

Believers in East Asia grow in faith during coronavirus outbreak

by Stella McMillian, posted Thursday, March 12, 2020 (one month ago)

EAST ASIA (BP) -- Normally, there wouldn't be anything noteworthy about Jane* and her family having other local believers over for dinner. But recently, life has been anything but normal. As the coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread throughout East Asia and other parts of the world, many cities including Jane's have imposed restrictions on travel and suspended group gatherings, making fellowship and community difficult.

So when Jane heard a few days ago that a local pastor and his wife were bringing their daughter over for dinner, she was excited. They'd not been able to have anyone over to their house for more than a month.

Jane is a nurse, and as the virus spread, she knew it would affect her and her family in some way. She just never expected how extensive restrictions in their city would become. The day she heard that their neighborhood wouldn't allow visitors, she remembers feeling discouraged and lonely.

Because the coronavirus fell right during the biggest holiday in East Asian culture, many people in Jane's church and in her neighborhood were already away. She felt isolated.

"That was a really lonely week, because there was no end date [to the restrictions]," she said. "That was hard, just emotionally and spiritually feeling alone. But it also became a time of just being with the Lord and remembering we're not alone."

Though the last few weeks have been challenging, Jane says she has seen God continue to work in and through the challenges those in East Asia are facing.

Her background as a nurse, for example, has helped her encourage friends around her who are fearful. The couple that came over for dinner has a young daughter, and they've been too scared to let her even go outside to play. Having them over gave Jane and her husband a chance to encourage them not to live in fear.

"We've been able to help people see, especially believers, with an eternal perspective. The Father's hand is still in this. He's still good, and we're still under His hand," she said.

Even before the restrictions began to lift and allow for people to visit each other again, Jane and her husband saw God open doors for them to love and serve their neighbors in small but meaningful ways.

When friends recently had a baby, Jane's husband brought them fresh fruit and vegetables. He wasn't even able to deliver them personally, but the gifts still reminded his friends that they were loved and supported.

Every time they go outside for groceries or for fresh air, they look for other neighbors and ask how they are doing. Jane said she's noticed that something as ordinary as a friendly question or two has meant a lot to her neighbors. Just last week, when Jane was outside, she saw an elderly woman who lives close by and asked about her health.

"Honestly, since this has happened, when you go outside, a lot of people have not even wanted to look at you or interact. They've seen you as the enemy," Jane said, speaking to the fear that people have had of catching the virus. "She was just so excited that I asked about her and checked in on her."

Though at times Jane says she's been tempted to worry or complain, God has continued to meet her family's needs. Sometimes this has been through other believers, like a week when the city faced a shortage of needed supplies. Two different families brought supplies to share with Jane's family.

Sometimes though, God's provision has come through a simple conviction to keep trusting Him and walking in faith even when they do not have a clear answer as to when this season will end.



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"I think in my own life, I've just been thinking through how easy it can be to complain in situations like this. But God has taught me, just as He taught the Israelites walking through the wilderness, that He's still good, He's still sovereign, and there's still things to cultivate gratitude for," Jane said. "Everything we've needed He's continued to provide."

To learn more or donate to the IMB's ongoing coronavirus relief efforts, visit <https://www.imb.org/give/project/coronavirus-response/>.

*Name changed.