



Embrace

Newsletter of Release Women
Spring 2021

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Out of the mouths of babes and infants!

For many Christians, persecution is experienced as the day-to-day reality of living with oppression and the resulting hardship. Release International's Jack Norman shares his experience of meeting persecuted sisters in Upper Egypt, and what we can learn from them and their families.

For Christian widows in Upper Egypt, life as a member of a religious minority can be especially difficult. Already suffering from the day-to-day oppression faced by Christians living in these rural communities, the loss of their husband can take away the means of looking after and providing for their families.

In Release International's *Voice* magazine in January, I wrote about Martha (not her real name), who experienced sexual assault in her community, following the death of her husband. As a result, she had to flee and leave everything behind to find refuge in the village, where I met her. Such was the trauma of what she and her family had experienced that she found it impossible to share the detail

with me. Yet even in such oppressive circumstances, some of these sisters and their families have much to teach us.

I often speak in churches from 2 Corinthians 8, where the Apostle Paul describes the Macedonian church as "begging" to give for the relief of other Christians, even though they themselves lived in poverty. One widow visited recently by our partners in Upper Egypt really brought this to life for me.



A typical village in Upper Egypt

She lives in one of the poorer villages visited by our partners to distribute food boxes. When she saw the box being brought in by the team member, she refused to take the food, saying she knew another family who needed it more than hers. She said, "I still have some food left, but this family has nothing, so please give them this box instead of me."

She was willing to see her family get by with less to bless another family who, in her eyes, needed the food more than she did. Thankfully, our partners were able to insist she kept her food, and they visited the other family with another food box.

This other family lives in very hard circumstances, with only a small stove and a rug (which they slept on) in their house. The mother said to our team, "God sent you in the perfect timing! Yesterday, I borrowed food from my neighbours because I had none to feed my children." Our partners were able to help this family and also provide them with a bed and a refrigerator. The team member who delivered these asked if anyone would like to pray. The youngest boy of the family, aged eight, said he did. His prayer was short but very powerful. "Thank you, Lord, for you are kind and that you remember us, as you sent us a bed to sleep on instead of the floor."

He may have been just eight years old, but he recognised God's goodness and mercy, and praised Him. May we do the same, in all circumstances!

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
voice
of Persecuted Christians

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

The prayers of the persecuted

We frequently encourage you to pray for those who are persecuted, and we always include prayer points on page 4 of *Embrace*. It is so important to do this; but have you ever wondered about those who are being persecuted and who they pray for? Release International partner Voice of the Martyrs Korea tells the story of how the prayers of persecuted Christians in China helped to bring a North Korean defector to faith in Christ.

Minji (not her real name) lived with her husband, a member of the North Korean State Security Department, and her family in North Korea. But when she was caught selling goods which had been smuggled in from South Korea, the whole family were at risk of execution for her crime. To help delay the case, her husband fled to China. Other family members in government positions bribed those who oversaw the case in order to reduce her sentence. But, unbeknown to Minji at the time, God used all of these events to bring the gospel to her husband. While he was in China, looking for someone to help him, he ended up at a church and put his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus.

By the time Minji's husband returned to North Korea, the bribes had been paid and the case closed. Now as a

Christian, Minji's husband shared the gospel with his family and friends. This time it was sharing the gospel, not selling smuggled goods, which was putting the family in danger. Minji believes that her husband would have known the cost of sharing his faith, because of the position he had previously held in the State Security Department. She also believes that many of his friends would have accepted what he shared with them due to his position, but eventually someone informed on him and he was sent to a concentration camp. 'I did not know how dangerous Christianity was until the moment it mattered to me personally,' said Minji. It is believed that her husband died in the camp, executed for his faith in Christ.

Minji remained at risk because of her husband's Christian activities and so an uncle arranged for her to be sent to a labour camp on charges relating to her selling South Korean goods. Her uncle's action caused much stress to some members of the family and he eventually lost his job because of it, but by doing this he saved Minji from harsher punishment. After serving a two-year sentence, she was able to return to her family. On her return Minji and her family escaped to China with the aim of defecting to South Korea.

While in China Minji was caught and imprisoned with other defectors. It was there that she met Chinese Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. Despite facing persecution, these faithful Christians prayed for Minji and for the other defectors. When the Christians were released from prison, they even sent money to the defectors through one of the guards. Minji began to wonder why they kept their faith even though they were persecuted for it. She also wondered about the God who was constantly intervening in her life!

It is clear that God had a plan for Minji's life. After a few months, one of the North Korean defectors, although quiet at first, began to witness about her faith. 'This woman could not hold it in anymore and wrote "Jesus Christ" on the wall with toothpaste,' said Minji. 'It was my first time to see the words "Jesus Christ". So, I asked her what it meant, and she began to share her faith with me.' Minji began to read a South Korean translation of the Bible for the first time in that prison.

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

After being released from prison in China, Minji defected to South Korea and another defector friend introduced her to Release partner Voice of the Martyrs Korea. She is now following a discipleship programme with them and is loving learning from the Bible.

Minji has decided that she wants to follow in her husband's footsteps and professes that she has a heart to follow Jesus like he did. She hopes to attend a theological school and become equipped to do God's work.

We give thanks for the prayers of the persecuted! They cannot have known how God would use their prayers, along with Minji's husband, her uncle, other North Korean defectors and Release's partner in South Korea to bring Minji to Himself. They were faithful in prayer and God fulfilled His plan.



Minji reading the words 'Jesus Christ' on a chalkboard

Looking to the future in Sri Lanka

It is nearly two years since the Easter Sunday bombings rocked Sri Lanka. Several churches were hit in the devastating attacks, which left more than 250 dead and around 500 injured. Since then Sri Lanka, like most of the world, has been hit by the Covid-19 crisis.

Many Christians in Sri Lanka live under the oppression of being a Christian minority, and so have a 'hand-to-mouth' existence, relying on work which pays a daily wage. When there is no work, there is no money coming in and nothing with which to buy the basics of life such as food. Release International's partner in Sri Lanka has been supplying food parcels to Christians, as well as continuing to support victims of the Easter Sunday bombings by supplying medicines and paying for surgery for some of those who were injured.

You may remember the story we featured on the front page of the Autumn 2019 edition of *Embrace*,



'I think we'd better pray'. Country Champion Linda shared the story of a mother of five whose family were badly affected by the bomb attack on Zion Church in Batticaloa. Her middle daughter died at the scene

and the daughter's husband eight days later. This daughter's seven-year-old girl was blinded and received burns to her limbs; the 10-year-old boy escaped unhurt. He was found by his aunt and it was his faithful words, 'I think we'd better pray', when he believed that his parents and sister were all dead, that spoke so powerfully to Linda.

The family are continuing to receive help from Release International's partner in Sri Lanka. It had been hoped that the young girl would be able to have an operation that might restore her sight. However, as the operation would need to take place in India, this has been put on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions. At present she is learning braille and the family are looking to the future. They are very grateful for the help from our partner, which the generous support of people like you helps to provide.

Linda has recently heard of another survivor's story. Reneesha (not her real name) is married with a daughter. Reneesha and her family attended church on that Easter Sunday. All the family managed to escape injury except for Reneesha, whose legs were badly damaged in the blast.

The explosion had caused a pole to fall on Reneesha which damaged one leg so badly that she couldn't walk. She was rushed to hospital and needed surgery to have a metal plate inserted into her leg. Our partner was able to meet the cost of this surgery to support the family.

The effect of the injury on Reneesha was significant. She was unable to look after her young daughter or to help out around the home she shares with her husband. Throughout many long months of recovery our partner has continued to assist this young family when there was no one else to

help. They gave her vouchers for food, helped to ensure that the child's needs were met and that there was support at home. They also assisted with the necessary medical treatments. It's wonderful to report that Reneesha is making a good recovery and is now able to walk again. She is very thankful to God for the love and practical care and concern shown to her by Release's partner.

Give thanks!

You may remember in last year's Spring edition of *Embrace* that we shared the story 'She's our daughter now!' about Nadeema (not her real name), a Christian teenager in Pakistan living with her aunt. Nadeema had been working as a housemaid in a Muslim home when she was 'married



off' by the Muslim family to a cleric and forcibly converted to Islam. Despite a court order for Nadeema to be returned to her aunt, she and her cousin Zenab (not

her real name) faced further threats and eventually they fled the country, with Zenab's brother acting as their chaperone.

After nearly a year in a country which offered them short-term protection, all three of these faithful young people have now relocated to a third country where they have been granted asylum and it is hoped they can settle indefinitely. Thank you for your prayers! We praise God for His protection over them and for providing them with a new home where they can live and worship freely.

You make a difference!

You have made a difference in each of these situations by your faithful prayers and by your generous gifts. Never underestimate the difference you make – however small you feel your contribution. Thank you for all that you do to support your persecuted family around the world.

Editorial

Dear sisters in Christ,

As I write this editorial and look out of the window it is snowing and winter is with us in full force. We are all looking forward to spring and all that will hold for us after almost a year of difficulties. However, when we read about our persecuted sisters, there can be no comparison to their problems.

I find them to be amazingly kind, long suffering, faithful and generous, not only to their own families but also to their neighbours. For instance, the woman who refused the food package because her neighbour was in greater need than her. The woman who gave food to her neighbour who asked to borrow some to feed her children.

We also read about the Chinese Christians who faithfully prayed for Minji and other women in prison to become Christians. Once released they even sent money through a guard for the defectors who were still in prison. Then there's the woman in Sri Lanka whose daughter and son-in-law were killed in the Easter bombings, and whose young granddaughter was so severely burned that she lost her sight. We pray that eventually she will be able to have an operation to re-gain it. These are incredible women.

Again, I ask myself, as I am certain you do, what can be done to help them? Our first thought as Christians is to pray. Prayer is of course the most important thing we can do for them. However, there are other things that can be done. We can raise awareness of persecution in our churches and communities, as well as among our own families and friends. We can raise much-needed funding in all kinds of different ways and if the Lord leads send a contribution towards their many needs via Release International. As you seek His face may He encourage you to help our dear sisters in any way you are able.

Every blessing,

Wendy

Prayer Points



'If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'

Isaiah 7:9b (NIV)

Please pray for Christian women in Upper Egypt and their families:

- That they continue to get food packages and other aid for themselves and their families.
- For Martha and her family, that with the Lord's help they will be overcomers.
- Praise God for our partners who can still help the needy, even with all the obstacles they face.
- God's blessing on the family and the young boy who thanked the Lord for His provision.

Please pray for Minji and other Christian North Korean defectors:

- Thank the Lord that Minji is studying His word and may she continue to enjoy doing so.
- That she will be given her heart's desire to be able to go to theological school.
- Ask the Lord to meet all Minji's needs, including being able to support herself.
- Pray that the Lord will keep the North Korean defectors safe and that they will continue evangelising.

Please pray for Reneesha in Sri Lanka and Nadeema from Pakistan:

- Praise the Lord for Reneesha's ongoing recovery and for all the help she has received.
- That Reneesha will regain full health and be able to take care of her family again.
- That the young girl will be able to have the eye operation and re-gain her sight.
- That Nadeema and her two cousins will be able to settle into a new and better life and be able to stay where they are permanently.

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Sunday, May 30, 2021

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Release Women email

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