

Monday 2nd November

Lebanon has been the scene of great tension recently, with the explosion in Beirut, and the Prime Minister, Hassan Diab, resigning following angry protests for three consecutive nights. Most Lebanese blame their leadership's corruption and neglect for the explosion at the port in Beirut. Mr Diab took office in January with the support of the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement and its allies, following the resignation of the previous government after mass protests. President Michael Aoun had asked the current government to stay on in a caretaker capacity until a new cabinet is formed.

Protests had been ongoing since last October, with many angry and frustrated for alleged government corruption and for its handling of the country's worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Humanly speaking this situation seems so broken, but God is able to do so much more than we can ask or imagine, and He is sovereign over all human governments and political processes.

Listen to the following song and, as you listen, ask God what He would have you pray for Lebanon:

Almighty by New Day https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3pNQLPo6_U

- Praise God that He is great, all powerful and that we can trust Him even with the most difficult situations.
- Thank God that, as the song says, 'every power must bow down'. Pray for a righteous and God-fearing government to lead Lebanon.

Tuesday 3rd November

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." Isaiah 60 1-3

This is a dark time for Lebanon. More than 50% of the Lebanese population lives under the poverty line. Hyperinflation has caused the Lebanese lira to lose 85% of its value in ten months. The unemployment rate is at 40%. Power cuts are daily and last up to 22 hours per day. The infrastructure is unsafe, and the water is unclean. The economy is collapsing, and the banking crisis has forbidden people to withdraw their own money from banks. There is no real access to a public healthcare system. Basic food items are becoming unaffordable to many. With the future of the port in Beirut in doubt, it will be difficult to get food supplies to the county at a time when there are already shortages. Lebanon imports most of its food.

Large amounts of food stored at the port were destroyed causing fears of even more widespread shortages.

A new Prime Minister will have to be chosen. Under the present system, political office is divided by a power-sharing agreement to ensure that the three major religious blocks - Shia, Sunni and Christian - are represented. The National Pact of 1943 established this division, declaring that the president must be Christian, the prime minister Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim.

The fear amongst the Lebanese people is that the system of sectarian politics will not bring the changes that they so desperately want.

- Pray for President Michel Aoun and other leaders in this country as they try to find a way forward through the current crises.
- Lebanon is in desperate need of better leadership. Pray that the people of Lebanon will find freedom from the oppressive corruption that has shrouded the country for so long.
- Pray for international help to reach the most needy and vulnerable.
- Pray for a release of hope across the nation of Lebanon. Pray that many will turn to Him as they lose hope in government and politics.

Source of some content: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-53656220>
<http://www.cryoutnow.org/>

Wednesday 4th November

Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The civil war in Syria caused more than 6.7 million people to flee to other parts of Syria, and over 5 million people to flee to the surrounding nations. Over 1.5 million people fled to Lebanon, which already hosted significant numbers of Palestinian refugees, giving it the highest per capita number of refugees in the world. To give some context, UNHCR statistics for the end of 2018 indicated that Britain had 126,000 refugees living there from all different nations.

This put massive pressure on Lebanon's infrastructure, and also created a lot of tension as many Lebanese had fought or were affected by their own war with Syria in fairly recent times.

Although Lebanon is a majority Muslim country, approximately 36% of the population adheres to some form of Christian denomination. We will be reading over the next couple of days stories of how the church in Lebanon has been salt and light in this very difficult situation.

Information extracted from: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance>

- Praise Jesus that He is the Prince of Peace and the Hope for the nations. Pray that He would bring peace to Lebanon.
- Pray for the divisions in Lebanon between religions and races to be healed and for common ground to be found.
- Thank God that the church in Lebanon is still living and active – pray that He would strengthen them.

Thursday 5th November

Emil and Reem, a couple who are supported by CMS as local partners, returned to Lebanon in 2014, after living in North Africa for several years. When they got home, they saw their house was surrounded by at least 20 Syrian families living in tents. “I remember it was the coldest winter in Lebanon for years,” said Reem. “These people had no furniture and very little food. Some of the children didn’t even have shoes.”

“They had nobody to care for them,” said Emil, an ordained Anglican priest. “I started asking local people what they were doing to help these poor people. Most of them weren’t interested. So I asked God what he wanted me to do. I felt him say to me, ‘Emil, one day you will stand before me and I will say to you, I was marginalised, what did you do? I was a stranger, what did you do? The next day I said to my neighbours that I respect how you feel, but I’m going to go to them. And that’s how this ministry started.’” Reem started spending a bit of time with some of the children, telling them stories under a tree.

One day she asked one girl, who was about 10 years old, “Farrah, if you could ask somebody to give you something what would you want.” Farrah answered that she would want a pencil and paper. “I was so affected by this,” said Reem. “I went and bought some notebooks for the children and started teaching them to write a bit.”

Alia from LSESD (a local NGO) pointed out that a vast number of Syrian refugee children are not in school. “Many are working. Because it’s hard for adults to find work, it’s more feasible to send the children to beg or steal or do manual labour.”

“I’ve seen children as young as four years old working on farms; the farmer will make them work all day in exchange for a place to stay,” said Reem.

Reem and Emil began looking for a place to start a small school for refugee children. “But as soon as people heard it was to help Syrians, everyone said no; they felt enmity with the Syrians because of the past, the war is alive in memories,” said Emil. After a couple of weeks of fruitless searching, Emil’s brother offered his garage.

Using it as a base, they dug out a slightly larger space and arranged it into a classroom. “We started with five, then 20, then 40, now sometimes up to 80 children,” said Emil. Most of the teachers are Iraqi refugees who came to Lebanon to escape IS. Emil had been doing Bible study with them and when they heard about the school they wanted to help.

“It’s normal school, but we also teach them the love of God,” Emil said. “The children come from Muslim backgrounds but their families are so happy they are learning, they have no problem with our faith – though it’s probably something they would never do back home: send their children to a priest for education. “This is a special time.

Shortened version of an article from: <https://churchmissionsociety.org/our-stories/lot-learn-lebanon/>

- Pray for this Christian couple serving selflessly in Lebanon. Pray that God would provide for their every need.
- Pray for the many Christian-run schools helping Syrian refugees, for provision and blessing.
- Pray that as refugees see the church being the hands and feet of Jesus to them, they would seek Him too.

Friday 6th November

There can be little doubt that the unexpected charity many Syrians are finding from Lebanese Christians is contributing to their curiosity about Jesus. Yet it would be disingenuous to suggest that overcoming fear, resentment and enmity towards their former occupiers has been easy for Lebanese Christians. And not all Christians have reacted magnanimously.

One pastor of a Baptist church said, “My family doesn’t like what I’m doing because the Syrians did bad things to Lebanon; our village was destroyed, they destroyed churches. I was with the militia back in those days fighting them; I spent 90 days under shelling day and night. And now I’m pastoring a church with lots of Syrian people. Some people get mad when you say you love Syrian people. But I believe God has sent them here.” His wife agreed: “It’s still a challenge to some Christians here to serve and show love for Syrians but it’s God’s love through us that does this.”

Her words reminded me of a passage in *The Hiding Place*, by Corrie ten Boom, when she is speaking at a church about forgiveness and then recognises a man who was a guard at the concentration camp where she was imprisoned for helping Jewish people during the Holocaust. The man wants to shake Corrie’s hand, but she recoils:

Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. ... I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I prayed, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on his. When he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself.

And in Lebanon, while many Christians might not have chosen forgiveness, it seems forgiveness has come to them. A pastor named Elie said: "Before I was a believer, I had bad feelings for Syrians because of the war. I've had many incidents where Syrians held me at gunpoint. It is difficult. But God moved me from one side to the other. I know he has prepared me and is calling me to work with them. I need to work with them." Another pastor who used to fight in the militia said, "God changed my heart, he took away my hatred. God started to use me. "

Alia from LSESD (a local NGO) told another story about a woman who was lined up with her family on a wall at gunpoint during the war. "She was praying, 'God I don't want to see my husband killed in front me.' Just then a man from the Lebanese army came and shot the Syrian captors. When her church started working with Syrians, she didn't want anything to do with it. Now she and her son help head up a relief ministry. God is helping people to forgive. That is what is touching Syrians. They know the history. This speaks volumes."

"I don't really understand what's happening with all these Syrians coming here," one pastor admitted. "Had God consulted with me, I would have advised something else. But God has a plan. People have been praying for a long time for God to touch the hearts of Muslims. So if God answers, who are we to not be happy about how it happens. We have to obey, to love."

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- Praise God that Syrian Muslims are finding Jesus.
- Pray that many more Syrians would continue to seek after Jesus, and that many would commit to following Him.
- Pray that God would be glorified in every part of Lebanese society.

Saturday 8th November

"Do you not know. Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom." Isaiah 40: 28

Listen to this worship song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAl1AIT22aE> (or another that reminds you of the greatness of God).

Today we are going to pray for our unstoppable God to move in Lebanon. We will do this by praying that God will release change there.

- Pray that peace will replace conflict.
- Pray that trust in Jesus will replace fear.
- Pray that the oil of joy will replace mourning.
- Pray that truth will replace lies.
- Pray that hope will replace despair.