

Beirut, Lebanon ... a beauty to behold, an oasis in the desert, a safety hub ... all expressions I have come to use to describe the place I experienced and quickly fell in love with in June of 2016 when I embarked on a last minute, nicely thrown together, informational missions trip.

I went, along with two other ladies from my church, in search of numbers, data, and facts about a Food Distribution Ministry to mostly Syrian refugee women. A local grassroots organization, in addition to our church, sent us to check out the project. We were to be eyes, ears, hands, hearts, souls, and feet on the ground, connecting with Chaouki and Maha Boulos, CBF field personnel from NC who are partnering with and supported by CBFNC. Upon our return to NC, we were to report our findings and be a mouthpiece for their ministries.

We immediately got comfortable with Chaouki and Maha Boulos, missionaries to and natives of Lebanon, who retrieved us from the airport in Beirut and welcomed us into their home and busy lives. Parents to two grown boys living back in the States, they embraced the experience of having three girls under their roof and in their care for ten days. They showed us their capital city and surroundings, introduced us to all the amazing and ever-so-tasty and healthy Lebanese food, and even let us stick our toes in the Mediterranean. We got to know them personally during lots of dining out, a few sight-seeing tours, and hands-on experience with one of their many ministries. We saw just a drop in the bucket of the natural beauty of Lebanon. It is literally and figuratively a green oasis along the seaside surrounded by war and desert.

Lebanon with its close to 4.5 million people is about the size of the state of Connecticut. Roughly half of its population is made up of refugees fleeing places like Armenia and Israel in the past and Syria and Iraq in the present. As far as spreading the Gospel goes, it is as strategic a place as any. Due to the volumes of Muslims and Christians fleeing their homelands and taking refuge in Lebanon,

it has become what I like to think of as a "hub." God is using people like Chaouki and Maha to bring the comfort, joy, and truth of the Gospel to lots and lots of suffering people who are open to the message of Christ. They see his church in action as they care

for, feed, guide, serve, love, and respect these hurting souls as they painstakingly wait for resettlement. It is a hub where they are seeking refuge now, but within years will be dispersed from. When they leave Lebanon, they will either go as new believers or as Muslims who were served and loved by Christians. They will take with them the seeds of the Gospel.

Chaouki and I had a nice chat on the patio one evening where he told me from his heart that he believed the harvest is NOW. Through the Food Distribution Ministry, some of the physical needs of the refugees are being met, and through attendance at the worship services required in order to receive the food packages, spiritual needs are also being met. Only God could take something so horrible like war and turn it into something beautiful to bring Him glory. I mean, not in their wildest dreams could Chaouki and Maha have thought that they

would be holding 3 worship services a week for around 500 women where Muslims and Christians worship in unity together. I count it as one of my top blessings in life to have served alongside them and to have witnessed what God is doing through their ministry to these beautiful, resilient, broken yet hopeful people.

I came away from this trip not only with my numbers, facts, and data but with a heart broken for refugees and an understanding of how important Lebanon is for the spread of

God's love and Good News. Supporting full-time missionaries to Lebanon like the Bouloses or serving as a short-term missionary yourself may very well be one of the most important things you ever do in life. It was for me.

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Chaouki and Maha Boulos