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Release Women Email - July 2020

Hello Friend

Behind the scenes

I wonder if you have read Release International's current *Voice* magazine yet. If not, maybe over the new few weeks of the summer holidays you'll find a chance to sit down with a cup of tea and read it or to browse through it [online](#).

If you have read it, did you spot Martha's story? Or Jiang Rong's? Susanna's or Esther's? Maybe not, because their stories are not in the headlines, but each of these women's stories is there, behind the scenes.

'Martha' (p15) is the wife of Middle Eastern believer 'Ezra', a prisoner of faith who was released from prison in April. During his imprisonment, first as he was held captive by ISIS-related militia and later as he was held for two years by his own Government, Martha continued to raise their four children alone. During that time, she received some financial help from a Release partner and now she has been reunited with her husband. Jiang Rong (p12) is the wife of another prisoner of faith, Pastor Wang Yi in China. Jiang Rong was arrested along with her husband in December 2018 and although she was subsequently released a few months later, Pastor Wang remains in prison, separated from his wife and family.

Another wife to experience the pain of separation from her husband is Susanna Koh (p21). Her husband, Pastor Raymond Koh, was abducted in a military-style operation in Malaysia in February 2017 and has not been seen since. Susanna has the additional trauma of not knowing where her husband is, or even if he is still alive. But she testifies that the Psalms have comforted her during this period of uncertainty: 'Psalm 23 and 91 are my favourites. God is our good shepherd. He is our protector, strength and living hope.'

It isn't only wives who suffer when their husbands are imprisoned, or worse; the rest of the family also share the pain and worry for their loved ones. Esther (p13) is the daughter of Pastor Zhang Shaojie, imprisoned in China. She posted a video to YouTube at the end of last year describing how the authorities were force-feeding her father unidentified medication. She



has since reported that, although the family has not been able to visit him recently because of coronavirus, he is no longer taking the medicine which was causing him problems.

Some women in scripture remain 'behind the scenes' just like these women. One such woman is Joanna, wife of Herod's steward Chuza. She was part of a group of women who travelled around with Jesus as he went from town to town proclaiming the gospel and she helped to support his practical ministry ([Luke 8:1-3](#)). We know too that she was one of the first witnesses to the resurrection of Christ and that she testified to the disciples what she had seen and heard at the empty tomb ([Luke 24:1-11](#)). But it would be easy to overlook her and to miss her significance or to underestimate the risk she took in following Jesus, just as it is easy to miss the suffering of our sisters in Christ: Martha, Jiang Rong, Susanna and Esther as they too follow Jesus.

As we hear of those who are persecuted for their faith, let's continue to pray for them. But spend a few minutes thinking of those who are 'behind the scenes' too, whether we know who they are or not: mothers, wives, sisters, daughters. Pray for them, that they will remain strong in their faith and will continue to be a source of encouragement and comfort to their loved ones.

'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'

1 Corinthians 12:26-27

Blessings,

Release Women Team