

Bible Study for December 14 - 20, 2020

For the season of Advent and Christmas, we continue looking at Bible Studies provided through Lutheran World Relief, one of the largest, yet relatively unknown, relief agencies in the world. While their work takes place in most countries around the globe, these studies give us some perspective on what they are doing in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. The full study, including videos, is available at: https://lwr.org/ai_file_subscribe/file/4638

MIDDLE EAST | LEBANON

Read: Isaiah 61:1-11

LEARN how your love helps neighbors in Lebanon. Located in the Middle East along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon shares a border with both Israel and Syria. With a population of nearly 7 million people, Lebanon is about four-fifths the size of Connecticut. Arabic is the official language of the country, with French and English considered secondary languages. Lebanon is host to the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. As refugees struggle to establish a new life and source of income, many poor Lebanese families are also facing hardships finding employment. Your congregation's love reaches Syrian refugees and poor Lebanese families with specialized agricultural training and employment opportunities, including an opportunity for women and men to learn how to produce crops in greenhouses, extending the growing season. Their crops will become their source of income and provide much-needed nourishing food for their communities. Your support also repairs and improves irrigation canals and water networks and helps these stressed local and refugee communities learn to work together. Additionally, the quilts and care kits you so lovingly assemble are reaching desperate refugees who seek shelter in Lebanon. These essential supplies allow people to allocate their very limited resources to things like food, medicine, and shelter. They also provide a spot of color and softness in what can be a grim, hard existence. On August 4, 2020, one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded sent a blast through the capital city of Beirut. More than 180 people were killed and an estimated 300,000 are currently displaced. Your swift and generous response meant that Lutheran World Relief could rush aid to our neighbors in Beirut. Right now, you are helping to meet basic needs through food distributions, home and business repairs and through distribution of quilts and kits. Thank you for reaching neighbors in Lebanon with gifts of light and hope.

DISCUSS or Ponder

1. What challenges faced by our neighbors in Beirut stood out to you the most? Why?

2. Imagine what it would be like to be a refugee. What do you think would be most difficult about being in that situation?
3. What could you do from home to help our neighbors in Lebanon?

BIBLE STUDY

Some of God's most extravagant work is described in today's Bible reading from Isaiah 61:1-11. Read verses 1-4.

1 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. 4They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

1. How might you summarize what God is saying through the prophet Isaiah in these four verses?
2. Do any of the words in these verses call to mind anything you have learned about our neighbors in Lebanon? What connections can you draw?
3. There are a lot of pairs of opposite words in these verses — release of prisoners, comfort and mourning, rising up and repairing ruined cities. Discuss contrasting ideas you notice in the Bible reading. Do you also notice contrasts in what you have read about and watched in the video regarding the situation in Lebanon today?

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for bringing your light and love into the world through Jesus. Be with our neighbors in Lebanon who are afraid or alone. Bring them comfort and hope. Thank you for inviting us to be part of bringing your good news into the world. Guide us to find ways to share the love you give us with our neighbors here at home and in faraway places like Lebanon. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One we long for in this season of hope. Amen.