



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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Lebanon Uprising Update

No new government has been formed yet while peaceful protests are turning into clashes with security forces. This has become an existential battle between those in authority, who want to cling to their power at any cost, and the resolute masses, who want to see a faint glimpse of serious change and reform. The economy is in rapid decline. Capital control measures are being put in place with restrictions on buying hard currencies and bank transfers outside the country, severely limiting trade. The local currency is losing its purchasing power. Many people have lost their jobs. Others are on partial pay. The economic and social effects are felt all around the country.

These effects are felt at ABTS just as well, although our classes and programs continue almost unaffected. The key question for us has been: do we play it safe, reduce our exposure and weather the storm, or are we able to experience God in new ways and find new opportunities to engage with the mission of God at a time like this? What kind of leadership are we going to model to our students? Leading in panic mode or leading with a vision for what God wants to accomplish in the midst of the crisis?

We are learning precious lessons during this period. For example, we are experiencing new depths of trusting God. It is easy to trust in God in a stable political, economic, and social climate. Or is this trusting in circumstances rather than trusting in God! The true test of trust in God is when nothing else can be trusted yet God sustains us and reveals Himself to us in fresh new ways.

As we prepare to celebrate, in a few days, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, the birth of Jesus Christ the ultimate revelation of God, we continue to be filled with awe and wonder at the depth of God's love for humanity. May we experience God's love to the fullest this Christmas season so that we can channel out this love to those suffering around us.

Elie Haddad, President

Yours, Lord, Is the Kingdom

Our students took the Kingdom of God module from October 21 to November 29. As part of the module, Walid Zailaa taught Biblical Theology of the Old Testament, Nabil Habiby taught Biblical Theology of the New Testament, Caleb Hutcherson taught The Kingdom of God through the History of Christianity, and Elie Haddad taught Kingdom Ethics. Read more to know why this module is significant to leadership formation.

Our theology informs our ethics, our actions and our character. Our understanding of God's Kingdom informs our role here on earth. If the Kingdom of God were solely a future reality, then life would be a pilgrimage in preparation for the joy to come. If it were solely a present reality, we would not think much of eternal matters. Our focus on when the Kingdom comes, however, leads to academic debate rather than faithful participation. The redemptive work of Christ on the cross initiated a restoration of all creation – a restoration which will be fulfilled at His second coming. Until then, God partners with us in His restoring work. This deliverance work is not only

restricted to the eternal salvation of the lost but also extends to seeking justice, mercy and reconciliation. We are called to live as Kingdom citizens today.

Our Lord placed much emphasis on this Kingdom. We see it in many of His parables. We see it in the Sermon on the Mount – the largest block of His recorded teachings. We believe that Jesus meant what He said on that mount. His teachings then cannot be overlooked today, but they sadly are, and this leads to a crisis in our Christian identity – a sort of dualism. In their book, *Kingdom Ethics*, Glen Stassen and David Gushee argue that the Sermon on the Mount is a “primer for kingdom ethics”. Rather than seeing the beatitudes as idealistic requirements for good works, they shift back the focus to the beatitudes’ prophetic nature and to God’s grace.

The passage, therefore, is not encouraging us to become prisoners or victims to earn God’s reward, but is a celebration of God’s gracious work of deliverance from captivity and victimhood into “God’s reign of deliverance, justice and joy.” Stassen and Gushee say, “The theme of Isaiah 61 is grace, and echoes of this theme appear in the Beatitudes, in Jesus’

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inaugural sermon in Luke 4:16-22 and elsewhere in the Gospels. Grace is God’s deliverance, his transforming initiative and not our human-effort, high-ideal, hard-striving achievement.” Jesus then did not offer “high ideals” but palpable ways to apply God’s will and participate in His reign. In the seventh beatitude, for instance, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9),” the peacemaking disciple is breaking the vicious cycle of fear and hate and taking a transformative initiative towards loving enemies.

We train our students to have such transformative initiatives and to tackle relevant, complex issues faithfully and humbly without resorting to simplistic answers. They get to wrestle with different perspectives using a biblical lenses, all the while remembering that they cannot contain the mind of God. It would take us an eternity to understand an infinite God. We think of God choosing Rahab, a prostitute who lied to save the spies, to be in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5), among the cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11:31), and commended by James as righteous (James 2:25).

As part of the *Kingdom of God* module, ABTS President Elie Haddad taught the course *Kingdom Ethics* to second and third year students. He shares,

Many times during class, we would stop and pray. The students’ experiences made the learning experience concrete. In a way, they taught the class. We saw lives being transformed before our eyes. We did not have to wait to spot the life-changing outcome. The cognitive part of learning is the easiest; it gets more difficult when it begins to scratch the surface of our lives, but that is where learning becomes real.

As part of this class, student groups grappled with ethical issues that are relevant to their context. One of the relevant topics our students dealt with is revolution. We see it in Lebanon, Iraq and Algeria. We saw it in Syria, Sudan and Egypt. It is an inescapable part of the Middle Eastern reality. Students brought back the issue of revolution to citizenship – the relationship that binds one to his or her land and people. When the ruling authority fails to work for the good of its people, citizens begin to feel oppressed, demotivated and detached. Either they accept the way things are, or they choose to speak up. A revolution, to some, might be one of the ways people bring about change in their country often leading to the replacement of a worsening authority. While some see revolutions as change propellers, others are more apprehensive of the loss that will ensue because of it.

Certainly, the Church is divided on whether participation in the demonstrations is an appropriate means of expression for Christ followers. Some would rather cut all ties with the “fallen



world” except when sharing the gospel. This group argues for unquestioning submission to authorities and against complaining and anger. Others argue that a Christ follower must be a responsible citizen. They see that rightful demonstrations are not expressions of anger and chaos but a brave stand against oppression. They see that a Christ follower must be involved in dialogue and actively speaking against injustice. While they do believe in submission to authorities, they call for peaceful resistance against corruption.

We know that our Lord inaugurated a radical Kingdom, which challenges the present social structures and values. The Lord spoke against different forms of normalized discrimination. He did not mince words, and He certainly does not want us to do so today. He does not want us to turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to oppression. At the end of their presentation, the student group posed the following question: “If Jesus were with us today in the flesh, would He have taken part in the demonstrations?”

In all, students shared how practical the course was and how it alerted them to the wrong things they thought were right. Susanna, our student from Sudan, shared:

“The *Kingdom Ethics* course stressed integrity. Integrity means that we do not compromise even when no one is watching. When we abide by integrity, however, some may shun us because we please God and not people. Overall, it was quite convicting. It led me to ask if I am willing to speak the truth even if it costs me my life. Every session was interactive, and the questions challenged us. I was part of the student group that worked on tribalism. My Sudanese context is tribal in essence. Now when I work with people from different tribes, I can accept their way of life even if it differs from mine.”

One student from Egypt shared:

“The course gave us the principles to weigh any ethical issue at church, ministry or society. We researched conflicting opinions and examined them in light of God’s word. On the personal level, it opened my eyes to the ethical nature of mundane things. For instance, we learned that the end does not necessarily justify the means and that we should not resort to unethical tools such as bribery to get what we want. My group focused on the problem of war, a very complex issue where people’s lives are at stake.”

Elia from Sudan shared:

“Do we make decisions based on our principles and convictions? Sudanese women, for instance, still have a long way to go in their journey for equality. Despite the warped social portrayals of women, however, the Sudanese Church is called to recognize their standing as made in the image of God just like men. Through empowering women and using their potential, the Sudanese Church will grow. The course also drove me to consider transformative initiatives with the youth in Sudanese war zones. War can have a detrimental effect on the youth, so we must welcome them and help them cope with postwar repercussions and seek a peaceful, civil future instead of war and retribution.”

Rafed from Syria shared:

“As Kingdom citizens, we are to apply kingdom ethics to contemporary social issues. During the Kingdom Ethics course, we looked at these issues from several dimensions including the biblical, the historical and the social. I enjoyed the group work and learning from other students’ experiences. We examined issues that are considered taboo in our Arab societies using biblical, cultural and scholarly approaches. The discussion served as a reminder that if we ignore the problem, it doesn’t mean it isn’t there.”

We pray that our current residential students will take on their role as Kingdom citizens participating in God’s reign; caring for the sick, the poor and the outcasts; seeking justice, righteousness and peace; making known the Way of Christ.

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Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Graduates

Graduate from Jordan

I am now serving a group of refugee women in Lebanon. Through our meetings and house visits, they are coming to know the Lord, but are now struggling with their circumstances. I ask you to pray that the Lord brings change into their lives and helps them come to Him. Pray that the Lord gives me wisdom in how I act with them.

Recent graduate from Sudan

I serve in teaching and discipleship. Pray that the Lord helps me with relaunching the college students' ministry. Pray that He helps me develop a curriculum for our church discipleship program. May He give me wisdom and strength as I start teaching at a seminary. Finally, pray that I continue to grow in my theological formation and my Biblical understanding, so I can better serve the church.

Graduate from Sudan

I serve the Sudanese diaspora in Egypt through counselling and discipleship. My wife and I have started counseling 4 new couples, and I am discipling new believers at church. Pray that the Lord gives us the wisdom and understanding to teach and mentor these new people in their experience of Christ. Also, pray for my children, especially my daughter, who is losing her hearing.

Michel from Lebanon

We run a Christian center in an area that has a large refugee community. Our goal is to reach those around us through the services we provide, amiably and peacefully. We ask the Lord that He keeps us focused on His vision for our ministry, that He continues to form our ministry team and help us recognize the

gifts of the Spirit in each other. Pray that He uses our services to reach more people and help those people on their walk with Him.

Couple from Morocco

We serve the body of Christ in Morocco through our ministry with our local church. We pray that the Lord uses us fully in service to his Kingdom. Pray that the Lord guides us in ministry as we disciple and train new believers.

Graduate from Morocco

I pastor a church in Morocco and have recently started serving with home groups in Mauritania. Both countries are difficult to minister in. Pray for us to continue to heed God's vision for our church. Also, pray for the believers and home groups in Mauritania, that the Lord keeps them through the difficulties they may face.

Nihad from Syria

I serve the Kurdish communities that have been affected by the Syrian civil war through outreach and relief. We have a church in Lebanon, and we often go out on mission trips to Syria. As our church grows, pray that the Lord provides for our relief ministry and helps us expand the ministry team.

To know more about Nihad's ministry and the current situation in Syria, read our Syria Brief for December [here](#).

Graduate from Algeria

My ministry is through a church's Bible school in Algeria. The Church here has been facing much persecution recently. Pray for God's peace in Algeria. May He give the decision makers wisdom and move them in His direction.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6 - NIV

We wish you a blessed Christmas celebrating Emmanuel who still brings good news to the poor, binds up the brokenhearted and proclaims liberty to captives!

