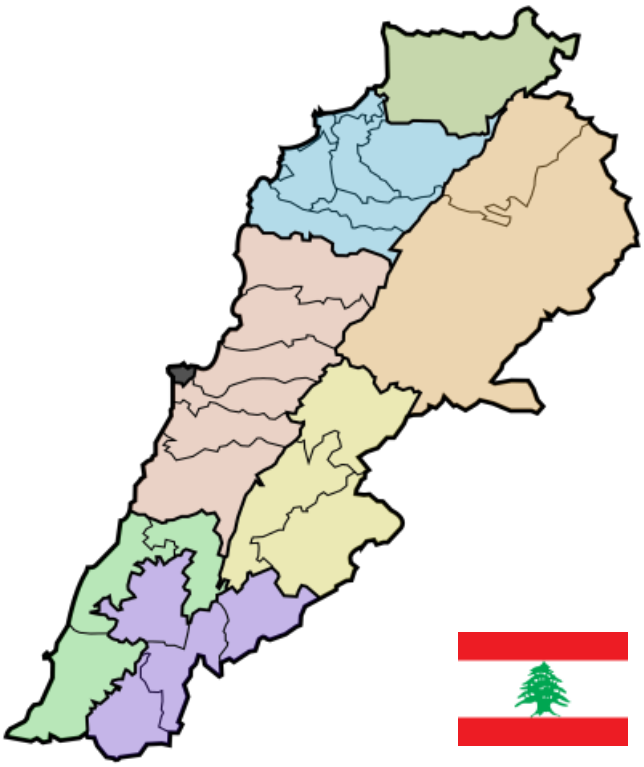
Arab Baptist Theological Seminary
كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية
www.abtslebanon.org
September 2018

Surrender to the Unsafe Will of God: The Story of an ABTS Graduate

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." – Jim Elliot

Below are the words of our graduate who serves in the north of Lebanon where the area was caught up in the struggle against religious extremists which has been playing out in Syria over the past few years. As a result, some northern regions in Lebanon have become quite different from Lebanon's generally tolerant relationships between people of different faiths. Embark with us on a journey to see God's work in that area.



It all started with an ABTS student who died for his Faith

Back in 2003, I owned a big beauty salon in the north. I was preparing my immigration papers to Canada when a young Jordanian believer suddenly appeared in the area. He was an ABTS student who wanted to spread God's love. He was so enamored with Christ; I couldn't help but take him in. Before I knew it, he had grown so close to my heart. I had been a believer for fourteen years, but my faith was traditional. I regularly attended church and pursued holiness, but I never thought of serving outside the church walls.

We began to serve together at a yearly book exhibition held in the north. We would rent a corner and there exhibit Bibles and Christian material; we certainly drew attention, including that of extremist religious groups. That year, my friend went to be with the Lord as a result of a bomb from members of these groups. I can't forget standing near his blood and then taking care of his funeral details.

I have decided to follow Jesus

The Lord called me to continue the ministry of my dear friend. I said, "Lord, I am still in financial debt. I can't do it." From 2003 to 2008, despite the worsening security situation in the area, God blessed me, and I was able to pay all my debts. In 2008, I was ready to follow God's calling. I left my job and began to study theology at ABTS. I studied for two years and graduated in 2010. After graduating, I returned to my ministry at the book exhibition. Then in 2011, the Syrian crisis began, and so did our ministry with refugees.

As I happen to have good relations with the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon and LSESD (Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development), I started a relief ministry in the North through the latter. My ministry team and I realized that it was time to practically live out our Bible teachings. The Lebanese Christian community was not equipped for such a work. At first, the idea of serving Syrian refugees repulsed them, because of the wounds the [Lebanese civil] war had left behind. The Lord changed this with time, and he helped the church to grow in accepting and adopting this work. We went to them, and many opened up to us as they saw how we had genuinely embraced them.

We built a center after the many threats we had received from extremist groups

Almost four years ago, the community's reality changed. We became more pressured as more extremist religious groups

appeared in the area. We were threatened and blackmailed. Once, a group of fifty armed young men came for me; I was escorting a team that included fourteen women. Upon reasoning with their leader, the Lord turned his heart, and he began to help us as we distributed aid. Then a police commander warned me to leave the area. He told me that a police undercover informant had heard an extremist group say that I was one of their targets.

Refugee children in class

Two months later, we had a big event at church. We had 200 to 300 attendees. The congregation was afraid, but our pastor encouraged us. A few extremist young men came to church on that day and directly threatened me. They told me that they were armed, and it was better for me not to contact the authorities, lest I would witness a massacre. I tried to reason with the leader, but he insisted that the matter was out of his hand. Upon this threat, we realized it was time for us to leave the area. We, the ministry team, began to pray that we might be able to start a center. We found a relatively safe area to which refugees can easily flock. In 2014, we built a wide, underground center.

God is working through the center

We have a children's ministry that welcomes 225 Syrian refugee children. We teach them English, Arabic and French. We set up summer camps and sports activities. In addition to this, we provide the children with medical assistance, and we provide alimentary aid, heating, hygienic material and clothes to refugees. We also have a home-visits ministry. Moreover, we provide young women with vocational training. In April 2018, we had a graduation celebration for 26 Lebanese and Syrian women as beauticians under the patronage of the association of beauty salon owners in North Lebanon. We started giving a course on makeup art to 30 Lebanese and Syrian women (both Christian and Muslim) at the beginning of July. The course will stop at the end of 2018. In all, our ministry has reached nearly 60,000 families.

We also still take part in the yearly book exhibition. Every year, we distribute nearly 15,000 to 20,000 publications (ranging from Christian books to Bibles or tracts) that talk about salvation through Christ alone. We follow up yearly with 200 to 250 people who fill up questionnaires. We also have more than 600 young men and women who decided to become disciples of Jesus within the past three years. They put their trust in God's salvation through Jesus after they had fully understood the message.

I praise God that we, with the help of LSESD and the brothers and sisters at ABTS, were able to help many people who had no hope. We found jobs for some and gave them a new chance. We fed the hungry and provided heating resources to those who were cold. I believe that life is one big opportunity to share God's love with the world around us. Most importantly, we tell them of redemption, forgiveness and a personal relationship with God.

I believe that theological education is a part of discipleship

I always encourage ministry workers at the center to study theology. We now have six from our team who are studying theology through ABTS Online. Two will be studying as ABTS full-time residential students next year, by God's grace.

I believe in the Holy Spirit who empowers God's servants. We do our part in reaching out to others, but a miracle must take place in their hearts. My petition is for God to grow and establish the people we are discipling so that they would know more of His will and rise to obedience. We might try to lead them to the right way, but no one can change another person's mind. They must be ready to make that decision for themselves.

Vocational training—Hairdressing

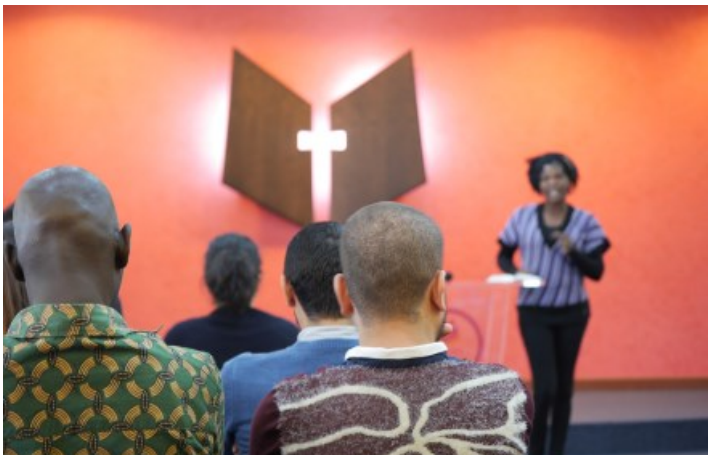
Another Academic Year Awaits Us

Our campus halls once more echo with the lively chatter of anticipating students. Our classrooms are once more busy and put to use. Our returning students have many stories to share of a summer spent serving God and their people and putting to practice what they gleaned at ABTS. Both our returning and new students come with hearts aflame, having said "Yes" to God. They come with a willingness to be transformed into leaders fit for the calling – able to make a change in their communities.

Our second-and-third year students have recently arrived with their classes commencing on the 10th. Our first-year students will soon follow with their classes commencing on October 8. This year, we accepted 23 new students coming from Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and South Sudan. In all, we may have more than 40 residential full-time students (if all of them successfully get their visas) in addition to our five part-time students. Since more applicants qualified to study at ABTS this year, we want to use more of our capacity to train them for ministry in the region.

During their first week (September 10 to 15), our second-and-third-year students took the *Credologos* Apologetics elective course. The course aimed to realize the mission and vision of the seminary through training students to respond to various arguments against the Christian faith. The course also explained the Christian faith in a logical, persuasive way. This allows future Church leaders to have a deeper understanding of their faith, and it equips them to engage in a respectful dialogue with others.

Moreover, Term IV 2018 of our online program starts on October 4. This year, we have 75 Arab online students, either serving in the Arab world or serving their communities in countries such as Canada, Sweden, Germany, Turkey and the US. Our Master of Religion (MRel) program in MENA studies, which starts its classes on October 8, will have 25 students coming from countries such as Lebanon, US, South Korea, Belgium and Singapore. Overall, we will be serving around 150 students.



Support the studies of a full-time residential student.

The annual cost of the tuition, fees, and room and board per a residential student is US$ 10,000.

Email us at information@abtslebanon.org

Pray with Us

Cinderella Zinaty, Senior Accountant

Please pray for the accounting team as we wrap up our fiscal year. It is a stressful time as we work on the budgeting, so your prayers are much appreciated.

Student Affairs Team

Please lift the new students up in prayer. Pray that our new students would get their visas so that they would soon join us. Also, pray for them to quickly adapt when they arrive. It is not easy to leave their families and churches for an extended period of time. Everything will be new at first; many of them might have a culture shock.

We were entrusted with these students; pray that we would be good, faithful stewards. It is a year to teach and to learn from these students. Pray that as their theological education helps them to mature spiritually that we would grow through learning more about their countries and cultures. Their presence among us will be a true blessing.

Abed El Kareem Zien El Dien, ABTS Faculty and Online Coordinator

Please pray for me as I study toward my DMin. I will be submitting part of my work by the end of this month, so pray that I would get the work done during this stressful period.

Fadi Salamoun, Facilities Manager

I ask you to pray for the guesthouse that the coming year would be as successful as the year past. Pray that we might get enough bookings so that the guesthouse would produce the needed revenue to support the minisrty.

Roula El Azzi, Executive Assistant

Please pray that God would strengthen the staff as we are busy preparing for the beginning of this academic year. May we be able to effectively accomplish the load of work smoothly and without stress. Also, pray that there would constantly be effective communication among us and that we would grow in unity that enhances our productivity.

Tamara Zorob, IMES Operations Manager

My friend found out that her mother is suffering from lung cancer just this week. This is a very difficult time for her and her family. Please keep my friend, her family, and her mother in your prayers.

Jesse Wheeler, Projects Manager

I praise God for the arrival of the new baby (James) to our family. Please pray for God's blessing upon him. I also ask you to pray for the MRel program as the MENA Cultures module ends and the MENA Islam module begins. Pray for the students who are finishing their final project for the MENA Cultures module. Also, pray for our new and returning students, and faculty, as MENA Islam starts in October.

Chaden Hani, Peacebuilding Initiatives Researcher

I ask you to pray for IMES's second peacebuilding initiative: The Church-Mosque Network. Meetings are held in Sidon, so pray that it will open doors for reconciliation among people of different faiths. May God show Himself through this initiative. [You can know more about IMES's second peacebuilding initiative here].

Ali Khalil, ABTS part-time student

Please pray that I might be able to reorganize my time so I can pick up from where I left off regarding my Master of Divinity studies.