



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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A LIFE WITH SCRIPTURE

An Interview with Faculty Member

Dustin Ellington



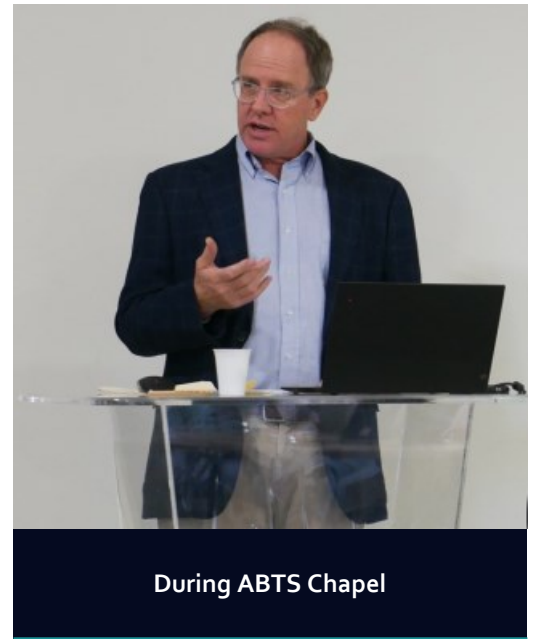
Over the years, the Lord has brought many faithful teachers to ABTS whose lives have been a testimony and encouragement to our students and to the ABTS community. Dustin Ellington is one of these teachers. Dustin has been a longtime friend of ABTS, and heeding God's calling for their lives, he and his wife, Sherri, decided to come to Lebanon and serve the Kingdom in the Arab world through ABTS last September. Over the past couple of months, Dustin has been teaching his first course in our Integrated Theology Program, while Sherri has been focusing on editorial work for our [blog](#). Now that he has settled in his new role, we had the opportunity to sit down with Dustin and learn more about his journey with the Lord.

What made you decide to get into theology?

When I was about 12 or 13, my parents went through a difficult divorce. I was raised in church, but after their divorce, I started drifting away from God. One night, when I was 13, I was sitting on my bed thinking about how miserable life is, and I heard a voice in my heart say, "you haven't read my word", so I started reading the Bible. It started that day and never stopped. Scripture brought me closer to God, and so I felt that I wanted a life that was immersed in scripture, teaching His word, and serving the gospel.

I went to college at Stanford, where I was very involved in campus ministry with InterVarsity. While there, I came to believe that I was called to be a pastor. After graduation, I went to Princeton Seminary and then became an associate pastor for youths and young adults at a Presbyterian church in California for 5 years. During that time, I saw that I loved ministering to young people, and I loved teaching the Bible and the Christian faith. I thought that if I had a choice, I would do more specialized ministry with young adults whom God was calling deeper and farther in their faith. Sherri

was open to me going back to school for this, and we moved to North Carolina where I started my PhD in New Testament Studies at Duke University. I was thankful to study at Duke, which was academically rigorous



During ABTS Chapel

and yet also had some deeply committed Christians and theologians teaching there. During the first year of my PhD, I met a theology instructor serving in Turkey who asked me what my plans were after graduating, and I said that I felt called to teach and develop leaders for the sake of the gospel. He told me I might want to consider doing that outside the US because there are a lot of places that have a need for leadership formation in the world. I sensed his words may have been from the Holy Spirit. I went home that day, and I shared the idea with Sherri, and she immediately said “yeah, let's do it!”

What has missionary life been like?

We've loved it! In 2005, we made the move to Egypt where Sherri and I both spent a lot of time and effort learning Arabic, and I was on the faculty at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) as a New Testament professor. It was a beautiful experience. We loved living among the people and building relationships for the sake of the gospel. I very much appreciated the students and my faculty colleagues. Though I had appreciated my academic training at Princeton and Duke, ETSC showed me how a seminary can be closer to the life of the church and more focused on equipping believers for Christian ministry. I loved that; it fit the kind of person God had been shaping me to become through my experience in ministry and my academics. We spent 4 and a half good years in Egypt. But in 2009, issues came up, we were not allowed to stay in Egypt, and we had to move back to the USA. During this time, a seminary in Zambia requested a New Testament professor from our sending organization. Sherri and I spent a lot of time discerning God's will for our next steps, and in 2010 we moved to Zambia!



Dustin and Sherri

Our time in Zambia was a blessing, not just for me as a teacher, but also for Sherri's ministry and for our kids. We spent 12 years in Zambia, during which I taught students training to be pastors from 9 different countries in Central and Southern Africa.

How did you decide to come to Lebanon?



Where God Has Led Dustin and Sherri

In Zambia, I could see that God was using my past experiences to equip people for ministry, but what about the thousands of hours we had invested in studying Arabic? I had this ongoing question of whether we could go back to the Middle East somehow. In 2013, Perry Shaw reached out to me regarding what I thought about teaching courses at ABTS. I taught classes there during visits to Lebanon in 2015, 2018, 2019, and 2020. Around 2017, Walid Zailaa (Academic Dean) asked me to consider coming to ABTS as fulltime faculty, which got the ball rolling. So, we were already considering ABTS, and when Elie Haddad (ABTS President) reached out with a short email that read "Dustin, we still need you", we felt that the Lord had prepared the way for us to come back to the Arab world!

How has the transition been so far?

The transition from having ministered essentially in English for 12 years to mainly in Arabic has been challenging yet also a time of growth. I have learned to shift my goal from wanting to be a great Arabic speaker to being able to facilitate deep and productive conversations with students about their lives, ministry, and scripture without language being a barrier. Overall, we've really enjoyed life in Lebanon. The people are close to us culturally, which is helping us transition better, and the food is amazing! Lebanon is beautiful. We're thankful to be here!

I'm also enjoying the transition to teaching at ABTS. ABTS is well run, and I enjoy being part of the diverse faculty and committed staff. It really is a place of creativity and innovation for the sake of the gospel. I appreciate the direction that the seminary is moving in. ABTS is full of ardent followers of Jesus Christ, and that is really inspiring.

How has teaching in the Integrated Theology Program been so far?

A reality of doing hybrid education is that the faculty are more dispersed, so that is a challenge, but there is a need for education here to be distanced. We have students who are deeply engaged in ministry, and the way we are doing education allows them to continue their ministry while also getting a theological education through the hybrid format.

I'm currently teaching the *New Testament Theology* course as part of the *Biblical and Historical Theology* module. Through the class, students are given a chance to think in-depth about major theological matters in the New Testament. Some of the things we've looked at so far were the meaning of discipleship, the role of the Holy Spirit in the spread of the gospel, and the significance of the death of Christ in Paul's theology, for example.



During BTh Residency



Chapel with Students

At the beginning of my class, I got two really good pieces of advice from my colleagues. The first was to start off the class with individual Zoom sessions with the students which helped me build a relationship with them. This is important because I think that, for theological education to be formative and transformative, it really needs to be relational and not just cognitive. The second piece of advice was to use weekly questions to work on specific subjects. In this manner, by working through the primary text (the Bible) and then thinking through specific questions about it, students were able to think about and articulate matters of Christian faith for the sake of their lives and ministries.

For me, the course has been a chance to invest in students whom God is raising up for a life of ministry in the Middle East and North Africa. The students are all involved in leading movements of house churches and other ministries. If I am able to contribute to the development of such students' life of faith and their ministries, then that is a great joy for me!

We thank the Lord for Dustin and Sherri and their hearts for God's mission in the Arab world. We pray that He continues to guide them in their journeys of faith as they surrender their all to Him.

Check out our latest Blog Posts



[Is Tolerance the Only Deciding Factor?](#)



[Lebanon, Failed Leaders, and Steward Leaders as a Model by the Church](#)

- Pray with Us - Some of our Faculty

Dustin Ellington | Associate Professor of New Testament

Pray for progress in my Arabic skills so that I am better able to facilitate good conversations with the students and go deep with them in discussions about what they are learning, their lives, and their ministries. Also, pray that Sherri and I always surrender to Jesus as Lord and Savior, that we are attentive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and that we are ready to say yes to His prompting of us every day.

Walid Zailaa | Academic Dean and Assistant Professor of Old Testament

Please pray for us as we prepare for the upcoming academic year which includes a two-week residency in October. Pray for our new students who will start this fall, and for our continuing students, that they keep up the good work. Finally, we ask you to pray for our faculty and staff who work tirelessly to ensure our students have everything they need to succeed.

Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen | Assistant Professor of Theological Education

In the Middle East, issues around the interaction between faith and being are what shape the patterns of life. Please pray that what is taught to students goes beyond the academic to form their lives and ministries. May we all look to Jesus as we seek to grow in Him and learn His word.

Abed El Kareem Zien El Dien | Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry

Let us pray for the students who live and serve in difficult countries where conflict and oppression are rife. Pray for our students who come from non-Christian background, that they grow deep roots in Christ and have a clear understanding of their identity in Him. Finally, let us pray for all of our students, that the Lord strengthens them in their studies.

Bassem Melki | Director of Non-formal Training and Assistant Professor of Peace Studies

Please pray that we as faculty and the curriculum that we teach continue to be relevant to our students' ministry contexts, and that we continue to create an educational environment of transformation and leadership formation.

Emad Botros | Assistant Professor of Old Testament

Pray for our Master of Theology students to grow in their knowledge of God and to experience His presence in all aspect of their lives and ministries as they study the *Advanced Old Testament Course*. Pray for me as well as I continue developing my commentary on Jonah through a series that will be titled *Windows on the Text: Reading the Bible from the Context of Islam*.

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