



Embrace

Newsletter of Release Women
Spring 2019



Sabina Wurmbbrand

‘Only God is with me’

Asia Bibi’s name is now well-known as a victim of the notorious blasphemy laws in Pakistan. Less well-known are some of the other victims and their families. Nawab Bibi is the wife of blasphemy victim, Zafar Bhatti. (Bibi is a common surname for Christian women in Pakistan and Nawab and Asia are not related.)

In July 2012, a complaint was filed at a police station against Zafar by an Islamic leader, saying he had been sent text messages from an unregistered number insulting the mother of Islam’s Prophet Mohammed. This was the beginning of a nightmare for Zafar and Nawab that is still ongoing. Zafar was arrested and charged under section 295-C of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws.

Zafar was tortured to extract a confession, but he insisted on his innocence. Several reports proved that the SIM card was not registered to Zafar but to a woman, Ghazala Khan. Although she too was arrested and charged with blasphemy, she was later released and

died a few years later. Zafar remained in prison and in 2017 he was sentenced to life. He has endured numerous attempts to kill him in prison (you can read his full story in his prisoner profile on our website).

Meanwhile though, Nawab has been left on her own, without her husband. A few years ago, she was praying and asking God why he had abandoned and forsaken her. She described that time saying, ‘Everybody has left me and my husband. Only God is with me who helps me to stand with my husband in this difficult time. I just weep and pray to God for my husband that God may help him and keep him.’ It was about that time that she received a phone call from a Release partner who offered to visit her. ‘This was the beginning of my hope to live again for my husband,’ she said. ‘My life is too hard as a woman, but I am the only hope for my husband by visiting and encouraging him in his difficult time.’

Nawab is currently living in a small rented house. She works as a cleaner in several different homes, trying to earn



Nawab, wife of blasphemy victim Zafar Bhatti

enough money to support herself. She is able to visit her husband each week and take him food and medicine and she receives support from a Release partner.

Nawab is grateful to God and gives thanks for Release partners and for the prayers and support she receives that give her a reason to live and to continue supporting her husband. ‘I would also request all friends to continue to pray for me and my husband that God will give us strength to be a testimony for Him wherever He has put us.’

You don’t know Nawab personally, but she is your sister in Christ whom you can lift to God in prayer. We have seen the power of prayer in the case of Asia Bibi, who was acquitted of blasphemy. Let’s pray that Zafar will also be released from prison and be reunited with his faithful wife, Nawab.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians



A woman sorting rubbish on one of Egypt's many garbage heaps

Hope and light in the darkness

Release's Jack Norman recently visited Egypt and saw how the Strength to Stand groups are helping to bring hope and light to women living under oppression.

In countries such as Egypt, Christians can face extreme poverty and oppression as they are living as a minority in a predominantly Muslim country. The pressures they face, and the desperation they feel, can cause them to turn to alcohol or drugs. We are all well aware from the reports that fill our TV screens and newspapers of the problems that are brought about when people are addicted to alcohol or drugs and this is true for Christians in Egypt too. Some may be Christian in name, but do not really understand what it is to know Christ as their personal Saviour. It is against this backdrop that the Strength to Stand (S2S) groups in Egypt help Christian women to learn their true identity in Christ and to recognise their worth in Him. As their faith becomes real, it grows and they learn to build resilience to the oppression and hostility they face.

Many of the women connected with the S2S groups have husbands who do not yet know Jesus and who turn to alcohol or drugs for false comfort. 'Martha' (not her real name) and her four-year-old daughter know the reality of this

situation. Martha's husband is a drug addict and any income he earns is used to feed his addiction, rather than feeding his family. As a result, Martha can't afford to send her daughter to nursery school. One of the S2S facilitators invited Martha to get involved in a group and through her participation she was able to purchase an old sewing machine. She now uses this machine to make and mend clothes. The S2S facilitators encourage other S2S group members to use her services and now Martha has a small income of her own and is better able to care for her daughter.

Martha's husband is still an addict, but together with her S2S group Martha is praying for him to be freed from his addiction. The facilitator of her group has seen how Martha is growing spiritually through her interaction with the other women as they pray together, worship and read the Bible. Martha is learning to trust God more each day.

'Ruth' (not her real name), who has five children, has been a member of one of the S2S groups since 2016. Her husband is also an addict. He is a

skilled carpenter and is able to earn a reasonable living, but he uses much of his income to support his addiction to the painkiller Tramadol. This addiction has a devastating effect on him. When he takes the drug, he experiences a 'high', followed by a deep low. During his low periods he is unable to work and so loses customers. The difficult economic situation in Egypt causes the family additional problems, with high inflation and expensive raw materials. Ruth has tried to earn some money by buying and selling clothes, but she made very little profit. Now, in order to send her children to school, Ruth works as a garbage sorter for a local hospital. This is dangerous because of the potential for the medical waste she is sorting to be contaminated.

In many ways, both Martha and Ruth's situations seem hopeless and dark. What we hear though from the facilitators of the Strength to Stand groups, which many of you support, is that the women experience real strength and comfort in sharing their experiences together. Knowing they are not alone brings them hope. Being able to pray together about their problems brings the light of Jesus into their situations. We know that families and communities are being changed as their faith grows and we pray that both Martha and Ruth will continue to experience that for themselves.

Give them the tools



You can help to bring about change in the lives of Christian women in Egypt and in Pakistan by holding a Sabina Supper and raising funds for the Strength to Stand groups. More information is available from our website: releaseinternational.org/sabina-suppers/. New for this year is an invitation template for you to use to invite others to your event. Remember, £5 supports one woman a month to attend a Strength to Stand group and £60 supports a whole

group for a month. How many women like Martha and Ruth will your Sabina Supper help?





Sisters you support

North Korea

We often feature stories from Pakistan and Egypt on these pages, as we have done in this edition, because so much of our work takes place in these two countries, including Release Women's Strength to Stand groups. However, Release works in many other countries around the world and women are supported through most of these projects. Here are just a few examples of sisters you support.

Iran

Release works with partners to support Christians in Iran who live under the threat of persecution and who worship together in simple 'house churches', often in villages. Evangelists travel to the villages and provide Christian teaching to the locals to encourage them in their faith. One farmer's wife shared how as a child she was physically unable to speak, until her father, who was working more than a hundred miles away at the time, met a Christian worker who prayed for her healing. Such was the Christian's conviction that she would be healed that the father gave his life to Christ immediately.

When the father returned home, he found that his five-year-old daughter had indeed been healed by God at the exact time of the man's prayer. The father and his wife, who also became a Christian, brought their daughter up to love and know the Lord. When she grew up, she married a Christian man herself and every night they read the Bible to their children and prayed together. When the evangelist heard this testimony, he rejoiced that the seed sown 47 years ago by a fellow worker had borne such fruit. It is hoped that the farmer and his wife will be able to attend a family conference supported by Release partners this year, to encourage them in their faith and to explore how the village ministry can be expanded.

Malaysia

Release's partner in Malaysia works primarily to share the gospel with Muslims and to support those who convert to Christianity and are at particular risk of persecution. One such woman they have supported is 'Amy' (not her real name). Amy converted from Hinduism to Islam when she married a Muslim, and they later had two sons.

Life was fine until the husband died and his family refused to allow her or her grown-up sons to stay in the family home. She spent some time living with a family member of her own, who told Release's partner about Amy. After much prayer our partner agreed to meet with Amy and her sons. Over a meal they told her and the sons about their work for

God's glory. The sons both wanted to find out more and Amy herself expressed some curiosity. Our partner invited Amy to stay with them and they helped to pay some of the husband's outstanding debts. They even secured employment for both of the boys who were soon able to set up home together. As a result of meeting our partner, Amy has now given her life to Christ! Although the sons have not yet made this commitment, they continue to seek Him and we pray that in time they too will come to know Him as their personal Saviour.

The farmer's wife, Julie and Amy are just three women from around the world who you support through Release partners and projects. We trust that their stories will encourage and inspire you.

Release partner, VOM Korea, works with North Korean defectors in South Korea. It runs a discipleship training programme for North Koreans called 'Underground Technology' (UT). The programme teaches the basics of the Christian faith; vital for even 'mature' Christians.

One of its recently graduated students is a young woman, 'Julie' (not her real name). Before undertaking the UT programme, Julie, already quite a mature Christian, had spent several years as an assistant minister for female North Korean defectors in South Korea. She had also undertaken some previous training and even been on a mission trip abroad. Yet Julie still had questions about her faith. After attending UT, Julie said, 'I feel that I am growing spiritually, and I find myself responding to confrontations at church and work in a different way. Now, I think more about Jesus in my daily life.'



UT students enjoying a lesson about prayer outdoors

During the UT lessons, students have an opportunity to role play traumatic experiences they wish they had dealt with differently. One UT student recalled that in North Korea she hadn't been allowed to attend her mother's funeral, so her fellow students role played the experience with her. With tears in her eyes, she told her "mother" the things she was never able to say before – and her brothers and sisters in Christ drew around her and showed her God's loving care.

Editorial

Dear sisters in Christ,

The year is well underway and as we look back over the last year and the past few weeks, we can see the Lord's hand has been upon our brothers and sisters around the world in some remarkable ways.

We have all been praying for the release of Asia Bibi. What a joy it is to us to have received the good news that she has been acquitted, after so many years in prison. What a privilege it is to be able to pray for our many sisters who are imprisoned, as well as those who have suffered and still are suffering because of their faith in our Lord Jesus.

As we look through these pages today, we can see how women suffer in many different ways because of their faith. The two women living under oppression in Egypt must both feel their suffering will never end and yet they go on in the strength of the Lord; as does Nawab, the woman whose husband is facing living the rest of his days in a prison cell. Not only that but he is also being tortured. How do they cope? We know, many of us from experience, that the only way to cope is to cling to the Lord and seek out our praying friends as well as casting our cares upon Him. There is no other way. We have seen many times in these pages how through prayer God has shown His strength on behalf of our persecuted sisters.

However, there are so many positives to be grateful for such as the story of the farmer's wife who as a little girl was healed, which led to her family being saved. A wonderful story encouraging us about the goodness of God and His love for His creation, teaching us He will never give up on those who belong to Him.

At times we may ask ourselves: 'Am I doing any good? Is God listening to me? Will my 'widow's mite' be enough to help a sister in distress?' The answer is yes, God is always listening. Yes, whatever we do for God will be effective and yes, however small our donation, God can use it and multiply it for his purposes. So be encouraged to never give up praying and supporting our sisters in any way you can.

Every blessing,

Wendy

Prayer Points



"...and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Acts 6v4 (NIV)

Please pray for Nawab:

- Pray for her husband's safety in prison and for his release.
- Pray for God to keep her strong and healthy, enabling her to work as well as to help her husband.
- Pray the Lord will give her strength to be a good witness and the ability to share the gospel wherever she is.

Please pray for Martha and Ruth:

- Pray Martha's husband becomes free from drugs, gives his life to Jesus and takes responsibility for his family.
- Pray for Martha's daughter that she will be educated and provided for. Also, that Martha will continue to be encouraged by her Bible studies.
- Pray that Ruth's husband is set free from his addiction, and she is safe from any contamination at work. Pray that she has the strength to continue to take care of her family.

Please pray for our sisters around the world:

- Pray that the farmer's wife will be able to attend the conference and be greatly encouraged and grow closer to God because of her attendance.
- Pray that Julie will continue to grow spiritually and be an ever-greater asset to her church and community.
- Pray Amy's sons will give their lives to the Lord, and that she will continue to grow as a Christian, setting her sons an example to follow.

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NOTICEBOARD



Release Women is delighted to announce that it will hold a Release Women National Conference on Saturday, October 12, at St. Michael's Church, Chester Square, LONDON, SW1W 9EF (10am to 4pm). Further details and tickets will be available soon. Watch this space!



Tortured for Christ film

Please contact the Supporter Relations Team if you can host a screening of our inspiring film* based on Richard Wurmbbrand's best-selling testimony *Tortured for Christ* this spring.

**We recommend parents/carers consider the content of the film before showing it to children.*

Please give

Please make a gift if you can. It's the generosity of people like you that enables us to help people like those you've read about in this edition of *Embrace*. You can give by using the response card inside this letter or by contacting our Supporter Relations Team (contact details below).

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