

**ACTS Series**  
**Part 10**  
**“Seeing Beyond the Surface”**  
**Pastor Brett McBride**  
**April 2, 2017**

Well Good Morning, Church! I so look forward to Easter. Just, there is something about baptisms and hearing people’s story about how they have encountered Jesus. It’s what it is all about, and I look forward to how God is going to minister to people, visitors on that day, through their testimonies.

If you have a Bible open to Acts Chapter 11, we re-engaged our journey through Acts at the beginning of March. Dave kicked us off looking back into the book of Acts, and for the last number of weeks we have been studying how God is multiplying the church throughout Judea and Samaria and now, as we look at Acts Chapter 11, into the city of Antioch and beyond.

And last week-end Sandra Ryan was scheduled to speak – I know it was probably a surprise when you arrived and I was standing on stage. It was because I was supposed to be in Lebanon and pretty jet lagged getting back. But we had discussed that, because I wasn’t able to go to Lebanon, because of a DVT (also known as a blood clot in my leg), that I would not be able to travel.

And just to let you know and give you an update, I thank you for your prayers. My leg has completely gone back to normal. The swelling is gone. I appreciate you praying for that. I still remain on blood thinners for a number of months. They want to be careful.

But I met with the specialist; he has cleared me to run again, so I have been running this week. It is so nice to run in 14 degree weather and sunny days like today. Thank goodness winter is on its way out.

Acts Chapter 1:8, Jesus, post-resurrection, meets with His disciples, gives them the Great Commission, but also gives them this instruction. And it is a lens through which we look at the whole book of Acts.

Acts 1:8:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

And what Jesus is saying is the Gospel is the mission of the church. “You will be My witnesses in your city, in your region and to the ends of the earth.”

So the Gospel is the central thing that the church is built upon - Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross, His death, burial and resurrection, and this new covenant relationship that we are invited into.

And as you look at the first seven chapters of the book of Acts you see the apostles being used by God after the Day of Pentecost to fill Jerusalem, fill their city, with this teaching.

And then in Acts Chapter 7 we have been looking at how a great persecution breaks out against the church. And what is designed to stop the spread of the church in fact propagates the spread of the church into the region of Judea and Samaria, and how Philip was used by God to bring the Gospel to a city in Samaria, to an Ethiopian who was on a journey back to Ethiopia, and how God advances His gospel spread through His body that has been scattered because of this persecution.

Last week we looked at Saul, who was a terrorist to the early church; God looks at him and raises him up, transforms him into the instrument through which many Gentiles will hear His message.

So God is on the move. The Spirit is at work, both in our city, our region and to the ends of the earth, is the instruction that He gives to His disciples.

And we pick up the story of this scattered, persecuted body of Christians. In Acts Chapter 11:19 we read this:

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.

“Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

“The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

“News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

“When he arrived and saw what the grace of God has done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

“He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

I want to focus on two things in our time together this morning, and that is the expansion of the Gospel and the encouragement of Barnabas.

Antioch is a city in northern Syria. It is the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It has a population about half a million people strong.

Now for an ancient city with no modern plumbing or electricity, that's a massive city. And it was world-renowned. It was a cultural epicenter. People from all nations lived within Antioch. And it was the seat of administration by which the Roman Empire exercised their control over Syria and the regions to the east.

Now I am going to sound like a broken record when I say this, but as we study the book of Acts and we look at this Gospel spreading from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria and now up into Syria, we see that what was designed to destroy the church actually forced it being spread throughout.

And when you look at Antioch and all the practices that existed within the city of Antioch, the major urban center it was, the cultural influences that existed within that city; as you study that, you realize that it is almost exactly the same as Toronto - a center from which all nations live, an influential force for culture.

And oftentimes I run into well-intentioned believers who see the cultural landscape in Toronto and see some of the pluralism that exists within our society, see some of the immorality that exists within our city, and it leads them to a place of fear.

There is actually a distancing away from the urban center because of a perceived infection that exists within it and it might contaminate me or my family. And there is a retreating away we have from some dark places in our city.

And as I study the Gospel being spread to a city like Antioch, friends can I suggest this: that what existed in New Testament Roman Empire, the culture that pervaded the New Testament and the practices of Roman rule and the temple practices that existed, the pluralism that existed; if God was able to preserve His people in the midst of the Antioch's of the world, He can preserve us today.

We do not need to be afraid of living in the Antioch's of our society. We do not need to retreat from these spaces.

These believers, scattered because of persecution, look at an Antioch and follow Jesus into the dark place and start to share His Gospel and it brings about transformation.

We are a sent body into these regions, not to avoid them.

And as you behold Jesus, as you have your eyes fixed on Him, He will lead you to these places, not away from them.

The other thing I notice in these chapters in Acts is a progression in who God uses to spread and grow His church.

When you study Acts Chapter 1 through 7, Jerusalem is filled with the teaching of Jesus, and it's through the apostles. Oftentimes it is Peter that is presented as sharing the Gospel.

In Acts Chapter 8, we see Philip, a second generation table waiter; someone who the apostles had laid hands on and prayed for, Philip is in fact the person who takes the Gospel to a city in Samaria. And he was a table waiter.

Later in the book of Acts he is referred to as Philip the Evangelist. But he doesn't realize that he has the gift of evangelism till he follows Jesus and steps into that city in Samaria.

And by the time we get to this passage, we are told that into this city God sends just some guys. A couple people; we don't even know their name.

God moved powerfully through the apostles in Jerusalem. He moves powerfully through a second generation, Philip in the city of Samaria. God raises up a terrorist to be His instrument through which the Gentiles will be reached.

But it is just some guys – we don't even have their name – that are sent into Antioch, start to preach across cultural boundaries, and the Lord's hand is with them and many are added to the number.

If there is a theme that emerges in the first number of chapters in the book of Acts it is this: God will use anyone who is willing to testify.

And the spread and growth of His church isn't simply through the apostles or designated leaders; it is through anyone who will avail himself or herself, to Jesus to be used by them to share the message of who He is.

And these gentlemen from Cyprus and Cyrene step into Antioch and start to share the Gospel. And we are told in Verse 21 that as they do this,

“The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

There is a key principle for us to be reminded of in that verse: the Lord's hand was with them.

When Jesus appears to His disciples and gives them the Great Commission, He says,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now go and make disciples, baptizing them, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you to the very end of the age.”

When we follow Jesus into the Antioch's, we do not go alone. When we step into the difficult circumstances or the dark situations within our city, within our households, whatever we are facing, we do not go alone. He is with us in the midst of it.

He is the One, in fact, who builds His church. We get to join Him in His work. We don't do it for Him; we do it with Him.

And so we join Jesus in proclaiming His Gospel, advancing it in our city, our nation, our world.

Oswald was an amplified voice from God to remind the church – he said this statement years ago: *“The supreme task of the church is the evangelization of the world.”*

And may I humbly suggest that Charles Price over the last number of years was an amplified voice from God to remind us that when we step out and do this missionary work, that we don't do this *for* Christ; we do it *with* Him. We join Him in what He is already doing.

And as we look at Acts Chapter 11 and we see these people simply following Christ into Antioch, lo, He is with them, His hand is with them.

And as they share about Jesus, He starts to add to Himself those who are being saved. So it is out of our union with Christ that we are led into the Antioch's of the world.

And as we study through the book of Acts, because Luke continues to draw our attention to it, I will continue to draw our attention to it; it is blatantly evident throughout the book of Acts that the Gospel's frontiers are expanding and that city-reaching was a key to impacting a whole region.

That is a repeated theme throughout the book of Acts.

And globally, if you look at all our mission partners that we work with, they would agree that we advance Gospel frontiers by establishing Gospel hubs in cities and urban areas, and from those hubs we press into more rural and remote areas.

But the city is strategic to reaching a whole region.

And so as our founder made this statement that that supreme task of the church is the evangelization of the world, and if you are new to Peoples Church you will hear us refer to what God is doing all over the world all the time, because God gave us a global vision.

We believe that the world is our neighborhood and that we have been uniquely called and raised up to be an amplified voice to what God is doing globally. We are a global community and we serve the world. So with this global vision we see the whole world as our neighborhood.

But as I have been poring over some of the statements that Oswald made over the years (the founder of the Peoples Church), he also made another statement that caught my attention.

And he says this: *“The light that shines the furthest shines the brightest at home.”*

And when I look at Acts Chapter 1:8, it is core to the DNA of the Peoples Church. “You will be My witnesses. The Gospel is what it's all about. And you will do this within your city. You

will do it regionally. And I have given you a global vision.” To the ends of the earth is what we are called to be as a church, to be engaged in God’s global mission.

But as I sat with that quote, “*The light that shines the furthest shines the brightest at home,*” with that in our DNA, we are forced to prayerfully ask the question, as we engage in a global vision, how bright is the light shining in our home front?

When Oswald made these statements 60 years ago, Canada was perceived as a Christian nation. When he made these statements, church attendance across Toronto was much higher. It was perceived that virtually everybody in Canada was a Christian. Therefore there was no need for Gospel witness within home, but there was desperate need when you looked out over the nations of the world.

When he made these statements the GTA had a population of just over one million people.

But 60 years later there are now over five million people in the GTA. And as we oftentimes survey the church and its impact and ability to reach out for those who aren’t attending church, as denominations are dwindling, churches throughout the city are shutting their doors, yes there are some remarkable emerging churches growing, yes there are some energetic, beautiful examples of the Gospel penetrating in this society, but I dare say that there is need in our own city, amen?

As Canada has opened its borders and Toronto is filled with the nations, it is listed as a gateway city, that if you reach Toronto with the Gospel, you are in fact reaching almost every country on our planet.

And we are seeing a recent phenomenon in global missions – people who have immigrated to Canada for a better life, who have come to Toronto, maybe with a different worship system in place, a different worship of a different god, experienced and encountered the Gospel of Jesus Christ, met Jesus Himself, were saved and transformed.

And what we are seeing now is oftentimes are called back to the country that they left, so that they might share the Gospel amongst their peers in the nation that they left in search of a better life.

So there is a rebound effect in global missions right now where Jesus is raising up missionaries from a country in Toronto and sending them back.

And U.S. denominations, Australian denominations are sending church planters into our city to establish churches because it is a gateway city.

And so as much as we have this global vision and want to be involved in what God is doing all over the world that we advance Gospel frontiers, we also need to be mindful of our own city and our own region.

And it is something for us to prayerfully consider in the days, months and years ahead without neglecting our founding call to advance the Gospel globally, but to realize that the world has come to Toronto as well, and that the light that shines the furthest also needs to shine the brightest in our own city.

We need to have an Acts 1:8 vision for the Gospel, that we advance it in our city, in our region and globally.

So as the Gospel impacts Antioch and spreads both geographically and now culturally because it is spreading amongst the Greeks, those who didn't have a Jewish background, it marks the expansion of the early church's vision for global evangelism.

When Jesus met with the apostles in Acts 1:8 and said to the ends of the earth, there is a progression in their understanding as to who the Gospel is for.

As Jesus is giving them that mandate, they might be thinking that the Gospel is really for God-fearing Jews.

But as they start to see this Gospel touch lives, even amongst those who might be worshipping idols or foreign gods or Greek gods or whatever the case may be, as the apostles see this growing phenomenon, that this message is for everyone, their vision of the work that is to be accomplished starts to expand beyond even Antioch.

And it wasn't that the evangelization of the Jews was to stop, but that the evangelization of the Gentiles was to begin.

And the commission given by Jesus in Acts Chapter 1:8 starts to become much larger for them. Now as this church starts to emerge in Antioch, and as the Gospel starts to bear fruit amongst these Greeks, news of this reaches the ears of the church at Jerusalem and they send Barnabas to Antioch.

And I just want to take a moment to look at the ministry of Barnabas because it highlights the importance of discipleship and follow-up work once someone has given their life to Jesus.

Barnabas was a part of the Jerusalem church. They actually changed his name to Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement" and it gives you an indication of the kind of character and person that he was. He was obviously an encourager and lifted others up who were around him.

We also know from earlier portions of Acts that he was generous with his resources. He would sell parts of his property and give to anyone who was in need. So Barnabas, the encourager, was sent to the Antioch church to, we are told in Verse 23,

“When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

So Barnabas is sent into this situation and his first order of business is to see the evidence of God's grace. See, when the Gospel enters into someone's life, when someone enters into a relationship with Jesus and makes Him Lord and Savior, there should be evidence of a changed life. There should be something different about them.

For a number of years I worked with a ministry called Urban Promise, worked amongst difficult communities in Toronto – low income, subsidized housing - and I remember one young man in particular. At the crucial age of 12, 13, 14, growing up in a lone parent family, start to get wrapped up in street life. He started to hang out with the local gang on the block.

This was a number of years ago so it was when all the guys on the block were wearing the baggy clothing – do you remember that? Things have gotten much tighter since.

But he would rock his pants down low, walk with that sag that I can't – okay, maybe I got it – I can't really do it. It's like...yeah; it just doesn't work, does it?

And he was craving attention, started to hang around with the guys on the block, started to get into drinking, smoking weed, started to do some petty crimes, stealing cars, things like that.

And I remember we would share the Gospel, we would share the message of Jesus; we would hang out with him. For hours I would play ball with him. We would play video games; we would do whatever we needed to do just so that we could be a positive presence in his life and let him know that we were there for him despite whatever choices he was making.

And I remember the season where Jesus did a powerful work in his life. All of a sudden the one, who was listening and bumping hard core amp up, started to devour and have an appetite for God's Word. And the one who was stealing cars and getting wrapped up in criminal activity started to talk about the love of Christ.

There was evidence of God's grace at work in his life because the music he used to listen to, the hard core hip-hop and the gang banging music that he listened to; he started to listen to worship music, started listening to Hillsong, and there was evidence of God's grace at work in his life.

He started to listen to an artist known as Jason Upton. You guys don't know who Jason Upton is, do you? I think Kellen does, but he is a white guy that wears really tight clothes and plays the piano and sings with a really high voice.

And so when I saw this urban youth who was involved in hard core hip-hop; as he started to listen to Jason Upton, I said, "My goodness! Only Jesus could create that cross-cultural experience."

Listen; don't mistake what I am saying. I am not saying that hip-hop is bad – it is a beautiful art form. Yes!

And that same young man who was on one path, who Jesus transformed, is now planting a church in his community and is using hip-hop and that beautiful art form to engage all kinds of

young men in his neighborhood and redeem the art form from the gang expression and there's a new gang in town. And they have a different gang leader – His name is Jesus – and He is not about stealing, killing and destroying; He is about bringing life and redemption and love and freedom and liberty.

And so when Barnabas steps into the Antioch church, what he is looking for is evidence of God's grace, because there should be evidence of a change that takes place.

The second order of business for Barnabas as he steps into Antioch is, we are told in Verse 23 again, after he has seen the evidence of God's grace

“He was glad and he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

And so the second order of business for Barnabas is the work of encouraging, which in the Greek there is the word “parakaleo.” It actually means “exhorted.”

So the second order of business was to exhort the new believers, to encourage and assist new believers in remaining true to the Lord.

The work of evangelism and discipleship are not separate, but it often appears to me that we do a lot of work to bring someone into the family, to bring them to a point of decision to make Jesus as Lord, and the Lord is with us and He confirms it; but then when someone has given their life to the Lord after they have been baptized, do we put the same amount of work and effort into exhorting them and encouraging them to walk with the Lord?

Or do we automatically assume that now that they have the Holy Spirit, He will teach them to obey everything that Jesus commanded us?

No there is a work for us to do in discipling people and helping them understand. And remember, this was the first church that was non-Jewish in origin. It was Greek in their make-up, which brought all kinds of misconceptions as to who God was, how He was to be worshiped.

So Barnabas steps into this space and starts to teach and train and exhort them to walk with the Lord. And I believe a high level survey of John's Gospel helps us understand the important work that Barnabas is doing in the church at Antioch here.

John's Gospel uses the term, *believe* 98 times - that is more times than all the other Gospels combined. It was a dominant theme throughout his Gospel. And when you study the way he uses the word *believe* or *believing* throughout His Gospel, those 98 instances, you see it clearly fall into three areas of what it meant to be a believer or to believe.

So let's start with this. The first thing that we notice in John's Gospel, when you study how he used the word *believe*, it referred to a creed or a credence understanding of what it meant to believe.

So as Barnabas comes to the Antioch church, because they don't have the Old Testament Scriptures, he starts to inform them about the Old Testament, all the prophecies that would refer to the coming of Christ. And he starts to establish them in a proper creedal understanding of who Jesus is, why He came, what He has done for them.

He begins to establish them in an understanding of the Gospel and the Scriptures. And so it is important for us that if someone has come to faith, it is important for us, whether we have been walking with the Lord a long time or a short time, to be in the Word because sound doctrine matters. A proper understanding of Scripture is vital for us as we believe. We need to know what we believe.

But as we spend our time in the Word, as we are rooted in the truth of God's Word in coming to an understanding of who He is, we understand the theological Jesus, but we also study the historical Jesus; that leads us to a confidence and a growing, maturing relationship and experience with Jesus.

You see we don't stop at the Scriptures. When I spend time each morning with my coffee studying the Scriptures, poring over this beautiful truth of who God is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ; as I am reading them, they are pointing me to a living Savior. And it is to direct us to a living relationship with the living Jesus who is alive and well and present today.

It isn't just a creedal understanding that I have as though there is a checklist of creedal statements that I make and I go, "Yes, I believe that, yes, I believe that, yes, I believe that." When John in his Gospel uses the term *believe* 98 times, there are times when it is referring to a creedal statement, but it is also pointing us to a confidence in Christ.

And so we are to have this living relationship that grows as time goes on. And sometimes I meet believers in the church who have all the creeds down. They know all the boxes that they are supposed to check. "Yes, I believe that He is the Son of God, yes, I believe He was born of a virgin birth, yes, I believe that He died, buried, resurrected, yeah, I believe all that; I'm going to heaven."

But there is no evidence that the creed is leading to a growing confidence in the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is no evidence of the grace of God at work as expressed in a vibrant living experience of who Christ is. It is almost a cold, religious checkbox, fire insurance, so that I am assured that I am going to heaven.

And so when Barnabas steps into the Antioch church, he is establishing them in a creedal understanding of the Gospel, but also that it leads to a real living experience and vibrancy in their relationship with Christ.

And the last thing that Barnabas is looking for as informed by the Gospel of John, is when John uses the word *believe* in his Gospel, for example in John 20:31, he says this:

"These are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by *believing* you may have life in his name."

He is using a verb about *believing* that is present continuous. So there needs to be a continuance in our faith that is evidence of God's grace at work.

Let me explain what I mean by that. I have a friend that when I am telling a story – I love telling stories to this guy because he is the greatest encourager you have ever met. When he is really into the story and he is just wrapped up with what you are saying, he will do this, as you are telling the story, he'll go, "Go on." And then he gets really worked up. He's like, "What? Go on!"

When John says, "By *believing* you will have life in his name" it is a present continuous verb. What John is actually saying is when you "go on" believing you experience life in His name. Not just in the future but in the now.

Let me put that in Philadelphia terms. In Philadelphia, what they would say is, "Keep on keeping on." (Well, this group is honkatzed or something.) Should I put it in a white term, "Keep on trucking?"

You haven't heard preaching until you have had a black preacher tell you to keep on keeping on. If you do not have the Holy Spirit, you will have the Holy Spirit in you by the end of the service.

And what they were illustrating is what Barnabas is doing at the church in Antioch, what John was doing in His Gospel is, it's not just a mere creedal belief that we ascribe to, a cold set of doctrines that we say, "yes, I believe that;" there is a living relationship that we have with Jesus. And despite whatever circumstances we face, we keep on keeping on, present, continuously believing our Savior for what He is doing, despite whatever circumstances we are experiencing.

And so as Barnabas steps into this church, he spends a year establishing a proper understanding of who Jesus is, that leads to a growing relationship with Him, that expresses itself in a continuance to keep on keeping on and go on believing no matter what happens in life.

And this continuance that we are encouraged to take place within a community. There is no solo Christianity. One of the disturbing trends I see today in my generation and younger is this notion that through podcasts and accessibility to great teaching online, we can listen and grow to a creedal understanding of who He is (yes, it might result in a confident growing relationship with Christ) and that we don't need to go to church, that we don't need to be in community with one another.

One of John's warnings is this notion that we are not created to grow in a silo. There is no solo Christianity. Throughout Scripture we are encouraged to come to the realization that we learn and experience who Christ is in community. That is an essential part of your growth and development as a Christian.

And so as we disciple people, like Barnabas in the city of Antioch, we focus on the truths of God's Word to a creedal understanding of who He is, sound doctrine – we are committed to that.

But we don't stop at the sound doctrine as a cold list of rules or descriptors as to who He is; it leads us to a vibrant, growing loving, deepening experience of who Christ is, a confidence in who He is.

And then we encourage one another into a continuance to keep on keeping on no matter what happens.

Barnabas goes and gets Saul from Tarsus to help disciple this fledgling church in Antioch. And we will spend all of next week looking at the significance of that because Barnabas, going from Antioch to Tarsus – that is a 123 mile journey that he takes to go get him - 246 round trip.

There are some significant things that take place through Barnabas the Encourager, to include and involve Saul in this ministry in Antioch. And we will spend all next week looking at it because it is just amazing.

But Luke draws our attention to one of the outcomes of their conversion. Remember Barnabas is looking for the evidence of God's grace at work in their lives and Luke includes that one of the actions by which they demonstrated the genuineness of their faith. In Verse 27, as Barnabas and Saul are establishing the church in a creedal understanding, a growing confidence and a continuance in their journey, in Verse 27 we are told that,

“During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

“One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)

“The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea.

“This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.”

And the last thing we note about the Antioch church at the conclusion of Chapter 11 is that they have a concern for the poor and the vulnerable.

Concern for the poor characterized the ministry of Jesus and the early church. In James Chapter 2, James warns the believers about having a faith without works, that our faith in Christ, our creedal understanding, our growing relationship with Christ, is evidenced by a concern for the needs of others - the real and practical needs of others, not just the spiritual needs of others.

In Galatians Chapter 2, after Paul's ministry has been well established and he has been given the right hand of fellowship with Peter and the other apostles – they to the Jews, he to the Gentiles – they say all that the apostles wished or asked was that I remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do, is what Paul says.

And so what characterized the evidence of God's grace in the lives of the people at the Antioch church was a growing concern and burden for those who were in need.

That should be one of the evidences of God's grace in our lives, a concern for the needs of others, a care and desire to help the poor among us.

And as I looked at Acts Chapter 11, over the last couple of weeks some letters have been pouring into our office from our mission partners in East Africa. And by complete coincidence or divine appointment, the same time we are looking at Acts Chapter 11 and a severe famine afflicting Jerusalem and Judea, our partners from East Africa are sending requests to our church because of the famine that is ravaging East Africa right now.

An Acts Chapter 11 event is right in front of us today. In East Africa, over the next number of months, 22 million people will be impacted by this famine. They are people who are in urgent need. 22 million – that's almost the population of Canada.

The UN is calling it the worst humanitarian crisis since 1945. And we are not hearing enough news on this are we? You turn on the news and it's all about political ideologies or arguments going on; meanwhile people are dying.

And our mission partners are sending in letters pleading for help because of this famine and the devastating impact it is having on our brothers and sisters in East Africa.

We are a global church connected to a global family, and our family needs our help. World Relief is an agency that the Peoples Church helped get established. We were instrumental in this organization being started. And they are doing work in the South Sudan right now.

But Guret, who is one of our missionaries in Ethiopia and Somalia, Hands at Work who is doing work in Zimbabwe, WOW who are doing work in Malawi, and the Mulli's children's family in Kenya have sent requests asking if there is anything we can do to help during this time of famine.

And so I just want to show a short video that outlines some of the work that World Relief is doing to promote sustainable agriculture that can weather some droughts and famines but also gives you a hint at what is happening in the south of Sudan right now.

Africa is in a battle for survival. As many as 40 million people are stalked by hunger right now. Formidable enemies work against the entire sub-Saharan region - drought, over-plowing, erosion, deforestation and soil degradation.

Sometimes the task seems completely overwhelming. But there is a way to fight all of those factors at once with a two-pronged approach. World Relief Canada, through the National Church of Africa, teaches farmers a revolutionary technique called resilient agriculture.

Using resilient agriculture, farmers can often double their crop yields and their farms are much better able to manage changing conditions for generations to come.

Resilient agriculture includes three main techniques: no-till cultivation, where we disturb only the soil we are putting the seeds into; mulch, mulch, mulch, ensuring that soil stays covered to preserve moisture and add nitrogen; and smart crop rotation, where we rotate at least three species and stagger the planting times.

Training is the key. Local leaders like Pastor Obadiah are trained by people such as World Relief's Norm Holbra from Peoples Church. That training is passed neighbor to neighbor, a little grassroots way of change. And when other farmers see the results they adopt resilient agriculture methods on their own.

More than 9000 farmers like Rosemary and Daniel are learning resilient agriculture through programs sponsored by Canadian Christians like you this year.

But there is another disturbing need that demands our action today, and this is the second prong: dealing with famine.

Almost 1.4 million children are on the brink of starvation as famine ravages South Sudan and neighboring countries. It is a famine caused by a four-year drought, amplified by civil war.

Through World Relief you can help rescue children who are at greatest risk. World Relief has been working in South Sudan for almost 20 years. We are known and we have great partners and we are trusted on all sides of the conflict.

That's why the World Food Program has asked us to distribute 3.9 million nutrition food supplement sachets to vulnerable children under age 5 in the next several months. A six to nine week course of supplement transforms a child from acute severe malnutrition back to health.

But we can't do it without your help. The World Food Program gives us these nutrition packs at no cost. The cost is in the distribution – setting up the feeding posts and screening children. But if we can raise half a million dollars we can distribute them to those most in need.

So we have already started to screen a first wave of 100,000 children as well as pregnant mothers and nursing mothers. At least 12,000 of them will be treated.

And once again we turn to the congregation at the Peoples Church for help. Your constant faithfulness and generosity have repeatedly saved lives and changed futures and given witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whatever you give this month you will be saving children's lives in South Sudan and helping farmers transform agriculture and their own futures one farm at a time.

Blessings on you, and thank you so much for your partnership. We and our African brothers and sisters thank God for you.

Acts 11 isn't just something that happened a long time ago. Acts 11 happens today.

And we are taking a long term approach to sustainable agriculture in countries that experience these types of conditions regularly. And there is time for development work that is long-term in nature, but there is also time for the life-saving relief work.

And that is what this situation is.

As I watched that video and I think of all my brothers and sisters who are in countries that are being impacted by this famine, as I sat around my table this week eating meals with my family, thinking of all the food we have in excess, that I can turn on the tap and there's water, and my brothers and sisters are dying – 22 million – the worst humanitarian crisis since 1945, and we're fighting over politics oftentimes.

But now we know. That video; we are going to work to have it on our website. I would ask that you share it through your social media networks so that we can raise awareness of what is happening, over the next two weeks.

So next Sunday and Easter Sunday we will be taking up a special offering over and above our normal giving that will go directly towards the work of World Relief in South Sudan. Guret, in Ethiopia and Somalia, Hands at Work in Zimbabwe, WOW in Malawi, Mulli's in Kenya; these are countries being affected by this famine. And we have missionary partners who are a part of our body already on the ground serving. And we are going to get the necessary resources we can to them.

We are going to be taking up the offering, not today – next weekend and the weekend after; because I wanted to give you time to respond.

And this week in your own time, as you are praying, ask God, "What is it that You would have me do in response to this famine that has been put before us?"

But just like the Antioch church, one of the evidences of God's grace at work in our lives is the compassion for the needs of others, and our faith is demonstrated by our actions. So may we as a church community display generosity toward the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Every donation will be matched 3:1. If you give \$1, it's \$3, \$100: \$300, \$1000:\$3000. It is being matched by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

So as we close our look at Acts Chapter 11, just as Barnabas looked at the Antioch church, grounded them in a creedal understanding of doctrine, the truth of God's Word that resulted in a growing confidence in the person of Christ and a vibrant relationship, and as he emphasized continuance, that we grow and develop our faith and keep on keeping on.

It was also evidenced by a concern for the poor and the vulnerable. And my prayer for us is that this week we as a church will meet with our friends and family, spread the word. I know Steph and I at mealtimes are talking with our kids. They have a little paper route so we are talking

about what they are going to give, and also for us to pray and go, “What can we do without so that we can help our brothers and sisters in need?”

Why? Because it is an evidence of God’s grace at work in our lives. Let’s pray together.

Father, we thank You for the privilege it is to share in this ministry, to help in the needs of others. We thank You that, I don’t believe it is by coincidence we are in Acts Chapter 11 where this exact thing takes place just as these letters came into our office.

Lord, You have brought us to such a time as this so that we could respond generously. We thank You that there is a 3:1 match. And we pray that over the next two Sundays, as we take up this special offering that you would use it for Your glory, multiply it to save lives in East Africa.

And Lord, we thank You for the global vision that You have placed within the DNA of this church. As we go through our week this week may we have eyes to see beyond the surface of things, to see where You are at work and join You in it.