



## Syria Through the Eyes of our Syrian Students

The daunting headlines of war in Syria and the fate of Christians in the Middle East have captured the world's attention since 2011. This month we spoke with our eight Syrian students and asked them for stories about their lives in Syria, how their faith has evolved in the suffering, their continuing ministries in the midst of conflict, and their prayers for the future of their homeland. We hope that you will join us in praying for all of our students coming from and soon returning to conflict zones as they seek to bring the light and love of Christ to this region.

### Life in Syria

Reflecting on his life before the war, Atallah (25), a third-year Master of Divinity student from southern Syria shared: "My favorite memory in Syria is of the peaceful life we used to have. When I was a university student in Damascus, I would travel back and forth at midnight from my town to the city. It was so safe that I would even sleep in the bus stations along the way. But right before I left Syria, to come study in Lebanon, I could not leave my house after 6 pm. When I think about Syria now, I can't image how we used to live without the bloodshed; I don't know how we can go back to the way things were before the war."

Gladis (29), a second-year Bachelor of Theology student from Aleppo, elaborated on the situation in her hometown: "Last month Aleppo came under siege for the fourth time. There is no water or electricity. Everyone has to get water from a well. When I lived in Aleppo during the war, my mother, brother, and I would walk 10 minutes to the well and then carry the water back to our building and up four flights of stairs every day. We could hear the missile rockets while we were out."

### Faith in Suffering

For married couple Rami (35) and Maya (28), first-year Certificate in Theology students from Homs, their biggest lessons from the war have been about faith. "We understand better God's thoughts and wisdom

now. If we didn't feel the Spirit leading us, protecting us, and providing for us we couldn't continue. If we didn't have God to turn to, it would have been very difficult." Diana (28), a first-year Certificate student from Aleppo who is studying at ABTS along with her husband Michael (29), added that her trust in the Lord has grown throughout this season: "God has continued to give us personal peace. The Lord has always provided what we needed. The Lord also protected us several times from shelling near us. I have learned not to complain when we have so many problems."

"When the war started, I was afraid everyday because a lot of people were dying without the assurance of their salvation," Gladis explained. "Because of the war, I started meeting with three mothers to share with them from the Bible. I also started reading the Bible more on my own, especially when we were without Internet or electricity."

Atallah explained that God was using his own questions to encourage others with doubts, telling us, "I became a believer in 2009; and even then I would ask God why there is suffering in the world. When the war began in 2011, I started asking even more questions. I know that God is God and my faith has not been shaken, but the war has made me ask more questions. Listening to the misery of family and friends leaves me with a burden. When I hear God answer my questions, I try to share with others on Facebook



Atallah at a Syrian refugee camp in East Lebanon



Michel, Diana, and their son Matteo, at ABTS

the hope that He gives me. I believe that what is happening in Syria now is a result of the Fall. What we really need now is Jesus.”

**Ministry in the Midst of War**

Atallah’s ministry continued throughout the war, but his message was adapted in order to encourage people and keep them from fear. “I was in university when the war started, so I would share with my peers and give them Bibles. I used to lead Sunday School and youth meetings and I also preached. I was also going to another village to lead the worship in their church and preach. It was hard to minister and share during that time, as people were confused and hurting. Now at ABTS I work with the Syrian refugees in East Lebanon.”

Rami and Maya were able to continue ministering with their church in Homs at the beginning of the war. “People saw that our Protestant churches were helping *all* people effected by the war, not just our own denomination, which opened the door for us to share more, because our love for others was obvious.” In 2012 when they fled to a village outside of the main city of Homs during a period of extreme conflict, there was no church so they started their own house groups. “We also helped a Christian organization with their Sunday School ministry. We hosted Christmas parties for children, and were even welcomed by daycares to put on programs sharing Bible stories with children.”

Youssef (29) and Carmen (28), first-year Bachelor of Theology students from Latakia, added that they served among Christians in Syria, but “after coming to Lebanon in November 2014, our vision grew as we saw Syrians turning to the Lord in this challenging situation. Since we came to Lebanon, we started to meet in small groups and our interactions with believers from non-Christian backgrounds is what led us to study at ABTS. We wanted to understand how to better explain the Gospel to them. God is redeeming the situation. We are seeing reconciliation between people despite the war and killings, and people are coming back to the Lord.”

**Prayer Requests**

Michael and Diana: “Pray for our families and parents still in Syria.” Diana added, “I am constantly worrying for my brother. He runs a small convenience store. He is the only one left with my mom. He must work in order to make money and provide for them, but every day he goes to work there is danger.”

Gladis: “Pray for peace. Pray especially for Syrian children, their situation is the most difficult. They play with bullet casings. Children should play and have innocent childhoods. Some children have not been able to go to school for 5 years. Pray for the people of Aleppo while they are under siege now.”

Atallah: “Pray that after the war, people will be more open to spiritual things. Pray that when the war ends we will have more opportunities to share hope with people.”

Youssef and Carmen: “Pray that the Lord’s will would be done in Syria. If His plan is for more war so that more people can come to Lord then may it be. We know He is a God of peace. Pray we can return to Syria and serve among our neighbors and continue to see the Lord work among us. Pray for our children’s future. We don’t want them to have to go back to an uncertain future, or a future without a proper education.”

Rami and Maya: “Pray the war will end soon. Pray we will be faithful to serve and minister in our hometown whether or not the war ends.”



Rami leading a children’s ministry event in Syria



Read about three of our graduates on the MEBO website: [The Faithfulness of God Evident in the Lives of ABTS Graduates Serving in Hard Places](#), October 27, 2015.

**The Middle East Bible Outreach (MEBO)** is a 501(c)(3) corporation based in Atlanta, GA, that coordinates efforts among our US friends and partners to generate awareness and much needed financial gifts and prayers to support the work of ABTS. To learn more, visit: [www.mebo.org](http://www.mebo.org).

**ABTS Mission:** To serve the Church in our region as it realizes its Biblical mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord by offering specialized learning resources and equipping faithful men and women for effective service.

## Get to Know Some of Our New Students!

We are now firmly into our 2015-2016 academic year as our students – both new and returning – can be found busily studying all over campus. Our new full-time students, fourteen in total from five different countries, have quickly adapted to ABTS campus life and are currently taking the class “New Testament Survey” taught by ABTS alumnus, active Iraqi pastor, and visiting faculty member Ara Badalian. All of our new students come from active churches and ministries in their home countries, ranging from church planting to refugee work to Sunday School. We hope that you join us in praying for our new students as they continue to adapt to life and school in a new context! Below you can get to know some of our new students, their visions, and their ministries.

**Daoud joined us this year from Port Sudan, Sudan,** an 11-hour drive from the Sudanese capital Khartoum.



Before coming to ABTS he was involved in a number of ministries with a focus on educating others about God and the teachings of the Bible. He came to ABTS because he found that many people in Sudan had difficult questions about theological issues he could not answer. His vision is to be able to return back to his people

and bring them correct Biblical teachings so that they may build strong faith in our God. His prayer for Sudan is that God will break through into his country and that we will witness all of the people of Sudan coming to know Christ.

**Joseph, an Egyptian student** who comes to us with a background in youth and church planting ministry, has actually been living outside of his home country for the last two years. He has been working with YWAM (Youth With A Mission) all over the Arab world: from unreached animists in South Sudan to Syrian refugees in Jordan first and then Lebanon. His calling is not to be a pastor or to lead a community, but for missions – especially among the youth or those in bad situations. He came to



study at ABTS to increase his theological knowledge and to become better qualified for ministry, especially among non-Christian-background believers.

This year we also have a **new student from the Palestinian city of Ramallah** in the West Bank. He came to Christ three years ago and after his first year as a believer, he felt that God was calling him for more than just attending church or Bible study. He had a gift for sharing his faith and decided to study theology because he wanted to be able to answer the difficult questions people asked him in this line of ministry. He had the opportunity to study theology in the US, but he chose to come to ABTS because he wanted to grow theologically in his own cultural context and to learn how to minister to his own people.

**Eman, from Egypt,** joined us this year after serving in Sunday School ministry for 24 years. Her dream is to continue in ministry among Egyptian children, especially those in violent homes, and to teach them how to share the message of Christ's Love with those around them. The Bible guided her during a difficult time in her life and she wants to use its knowledge and wisdom during her Sunday School lessons. She came to ABTS to better understand the Bible so she could better help the children among whom she ministers. She believes that educating these children and helping them build a solid spiritual foundation will change the future of her country.



### Partner with us in equipping future Arab Church leaders!

Your financial support provides scholarships for our students. Your gifts empower Arab Church leaders to be transformed and better equipped to return and serve their churches and communities across the Middle East and North Africa. US Contributions are tax-deductible.

For information on how you can give to ABTS, contact: **Wissam al-Saliby, Partnerships Manager, at [walsaliby@abtslebanon.org](mailto:walsaliby@abtslebanon.org)**

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