

# THIMAR

LSESD MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

## *A Way in the Wilderness*

EXODUS: THE THREAT FACING CHRISTIANS	3
ABTS: PROCLAIMING HOPE ONE YEAR LATER	5
LSESD: WORSHIP IN THE WAITING	7
ARE YOU OKAY? WE'RE FOCUSED ON HIM	8



Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:19

## Editor's Note

By Sarah Jennings

From the threats of exodus to a revival of hope, this issue of *Thimar* explores the relationship between temporal uncertainty and joyful reliance on God. We urge you to stop for a moment and consider this radical statement –

“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”  
(1 Corinthians 2:10)

Rarely do we truly believe this. If only we had a better morning routine, a better church, or a few of our burdens removed, then we could do more for the Lord.

Yet, Paul instructs us to delight in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For those of us remaining in the ruins of Lebanon’s failed state, we feel this dichotomy keenly. Every day brings news of another way we cannot provide for ourselves, yet in yielding to God for our every need, we feel ever more resolute in our belief in God’s faithfulness.

Our hope for this newsletter is that as you read passages of heartbreaking exodus, you will also be refreshed by the springs of church transformation, communal worship, and finally, the faith that grows out of pain.

The Lord is good to those who wait on Him.





# EXODUS: THE THREAT FACING CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY WISSAM NASRALLAH

All summer, the departure lounges at the Rafic Hariri Airport in Beirut were packed with expectant passengers. Yet instead of the usual energizing atmosphere of families going on holiday, the air was heavy. Faces were grim, as passengers lugged suitcases full of their most precious belongings and worried about the family left behind.

Many Lebanese have left before, but unlike the previous migrations, this time it is not war they are fleeing, but despair.

Driven by increasingly desperate living circumstances and no visible resolution, a significant number of Lebanese have been forced to seek a sense of normalcy abroad. The number is significant enough that it can be called an exodus. By some estimates, more than 380,000 people have already left the country, with many more lining up to do so.

While well-off families and dual nationals have the means to seek a better life elsewhere, most Lebanese feel stranded in their own country.

Lebanon has become a graveyard of dreams for many people, young and old, who were seeking either to start a family or to retire decently.

This exodus is stripping Lebanon of everyone who would be needed to rebuild the economy and start over – its doctors, teachers, intellectuals, and youth. Lebanon is bleeding itself to death.

Furthermore, this crisis is also majorly impacting the church as many pastors and youth leave, which is reminiscent of the exodus caused by the 15-year civil war. Many in churches today are struggling with the question of whether they should leave to provide a better life for their families or if they should stay for the sake of providing an active Christian witness.

At LSESD, we started a program more than a year and a half ago that aims to support pastors and church members, so that they can continue helping and supporting those around them. After all, how can you feed the hungry when your own kids are hungry?

This is the unspoken tragedy of the Middle East, one that has been long in the making: the cradle of Christianity is being emptied of its ancient Christian communities.

Throughout the twentieth century, Christian communities in the Middle East have been declining in numbers because of low birth rates, emigration and, in some instances, persecution and violence. This secular trend has accelerated in recent years due to the rise of fundamental Islam, second level citizenship, the lack of economic opportunities, corruption and poor governance. The largest recent Christian exodus in the Middle East occurred in Iraq, where now only 300,000 Christians remain, down from 1.3 million in 2003. Syria and Palestine are slowly but surely following the same route.

Lebanon has long been an exception in the Middle East, as Christians have enjoyed considerable political power and representation, thanks to a quota-based confessional system. However, Christians are more prone to leave than other groups, especially given the increased awareness that they are becoming a minority in their own country with no hope of a better future.

*This is a critical time in the history of the region. If nothing is done today, ancient Churches will no longer be visited as places of community and worship. In a single generation, they may be nothing more than museums.*

This requires urgent action by the Church, spurred not just by trust in the Lord's eternal plan, but an active understanding of a believer's role in bringing about this plan.

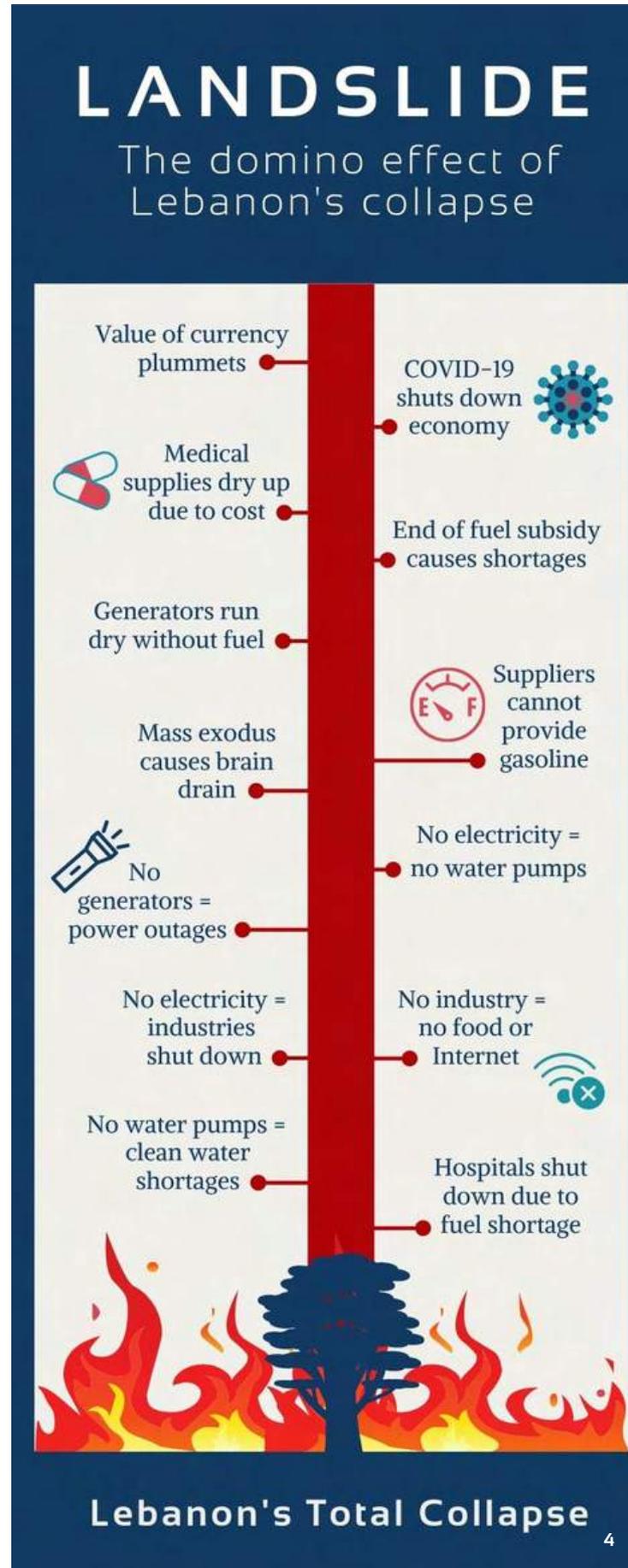
It's worth reminding the church – none of this is a surprise to God. Every aspect of the world, from the deceit of the most insignificant politician to the humiliation of the Lebanese fuel line, is seen by the Lord. Someday his kingdom of justice will reign eternally, but for now, every new day is a mercy day. He is giving the world and its people more time to come to know him.

If this is why there are still days of suffering left on earth, then it logically follows that Christians are not called to create a separate, insular haven on earth. No, the last words of Jesus to his people were to "go out and make disciples of all the earth."

For some apostles, this meant leaving. For others like Peter, it meant staying in Jerusalem and Judea among his people.

As Christians leave the Middle East, the need for fellow laborers continues to grow more desperate, yet the ground left behind is ripe for the Good News. After all, blessed are the persecuted, the poor in spirit, and the peacemakers for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

**Take Action**



# PROCLAIMING HOPE ONE YEAR LATER

BY ELIE HADDAD

As I reflect on this past year, it seems that for most Lebanese hope is rapidly fading. We are left with ultimate despair. What can we say to the people of Lebanon? What can the Church say without resorting to empty and meaningless words?

It is somewhat easier to communicate words of hope to a suffering Church. The Church understands the gift of suffering, the power of the resurrected life, and the eschatological hope that we have in Christ. In addition, the Church can readily recall its past experiences of God's grace and provisions despite all circumstances.

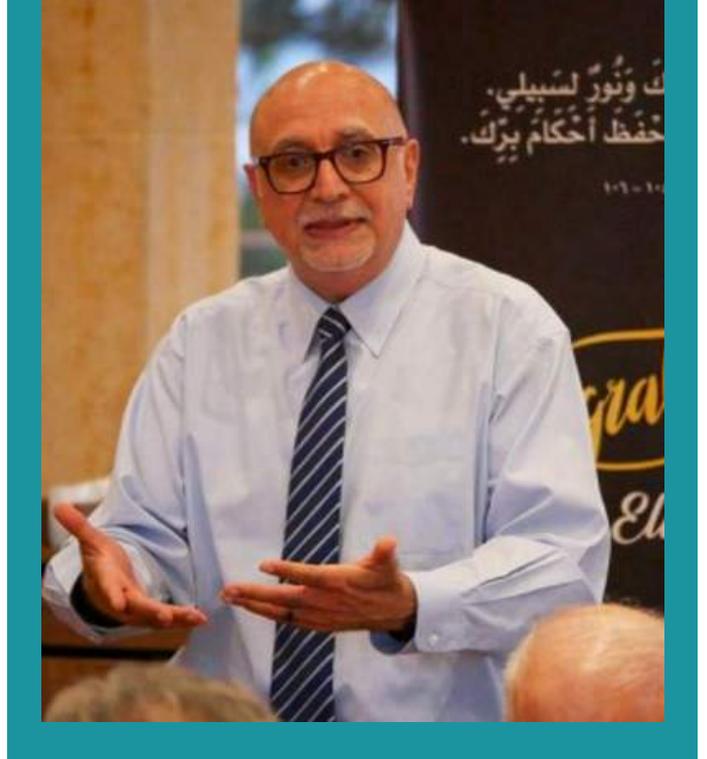
*But what about the unchurched? What words of hope can be communicated to them?*

That Jesus is coming again and that eventually good will win over evil? What words can be meaningful to those who are starving, grieving, and are in total despair today?

In his Gospel account, Luke writes several times about preaching Good News to the poor. Tom Houston argues that in Luke's reference to the poor as a category, he is also referring to the captives, the blind, the oppressed, etc. But what was the content of this Good News to the poor? What made it Good News? Of course, it always included the forgiveness of sin. But more than that, the Good News addressed the hearers at the points of their deep need, whether it was healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, releasing the captives, or giving justice to the oppressed. The content of the Good News brought hope to the sinner and brought hope to the poor. These two aspects of proclaiming the Gospel were inseparable.

One key aspect for Luke is that the Good News has implications for the rich just as it does for the poor. It is the rich who can sell their belongings to give to the poor. For Good News to bring hope to the poor, it takes rich and compassionate people to act.

Similarly, the Good News has implications for the Church. Proclaiming the Good News cannot leave the Church and followers of Christ unchanged. We have experienced this firsthand during the recent crises and especially since last year's blast.



The Church in Lebanon is being changed. It is learning how to bring hope to the poor by serving them at the time and place of their intense suffering. It is learning what it means to engage in incarnational ministry, to be embedded within the people it serves, to be present, and to live out its identity in recognizable ways.

So, how can the Church communicate hope beyond empty words? Houston suggests that it needs to become more compassionate and more credible. "We must give up something significant if the compassion of Jesus for the poor is to be seen in us," comments Houston.

*Compassion is always costly. When the Church remains unaffected by the misery of those around it, this is what Houston refers to as the "credibility gap." We lose our credibility when we fail to get into the trenches to come alongside the suffering.*

As the Good News has implications for the poor, for the rich, and for the Church, undoubtedly it also has implications for the seminary. We are learning precious lessons at ABTS during these days of hardship, too numerous to mention here. The most important, perhaps, is that our curricula, our approaches, our delivery, even our outcomes, must be dynamic and ever-changing in response to what God is teaching us about Himself and His actions in our world.

With the devastation that we are experiencing in Lebanon, and with the widespread and alarming despair, it is no longer enough to tell people that God loves them. This is the time to show them God's love.

I do get my hope from the knowledge that Jesus is coming again and from the assurance that good will eventually win over evil. But what the people of Lebanon need to experience today is God's redemptive power through the love, service, and sacrifice of His people in their midst.

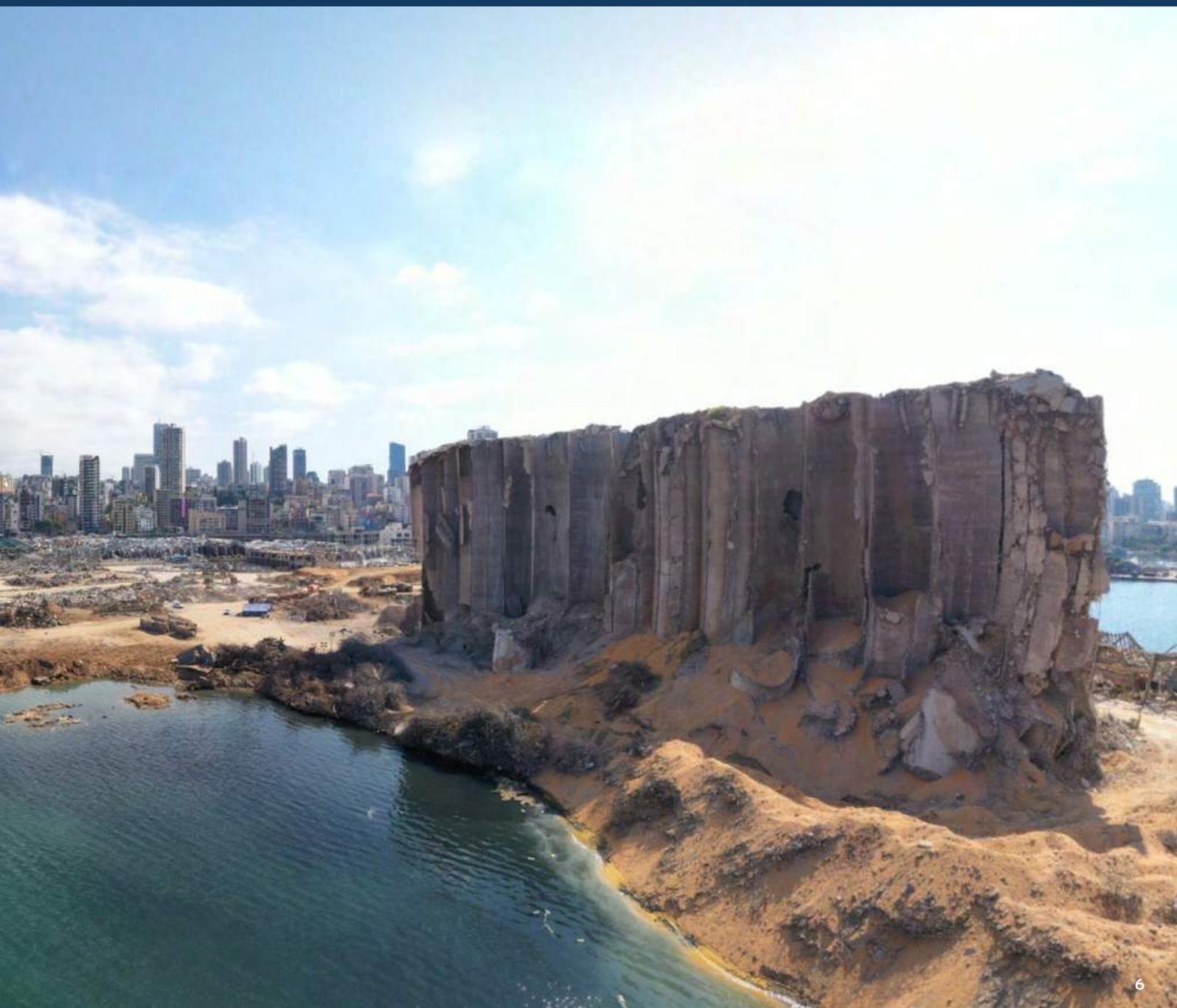
My prayer at this decisive time is that the power of the Good News changes us first in order for it to change the world.

*This article was adapted from a recent reflection in the [August ABTS newsletter](#).*

[\*\*See The New Strategic Direction\*\*](#)

*"We must give up something significant if the compassion of Jesus for the poor is to be seen in us."*

*-Tom Houston*





# WORSHIP IN THE WAITING

BY SARAH JENNINGS

Voices from different countries, a chorus of accents, blend beautifully into one voice. As they lift up the name of their Father and King, the room fills with the peace of God.

With chills on her skin, Loulou Koborsi reminisced, “It was the first worship event I attended after COVID closed everything. Everything was good. You felt the presence of God. I remember the songs talking about God’s care.”

As the administrative assistant at LSESD, Koborsi is witness to many powerful ways that the Lord works through people and their mercy to the vulnerable. Each day brings another story of God’s provision. Yet, there was something unique about this warm July night.

LSESD and Lighthouse Arab World came together for a time of worship, teaching, and prayer for the country of Lebanon. Speaking outdoors on the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) campus, Jordanian speaker Dani Samarneh encouraged the worshippers with a message of God’s sovereignty amidst the current crisis.

“Whatever happens, God is in control. He is the One who said that a hair doesn’t fall from your head without his knowledge... What really clicked in my mind, is that whatever happens, He made it for his glory and for our best,” said Koborsi, as she remembered his words.

B Sharp Band, a Lebanese Christian band, then led the group in songs about the Lord’s provision and love for His people. Worship is a gift from God that sustains us through our darkest periods, lifting us out of our own minds and turning our thoughts fully on Him.

In a time when Christians are struggling to stay together, whether due to a physical exodus in the Middle East or philosophical divisions across the world, communal worship is an essential tool for reminding us that we are all one in Christ. Whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, rich or poor, left or right – we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body.

Songs of worship are unique in that they connect both head and the heart in faith. In the lyrics, we gain theological understanding, combatting the lies of our own hearts and secular wisdom. In the music, we gain access to our emotions, which are sometimes locked out of theological discussions. We forget our small internal worlds and fears; we can move forward with a new identity as the saved son and daughter of an omnipresent God.

Koborsi observed, “It’s His desire to hear us talking to Him. This is our thank you... And when we go up [to heaven], the only thing we’re going to do is worship.”

Perhaps this is why worship is mentioned so much in the Bible, especially alongside stories of suffering. Paul and Silas worshipped together in jail (Acts 16), David wrote songs while on the run from Saul (Psalm 7), and Jesus sang with his disciples at the conclusion of his Last Supper (Matthew 26). Surely, he must have been grieving his future sacrifice, yet he modeled this tradition for his followers. In Jewish tradition, it’s likely that they sang hymns from the Hallel (Psalms 113–118), which praise God for his protection and plan of salvation.

As we wait, let us turn to communal worship to remind us of God’s constant presence and to experience a taste of his kingdom on earth. For though creation may groan in waiting, we – the children of God – may sing freely of the glory that is to come!

[Watch Worship Service](#)

# Video Devotional

BY ROSETTE MANSOUR



## STAFF PICKS

Didomi.co

**LISTEN**

35 min | One year after the Beirut blast: finding hope in the midst of chaos



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Beirut-based visual journalist and artist tells local stories, while drawing live on location

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