

UGANDA

Opportunity Africa provides food security to Christian communities

FOOD.GIVES

Another year of feeding our hungry brothers and sisters

LIVING BY GOD'S LAW

Finding the way of the righteous in Psalm 1

barnabasaid

Empowering marginalised Christians

In South-East Asia



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.

International office

The Old Rectory, River Street,
Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK
Telephone 01672 564938
Email info@barnabasaid.org
Fax 01672 565030

Australia

GPO Box 612, Adelaide SA 5001
Telephone (08) 8117 8079
or 1300 365 799
Email australia@barnabasaid.org
Barnabas Aid Australia is a charitable institution but gifts are not tax deductible. Barnabas Aid Australia is a registered business name of Barnabas Fund Australia. ABN 70 005 572 485.

New Zealand

PO Box 276018,
Manukau City, Auckland 2241
Telephone (09) 280 4385
or 0800 008 805
Email newzealand@barnabasaid.org

Published by Barnabas Aid
1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350
Vienna, VA 22182, USA
Email info@barnabasaid.org

© Barnabas Aid 2024

For permission to reproduce articles from this magazine, please contact the International Headquarters address above right.

To guard the safety of Christians in hostile environments, names may have been changed or omitted. Thank you for your understanding.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and obtain permission for stories and images used in this publication. Barnabas Aid apologises for any errors or omissions and will be grateful for any further information regarding copyright.

The paper used in this publication comes from sustainable forests and can be 100% recycled. The paper used is produced using wood fibre at a mill that has been awarded the ISO14001 certificate for environmental management.

The poly film plastic used to wrap this magazine for mailing is recyclable.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com
The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Front cover: Dao in South-East Asia has received Barnabas-funded training in sewing and weaving

Blessings and gifts from God

As we approach Christmas, our thoughts naturally turn to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

For much of the world, it is a time known for giving and receiving gifts. Even though we are often caught up in the festive season ourselves, we should never forget the “reason for the season” – that God sent His servant, His one and only Son, as the greatest gift in history for all, to redeem and rescue us, and bring us back to Him.

Let us also remember another, albeit smaller, example of giving gifts as we round off the year.

By God's grace, we strive to steward these gifts to yield great hope and relief for the bride of Christ.

We are told in Genesis that Abraham, now very old, had been blessed in every way (Genesis 24:1). He too sent his servant to procure a bride for his son Isaac, and sent camels laden with gifts of great value to do so. The Lord blessed the servant, and he brought back a bride, Rebekah.

Rebekah is a picture of the Church – the Lord's redeemed people. Though she had never met Isaac, she loved him, and journeyed to meet him. So it is that every Christian loves Christ, though we have not seen Him, and we willingly journey through this life in eager expectation of the day we shall finally meet Him.

We should also reflect on the faithfulness of the servant, who delivered his master's gifts to where they were needed. What if the servant had broken his promise and stolen the gifts he was sent out with, never to be seen again? Thankfully, the servant proved reliable with what had been entrusted to him.

We here at Barnabas Aid are humbled and grateful for the gifts our supporters entrust to us.

By God's grace, we strive to steward these gifts to yield great hope and relief for the bride of Christ. It is never lost on us how much faith our supporters have in us to do His work, for His glory, and we pray that His will be done in this important work for many years to come.

BARNABAS AID

Contents

4 **Compassion in Action**
Prayers and aid for Christians in the Middle East

6 **Opportunity Africa**
Cassava crops provide food security in Uganda



9 **food.gives**
Another year of feeding our hungry brothers and sisters



10 **South-East Asia**
Vocational training brings hope to the impoverished

12 **The way of the righteous**
The first of our new series through the book of Psalms

15 **Christmas persecution**
Pray for believers at risk of Christmas attacks

16 **In Brief**
Pakistan Christians charged with “blasphemy”

18 **Give the gift of hope**
Introducing the new edition of *Barnabas Gifts*

19 **In Touch**
Remember Barnabas Aid on #GivingTuesday

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.

\$9,498



Seminar strengthens the growing Church in Uzbekistan

A Barnabas-funded seminar has strengthened church leaders in a region of Uzbekistan where the Church is growing, despite continuing discrimination from radicals within the Muslim majority. Christian converts from Islam have endured increasing hostility from family members, their communities and employers.

The five-day seminar held in August enabled the 50 church leaders attending to strengthen the connections between themselves, build their Biblical knowledge, and plan how best to respond to the needs of the growing Christian community.



A church service in Uzbekistan

Project reference: PRI450
(Leadership training in Uzbekistan)

\$41,666



Support for African Christian refugees in the Holy Land

Christians who fled violence in Africa are being given help to build new lives in the Holy Land. Many of the 2,500-strong community of refugees from Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia live in poverty and still bear the physical and mental scars of their escape.

Barnabas helps to fund an NGO that offers a range of support to refugees, including vocational training and education programmes for children and adults. Our partners provide food, psychological support to the traumatised, and advocacy assistance.



Barnabas funding helps provide educational and vocational opportunities for African refugees in the Holy Land

Project reference: 00-345
(Victims of Violence)

\$25,000



Prayers and practical aid sustain believers in Middle East

Regional conflict has caused anxiety and hardship among members of the small Christian community in a Middle Eastern country. Many have lost their jobs, and they worry about how they can provide for their families as food prices spiral.

Barnabas provided warm meals and parcels of food and hygiene items for 200 Christian families most in need. Our church partners, who prayed with believers as they distributed the aid, said families were “encouraged and strengthened” to receive practical and spiritual support.



One of our church partners delivers food aid and prays with an elderly Christian couple

Project reference: 00-1032
(Middle East Fund)

\$13,166



Food aid for Christian victims of military attacks in Myanmar

“I am overwhelmed with joy for this gift,” said an elderly Christian woman in Myanmar. “Our pains are healed by these items from Barnabas.” The woman was among 350 families of believers in need given Barnabas-funded rice, chickpeas and cooking oil.

The families were forced to flee their homes after the military burned down four villages in a Christian-majority region. Many are now living in a forest in makeshift wood or bamboo shacks they built themselves. Others are living with relatives or friends, or sheltering in church buildings.



An elderly believer thanks Barnabas for providing food to meet the needs of 350 families

*Project reference: 75-763
(Myanmar – Aid for Persecuted Christians Fund)*

\$3016



Aid sent swiftly to believers as typhoon batters SE Asia

“It’s so heartbreaking to see this,” said our project partner in South-East Asia as he described the devastation caused by Typhoon Yagi to rural Christian communities in northern Vietnam and Laos in September.

Hundreds of marginalised and impoverished believers have lost their rice crops that were almost ready for harvest as well as their homes and possessions. Barnabas acted swiftly to provide emergency aid including two tonnes of rice, and funding for tools and machinery to clear mud slides and debris.



Christians struggle to clear the wreckage left by Typhoon Yagi

*Project reference: 00-634
(Disaster Relief Fund)*

Opportunity

Africa *Transforming lives of impoverished believers*

New farming initiatives increase food security in western Uganda

Barnabas Aid is working with church leaders in western Uganda to cut rising poverty and hunger among Christians by increasing crop yields and starting up small goat-rearing farms. This programme is just one part of our Opportunity Africa initiative designed to build long-term sustainability and food security for our brothers and sisters.

"This project will transform people's lives," said Bishop Nason Baluku as he surveyed the new plants standing tall in the parched Ugandan farmland.

"We strongly believe it is going to bring long-term food security to families who up to now have hardly managed to obtain even one full meal a day."

Barnabas Aid has funded the planting of 900 acres of cassava, the region's staple food crop. This is a new, faster growing, disease-resistant variety of cassava. The crops were planted in the South Rwenzori Diocese of Kasese district, western Uganda, in April 2024.

The initiative is a part of a ten-year vision of Bishop Nason and his team to build a sustainable future for our brothers and sisters in Kasese, which has suffered anti-Christian attacks from Islamists based in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This initiative also includes the creation of new goat-rearing enterprises. The aim is to help bring an end to rising poverty, hunger and malnutrition across the district.

Falling cassava yields increased hunger

The overwhelming majority of households in Kasese rely on growing the versatile root vegetable cassava to sustain themselves. Yet yields have plunged in recent years because of prolonged periods of drought, outdated farming practices, and crop disease.

As a result, the price of the cassava vegetable, cassava flour and sombe (a sauce made from pounded cassava leaves) upon which so many families depend for their daily meals has soared, leading to increasing levels of hunger and malnutrition. Many families have gone for days without food.

The new variety of cassava (called Coronus 1) is hardier and can be grown in challenging conditions.

Unlike the old cassava that took three years to mature, it is ready for harvest within eight months.



New variety given to almost 14,000 households

Barnabas funded the purchase of 5,400 sacks of stem cuttings of cassava that were distributed to 13,983 Christian households in ten of the diocese's 14 parishes, where the conditions were assessed as most suitable for cultivation.

Every recipient was given training in good farming practices, including land preparation, best planting methods as well as instruction on ways to avoid and control mosaic disease, which can wipe out cassava crops.



The Coronus 1 variety of cassava root is faster growing and provides better yields



Masika is amazed at the speed of growth of her Coronus 1 cassava plants

Pastor Alfred thanked Barnabas for supporting the project. “We expect to have cassava in plenty within the next year,” he said. “May God bless the hand that gives!”

 **Delight at results of first harvest**

At first, many households were sceptical about the new crop variety, but excitement grew as the cassava flourished.

Mother-of-two Masika praises God for her first harvest of Coronus 1 cassava.

“Imagine after only a few months I am already able to feed my family with sombe and cassava flour as well!” she declared.

Masika’s crop yields from the previous cassava variety had been falling year by year. With prices rising at the local market, she had struggled to provide even a meal a day for her family.

“Therefore, it is with much happiness in my heart that I thank the diocese and Barnabas Aid for relieving me of this famine situation,” she said.

As part of the Barnabas-funded initiative, all participants are requested to provide two other Christian households with cassava stem cuttings and pass on the farming training they received. This means that the project is more sustainable and will bless others beyond the original recipients.

Camsongory John and his wife Margaret say that their first planting has been so successful that they have enough to give stem cuttings to at least ten other families.

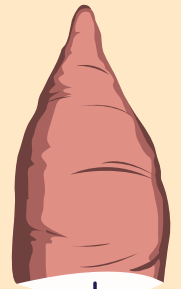
The couple and their children converted to Christianity from Islam two years ago, which led them to be rejected by their Muslim relatives and community.

They have experienced the pains of hunger in the past yet, thanks to the new cassava variety, they now have hope of food security – and have money from the sale of surplus produce to pay their children’s school fees.

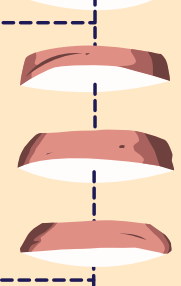
“I appreciate that the church and Barnabas assisted us,” said Camsongory. “We are very happy. Thank you very much.”

What is cassava?

Cassava is a root vegetable, and its roots look similar to sweet potatoes.

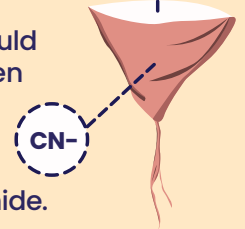


The cassava root is a good source of carbohydrates and key vitamins and minerals.



C D K

Cassava should never be eaten raw because it contains dangerous levels of cyanide.



In Uganda it is usually boiled or baked or made into flour. It can be fermented before serving.

Its leaves are high in protein and are used to make soup or the sauce sombe.



Cassava is versatile. Surplus can be sold on for the starch to be used in food processing.



The stems can be used as firewood and the skin can be used as animal feed or to make rope. Even the extracted cyanide



can be sold for use by the pharmaceutical industry.



“Soon every home will have cassava”

In another part of the diocese, the results of the first planting have reversed the decade-long mindset among Christians that cassava would not grow in the parish.

Local minister Pastor Ezra said cassava plantations now line the main road to the DRC. He is confident that the 56 acres currently under cultivation in his area will shortly expand to cover hundreds of acres more.

“Very soon every home will have cassava,” he said joyfully. “Very soon the community will start exporting more cassava flour than we import.”

He added, “I continue to give thanks to our partners for supporting the diocese in their programme of food security.”

Mother-of-four Angela praises God for her new-found food security. She and her children went to bed hungry many times as her cassava crops failed because of lack of rain.

Angela is grateful to have been among the recipients of the new cassava variety. “My life is going to change,” she told Barnabas, “because I will be getting food and money and I will always be happy because I don’t have to beg for anything anymore.

“I thank God so much and may He continue to bless Barnabas Aid to continue giving a hand to people like me.”



Angela and her children no longer go to bed hungry, thanks to the new cassava variety funded by Barnabas

Watch Angela’s story at barnabasaid.org/stories/angela



Goat farming helps lift Christians out of poverty

Barnabas is also helping to lift our Ugandan brothers and sisters out of poverty and hunger by giving them the gift of a goat.

We have provided female goats to 800 poor Christian households in Kasese district under the diocese initiative to set up goat farming ventures that will sustain families.

The goats reproduce quickly, breeding with males owned by others within the community. They give birth to two to three goats per pregnancy, and the young can be sold to give an income.

The goat’s milk can be used to feed the household or sold. Each animal’s manure can be used as a crop fertiliser or sold. They can also provide meat and skins.

Each recipient of a Barnabas goat was given training in how to look after the animal correctly. They were also encouraged to give a kid from their goat’s early litters to another Christian to establish more new ventures.

Lay reader Eryeza, 62, gives thanks to God that owning a goat will help to support him and his family into his retirement from active church service in two years’ time.

“God is a loving and faithful Father who remembers and cares for His people,” said Eryeza. “I thank the Lord for using Barnabas Aid through the diocese and for remembering my family.”



Eryeza’s Barnabas-funded goat is soon to deliver her first kids

Project reference: PR1700 (Opportunity Africa)

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.

Opportunity Africa consists of 12 strands:

- 1. Food: innovative, long-term approaches to feeding
- 2. Healthcare, medical needs and disabilities
- 3. Economic empowerment, including for groups and churches
- 4. Education: schools and vocational training
- 5. Energy
- 6. Digital connectivity
- 7. Water
- 8. Agriculture
- 9. Houses, churches, other community buildings
- 10. Christian refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons)
- 11. Bible training and spiritual development
- 12. Human capacity development

For more details see *Barnabas Aid* May/June 2024 pp.6-10 or visit barnabasaid.org/magazine/opportunity-africa

food.gives

Another year of feeding the hungry

Barnabas Aid's food.gives project has made tremendous progress in feeding our hungry brothers and sisters around the world throughout 2024.

This year we have shipped 148 tonnes of food, providing 5.2 million servings.

We could not have done this without the help of our amazing supporters. Every contribution, no matter how small, has had a massive impact, helping us to feed the hungry.

In Australia, despite rising food prices, food.gives has grown, with more than 50% more food.gives boxes received in 2024 than in 2023.

To accommodate this growth, we are opening a new warehouse in Newcastle, NSW (see "In Touch", p.19).

"We are thankful to God for what we have been able to achieve this year," said Ashley Saunders, Barnabas Aid Head of Operations in Australia.

"The increase in numbers of food boxes being received is very encouraging, and is helping us to feed more hungry Christian brothers and sisters," he continued.

"The reality of Christians suffering because of their faith is an unreported tragedy. I am so grateful

to our wonderful supporters, whose generosity is helping us to meet their physical needs."

food.gives in the UK has seen similar growth, with a new warehouse being opened in Northern Ireland.

Supporters in the US have funded six containers of food in 2024, each measuring 40ft. One of these containers, sent to Cuba, is being repurposed to house a church's printing press, so that more scripture and Christian literature can be printed for the believers in the area. Now, as well as food aid, Cuban Christians have increased access to God's Word.

Through food.gives, many hungry Christians around the world have been fed this year. This is all thanks to the generosity of our supporters.

In the words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Want to get involved?

It is only thanks to our generous supporters that we can continue feeding hungry Christians around the world. If you would like to join the food.gives family and make a difference by providing food for suffering believers, visit www.food.gives or scan the QR code



How has food.gives helped suffering Christians in 2024?

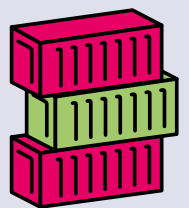
5.2 million servings have been provided



Food aid has been sent to hungry believers in five countries, in five different regions of the world.



148 tonnes of food have been shipped



Project reference: PR1555
(food.gives general)

(Figures correct as of September)

Vocational training brings hope to Christian communities in South-East Asia

South-East Asia is a region of poverty and hunger. An estimated three-quarters of people in this beautiful but disadvantaged part of the world are impoverished and short of food. Rural areas are the worst affected.

Christians are often among the least well-off in South-East Asian countries, and are a small, persecuted minority. But Barnabas Aid is bringing hope to the least among our brothers and sisters in Laos and Vietnam by funding vocational training and the setting up of small businesses. In this we are following the Biblical teaching, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD" (Proverbs 19:17).

Each venture has been crucial in transforming lives and prospects. Our brothers and sisters are helped to develop skills and start businesses that boost sustainability and opportunity for whole Christian communities.

Fish farming blossoms with improved stock

Barnabas partners have started two fish hatcheries that also serve as training centres for prospective fish farmers. This training has completely turned around the lives of Christian families.

Some rural Christians have fishponds that have fallen into disuse because of the poor quality of available fish hatchlings. The aim is to transform these fishponds into viable fish farms.

Our project partners were able to obtain very high-quality breeding stock that grow fast and are more resistant to disease. As a result, the number of fish has increased to around 2.4 million. Together we have helped more than 80 Christian families to make a living from fish farming in 2024.

From poison to productivity
Mushroom farming has been equally effective in sustaining believers, providing an income for 85 families.

This training opportunity developed after some of the most impoverished Christians lost family members who died after eating wild poisonous mushrooms. They had picked these mushrooms from the jungle when all other food was scarce.

Our partner responded by setting up a safe rural mushroom project. Christians are trained in starting small oyster mushroom farms.

Through the training and equipment that Barnabas has funded, families can grow up to 1-3 kg of mushrooms

per day, providing an income of around \$360-\$900 over a three-month period before new mushroom-growing bags are required.

Sewing project provides future for women and girls

Sixty-eight women are, at the time of writing, receiving training in sewing and weaving and being equipped with sewing machines. At centres each morning they take part in group devotions and, on weekday evenings, more in-depth Bible studies.

"The women's sewing project really helps reduce the risk of young Christian girls being sucked into a dark world of trafficking."

Our partner underlines how vital the acquisition of these skills is. "The women's sewing project really helps reduce the risk of young Christian girls being sucked into a dark world of trafficking."

A further 90 women are being trained in hair and beauty. These skills are in high demand as, even in the poorest villages, rural women are keen to receive hair and beauty treatments. Often payment is in kind, with



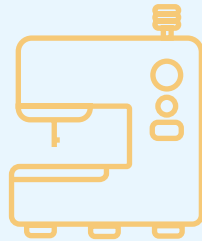
The motorbike mechanic trainee scheme, originally introduced for young Christian men, has now included several young women who drive motorbikes



Watch Dao's story at barnabasaid.org/stories/dao or scan the QR code



Sewing projects have expanded in response to requests from churches across the region



Mushroom-growing bags being packed at a training centre in South-East Asia



rice, vegetables, help with chores or other assistance with income.

Motorbike maintenance boosted by training facility

Instruction in motorbike mechanics has grown as young men – and, increasingly, women – are eager to develop these skills.

In most rural areas motorbikes are the only viable transport option. More than 160 young people have enrolled in 2024, and a dedicated training building is being constructed in one region to make the sessions more effective.

Each trainee is given a tool kit and taught by a trained mechanic how to change oil, the importance of chain tension and repairs, brake maintenance, gears, tyre repairs and other essentials. These skills are vital in enabling Christians to reach less accessible areas in various work-related tasks and thus strengthen the local economy.

“A blessing to our community”

These are just some of the skills being developed through our partners in South-East Asia. Christians are also gaining valuable training in pig farming, kitchen gardening, barber shop proficiency and essential computer skills. The income generation achieved by all these schemes has significant positive effects on Christian communities in South-East Asia.

It is now financially easier for many families and especially young people to continue living in their rural villages instead of being compelled to seek work in major cities or even abroad. This means that local churches are not weakened by members relocating for financial reasons.

“Pani” – a mushroom farmer – speaks for many. “God has provided a way for us to be a blessing to our community,” he says. “We hope to be an even bigger blessing in the future.”

The way of the righteous



Living by God's Law in a world of wickedness:

The first of our new series looking at the book of Psalms

We live in a world obsessed with material success, superficial networking and becoming associated with the people who are most admired by general society.

It can be tempting to be drawn into the glamour of modern society, and to rub shoulders with those who are deemed popular, cool or influential – but this is not how God has told us to live.

Psalm 1 reminds us of the merits of being obedient to God and assists us in navigating a world that disobeys Him.

Following the right path

The psalm begins by proclaiming that the righteous follower of God is blessed. The original Hebrew word used here is *esher*, meaning “happiness/blessedness”. The type of blessedness this psalm refers to is not a physical bestowal of fortune, or the acquisition of God's favour. Instead, describing a

person as “blessed” using the Hebrew *esher* refers to an externally recognisable feeling of joy and contentment that radiates from them when that favour has already been bestowed. (Think how we can often tell by observing someone whether they have a deep inner joy; we can recognise this as them having a good relationship with the Lord, and understanding this encourages respect for them.)

The follower of God in this psalm is blessed in this way because they keep away from the wicked and are always thinking on the Law of God.

As Christians, we must be careful of the company we keep. As the psalmist writes, it is not enough to refrain from wicked deeds yourself; you must also stay away from those who are wicked. “Walking in step” with them, “standing in the way they take” or “sitting in their company” will be a hindrance to meditating

on God's law and developing into a fruitful follower of God.

Following the way of this world – its values, its preferences, its priorities – can be tempting. Yet this leads believers to fall in step with the intentions and actions of those who have no concern for God, forgetting that they are walking a path that leads away from the Lord and spiritual fulfilment.

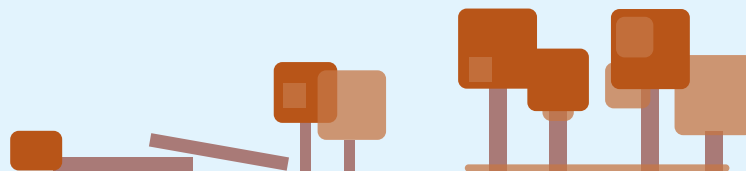
We must not become distracted by the temptations of temporary thrills and materialism; instead, we should concentrate on increasing in righteousness and Christ-likeness, and let our joy stem from the spiritual growth that comes with following the Law of God.

Arboreal metaphor

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers. (v.3)

Verse 3 uses arboreal metaphor (that is, tree-based description) to describe the life of the righteous follower of God.

The psalmist is here following the pattern throughout the Bible of using trees as meeting places between God and humanity. Some examples of this include the trees in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), God's appearance to Abraham at the Oak of Moreh (Genesis 12:6-7), and the



angels coming to Abraham at the great trees of Mamre (Genesis 18), as well as God speaking to Moses through the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-5).

Not all Biblical uses of trees as meeting places between God and humanity are physical: sometimes, the “meeting” is a spiritual one, with the tree acting as conduit between the nature of humanity and that of God. Examples of this include the description of Wisdom as a “tree of life” in Proverbs 3:18, Christ dying on a tree (1 Peter 2:24, ESV) to cleanse us of our sins, and the tree of life in Revelation 22:1-2, through which God’s people are healed.

Recognising the use of trees in the Bible as a means of connecting with God, we can better understand what is meant by the psalmist here. It is not just some flowery metaphor meant to show that we become strong and fruitful by doing as God asks of us. It is also indicative that continuously delighting in and meditating upon God’s Law will enable us to form that spiritual connection with God that we so crave.

Our union with God is based on the finished work of Christ. Yet by living according to God’s Law, we can become more like Christ, and as such can experience a deeper and closer communion with God – and this closeness will lead to a life that is spiritually prosperous.

Psalms 1’s arboreal description of the righteous follower of God is almost directly parallel to Jeremiah 17:8, where the person who trusts in the Lord is described as follows:

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

In both of these passages, it is explained through the metaphor of a tree how trusting in God will impact a believer’s life. If we stay close to God’s Word, the water of life (John 4:14), that is the Holy Spirit, will give us spiritual nourishment and help us grow strong. Abiding by God’s commandments will mean that whatever we do will be fruitful: everything will turn out in a way that is beneficial to us. As long as we follow the Lord, we will not go through

periods of spiritual emptiness: the “leaf” of our soul “does not wither”.

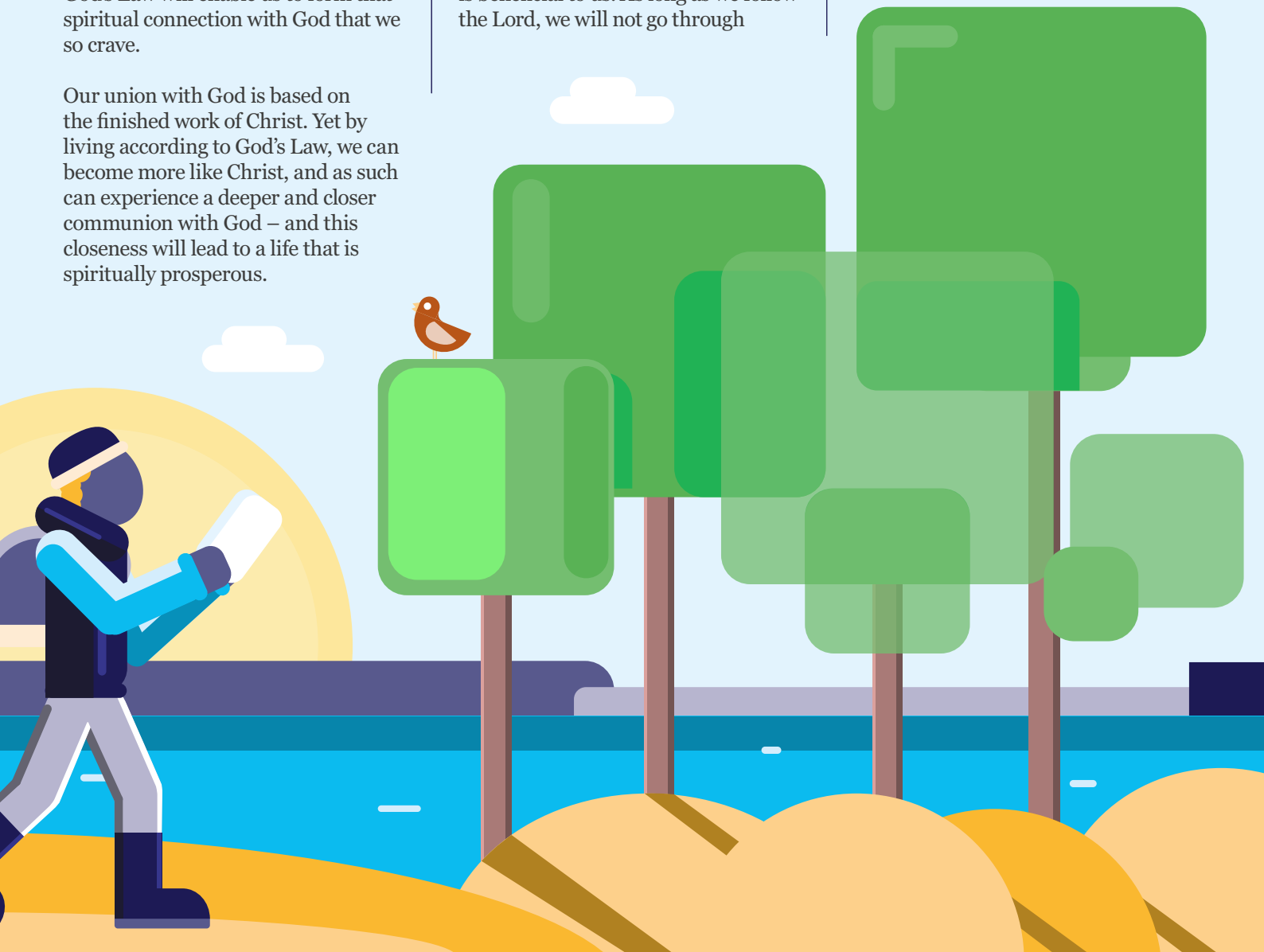
Wickedness and emptiness

Now contrast this with the description of the wicked person:

They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. (vv.4-5)

Think of all the connotations of chaff: emptiness, lifelessness, weakness, dryness. There is nothing in it, no purpose for it. It does not contain, create nor sustain life. It is of such little substance that it is blown away by the wind.

As we read the two options presented in the psalm, it seems clear which is preferable. But we must remember that it is not always easy to choose



the right path, even when it should be obvious: in this fallen world, the vanity and lack of principles displayed by the wicked seem to be rewarded, and trying to live morally and abide by God's Law often leads to you being ridiculed, disliked, and maybe falling behind in material success.

In such a world, even if you remain strong in your principles yourself, it is very tempting to want to be associated with those who are perceived as "successful" (even if their actions are clearly against God's Law) so that your life will be made easier. However, material success is fleeting, and very often vacuous: it does not provide the fulfilment one thinks it will.

The true happiness that comes with human flourishing is only possible by staying on God's path and following His Law. Remember the words of the psalmist: a life without God and His Law is like chaff – empty, lifeless and weak. If you act wickedly you will not get the happiness you crave, neither will you stand under God's judgement.

Righteousness vs wickedness

*For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction. (v.6)*

Therefore, be careful: keep in mind the Law of God as it is written in the Bible and try to live by it. If you do, you will live a blessed life of increasing righteousness and communion with God. He will watch over you, ensuring that all things turn out beneficially for you (Romans 8:28).

Be careful of the company you keep and be wary of those who seem to live successful lives but whose success is only superficial. Their inner circle may seem tempting, but is spiritually empty, and will not lead to happiness. They will, ultimately, be the cause of their own destruction.

By contrast, we may be satisfied in knowing that, by God's grace, we have chosen the better path. Let your fruitfulness speak for you and be a witness to those who don't yet know the Lord who watches over His people.



A time of joy marred by sorrow

This woman suffered bullet wounds in the Christmas Eve 2023 massacre, during which a number of her family were killed

This has indeed been a very gory Christmas for us,” said Caleb Mutfwang, the governor of Nigeria’s Plateau State. “We have had to celebrate with a heavy heart.”

Governor Mutfwang was speaking after a series of Islamist attacks on Christian communities that began on 23 December 2023 and ended on the morning of Christmas Day.

More than 600 were slaughtered in the relentless onslaught – many of them women, children and the disabled who were the least able to flee fires set by their attackers.



Nanchin and two of her daughters recover in hospital from machete wounds inflicted on Christmas Eve 2023 by militants who attacked their village. Her third daughter, not pictured, was even more seriously injured. Nanchin’s husband narrowly survived unhurt but the family lost everything they owned

Another 30,000 people were displaced from their homes. Eight church buildings and around 1,500 houses were burnt down.

Christmas is of course a time when many celebrate the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we should not forget that our persecuted brothers and sisters have often experienced “a very gory Christmas”.

An opportunity to attack

Many extremists see Christmas as a prime opportunity to attack. Christians gather together in large numbers for church services and other celebrations, inadvertently making themselves a target for terrorist attacks and other violence.

Additionally, some extremists will see Christmas as the ideal time to strike a blow for their own religions and ideologies.

“We couldn’t say ‘Merry Christmas’ anymore”...

On Christmas Eve 2020, in Borno State, Nigeria, at least 24 were killed in an attack by terrorists from Islamic State West Africa Province. The Islamists described the killings as a “Christmas present”.

At Christmas 2021, the Buddhist-nationalist Myanmar military shot at least 35 people in Christian-majority Kayah State. The bodies were then burned. “We all had tears in our eyes,” said a local church leader. “We couldn’t say ‘Merry Christmas’ anymore. Christmas was very dark

for us ... The presence of the burned bodies was there around us.”

That same year seven people were killed in a suicide bombing at a Christmas celebration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A year earlier two pastors were shot dead after a Christmas Day service by Islamists in the Central African Republic.



Peace one day

When the angels came to declare the news of our Saviour’s

birth to the shepherds on the Bethlehem hillside, they said that He had come to bring “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14).

This promise has not yet been realised. Until the day of the Lord’s return persecution will continue (Matthew 24:9-14). Our brothers and sisters will continue to be killed (Revelation 6:9-11). But we can still pray for the Lord’s protection over His people. While many have been martyred, many have also been delivered from harm.

We must also pray that the faith of persecuted Christians will be preserved until the end (Matthew 24:13) – until the day that all believers share in the victory that belongs to the risen, glorified Saviour, who was once a baby laid in a manger.

New version of stringent religion law proposed

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan's National Security Committee (NSC) and State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) officials have prepared a new version of a restrictive Religion Law to submit to the Kyrgyz parliament.

An earlier bill drawn up in October 2023 was rejected by parliament in June 2024.

Amongst proposed changes, the amended version not only requires all religious communities to apply for state registration (as is currently required) but also demands re-registration every five years.

Under the new law religious communities would have to provide evidence of at least 200 adult founder members living in a single district. National organisations would have to be represented with at least 2,000 adult citizen founders from communities with at least 300 adult citizens in each of the country's nine regions.

The draft law insists on SCRA permission before an individual can conduct "preaching activity" and bans religious education (whether of children or adults) without SCRA authorisation.

One Christian leader commented, "I am afraid that if these changes are adopted, and if the authorities continue their past strategies, many churches will be closed down."

Christians charged with "blasphemy" in two separate Punjab cases

PAKISTAN

In separate cases in Punjab province, two pairs of Pakistani Christian siblings have been charged with "blasphemy" for desecration of the Quran.

Sonia and Saima, sisters from Toba Tek Singh District, were charged on 7 August after a complaint by local Muslim man Mohammad Haider.

Haider claimed to have seen pages of the Quran in a bag of rubbish that Sonia threw out. He and two other men went to her house the next day to investigate. The men alleged that Saima, who also lives there, made some inappropriate comments that led Haider to report both sisters to the police for "blasphemy".

Sonia and Saima were arrested and charged under section 295-B of the Pakistan Penal Code for "wilful defilement, damage or desecration of the Quran". This section of the law requires a life sentence for those found guilty.



Naveed Walter, president of Human Rights Focus Pakistan

Naveed Walter, president of Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP), commented, "Christians don't feel safe and secure in their own country just because they are a minority. Being a minority should not deprive anyone of their rights."

Also in Punjab, twin brothers, both Christians, were arrested and charged with "blasphemy" in Kasur District on 27 August.

The 18-year-old brothers Kalu (also known as Yeshua) and Tabish, from the village of Kale Wala, are accused of desecrating the Quran at an annual festival the previous evening.

As part of the festival, the crowd threw torn pieces of paper into the air. It is alleged that the papers thrown by Kalu and Tabish contained verses from the Quran. A local Muslim farmer filed a complaint to police, claiming that several villagers witnessed the twins' actions, collected the scattered pieces, and discovered the verses.

The incident report was also registered under Section 295-B of the Pakistan Penal Code.

Sources close to the family affirm that Kalu and Tabish are illiterate, and did not know that the paper they tore and threw was anything other than wastepaper.

The arrest of the two brothers caused local Christians to fear for their safety. Several Christian families reportedly fled their homes, fearing violence from Islamist extremists.

Islamist militants kill 26 Christian men in church

BURKINA FASO

Islamist militants have killed 26 Christian men in an armed attack on a church in Banwa province, western Burkina Faso, near the border with Mali.

The attack took place during a morning service in the small village of Kounla on Sunday 25 August. On entering the church the militants ordered the women and children to

leave. They detained 26 men before killing each one.

The Islamists belonged to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a West African terror group affiliated to Al Qaeda.

The attackers set fire to houses and stole livestock before leaving the village. The survivors took refuge in the nearby town of Sanaba.

Islamists (including JNIM and Islamic State Sahel Province) have been waging a nine-year campaign of violence in Burkina Faso, including targeting Christians and churches. An attack on a church in Oudalan province in February 2024 left 15 worshippers dead.

Jihadists now control more than 40% of the nation's territory.

More than 90 killed in Islamist attacks

D. R. CONGO

More than 90 people were killed in Islamist attacks in July and August across three provinces in Christian-majority north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Attacks by Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP, also known as Allied Democratic Forces) in the province of North Kivu left at least 84 dead.

Thirty-five people were killed in a series of armed assaults on villages in Mamove district on 23 July. At least 20 were found beheaded immediately following the attacks. The other 15 bodies were discovered two days later. ISCAP had already killed at least 37 people in an attack in the same district on 17 July. An unknown number of residents were feared abducted.

Local civic leader Kinosh Katuho reported that the authorities had failed to respond after he had alerted them to the presence of militants in the area.

On 10 August at least 12 more people were killed in a fresh attack in North Kivu.

The neighbouring province of Ituri has also come under attack. An ISCAP announcement, published on 15 August, boasted that the group had “captured 5 infidel Christians ... and slaughtered them, praise be to God”.

In Tshopo province ISCAP fighters killed two Christian villagers along with three soldiers on 10 August. The fighters then burned down more than 50 houses. This was the first known ISCAP attack in Tshopo.

Pastor shot dead by masked gunmen; Imprisoned Christians released

LAOS

A pastor in northern Laos was shot dead at his home on 23 July, reports a Barnabas Aid contact.

Two masked gunmen shot Pastor Thongkham Philavanh seven times.

The pastor is survived by his wife Sengdala, as well as a son and daughter. Barnabas Aid partners assisted the family with funding for essential costs following the shooting.

The motive for the shooting, although unconfirmed, is widely acknowledged as a response to Pastor Thongkham's faith in Christ. The pastor was chairman of the regional branch of Lao Evangelical Churches.

Meanwhile, six Christians in Khammouane Province, central Laos, were released after a month's imprisonment.

The six believers – Pastor Mum and five other church members – were arrested on 22 June (see “In Brief”, *Barnabas Aid* September/October 2024) at a prayer meeting outside Tahae village and held until 25 July.

“The authorities have warned them,” reported a Barnabas contact, “and said to do only low-key Christian ministry or they will have problems again.”

There has been an active Christian community of up to 20 people in Tahae village for several years.

While in prison Pastor Mum was held separately from the other Christians, and had his hands and feet chained.

A “Law on the Evangelical Church”, in force since December 2019, gives Christians in Laos the right to conduct services, preach throughout Laos and maintain contacts with believers in other countries, but this law is not well enforced in rural areas.



Pastor Thongkham and his wife Sengdala

Convert held on charge of “Christianity”

IRAN

A Christian convert from Islam was arrested and held in a detention centre run by Iran's Ministry of Intelligence in early September on charges of “Christianity” and “illegal Christian activities”.

Mojdeh Falahi, 36, whose two older sisters were arrested in 2019 for their Christian activities, was arrested on 9 September at the prosecutor's office in the southern city of Shiraz.



Mojdeh Falahi [Image credit: Article 18]

Mojdeh, a hairdresser, had gone to the prosecutor's office to provide a Christian friend with essential documents required for his release following his own arrest the previous day.

In the week following Mojdeh's arrest, her family repeatedly visited the prosecutor's office and requested to see her, but as of the time of writing they had been refused permission.

Mojdeh's sisters, Maryam and Marjan, were among a group of eight Christian converts arrested in Bushehr, 200 miles west of Shiraz, in July 2019. Both sisters received heavy fines for their Christian activities in 2020.

Maryam, a nurse, was banned for life from working for any national institution, including the hospital where she had worked for 20 years.

In a separate court case in 2020, a judge ruled that Maryam and her husband, Sam Khosravi, could no longer maintain custody of their adopted daughter, Lydia, because they were Christians and Lydia, of unknown parentage, was considered a Muslim.

Unlike the historic Armenian- and Assyrian-speaking Christian communities of Iran, Farsi-speaking Christians such as Mojdeh and her family are converts from Islam – that is, apostates – and therefore punishable according to Islamic law for practising the Christian faith.

You can give the gift of hope this Christmas



Barnabas Gifts 2024

It may have become a cliché, but it remains true – the giving of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinful humanity is the greatest gift that was ever given.

We know that nothing we give in response could ever compare to this.

So it's striking that the Apostle Paul does liken the generous gifts of the Philippian believers to Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself. "They are a fragrant offering," he says, "an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18).

Our annual *Barnabas Gifts* catalogue is your opportunity to give a gift to suffering and persecuted Christians.

For the first time we have enclosed *Barnabas Gifts* along with this

magazine. In the catalogue you will find many ways that you, your small group or your church can give a gift to Christians facing persecution, discrimination and poverty because of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each page of the booklet focuses on a particular area of need and suggests individual gifts. These could make a thoughtful alternative birthday or Christmas gift. We can also supply an attractive "Thank You" card to send to the person on whose behalf you have made the donation.

You can make a lasting, transformational difference to the lives of Christian brothers and sisters who are standing firm in their faith in the midst of trial. Your giving will also be "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice" that is pleasing to the Lord.



In Touch

Remember Opportunity Africa on Giving Tuesday

After the consumerism of #BlackFriday, #GivingTuesday on 3 December is a great way of giving back to Christians less fortunate than ourselves.

Barnabas Aid is encouraging supporters to send a special Giving Tuesday gift for Opportunity Africa, our new initiative designed to help and empower suffering and persecuted Christians in 36 countries across sub-Saharan Africa.

You can read in this edition of *Barnabas Aid* how Opportunity Africa is already making a difference to the lives of hungry and impoverished Christians in Uganda (see pp. 6-9) through the provision of a new, faster growing variety of the region's staple crop cassava, and the gift of hundreds of goats.

In Nigeria we are helping Christians to become more resilient and self-sufficient by providing vocational training, as well as medical equipment and medical training for volunteers to enable them to respond to emergencies. We are also purchasing pigs for farmers, sewing machines and corn-grinding machines to help people earn an income.

Please give a gift to our African church family on Giving Tuesday via our website barnabasaid.org/donate, by post (address on inside front cover) or by phone 1300 365 799 quoting the project reference PR1700. Thank you.



Sacks full of Barnabas-funded stem cuttings of a new variety of cassava are delivered to a Christian community in Uganda

New food.gives warehouse to open in Newcastle

We praise God for the growth of food.gives in Australia. By His grace and the generosity of our supporters, donations of filled food boxes rose by more than 50% in 2024, compared with the previous year.

To accommodate the growth of the programme we are winding down operations at our warehouse in Bendigo, Victoria, and moving to a shared facility in Newcastle, New South Wales.

The new warehouse, which was opened in October, is larger, and is more central to the majority of food.gives supporters, with better proximity to Sydney and Brisbane.

Thanks to the generosity of a Christian businessman, it will also cost less to operate.

We thank all the volunteers who have given their time at the Bendigo warehouse to sort, pack and label food.gives boxes ready for distribution to Christians in need around the world.

If anyone would like to volunteer at our new Newcastle facility, please email our office at australia@barnabasaid.org or call 1300 365 799.

Love-ly to see you all in Sydney

Barnabas Aid was privileged to co-sponsor the OneLove Conference in Sydney, a day of praise and growth attended by around 1,500 women in August.

Members of our team (pictured below) were delighted to be able to share details about the work of Barnabas with fellow Christians and highlight our new project, Opportunity Africa, which empowers African Christian communities with sustainability-focused aid and support.



Bless our suffering Church family with a Christmas offering

Soon we will be joining Christians all over the world to celebrate the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This year so many of our already marginalised brothers and sisters have endured additional hardship because of violence, conflict, drought and floods.

Could your church or group take up a special Christmas offering to make a difference to the lives of our suffering Church family who need our help?



Get involved with SCAAW 27 Oct to 3 Nov

Please remember our persecuted brothers and sisters during Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) from Sunday 27 October to Sunday 3 November.

Barnabas has a range of inspirational material for you, your prayer group and your church to enable you to get involved in SCAAW through prayer and practical action.

These resources are available free of charge to download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or they can be ordered from your local Barnabas office (details on inside front cover).



Stay connected to the
global Church



If you're holding a Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week event, let us know on social media **#SCAAW**

Find Barnabas Aid on:



Instagram

[instagram.com/barnabasaidofficial](https://www.instagram.com/barnabasaidofficial)



YouTube

[youtube.com/barnabasaid](https://www.youtube.com/barnabasaid)



X

[x.com/barnabasaid](https://www.x.com/barnabasaid)



Facebook

[facebook.com/barnabasaidofficial](https://www.facebook.com/barnabasaidofficial)