



A Powerful Disease, A Powerful God

COVID- 19 took away
her friends but God gave her faith.

By Claire K. Taetz

“What virus? I’ve been in China, and I haven’t heard anything about this,” says Jacqueline Hutchins. She had been living in China during the most imperative time of the global pandemic: the birth and first two weeks of COVID- 19. When she arrived back in the U.S. on January 15, COVID- 19 was news to her—while it was on the frontlines of U.S. media.

A new country, a new chapter

Hutchins graduated from Texas Christian University in May of 2019 with a degree in political science and minors in business and comparative race and ethnics studies. However, after graduation, she wanted to stray away from the norm and pursue the rare job opportunity that she was offered. During her senior year of college, Hutchins was offered an overseas job in China with Coast 2 Coast, known as C2C. The job entails living in China to do ministry with college students on campus. Hutchins doesn’t just share the teachings of the Bible with college girls but shares her life with her new friends, as she introduces them to the idea of being in a relationship with God.

It is not illegal to be a Christian in China. It is illegal to do ministry. Hutchins communicates with her financial supporters and community by emailing them a monthly newsletter. She uses code words like “yarping” for praying, “the Good Book” for the Bible, and “Club” for church.

To an individualistic American, the job and its risks seem unwise, but to strong Christians like Hutchins, she sees it as her duty as a follower of Christ. “I live my life for God, not for the world. I live for him and to make an impact for his eternal kingdom that is to come. There is nothing else I would rather do than share what he has done in my life with people who may never have the chance to hear.”



A home in China

In August 2019, Hutchins flew to a city in China, kept under wraps for security reasons. She settled in with expectations of staying there for at least the next five years, besides her trip home to renew her visa and her planned visits to see friends and family in the U.S.

While in China, her daily schedule consists of morning Chinese tutoring at the local university, lunch and Bible study on campus with students, afternoons studying Chinese, team meetings for the house church, and dinner at her house for the college girls.

Two of the girls that Hutchins is closest with are her two friends Eva and Fragrant; the girls are second-year students studying business English. They help Hutchins with her Chinese homework, and Hutchins helps the girls with their English. When they are not studying, the girls explore China together. They *were* inseparable.

“Adjusting to culture in China was super hard. China’s culture is unlike anything I’ve ever witnessed,” explains Hutchins. Culture in China is communal, as generations of families live together. The Chinese culture is centered around much work and little play. Families rest when they go to sleep at night, but also rest by taking a nap for energy after lunch.

“China has been doing the same thing for the past thousands of years, but they just use technology to do it now. Their wages haven’t even changed, they cook the same meals, and they have the same family traditions and expectations. They are not as open to talking about deep topics because they’re simply not used to it.” With strict family beliefs and a rigid government, it makes sense why Hutchins finds it more challenging to pursue deep friendships in China. Five months into living in China, Hutchins felt like she was connecting with the Chinese students and understanding the Chinese culture.

With Chinese being an intricate language, Hutchins understands that learning Chinese is a difficult task, but she is determined. She wants to learn not just the spoken and written language, but also the “heart language,” she says, as she wants to not just understand them, but relate to them, know them. She usually finds it easy to share God with others in the U.S. However, she runs into many obstacles while sharing in China. Hutchins says, “I love talking to people, and I love knowing people deeply. Even if I learn conversational Chinese, how are you supposed to know the depth of someone’s heart if they only understand topical words? How do I explain to you the grace of God to these girls if they don’t understand what grace means in general? And how do I convey that to them in a way they understand?”

Hutchins relays that the most fulfilling part of her job is when she sees her relationships deepening with students, despite the obstacles and language barriers. “It is so sweet because it means that they trust me, and they want to have deep conversations about life that are normally taboo in the Chinese culture. They look up to me with honor and think I’m wise. So, I’m like, I don’t think I am, but thank you for thinking that. It is really special.”

In the face of the language barrier, the strict traditions, a legalistic government, and a lack of depth in conversation, Hutchins has witnessed girls in China come to faith, as she shares the word of the Bible with them. Unfortunately, another obstacle surfaced--the Coronavirus Disease 2019.

A change of plans

Hutchins first heard about COVID- 19 when she landed in the U.S. to do a visa change. She had been in China for five months and during the first two weeks of the disease.

In response to her friends asking her about the Coronavirus in China, Hutchins asks, “What virus? I’ve been in China and I haven’t heard anything about this.” Her friends and family were confused with her response, as COVID- 19 has been in the U.S. media since its debut in China.

Because China’s government controls the media in China, they were trying to minimize the shame that came with the disease by putting those who spoke out against it in jail. “The people of China know that their country is responsible for this fatal disease, so they feel shameful. They don’t want their image of China to be weak, and that's why they tried to cover it up so hard at the beginning. It’s really sad, because their whole life depends on being the best at work and having an honorable reputation,” voices Hutchins.

With the global pandemic of COVID- 19, countries, businesses, public spaces, and universities are shutting down, but racism is aggressively sweeping through nations. The World Health Organization reports that there are over 400k cases of COVID- 19 around the globe, and people are distraught. People who are Chinese, or any Asian ethnicity, are facing racist comments in all countries from those who are livid with China’s responsibility for the spread of the disease. Hutchins says, “it is not a Chinese disease. It came from China.”

People are looking for the government of China, and the people of China, to take a punishment for the widespread panics, economic distress, and deaths that COVID- 19 caused. Despite the tension, those who are quarantining in China have been deflecting the racism by focusing even more on their jobs while they work overtime from home. Hutchins adds, “one of our friends said that he just left his apartment to go outside. After 52 days of being inside and he wasn't on leave...for 52 days! That's got to be emotionally draining.”

After her short stay in the U.S., Hutchins flew back to East Asia, but this time to Thailand. In Thailand, she attended the small C2C staff conference for her ministry team, as they waited in hopes of COVID- 19 to die out. “We had our conference to sort out logistics. However, we missed the Spring Festival, which is the Chinese New Year. We were going to visit the hometown of some of my friends. We were going to meet their families and see where they grew up, which was going to be really beneficial for the deepening friendships. But I wasn't able to fly back to China to do that,” says Hutchins.

Being isolated from her friends and the secret house church that C2C established in China, Hutchins is having a hard time ministering to the girls from afar. She is able to stay in contact with her friends in China through WeChat, as China doesn't have iMessage. To avoid putting their lives in jeopardy, Hutchins can't talk about God and ministry with them over this app.

"I've been messaging a lot of them asking how they are doing and how online school is going, but the sweet thing is that they are reaching out to me as well. They are concerned with how I'm doing and COVID- 19 in the U.S.," says Hutchins. Hutchins and the C2C team are able to talk to those who have given their life to Christ and became members at the house church in China through Zoom, as it is a safe way to communicate for both parties.

Hutchins and her team are currently in quarantine at a house in Texas. "The team is waiting, and we are hanging out. I'm just trying to remember the truth. God is in control, and he's intentional," says Hutchins. Christians have been a source of comfort to those who are crippled with anxiety that is being fueled by the media.

Many Christians have appeared on national news coverage and media streams to say that God can and will use this mess to point us back to Him as a nation, but also individually point people back to Him. With the delay of sports games, the closure of businesses and universities, the cancellation of award shows, the withdrawal from family and friends, and the elimination of entitlement that comes with managing daily activities, the U.S. is being stripped of the activities its people love most.

Hutchins adds "I am so grateful that God has unlimited provisions and control over everything. He isn't affected by the world because he made it. He didn't create this disease. He could stop this mess, but he is using it to wake people up from their severed connection with Him." But how can Christians be productive in online ministry when foreign governments stand in the way?

Hutchins is discouraged by the change of plans but refuses to be defeated by the circumstances at hand. Hutchins shares, "Christians need to have a growth mindset. We have the opportunity to start conversations about the Gospel and the Trinity with people in our households as we submit to governing authorities by staying in quarantine. But for our friends in China, we just have to keep praying."

In quarantine, questions, & reflection

As Hutchins quarantines with her team in Texas, she is making plans to see her family. However, with airports being a cesspool for germs, traveling is risky, especially for those who have health conditions like Hutchins.

"Some people can't see their families with states being shut down. I can't travel back home to see my parents because they can't take risks with contracting COVID- 19. I have severe asthma, which makes flying through airports an even higher risk." Hutchins would normally use time

back in the states as an opportunity to see her financial supporters. However, with countries on lockdown, in hopes of limiting the spread of the disease, it is not safe to do so. As Hutchins quarantines, she is continuing her studying of the Chinese language. Because of their higher risk of exposure from being in East Asia, the C2C team has contacts in Texas that are providing the team with essentials—food, healthcare items, and toiletries.

The team thought about heading to Taiwan, as the pandemic could be going on for months, or even a year. They had the opportunity to enter Taiwan before it locks down, but it would be hard to be in a foreign country where they wouldn't know what's going on during this global crisis. Hutchins wasn't pushed away by fear for being under compromising conditions in China. However, with the severity of the disease, health conditions of members on the team, and the work they have already started in China, it is best that they refrain from starting a new ministry in Taiwan and wait until they can settle back into China.

Teams through C2C never just show up into a country. C2C studies the country, the government, the language, and the people before embarking on a new mission. Hutchins adds, "I feel more comfortable being in the U.S. during this time. The U.S. government will take care of us more than the governing bodies in another country, like Taiwan or China."

Hutchins was in the U.S. two months ago when she came back on January 15 before heading to Thailand. However, some of the members on her team have not been back to the U.S. in over eight months. "We are in a house all together right now, so they're not going into culture shock yet. But when they are back in the U.S. culture, I think it'll be hard for them, but it'll be doable. Nothing will compare to the culture shock of when we settled in China," notes Hutchins.

Hutchins's time in China has not just benefited the people of China but has mended her character into a more Christ-like way. Hutchins admits, "Before living in China, I was struggling with pride. I loved to do everything on my own. I didn't want to ask for help from God, and I didn't ask for help from friends. I have learned to be humble enough to ask for help and being okay with not understanding how things work. The U.S. is an individualistic society, and I had fallen guilty to it."

Because the U.S. and China have completely different cultures, there are many things we can learn from one another. One is not wiser than the other. There is more than one way of thinking. "I think I've only been in fellowship with people like me. But without a lot of options of people like me on my team and in China, I've grown to love and get close to people that are not like me. We are all made in the image of God. We have the capability of loving anyone, or at least the ability to love the Christ-like pieces of their character," Hutchins concludes.

The uncertainty of COVID- 19 has fueled fear in the U.S. and in the world. However, people can use this time of unknowns to find peace in the midst of chaos. God's work in Jacqueline

Hutchins is an impeccable example of what it looks like to use the uncertainty caused by this global pandemic to fuel faith, rather than fear.

The death of COVID- 19 is not in our control, but whether we choose to fuel our fear or faith lies in our hands.