



Update from Peter and Patty Ford March 2021

*Lord, have mercy on us,
Come and heal our land;
Cleanse with Your fire,
Heal with Your touch;
Humbly we bow
And call upon You now,
O Lord, have mercy on us,
O Lord, have mercy on us...*

Dear Friends,

The words of this song have been echoing in my mind these last weeks as we have experienced a growing freefall in the economic situation in Lebanon. A steep rise in COVID-19 cases in January sparked a full eight-week lockdown that is gradually being lifted. But it has resulted in many people having little or no income, while some businesses have been forced to close permanently, resulting in even more job losses. Meanwhile, the Lebanese pound has been steadily falling. In the last few days, it has entered a daily avalanche drop (the exchange rate had been a steady 1500 to the dollar for years—it is now over 15,000 to the dollar—all within the last six months, dropping over 5000 in just three days). Those fortunate enough to still have a job have seen their salary evaporate—from an average of \$460 a month to less than \$40 a month. People are in utter despair. They are hungry, they are jobless, many are homeless. The majority of Lebanese now live below the poverty line with no hope.

Lebanon is still without a government after the previous government resigned following the Port blast in August 2020. The politicians continue to bicker over cabinet representation and control of particular posts, while the ordinary people suffer. The wealthy see no problem and the rest see no future. And recently, the government announced they will run out of fuel to produce electricity by the end of the month because they do not have the dollars to buy more fuel—meaning the entire country will go dark.

Migrant workers have been thrown out to fend for themselves as their employers cannot afford to pay them. Refugees, who have already been struggling, are facing even greater hardship. And the elderly, living on a fixed income—much of which they cannot access because the banks have frozen withdrawals—can not survive as prices skyrocket. Meanwhile, people protest daily to no avail. People fight in the supermarkets for scarce goods. The country feels like it is in free fall on so many fronts, and the bad news gets worse hourly.

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Not only are the Lebanese suffering, but this situation has affected neighboring Syria as well. Syria marked the tenth anniversary of its civil war this week, and during the war, many Syrians put their money into Lebanese banks for safekeeping. But now they too have no money and so Syria is also facing an economic collapse.

The need is so vast and we are so small, yet we and various organizations try to help where we can. And even though all of this is going on, we can continue our ministry here. NEST continues to hold classes so our students can carry on with their pastoral training. Most classes and chapel services are still via Zoom, while almost all other activities have been suspended. We are managing to stay on schedule, but the economic crisis overshadows everything.

Please join us in praying for Lebanon, for an end to the political wrangling so a government can be formed to institute needed reforms, allowing international aid to be released. Pray for the people who have no hope, who are hungry and homeless. Pray especially for the children who suffer most when there is no money and no food and no security. Pray also for the people of neighboring Syria where many of our NEST graduates serve the struggling churches situated there.

Lord, have mercy on us. Humbly we bow, and call upon you now, O Lord have mercy on us.

Serving God's Kingdom together,
Patty and Peter