



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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A few weeks ago, our students were finally able to return home. They had been stuck on campus since March due to airport closures. We had been concerned about their safety with the pandemic, so we were happy to see them get back home. We were eager to shut down our dorms building because it had gotten old and had become a drain on our budget. With our new strategy of moving away from full-time residential education, we no longer needed to pour money into this old

Continue reading about our New Strategic Direction in the latest article by Bassem Melki, our Dean of Students, Developing the New Non-Formal Components

building. Little did we know that, within ten days, we would be giving the building a deep-clean and a fresh paint job in order to house families whose homes were destroyed in the Beirut explosion. This cataclysmic event changed everything, again.

The question that keeps lingering in our minds is: Where is God in all of this? Where is God in this senseless pain and preventable suffering? Where is God when the people of Lebanon have been enduring for decades the rule of political leaders who are marked by corruption, greed, incompetence, and indifference? Where is God within the multiple layers of crises, from refugee crisis to economic crisis to political crisis to social crisis to health crisis, and now, add to that an explosion that destroyed a good portion of Beirut? "How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?"

Part of the wonder of God is that, not only does He listen, His heart no doubt bleeds for Beirut and its people with unconditional compassion and love, and He reveals Himself in fresh new ways in the middle of our anguish. There isn't enough space here to record all that God is doing, nor can we comprehend the vastness of God's actions. Nevertheless, let me highlight briefly where I see God in the midst of this explosion.

...Churches and ministries immediately sprang into action. If you go to Beirut today, you don't have to look far to see the hands and feet of Jesus.

I can see God in the goodness of countless Lebanese who took to the streets to clean, help, feed, and comfort the distressed. It's easy for us to identify the evil in people who are away from God. However, we are now learning to see and recognize glimpses of the image of God in people all over the streets of Beirut.

I can see God in the response of His people. I grew up during the Lebanese civil war when the Church was mostly silent and in hiding. Not today. God has transformed His Church to become a wonderful expression of His love for people. So many churches and ministries immediately sprang into action. If you go to Beirut today, you don't have to look far to see the hands and feet of Jesus.

I can see God working through our ABTS community. We spend a lot of time in discernment as we steer the ministry where we believe God wants to take it. But not in response to the explosion. We didn't need to stop and ask God what to do. We immediately knew what He wanted. Opening up our facilities to house newly homeless people was the most natural thing to do. This is a testimony of God's work in our hearts for years and years.

I can see God through our partners. The amount of care, concern, and prayers that we are receiving is moving and inspiring. We did not need to raise funds to care for families. Unsolicited, our partners are sending us generous portions of God's love in monetary form to provide the care that is needed.

Where is God in the midst of the calamity? All around us. We just have to look for His fingerprints.



The four buildings in which we are hosting families affected by the explosion



Lunch being distributed to the families



MERATH delivering food packages

Get Ready to Tend A Broken World

Certificate in Ministry Online Students Share About Their Current Courses

Upon closing their laptop screens, each of our Certificate in Ministry online students heads to serve God in their different geographical locations. In light of the pandemic, people have been reevaluating their lives and seeking God, amplifying the need for trained ministry workers. In the words of Rabih Hasbany, ABTS Distributed Learning Program Lead:

In light of COVID-19 and the social distancing that has ensued, many theological education institutions moved to online learning. We praise God for having this direction at ABTS for the past five years since we had first started the Certificate in Ministry online program. Recently, we have noticed a rise in the number of applicants as more Christ followers realized the need for theological training in preparation for ministry, and lockdown gave them more time for that. We continuously aim to advance our program to suit the changing ministry needs and better serve the Arabic-speaking Church.

Our online students are currently taking this term's courses. As you read about the courses, we invite you to meet the tutors and a few online students who share about God's marvelous work through the online program and through their own lives and ministries.

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

The *New Testament Survey* course lays down the foundations for a thorough understanding of New Testament passages and their context. It highlights the life and teachings of our Lord in the four gospels, the ministry and outreach of the apostles in Acts, their teachings in the epistles, and Revelation.

Our student Dalia from Lebanon leads the women's ministry of her local church. She shared, "We are currently studying the four gospels. I realized that studying the writing style of each gospel is essential for a fuller understanding of the text. I also saw the meticulous accuracy in reporting the historical events of Christ's ministry."

Course tutor Elia is one of our 2015 Master of Divinity graduates. Recently, he has been focusing on online evangelism and discipleship. Elia lives in the city of Minia in Upper Egypt, where coronavirus has affected many, including him and his parents. Since his father suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure, they had to admit him into the ICU, but it was hard to find a bed and a ventilator, as hospitals were full. He said, "People in Minia feel helpless, so this is the time for the Church to practice what it preaches. I know churches in Minia that are covering the treatment costs of corona patients. I know churches that are



providing oxygen tanks to house patients because hospitals are full.”

Elia was determined to push through and continue tutoring the course despite the sickness. He shared, “I love to build friendships with the students. They come with different – sometimes-clashing – perceptions of the New Testament, so I try to encourage constructive discussion and broaden their perspective.”

EFFECTIVE FAITH SHARING

How do we share the gospel now that our communities are more open than ever?

This course helps motivate believers to have an active role in the world as gospel bearers. It offers a theoretical framework for evangelism and offers the various practical tools to do that, both on the individual and communal levels.

Our online student Marianne from Upper Egypt serves the children at her local church and holds literacy programs for women living in poor villages. She shared, “This course showed me that God’s nature is missional and that His love extends to all nations. As Christ’s disciples, we are called to go out into the world and share the gospel out of obedience to the great commission and the greatest commandment, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Our 2014 Bachelor of Theology graduate from Morocco, who is the course tutor, leads a home church with her husband. She shared, “We are still adjusting to a new reality as we phase out of lockdown in Morocco. We have been reaching out to those suffering from the economy halt through giving widows and refugees food packages, masks and sanitizing products.” She also said regarding her online tutoring experience,

I learn so much from the students. I get excited at their excitement and energy, their strong desire to learn and be equipped for God’s service, and their gratitude to be part of a program available in Arabic that addresses their specific ministries and contexts – especially those who are in unreached areas. The growing number of online students is exciting, too!



CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

This course aims to reestablish what Christian identity means and to manifest it as an integral part of the region’s identity. Students get to see its uniqueness due to its heavenly nature and how that changes the way they impact society. They learn to respect other identities while staying true to their identity in Christ.

Our Iraqi online student, who lives in Finland and has an online discipleship ministry, shared, “Having a citizenship in heaven does not mean we ignore our citizenship here, but we become good citizens and serve our countries faithfully as ambassadors of Christ. I also learned not to mistake racial, social or political affiliation for Christian identity!”

One of our 2019 Bachelor of Theology graduates is tutoring this course. She teaches the Bible to groups of non-Christian women at a ministry center, but they currently gather online. She shares, “I raise issues that touch on the current situation in Lebanon and offer them comfort and hope. I am thankful for the amazing relationship we have.”

She also believes that joining our online team is timely. She adds, “I had gotten used to teaching and discipling groups in person. I never thought I would have to change my teaching style. Yet, today I have gained the skill of online teaching through tutoring in the Certificate in Ministry program, which is much needed as online learning takes precedence globally.”

Keep our online team and students in your prayers as they respond to the changing ministry needs of our region.

محادثات الشرق الأوسط • MIDDLE EAST CONVERSATIONS

“ To lend Middle Eastern voices to the global discourse on urgent matters of faith and witness أصوات من الشرق الأوسط حول مسائل ملحة تسود الخطاب العالمي في الإيمان والشهادة المسيحية ”

Church Without Space

الكنيسة بلا مكان



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- Pray With Us -

Who would have thought that 2020 would hold so much tragedy for Lebanon? Calamity upon calamity, people are still in a state of disbelief. And now, the Beirut blast has come upon us like a forceful blow. More than a two hundred lives are lost, thousands are injured, and many are still missing. Search and rescue teams are still digging through rubble in search of them. Many have lost their homes, and Beirut is not what it once used to be. Please stand with us in prayer for Lebanon.

- Now that the prime minister and his cabinet have resigned, demonstrations are calling for the resignation of the rest of the government, or at least for an early parliamentary election. Please pray for the potential vacuum that will ensue. Pray also for the members of the coming government. May they be competent and transparent, serving the people rather than their own interests. Pray that they may be given wisdom and strength to manage the catastrophic human and economic consequences.
- Please pray for the families who have lost their homes and loved ones. Pray for the injured, the health workers who are caring for them, and the rescue teams who are looking for missing people.
- Pray for the overwhelmed hospitals across the country and pray especially for those that were partially destroyed.
- Please pray for ABTS staff and faculty members as some suffered from the consequences of the blast. We praise God that none of them is physically hurt, but they have suffered material loss to a varying degree, and some of their loved ones got hurt. Pray for their families to get through this.
- Please pray for the Church in Lebanon as it serves the distressed and brokenhearted. May its light penetrate the darkness. May it spread the hope of Christ.
- Pray for us at ABTS as we welcome many families that lost their homes and belongings in the Beirut explosion. Many of them are injured and traumatized, and they need special care. Pray for us as we tend to their material and spiritual needs.

We finally invite you to praise God with us for His protection and provisions, and for the loving care and support that we are receiving from the global Church.