



Embrace

Newsletter of Release Women
Autumn 2020

Sabina Wurmbrand

From Jail to Jesus!

In many parts of our world today coming to faith in Christ can be costly. Hannah's story is told by Release International's Stephen.

Hannah (not her real name) was born into a pious Muslim family, in a South East Asian country. Of her life as a Muslim she says: 'I never felt whole, I always felt that something was missing but I didn't know what.'

But life was to take a tragic turn for Hannah. After starting a relationship, her new partner asked her if she would take a parcel to a friend in East Asia. As she was being well paid for this, and needed the money, she was happy to comply. However, after arriving in the country she was arrested. When the package was opened, the authorities discovered illegal drugs – cocaine!

Hannah was immediately sent to prison, receiving an eight-year sentence. She says she felt 'downgraded...like it was the end of the world'. But during her incarceration, Hannah met some Christians. They gave her several books,

including a Bible, which she read with great curiosity.

In her fourth year of imprisonment, she recalls that it was the book – *Seeking Allah, finding Jesus*, by Nabeel Qureshi, which quickly became her favourite. 'It really opened up my eyes and mind ...and one day I surrendered myself to Jesus,' she recalls. She then began corresponding with another believer near to her homeland.

But it was only when she was released that Hannah began to discover the cost of following Christ. She returned to her home country this year and lived with her parents for a short time, but they soon asked her to leave. She moved in with her sister, who quickly noticed that Hannah had changed. When Hannah openly confessed her new-found faith in Jesus she was thrown out of the house, and her clothes and personal belongings were dumped on the roadside.

In tears and with nowhere to go Hannah contacted some believers, whom she had recently met, and they have taken her into their own family home.

Despite all she has been through, Hannah says: 'I always know that He is with me. The love and understanding that I felt from brothers and sisters in Christ is so overwhelming. I'm so blessed. I know the path I'm on will not be smooth or easy, but I know and I believe I'm His daughter and He loves me.'



A believer being baptised in East Asia

Please pray for Hannah as she continues in her walk with Jesus. She has been baptised recently but there are currently huge family issues which are being presented to the courts. It appears that this will be an ugly fight between Hannah and the rest of her family, who now regard her as an infidel, as leaving Islam is illegal in her country.

Supporting discipleship

In Hannah's country Release International's partner regularly reaches out in pastoral situations like this. Our partner is passionate to see new believers mature in their faith. Discipleship and pastoral care are, therefore, at the centre of the ministry Release supports in that country.

Hannah's story is neither unique, nor surprising, but our partner is encouraged by seeing more and more individuals coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

Release Women: Connecting Christian women in the UK and Ireland with their suffering sisters around the world.

Lockdown Life!

There is no doubt that 2020 has not gone the way any of us may have planned at the beginning of the year. We have all had to cope with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Each of us may have been affected in different ways.

That is not only true for us here in the UK, but also for our sisters around the world. Just as we have had to get used to not meeting up with friends and family, and not having the same face-to-face fellowship with our church family on Sundays, the same is true of our international partners. Rather than travelling to spend time with them and meeting our persecuted family face-to-face, we have had to maintain contact with them in other ways. For them, opposition, oppression, violence and other forms of persecution have not stopped because of the pandemic. In some cases, the difficulties they have faced have increased. Perhaps, though, our insight and understanding of their situations has increased a little over the past few months as we too have experienced some of the challenges of 'lockdown'.

In this edition of *Embrace* we bring you some updates from around the world, to encourage you to pray for our persecuted family. We have also shared some updates from sisters here in the UK about how they are finding creative ways to continue to raise funds for our suffering sisters.

Nigeria

In our Spring 2020 edition of *Embrace* we shared the story of Comfort Mark, a nurse who believes that God has given her a spirit of boldness. Please continue to pray for Comfort as she has faced some particular challenges recently. Praise God that her faith remains strong but please pray that she will continue to know God's presence protecting and guiding her.

Release's latest *Voice* magazine profiles Nigeria and the devastating impact of attacks on Christian communities. Please pray for Rose, the widow of a newly ordained pastor, Matthew Tagwi, who



Rose, widow of Pastor Matthew

was killed in April this year by Fulani militants. Rose has since given birth to their third child, Patience, a younger sister for their two older girls. Rose says that she has forgiven her husband's killers and that nothing will stop the gospel of Christ.

Pakistan

Also, in our Spring 2020 edition of *Embrace* we asked you to pray for a young Christian girl, Nadeema (not her real name), who had fled the country with her two cousins, following her forced conversion to Islam and threats to her and her family. Thank you for praying! Nadeema and her cousins are doing well and are growing in their faith. They have just learned that they will be able to relocate permanently to a third country; one where they will have freedom to worship as Christians. Please pray that nothing will stop this from happening, especially a block on flights due to Covid-19.

Throughout the pandemic we have remained in touch with our partner in Pakistan who manages the Strength to Stand (S2S) project. As some of their own 'lockdown' restrictions have lifted, they have held two separate sessions of training for the S2S facilitators, each over the course of two days. We reported on the first training session in June's Release Women Email, but we were encouraged to hear that a second session of training has been held recently. As before, they started their training with time to reflect on God's word as they studied together God's commandment in Matthew 22:36-38, to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' The following day they spent time studying the character of Lydia, from Acts 16. The training covered many relevant topics, such as healthcare, stress management – particularly important during the pandemic – minority rights and Christian marriage, as well as a practical session on self-defence!

Please pray for the facilitators and that they will be able to share the training they have received with the group members; and that everyone will be wise about when and how to start to meet properly in their S2S groups again.



Self-defence training

Egypt

The facilitators of the S2S groups in Egypt have also met for socially distanced training recently. Our partner reports that six of the facilitators, and some of their family members, contracted the virus, although they have now recovered. When it wasn't possible to meet the facilitators in person, our partner was able to stay in touch over the internet – an experience common to many of us! However, as restrictions have eased, our partner has been able to travel to meet with the facilitators weekly and they too are starting to meet with the S2S groups again. Please do pray for everyone involved, and especially for the women in the groups that they will have the strength to keep 'standing for Jesus' in the challenges they face in their daily lives as a Christian minority.

Eritrea

We rejoice in recent reports from Eritrea that a number of Christian prisoners of faith have been released! We know that the strict lockdown restrictions in Eritrea have impacted the prisoners especially, as they have been unable to receive food cooked by Christian mothers who in 'normal' times make simple meals for those in local prisons. Prisoners' families have also been affected by rising food prices. We praise God for news of those released and pray that many more will be released soon. We continue to pray for our sisters in Eritrea

Some of the prisoners released had been held for more than ten years, and the world they have been released into will seem very different to them, especially with the impact of the pandemic. Please pray for them and those who remain in prison as they wait anxiously to be released. Pray that they will remain strong in their faith in Jesus – He who is the same yesterday, today and for ever (Hebrews 13:8).

Being creative online!

Here in the UK, you have not been idle during 'lockdown'! We know that many of you have been praying regularly and have found the Prayer Shield in the magazine especially helpful.



Jenny

One volunteer, Jenny, led her first ever Zoom meeting with a church home group – something completely out of her comfort zone! Over the course of two evenings, one in July and one in September, she had the opportunity to share with the group about persecuted Christians. Using Matthew 10:1-31 she explained how Jesus had prepared the disciples for persecution and how we too should expect and be prepared for it. On the second evening she shared some of the stories of Christians who are persecuted today for their faith. The group are keen to know more, so please



Helen having her hair cut live 'on-air', as a fund raiser!

pray for them as they learn more about our persecuted family.



Joyce, a volunteer in Scotland, is determined not to let the coronavirus restrictions stop her from holding

another fundraising 'Esther Experience' for the S2S groups this November. As the women won't be able to meet in person for a pamper event, Joyce is creating an 'Esther Experience in a box'. She plans to make up a special box for each person invited, containing items such as nail varnish, foot-bath salts, stones for painting, and tasty treats. These will be delivered the day before, and then during the event participants will be invited to open their boxes live online as different guests lead them through the Esther story and related activities based on the items in their box. What a great idea and a creative way to work within the restrictions! Please pray that this event is a great success!

Alison and Helen from Swansea held a fundraising coffee morning on Zoom and raised nearly £2,000 for the S2S groups in Egypt and Pakistan mentioned earlier. Thank you, Alison, and especially Helen (pictured below) for allowing your husband to cut your hair live 'on-air'!

The Release Women team would love to challenge you to come up with a creative idea of how you too can share with your friends, neighbours or family online to 'introduce' them to our persecuted sisters, to pray together, to have fellowship or to raise funds. Please let us know how you get on by emailing Emőke with your stories and photos at info@releaseinternational.org.

Editorial

Dear sisters in Christ,

How the world has changed since our first 2020 edition of *Embrace*. Life has changed for everyone throughout the whole world as we can clearly see from this edition. As I said in the last edition we can now empathise with our persecuted sisters as we ourselves have been in a lockdown situation with all the restrictions that involves.

It is very sad to note that life for our persecuted sisters has become a lot worse and their problems have increased considerably during the pandemic.

As we consider the terrible position Nigerian Christian Rose finds herself in, it is almost impossible to imagine being in her situation with a new baby and two other children to bring up and support without the love and assistance of her husband. However, as we read about S2S projects in Pakistan and Egypt we can only praise the Lord for the strength and tenacity of the facilitators as He has enabled them to continue their very necessary work as the lockdowns have eased. Let's pray that Rose finds similar love and support in her situation.

We must thank God for the many women in our own country, like Jenny, Joyce, Helen and Alison who have found innovative ways of raising much-needed funds during our own lockdown, to help our sisters who are suffering persecution in all parts of the world.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for all the help, generous support and prayers for our suffering sisters.

Let's remember what the hymn writer Joseph M. Scriven wrote: *What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.*

Every blessing,

Wendy

Prayer Points



'In fact everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted.'

2 Tim. 3:12 (NIV)

Please pray for Hannah:

- That the court case will have a successful outcome.
- That Hannah will feel God's hand upon her and His peace during her time in court.
- That she will remain strong in her faith.
- That her family will follow in her footsteps and come to know the Lord.

Please pray for sisters in Nigeria and Pakistan:

- For Comfort, that she will be able to continue to be strong in the new challenges that she is facing.
- For Rose as she takes care of her young children and that she will be supported by her Christian family. Pray that the Lord will enable her to do His will.
- That Nadeema will be enabled to get to her final destination safely and without any hold-ups. Pray that she will be kept safe and strong in her faith.
- For everyone involved in the S2S groups in Pakistan.

Please pray for sisters in Egypt and Eritrea:

- That our partner in Egypt will continue to be able to stay in contact with the facilitators of the S2S groups.
- That the women within the S2S groups will continue to have the strength to keep standing for Jesus.
- For all who are imprisoned for their faith, that the Lord will keep them faithful in the spreading of the Gospel whilst they are in prison.
- For prisoners of faith to be released in Eritrea.

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NOTICEBOARD



International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church 2020

**Sunday, November 15,
7.30pm – 8.30pm**

See releaseinternational.org/idop for free resources and the latest details.

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).

Release Women email

Each month, the Release Women Team helps to connect you with your suffering sisters by sharing their stories in a monthly email, to encourage you to pray, give or take action. If you don't already receive this monthly email, please contact our Supporter Relations Team (contact details below).

If you no longer wish to receive *Embrace*, please phone or email our Supporter Relations Team (see contact details) and ask to be removed from the mailing list.

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