

Sister Siu tells of perseverance through pain – for the sake of the Gospel

Siu's journey has not been an easy one. But – like many courageous Christian women – she has stood firm for the Lord Jesus, even through the bleakest of times.

I became a Christian back in 1991, and after an initial period of feeling very close to Jesus, my life became very difficult. I was educated, with a good job in the government. But when I refused to sign forms allowing officials to steal top quality clothing, I was 'removed'.

Then I began to study the Bible, but my pastor felt threatened by me. He was a simple man and he began to make remarks like, "We must never use our minds for they just lead to trouble, just read the Word and obey it." He would look at me as if to say, "Your mind will just lead us all into trouble." When I began learning Greek over the Internet, it was the last straw.

Sadly, house churches like this one have only one role for women like me, and that is to send us to an unevangelised area. We cannot teach, because we "cannot be trusted." So I was sent to a distant province where there were few Christians.

Abandoned?

We were not given any money. We were supposed to 'live by faith'. I was sent with another woman of 22. I was 28. She died of exposure after six months. The house that we built was not warm enough, and that winter was a harsh one. I was alone, and all the more so because it seemed Jesus had abandoned me.

Then one day in the town, I began sharing my faith with a Muslim man. Unknown to

me, he was the leader of a local mosque. By nightfall I was in jail for "illegal preaching." I was put into a cell with twenty other women. I had heard that prison was a great place to make converts, but most of them were disturbed, and I was beaten many times.

Eventually, I was released. But there were still no converts. I was skin and bone from the poor prison gruel. The house I had built with my deceased co-worker was all broken down, and all valuable items had been stolen, including the stove.

More precious than the stars

I remember sitting in the house. The roof was off, and as dusk fell, I saw the stars. They were so bright and close I felt I could just reach out and touch them. My instinct was to feel utterly insignificant, but at that moment I suddenly felt a great warmth flowing through me, and I heard a voice distinctly saying, "I love you far more than these stars."

After that, I had a new determination to keep going. Two days later, the leader of my house church movement arrived. He was clearly shocked by my emaciated appearance. He heard me talk of my time in jail, and I could see that I was now a "safe" person in his eyes. I had been tested by affliction and come through.

Four months later, seven women arrived to help me. They said, "We are to be your co-workers and you are to teach us the

Scriptures and we will walk the streets doing evangelism." Two years later, the church is now 30 strong, and we are growing slowly. We even have four former Muslims in the fellowship.

There was a long season in my life when knowing Jesus was not easy, and I had to worship through it all even though I did not feel like it. But praise His name, He helped me persevere through the pain.



Please remember Christian women like Siu in your prayers as they serve the Lord Jesus wholeheartedly, no matter what the cost.

Briefing: Bringing healing and restoration to Christian marriages across China

Imagine the scene. While travelling in China, you are invited to share an evening meal with a house church pastor and his wife. You receive a warm welcome at the couple's home, and soon enough dinner is served. The food looks and smells delicious! Just when you are expecting the pastor to give thanks for the food, he instead addresses you as his honoured guest. "I apologise for my dumb and lazy wife," he says as his wife, in shame, lowers her eyes to the floor. "She has prepared this disgusting meal for you to endure. Please accept our apologies."

Although shocking, this is sadly a typical scenario for Christian couples in China. In many aspects of personal relationships, cultural norms still hold sway, even among couples who have been Christians for many years. Few have ever received teaching on the Biblical principles for marriage.

In particular, the marriages of pastors and leaders are under particular strain, with threats and pressures coming from all sides:

1. Ministry Pressure

Chinese pastors work very hard, keeping long hours. Many are away from home for weeks or months at a time. Their busy schedules allow very little time for couples to spend together to cultivate mutual understanding.

2. Persecution Pressure

Many pastors and evangelists are under surveillance by the authorities. For many, this means they are unable to return home after ministry assignments.

3. Spiritual Pressure

Because of the intensity of their ministry, church co-workers are always 'giving out' to others. As such, they have little spiritual energy left to invest in their own family.

In recent years, Open Doors co-workers have identified this as a significant threat to the Church across China. In response, we have devised a new stream of training to help counter the threats, and encourage Christian couples to live the Biblical model of love, respect and submission.

Couples in key leadership roles are invited to attend the training sessions, which take place over the course of four days. Both husband and wife are included, which often comes as a surprise! Ordinarily, this would be viewed as a waste of money.

One couple on a recent training camp had been married for 14 years. This was the first time in their entire married life that they had been away from home together and had time dedicated to one another.

During the course of the training, each 'student' is given a small sum of money with which they are instructed to buy a gift for their spouse. For most, this is a completely alien concept – another

challenge of Biblical principles versus Chinese culture.

"I want to thank you so much for having this opportunity to learn," says Sister Mei, wife of Lok, a key house church pastor. "I feel convicted by God that I have often neglected my husband."

"And please pray for me," says Lok. "Pray for me in our marriage, that I will be able to make up for the times when I have mistreated Mei."

The training has vast potential as each couple are commissioned to pass on the lessons they learn to other couples in their local networks. Please do pray that many Christian marriages will be healed and restored through Open Doors 'Marriage Enrichment' training.

Your gift can help fund these vital seminars. Please refer to your attached Response Form.

Lok and Mei meet Paul Tew of Open Doors UK to tell him just how much the 'Marriage Enrichment' training has meant to them.





“Thank God, my husband is free!”

Meet Sister Mary. Her husband, Chen, was arrested in the year 2000 because of his involvement in literature distribution across China. During Chen's imprisonment, life has been hard for Mary. But she is so grateful for your prayers which she believes have not only helped her to stand firm – but have also brought about the early release of Chen from jail. Mary shares her experiences with us.

My husband Chen was arrested a few years' ago and sentenced to five years in labour camp.

We used to travel together all the time for ministry. We knew of the risks involved in being Bible distributors as well as leading an unregistered house church network.

My heart almost stopped

That fateful day, we had to be in two different places but made arrangements to meet up a little later. When I was informed that he had been arrested by the Public Security Bureau, my heart almost stopped.

During his time in jail, I visited him once or twice a month. The journey to and from the city where he was imprisoned was long and I ended up spending only about two hours with him each visit. During the SARS epidemic in 2003, the labour camp was closed to visitors.

Two years ago, I managed to smuggle a Bible in for him. We were not able to pray together during my visits. The two hours always passed by very quickly. Our two

children accompanied me on my visits every six months. We also arranged for other church members to visit Chen every other week so that he received constant encouragement.

For us, it was only four years

With Chen imprisoned, I was forced to take on responsibility for our church.

“...we had the comfort of many people supporting and praying for us.”

When things got too difficult, I learned to pray and the Lord helped me step by step. I also read Alan Yuan's testimony and how his wife Alice had to cope on her own for over twenty years. For us, it was only four years and we had the comfort of many people supporting and praying for us.

Chen was given the role of kitchen supervisor at the camp. Before that, he was assigned to stringing badminton

rackets and ironing clothes. I thank God that he was healthy and treated well in the camp. His faith always remained strong.

We thank God

Now, we thank God for answering so many prayers – my husband is free! He was released early because of his good behaviour. But his release will most likely be conditional and he will be restricted in his movements for a while. Despite all this, I know he'll want to serve the Church again.

Chen has always been like a big tree to me and before his imprisonment, I enjoyed the shade of that big tree for many years. Now he is free, I can hide behind the big tree once again.

Please continue in prayer for other Christian prisoners and their wives. Though we cannot divulge their names and situations, we trust that the Lord still hears and answers our prayers, just as he has done for Chen and Mary.

China Watch

Attacks stepped up on “illegal” religious activity

On 13 June, Chinese authorities detained and interrogated well-known house church leader, Samuel Lamb, after worship services. Ten of his co-workers were also taken in for questioning. Pastor Lamb and his co-workers were all released by the following day.

This is the first time in 14 years that Chinese authorities have taken repressive steps against Pastor Lamb, who reportedly hosts 3,000 worshippers a week at his new meeting place in Guangzhou.

Sources in China say that it is no coincidence that just two days earlier,

authorities detained and later released 100 leaders of the China Gospel Fellowship house church network in the central city of Wuhan. Prior to these incidents, a high-level Politburo meeting reportedly issued a secret directive calling for a crackdown on all “illegal” religious activities. It is thought that Chinese authorities may be reacting to high profile publicity concerning house churches and the “Back to Jerusalem Movement” published in overseas media.

Xu Guoxing released from labour camp

Philip Xu Guoxing, a prominent leader of an unregistered house church movement

based in Shanghai, was released on 7 June from a labour camp in Jiangsu province. Xu had served 18 months in the camp for setting up unregistered house churches in East China. According to a relative, he has now returned to Shanghai to be with his wife and daughter.

First arrested in March 1980, Xu was again arrested and jailed in 1989 and 1997. He has performed hard labour and suffered beatings for more than six years – punishment for his refusal to join the government-controlled Three Self Patriotic Movement. Even though Xu's fourth imprisonment has taken its toll on his health, he has consistently refused to leave China, believing God has called him to stay to build up the Church.



Letters from China

"We used to worship in the big 'Three Self' church. The elderly Christians and the unemployed met together for prayer, Bible study and hymn singing. But the 'Three Self' leaders of the big church would not allow us to meet as we wanted. They encouraged the government to arrest many people. The brothers were unable to protest, and each of them was fined 1,000 RMB (approximately one month's wages). The sisters were each fined 200 RMB. All were then released.

"After this we formed a house church. One day as we were meeting together in prayer, the police entered the church and arrested believers. After the prayers, I stood up in the pulpit pretending I was the pastor. I wanted to protect our young teacher, as he was employed and would be heavily fined whereas I am a poor widow with no money even if they wanted it! I was detained for one day, and in the evening they released me. Later they arrested me several more times.

"The more I love the Lord, the stronger I become! But please pray for me!"

- Letter from Mrs. C,
Shuangyashan City

Source: Compass Direct

Prayer Focus

The women of the Chinese Church often carry heavy responsibilities while enduring persecution and pain. Please lift them in prayer.

Prayer

- In many ways, Chinese culture leaves women with low self-esteem. In Christ, women can find a new identity and self-worth as 'children of God'.
- Christian couples face a struggle in their marriages between cultural expectations and Biblical principles. Open Doors teams are working to help Christian couples to overcome these challenges, through our 'Marriage Enrichment' seminars (see page 2).
- With their pastor husbands often on the road with ministry duties, many Christian women are left to raise their children alone for months at a time. They need God's help, strength and wisdom in this lonely task.
- The wives of Christian prisoners often take on responsibility for church leadership during their husbands' time in jail. This can cause extra pressures on the family at an already difficult time.
- Like Sister Siu, many Christian women are sent to remote provinces to share the Gospel (see page 1). This can be an incredibly hard task, fraught with dangers and difficulties. These sisters need God's strength and help.

- Christian women involved in active ministry roles are often arrested and interrogated. They are vulnerable to abuse by guards and officials.
- In many cases, China's Sunday Schools are run by dedicated Christian women. This is a vital but dangerous ministry, and our sisters need resources, strength and courage for the task.

Praise

- Despite facing great threats and pressure, many Christian women across China hold on to their faith with courage and perseverance. They bring glory to the Lord through their faithful witness.
- Open Doors 'Marriage Enrichment' training has already been very well received by many couples in leadership positions. They have gone on to share the important Biblical lessons with others in their networks.
- The testimonies of many courageous and dedicated Christian women are woven into the history of the Chinese Church. These examples of great faith bring encouragement and hope to Christian women today.

Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and the Suffering Church worldwide. Open Doors is involved in supplying Bibles, leadership training, Scripture-based literacy programmes and livelihood projects. We also seek to mobilise the Church to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

Yes – I want to support my suffering Chinese sisters

My gift:

You can care for your suffering sisters across China. By providing Bibles and resources, you will help them stand firm in their faith. And your gift for Open Doors training programmes will enable more couples to attend our invaluable 'Marriage Enrichment' seminars.

I want to give £_____ to provide Bibles and Scripture resources for Chinese house churches
Just £10.00 provides five Christians with their own copy of God's Word

I want to give £_____ to provide training for house church leaders
A gift of £300 will sponsor one couple to attend the four days of our 'Marriage Enrichment' training.

My payment details:

Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms / Rev / Dr (delete as appropriate) Surname _____

Forename(s) _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Tel _____ Email _____

I enclose a cheque for £ _____ made payable to Open Doors

We also accept donations by: (please tick)

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Card number:

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Name on card: _____

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Please return this form, together with your gift, to the Freepost address overleaf.

China Prayer Campaign

Bulletin 11: Women of the Chinese Church

Dear praying friend,

Welcome to Bulletin 11 of our China Prayer Campaign. Our focus in this edition is on the 'Women of the Chinese Church'. I am sure you will be challenged and inspired to pray all the more as you read of the great faith and perseverance of our suffering sisters.

As you read these articles, you may find the Lord giving you a particular burden for the women of the Suffering Church. If so, you may like to become part of our growing 'Women's Ministry' division. For more details, contact Jenny on 01993 885424 or email jennyw@opendoorsuk.org

As ever, thank you for your faithfulness in prayer.

Catherine

Communications Manager



PS You may have heard about a significant new DVD which has been released detailing the history of the Chinese Church. You can order your copy of 'The Cross: Jesus in China' through Open Doors. See the box below.

The Cross: Jesus in China

The last 50 years of China's revival is chronicled on this significant new DVD. With over four hours of exclusive footage, the film will give you unique insight into how the Lord has been building His Kingdom through and since China's Cultural Revolution.

The DVD is divided into four sections:

Spring of Life - Testimonies from a broad spectrum of Chinese Christians; farmers, students, officials, criminals...

Seeds of Blood - Interviews and life stories of famous Chinese missionaries of the 20th century; John Sung, Wang Ming Dao, Watchman Nee, Allen Yuan, Samuel Lamb, Moses Xie.

Bitter Cup - Testimonies from the younger generation of Chinese missionaries.

The Canaan Hymns - The story and music of Xiao Min, a farm girl with no formal music tuition, who has written over 1,000 hymns.

[Note - When first released by the 'China Soul for Christ Foundation', this DVD caused considerable difficulties for many of the believers featured. However, it is now on general release, and we believe it is a valuable resource giving information and inspiration about the Church in China.]



You can order your copy of 'The Cross' DVD through Open Doors.

£15 each
(inc P&P)

For every order you place, we will contribute £5 to Open Doors training programmes in China. Please make cheques payable to 'Open Doors Resources'.