

Our Time in China is Up

After serving in China for 10 years, Jeanette returned to her apartment one afternoon in late 2020 to find 25 police officers in her home. Three officers immediately ordered her to put her phone on the table so she couldn't erase its data or use it to notify others about the police raid. She saw one group of officers questioning her husband, Richard, while other officers meticulously searched through their possessions and recorded the whole ordeal.

"My thought was, 'OK, they are here for the thing that we have mentally ... been preparing for, and our time in China is up,'" Jeanette recalled.

As Richard's interrogation proceeded, he too knew that their family's time in China was over. "We know you are guilty," the officers told him. "We know who you are, who you work for, what you are doing here."

Richard was taken to the police station and detained overnight. In the days following his return home, he was repeatedly summoned to the police station for further interrogation. He was secured to the "tiger chair" for long hours as police asked about his work, his travels and his contacts with foreigners and Chinese citizens. Authorities warned that he and his family would face severe consequences if they told anyone about the raid on their house or the interrogations. Chinese police told him they had been watching his family for five years. Confirming their close surveillance, they showed Richard a chart of his mission organization's leadership hierarchy, complete with names, pictures and titles. The chart started with Richard and Jeanette in China and progressed to ministry leaders at the group's U.S. headquarters.

In previous weeks, the entire family had been memorizing

Philippians 4:6–7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Now they needed to put Paul’s instructions into practice.

“Honestly,” Jeanette said, “my first thought was, ‘The Lord is sovereign, and the Lord is good, and these two things are not contradictory. No matter what is going to happen over the next however many hours, days or weeks, he is still trustworthy and he hasn’t changed.’”

Within three weeks, Richard, Jeanette and their children were on a flight out of China. They know they will never be allowed to return to the country they love and once considered home.

“Never coming back was a hard ending, a very rough ending,” Richard said. “I cried; it was the first time I could cry when they stamped my passport, ‘Exit.’”

And despite the emotional trials of the interrogation and eventual departure from China, the couple continue to express thanksgiving for the experience.

“Both of us walked away saying I am thankful for that, I am thankful to have gone through this type of suffering to know the Lord in a deeper way, to see how He answers prayer and how He is working through the local church, you know, through our suffering, for their glory, too, to strengthen their faith,” Jeanette said.

“It took this circumstance so that I could be more like Christ,” Richard added. “It really strengthened my trust in Christ but it also helped me identify better with the suffering of Christ. My suffering was light, in comparison...I am just so thankful to have known Christ better in and through what happened.”

Ruth Foster *is a staff writer for Voices of the Martyrs magazine.*