

Release Women Email - March 2020

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Hello Friend

Those who look to Him are radiant!

Aki (not her real name), an Eritrean widow living in Ethiopia, listened intently throughout three days of discipleship training, led by a Release International partner to a group of Eritrean Christians. Many of those who attended the training, which was held in a small Ethiopian town earlier this year, were pastors, but all were in some type of Christian ministry. Aki was one of seven women there.

Eritrea is a small country on the Horn of Africa and is sometimes known as the North Korea of Africa, because of the repressive regime and persecution experienced there by Christians. The training was an opportunity to strengthen these Eritrean Christians in their faith, to help to equip them for ministry, whatever their circumstances, and to resource them to deal with the trauma they have all been through.

During the training there were opportunities to share testimonies and Aki was encouraged to share her story, but she refused, saying she would be too upset to do so. On the last day, cards, written by Christians in the UK and Holland, and beautiful gifts of crocheted crosses and felt hearts made by two Release supporters, were



distributed and one of the Eritrean brothers led a time of worship. Aki lifted her head, hands and voice in worship and praised God! The joy on her face was so evident and at the end of the session she shared a few words of encouragement with the group. 'When I'm worshipping, I forget about my trauma,' she said. (Picture: Aki reading a card of encouragement from a supporter.)

A couple of days later, a small group of us met Aki and she shared her testimony. She'd been a Christian since her teens and as a young Christian she had joined the National Military Service in Eritrea, sharing her faith with her fellow soldiers as they fought on the Eritrean/Ethiopian border. She was engaged to a fellow Christian, a medical worker, who was also sent to the frontline and on separate occasions they were both wounded but recovered from their injuries. Two weeks after their wedding, her husband was sent back to the frontline and did not return for three years. During his first visit home Aki became pregnant with their first daughter, but it was at this time, in about 2002, that the government clampdown on many Christians in Eritrea began. Aki's husband was arrested for his faith and spent the next few years in and out of prison. By 2005, Aki had two young daughters, but her husband was arrested and imprisoned once more. She never saw him again.

Aki herself was arrested for her faith and kept in solitary confinement for four months. Then, at new year, Aki says that she was sexually assaulted by one of the prison guards. After 10 months in prison she was released, having experienced a breakdown. Aki was sick and depressed; eventually she was diagnosed with HIV, which she believes was as a result of the assault. She felt overwhelmed with shame. Aki's husband died in prison four years after his final arrest, but she didn't receive confirmation of that for another four years.

Last year, Aki fled Eritrea with her two teenage daughters and is now trying to re-establish her life in Ethiopia. But as she shared her story with us, her head was bowed in shame. Gone was the joy from her face. Together we read David's words from Psalm 34: 4.

'Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered in shame.'

As Aki repeated these words out loud several times, so her head gradually lifted, the look of shame fell away, the joy returned. 'You fought for Eritrea, so you must fight for the kingdom of God,' challenged our partner who had led the training. 'Your weapon is the sword – the word of God!' After praying together, Aki left us with this challenge ringing in her ears. We pray that she will keep her head held high, her eyes fixed on Jesus, and that she will indeed fight for God's kingdom! Please pray for Aki and many other Eritrean Christian widows like her; that they will be equipped to minister, whatever their circumstances and wherever they are.

Thank you for your prayers

Blessings

Release Women team

PS. Thank you to everyone taking part in the 40x40x40 Lent initiative. Details will be on the website after Easter about how to send any funds to Release International.

Please **CLICK** on the red button if you prayed.

I prayed!

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