalised.

The brothers were charged under all three of Pakistan’s “blasphemy” laws, including Section 295-C of the Penal Code. This section, relating to defiling the name of Muhammad, the

prophet of Islam, carries a mandatory death penalty.

They also were accused under Section 9 of Pakistan’s Anti-Terrorism Act of stirring up sectarian hatred.

A police investigation has since discovered that two other individuals, also arrested at the time and still in prison, sought to implicate the brothers in “blasphemy” charges.

Defence lawyer Tahir Bashir described the acquittal as “a powerful reminder of the strength of due process and the importance of an independent judiciary”, adding, “It highlights the courage of those who stand up for the rights of minorities in the face of great adversity.”



Umar Saleem (Rocky) and Umair Saleem (Raja), with defence lawyer Tahir Bashir (centre), were cleared of “blasphemy” charges on 29 February [Image credit: Facebook/Tahir Bashir]

Islamists shoot convert dead during worship service at Istanbul church

TURKEY

Tuncer Cihan, a Christian convert from Islam, was shot dead by Islamist terrorists in a targeted attack during a church service in Istanbul on Sunday 28 January. Two masked gunmen entered the church in the Sariyer district on the European side of the city at around 11.40am and killed him before fleeing the scene.

Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) later claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement on its Telegram channels. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed condolences to the church leaders and strongly condemned the murder. Police subsequently conducted a series of raids across the city, which resulted in 47 people being detained.

Supreme Court supports Jaranwala Christians by dismissing official report on riots

PAKISTAN

Pakistan’s Supreme Court rejected the Punjab government’s interim report on the anti-Christian riots that devastated Jaranwala in August 2023, describing the document as “worth throwing in the trash”.

The remark was made by the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Qazi Faez Isa, on 13 February as he headed a three-judge bench hearing a petition filed by the Christian community seeking an inquiry into the events of 16 August when a Muslim mob rampaged through the city’s Christian area.

“Those who have no knowledge about Islam are pretending to be authorities,” declared the senior judge. “Islam prohibits attacks on places of worship.”

The official report stated that 304 suspects were arrested following the riots, but only 18 challans (charge sheets) were submitted in the courts.

Village authorities tear down house church

LAOS

Village leaders and residents tore down the private home where Christians were gathered and interrupted a worship service in Savannakhet province on Sunday 4 February.

“The village authorities came here and tore down our home at around 10.30 am Sunday morning,” reported a worshipper at the church in Kaleum Vangke village in Xonboury district, adding that the mob burned Bibles and other documents in the assault.

Christians are legally entitled to conduct services, preach throughout Laos and maintain contacts with believers abroad. However, the law is not well enforced in rural areas, where Christians are often violently persecuted.

Ten killed as IS steps up terrorist campaign in Christian areas

MOZAMBIQUE

Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) claimed responsibility for killing ten Christians in a series of attacks waged over two weeks against Christian villages in northern Mozambique.

The claim coincided with the launch on 4 January of the group's new global terror campaign, "Kill Them Wherever You Find Them", announced in an audio message by its spokesman, Abu Hadhayfah Al-Ansari.

The campaign's title apparently refers to the "Sword Verse" in the Quran, which says "Fight and slay the pagans [interpreted as all non-Muslims] wherever you find them" (Q 9:5).

The violence, centred on three districts in Cabo Delgado province,

began on 3 January in Mocimboa da Praia district when IS fighters struck the village of Ntotoe, killing three residents and burning down a church and more than 60 houses. They hit Chimbanga village on 5 January, murdering three Christians and torching over 70 houses. On 7 January marauders set fire to nearly 40 houses in a village in the same district.

Four Christians were murdered in attacks on 4, 5 and 9 January in villages in Macomia and Muidumbe districts.

Around 1,800 Christians have been murdered in northern Mozambique since October 2017 in sustained anti-Christian violence. Moderate Muslims have also been targeted and killed.



Flames engulf homes in Ntotoe village, Mocimboa da Praia district

Thirty deaths in Islamist attack on Christian community in Plateau State

NIGERIA

Thirty people were killed in an attack by suspected Fulani Islamists on a Christian community in Plateau State on 24 January. The gunmen invaded Kwahaslalek and neighbouring villages in Mangu Local Government Area shortly

after midnight. They had defied a 24-hour curfew declared by the state governor Caleb Mutfwang in response to the worsening security situation in the area.

Police arrested nine suspects in connection with the attack.

Convert summoned to start six-year sentence as other Christians are detained

IRAN

A 60-year-old Iranian Christian convert from Islam received notice to begin her sentence in Evin Prison, Tehran, on 3 January. Mina Khajavi was summoned to begin a six-year term for "acting against national security by promoting 'Zionist' Christianity", an accusation typically made against Iranian believers for involvement in "house churches".

Mina was arrested in 2020 and sentenced in 2022. However, she was deemed unfit to begin her sentence when her ankle was broken after she was run over by a car, an incident that has caused her to have metal plates fitted and walk with a limp.

At the time of writing another convert remains in detention after being arrested in Dezful, western Iran. Esmaeil Narimanpour was arrested on Christmas Eve, 24 December 2023. His home was raided in a search conducted without a warrant, and Christian books were confiscated. He was last reported as being held in Ahvaz, around 100 miles south of Dezful. Esmaeil was among several converts cleared of "propaganda" charges in 2021 but subsequently forced to attend Islamic classes.

Also in Dezful, Iman Golzar, who belongs to the same church as Esmaeil, was released on bail on 7 February. He was arrested at midnight on 16 January by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence who seized his computer and CCTV cameras. It is not known whether he has been charged with any offence.



Mina Khajavi was summoned to begin her sentence on 3 January [Image credit: Article 18]

Getting to know Barnabas

An aid agency for the persecuted Church

From Christians, through Christians, to Christians. Barnabas sustains 2,000 impoverished Christian families in Pakistan through our feeding programme



“I almost lost all hope, but then came your help which reminded me that God does not forget” – the words of a Syrian Christian survivor of the earthquake that devastated southern Turkey and northern Syria in 2023. Barnabas Aid helped over 7,000 believers in its aftermath, providing food, water, blankets, tents and more.

Christians around the world suffer in many ways. Some are persecuted or discriminated against because of their Christian faith. Others suffer in natural disasters.

For 30 years Barnabas Aid has served the persecuted and suffering Church. We believe that our calling from God, as a ministry, is to help especially the family of believers (Galatians 6:10), and within the family of believers to help especially those who are suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Practical aid – given from Christians, through Christians, to Christians – is the heart of Barnabas’s work.

Barnabas now helps 300-400 projects in about 50 countries each year. Since the ministry began, we have funded an estimated 5,000 projects across 109 countries. Only the Lord knows how many lives of poor and persecuted Christians have been saved.

What does Barnabas do?

Food for hungry Christians. Water for thirsty Christians. Medicine for believers who are sick. Shelter for converts thrown out of the family home. Bibles for Christians who fled violence leaving everything behind. Practical care for the families of those in prison for the sake of the Lord. Loving Christian schools for

Christian children who are despised by mainstream society. Discipleship for new believers. Trauma counselling for Christian survivors of war and conflict. Living costs for pastors, church-planters and local missionaries, bravely serving Christ in hostile situations. These are just some of the ways Barnabas Aid is helping our suffering Church family.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

(Galatians 6:10)

We also focus on ministry training for Christian leaders in places of pressure and persecution. The Shepherd’s Academy (TSA) is Barnabas’s own training wing for grassroots leaders. TSA is not just about Bible knowledge, but also about ministry skills and formation of a Christ-like character. (www.shepherds.academy)

How does Barnabas help?

Mainly we help by sending money. We channel financial gifts from our supporters around the world to churches and ministries on the ground in places of poverty and persecution. They use the money to fund their projects to aid suffering Christians.

But sometimes we send food, blankets, clothes, medicines, PPE or other items donated by our supporters, which we load into shipping containers and transport by land or sea to needy Christians. These are our food.gives and medical.gives projects, which began in 2021 (www.food.gives). With God’s help and yours, we have already sent 173 containers, providing 79,590,000 portions of food, 50 million pieces of PPE and many other kinds of aid.

Prayer is just as important as practical aid. So we provide a range of prayer resources: daily, monthly and annual.

Hope and aid for the suffering Church

Practical aid creates hope and spiritual encouragement. Suffering Christians are greatly comforted to know that the aid comes from fellow-Christians.

“People were happy that Christians in other lands thought of them... People praised God and thanked Barnabas for coming to help them even though they were in remote areas not known to the world,” reported our project partner in Chad, when we provided maize after catastrophic flooding in 2022.

God, you, Barnabas and the suffering Church

It is a wonderful privilege to serve the suffering Church. We are so thankful to the Lord and to our supporters for making it possible.



Find out more about the ministry at: www.barnabasaid.org

We strive to keep our overheads low – currently 12% globally, which means 88% of the money donated to Barnabas is available to help suffering Christians. The 12% (which covers running costs, raising awareness and prayer resources) comes from donations to our General Fund. **Any financial gift which a donor directs to a specific project is used 100% for that project and its expenses; nothing is taken from it for our overheads.**

In Touch

Supporter makes a big difference through food.gives

“I get so much joy out of getting these food.gives boxes ready ... knowing that the small thing I do makes such a great difference.”

These are the words of Pauline, a supporter from Australia, who diligently gathers packets of rice, pulses, chick-peas and lentils to pack into food.gives boxes to sustain suffering Christians around the world.

Pauline first read about our food.gives programme after being given a copy of *Barnabas Aid* magazine two years ago. She immediately decided to help by putting together one food.gives box a month, then two, three, five and finally settling at eight a month.

She has no car, and to save the cost of postage, Pauline bought a beach trolley to transport her boxes.

Journey filled with prayer

Every few weeks Pauline leaves her home in Safety Bay, an outer suburb of Perth about 50km from the city, and walks 30 minutes with her beach trolley to Rockingham train station. She travels about one hour by train before walking about 15 minutes to our food.gives warehouse to deliver her filled boxes.

As she makes the journey she thinks and prays for the Christians who will be receiving the boxes, for whom life is so much harder.

“We are so privileged and have it so good compared with our persecuted brothers and sisters,” says Pauline.

Pauline weighs every box she gives and has recently reached the milestone of 1.5 tonnes since she started two years ago.

Thanks to the efforts of Pauline and other supporters food.gives has provided more than 79.5 million servings of food to Christians in need.

If you would like to find out more about how you can help, go to www.food.gives

Your gifts for Pakistani Christians in need fill 20ft container

Praise God that our first container of aid from Christians in New Zealand to Christians in Pakistan was, at the time of writing, being prepared for shipping.

Your gifts generously given are enough to fill the 20ft container full of essential food and medical supplies that will make a real difference to our suffering brothers and sisters.

You have provided hundreds of food.gives boxes packed with staples – rice, lentils, sugar and salt. Equipment given through medical.gives includes moonboots, crutches, care

pads, bandages, stethoscopes, CPR dummies, blood pressure monitors, first aid kits and more.

Symbols of hope

“Every item symbolises hope and sustenance for those facing challenging circumstances,” said Stephanie Johnston, Head of Operations (New Zealand).

“We extend our deepest gratitude to all who have played a part, whether by contributing supplies, volunteering time or offering support in any way.”

We are busy collecting food.gives boxes and other supplies to ship another container later this year. If you or your church would like to become involved in .gives please go to our website www.food.gives



Volunteers Abby and Warren help to package your food.gives boxes for shipping to Pakistan



Pauline packs her beach trolley with filled food.gives boxes

Our .gives collection hubs

You and your church are welcome to drop off your .gives donations at any of our seven collection hubs.

Auckland

food.gives warehouse
6C Kellow Place, Wiri,
Auckland, 2104
Drop off times: Call the office
to find out times
09 280 4385

Hamilton

West Hamilton Community
Church, 27A Rifle Range Road,
Dinsdale, Hamilton 3204
Drop off times: Tuesday-Friday,
9am-1pm
07 847 8417
office@whcc.org.nz

Hamilton

Fairfield Baptist Church, 1101
Heaphy Terrace, Fairfield,
Hamilton, 3204
Drop off times: Monday-
Thursday, 9am-1pm
07 8555 469
office@fairfieldbaptist.co.nz

Rangiora

Rangiora Baptist Church, 111
East Belt, Rangiora 7400
Drop off times: Monday-
Friday, 9am-1pm

Waikanae

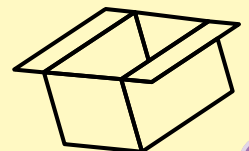
Waikanae Baptist Church, 286
Te Moana Road, Waikanae 5036
Drop off times: Tuesday-
Friday, 9am-12pm
04 293 6810
office@waikanaebaptist.co.nz

Lower Hutt

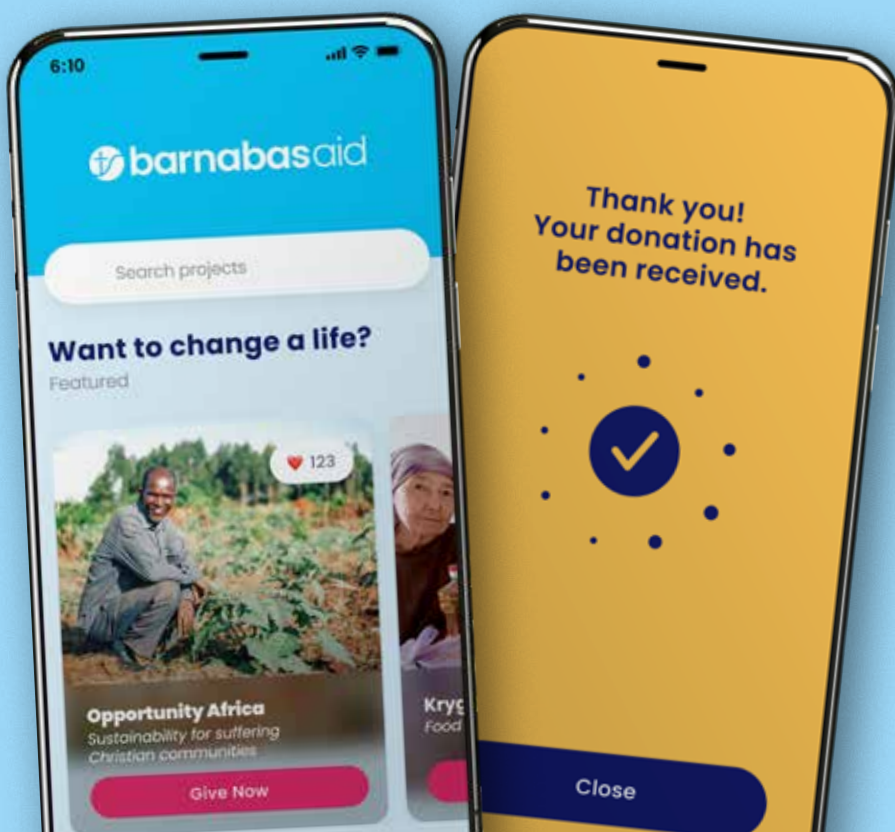
Hutt City Baptist Church, 132 –
146 High St, Lower Hutt, 5010
Drop off times: Tuesday-Friday,
9am-12pm (Call or email first)
04 566 0467
admin@huttbaptist.org.nz

Tasman

Tasman Church, 6 Williams
Road, Tasman, 7173
Drop off times: Monday-
Saturday 9am-5pm, Sunday
10am-11:30am
03 526 6836



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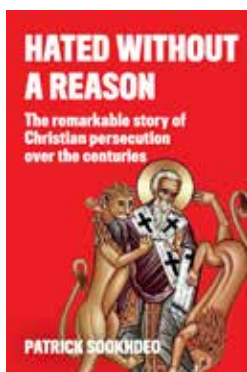
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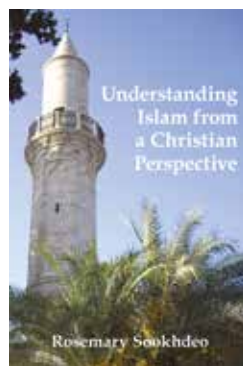
\$30

Hated Without a Reason

The remarkable story of Christian persecution over the centuries

Patrick Sookhdeo

This unique book explores Christian persecution throughout the ages and shows it is not restricted to a certain region or era. It has inspiring stories of courageous individuals. Dr Sookhdeo shows the different ways Christians respond to persecution and its causes. He also gives lessons from the past that are relevant and applicable today.



\$16

Understanding Islam from a Christian Perspective

This is a book on Islam with a difference. Most people don't realise that Islam was founded 600 years after Christ, and began in an area where many Christians lived. The author covers the areas where Islam has borrowed from Christianity and discusses the influence that Christian theology had on the growth and establishment of Islam.

To order, please visit barnabasaid.org/resources/books or contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (addresses on inside front cover).

sales@barnabasbooks.org | barnabasaid.org

 **barnabasaid**
bringing hope to suffering Christians