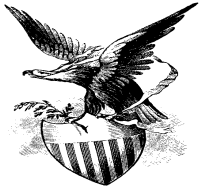


# Light Brings Salt

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## Iron Range Bible Church

*Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God*



### Ministry Report and Opportunities

The following is from the March newsletter from Dr. Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. It gives us an overview of what God is doing out there in various mission fields around the world and the opportunities that Dr Zacharias and his team have had.

Poets and artists are drawn to the quiet solitude of mountain retreats and gardens as they put pen to paper. Their imaginations are fed, their minds are at rest, and their thoughts flow. But such settings can hold me for only a day or two-I would not even unpack there because I begin to panic at the thought of spending several days there. Gardens, yes, and mountains if I am recuperating, but to write, my inspiration comes from listening to people, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and watching life happen at its hectic pace. In fact, when I am writing, I walk busy streets around the world at least once every day, observing life as it is lived, bartered, verbalized, fed, and argued about. When the Lord called me He knew that the only inclination I had that would qualify me to speak is that I observe life and listen to the thoughts of others on what stirs their individual lives.

And in that context, I have just returned from one of the most life-stirring trips in my memory. It began the day after New Year's Day and lasted six weeks. Margie was with me for most of the time and that broke the strain of being gone so long. We journeyed through Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, India, Sri Lanka, elsewhere to write, and then on to Oxford to speak at an annual outreach to its students sponsored by Christian groups at the colleges. Talk about seeing the world in its hurts and in its glories! Where does one begin to even report after a journey such as this?

Our first stop was Beirut. On arrival we were told that Hezbollah had taken over the center of the city and was threatening the government with reprisals if it wasn't given equal say in governance. In fact, on our way to the hotel we drove by the group's demonstration. Some groups in the world seem to have only one response to anything they don't like: violence. Hezbollah has already had a share in the killings there, and now, emboldened by its "success" against Israel, it is more belligerent than ever.

But our setting was a peaceful hotel where the hall was packed with pastors and Christian leaders from the entire Middle East for a conference hosted by Sami Dagher. At the conclusion of the conference they all signed a historic document pledging their love for the Lord and for each other. That part of the world is steeped in factions, and this signing was for them the first such affirmation to promise not to be envious of each other's success but to love one another as compatriots in Christ's service.

They live with constant uncertainty, continuous violence. The blown-out buildings and endless reconstruction on the streets tell the story of their history for the past two decades. In spite of this, most thrilling to me was to meet several young men and women who are eager to enter Christ's service and are desirous of preparing for a calling fraught with danger. I can say to you candidly that if we had the funds we could train a dozen of them easily within the next three years and prepare capable apologists for that part of the world. They have bright young minds and are ready to serve. We are praying earnestly for the enabling to get behind them.

From Beirut we drove to Damascus. What was to be a drive of about two hours took more than four. That evening I preached at a local church

and saw the sanctuary filled with men, women, and young people. After the meeting we were all taken out for dinner, and two doctors at the dinner asked if I would be able to find the time to answer questions from medical doctors in a private setting. We decided that the only time would be about 10 PM on the last night that I would be there.

So we set the time and place. Little did I know what the next days would hold. Midmorning the next day began with the pastor telling me that a highly-placed official in the Syrian government would like to meet with me for an hour or so. What began with that call took the rest of the day. After about an hour with him, he said, "I think it is important for you to meet this person because he is one of the most influential men in the country." Before I knew it we were in the car and half-an-hour later we were in a meeting with the second official. Halfway through that, he suggested that I also meet with the Grand Mufti of Syria, who is the chief Islamic cleric in the country. Soon we were in the car being whisked over there.

As we talked, he felt certain that a meeting with another top leader would be in order, which would take two to three days to put together. Could I stay on an extra day? As it happened, I was leaving in two days and could not stay beyond that. But as a result of those three meetings, an invitation has been extended to come back and meet with the leadership of the country. Just this week I have been asked for a date. That evening the meetings began in full force. What a forty-eight hours stretch it was! Every meeting was full, with people from all walks of life and professions, including professional journalists. On the last night many people responded to the invitation that was given, and then as promised, at 10 PM I met with fifty medical practitioners from various religious persuasions and answered their questions till past midnight. My three colleagues were already half asleep and thoroughly worn out by then.

They wanted to know what I had eaten that kept me going that far into the night! I don't know how to answer that except to say that had I been in a mountain retreat I would have been sleeping too. In a setting such as this, being with spiritually hungry people, the Lord seems to give me strength beyond my own understanding.

This is my third or fourth visit to Syria. After my last visit the pastor was put under house arrest for two years. The hunger and openness I saw this time was unparalleled. It is a moment of opportunity, a wrinkle in time that I long for us to capitalize on. It was here that the Apostle Paul was transformed and from here that he carried the Gospel to the known world of his time.

Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited capital city in the world. Yet, in the midst of such opportunity, one prominent leader urgently said to me, "If something doesn't change, I give this area-and the world-five years, maximum ten, before it will explode." These words were uttered in great concern, pleading with me to be the catalyst to bring help and change.

The political situation in those parts is precarious, while the spiritual hunger is unprecedented. But here in the West we spend the resources that God has given us to build bigger buildings and streamline programs. The opportunity to make a change where God is working and where the devil is seeking to destroy is ignored, without any effort on our part.

I am pleading with all who are reading this letter to at least pray-pray that God will lead some to go there themselves or to give sacrificially so that others can go and give the hope of God through Christ. It is the only solution to this volatile situation.

We at RZIM are eagerly seeking God's will for us in this, so that we can determine what we can do and what we can give up in order to meet this need. In June our whole team will be meeting together. It would mean much to us to know that many of you will be praying for us at that time as we spend the time in prayer, asking God to show us the strategy He has for us as a team to meet this urgent need. From Damascus we flew to Amman, Jordan. Literally within two or three hours of arriving we were invited to meet a very special member of the Hashemite royal family who wanted to welcome us into the country and share his thoughts on what his part of the world is experiencing. He was a most gracious host and gentleman whose compassionate heart was evident from his affirmation of what we are doing globally through Wellspring. What God is doing in that part of the world in spite of all the tragedies is amazing to me. The meetings began that

evening, and by the time we left three days later our hearts were charged with a clear call to become involved there. One Christian leader took me aside and said, "Did you see what has happened here tonight? This has never happened here before. Leaders of denominations were here; people from other churches with their friends. You must return and soon! This is our time in our land." Margie and I spent the rest of the journey asking ourselves, "is this our Macedonian call?" How and in what way was yet to be made clear in our own thinking.

The next stop helped answer that question when we arrived in the city of Chennai (formerly called Madras). Politicians must have little to do when they spend their time changing the names of cities. Anyhow, so it is. Unfortunately, try telling a travel agent you want to go to Chennai; you'll be there a while until he figures out where that is! That aside, we were there to see a dream come true. For years we have wanted to build a training center in apologetics for Asian youth, and that dream has at last become a reality. I almost wish I could include a picture here but it will have to wait. That beautiful center is now open and the first lectures will begin in May. To this place we can bring students from Asia, Europe, the South Pacific, and the Middle East. It will cost much less, the setting is much less materially seductive, and the teaching will be equally as good as we use our faculty from all over the world, including Oxford. This opened my eyes to how we can help train Middle Easterners.

It is a short hop from there to India, and with proper planning and strategic thinking, the center for learning and apologetics can become a launching pad for our global vision. Within the next five days in India we would be in three cities, the last of which was Trivandrum. The university auditorium was filled and students were even sitting in the windows and aisles listening to the Gospel being presented. It is very difficult to absorb all this in such quick sequence. But here again in India we see God working and our hearts tugged to come and help.

From India it was on to Sri Lanka, a beautiful island turned into a hotbed for terrorist activities. The political scene is precarious, and so many children and young people are being co-opted for deadly purposes. Only a few months previously a bomb was set off and many were killed in the

very auditorium where we held the meetings. Militants who seek power do it with callous and this-worldly intent while using moralizing language with which to kill and maim. The meetings were packed and the response was heartwarming. We heard the same refrain everywhere: "When can you come back?"

The last stop was Oxford. The three open forums at the university began with the news that very morning that the student body president of one of the colleges, a twenty-year-old young man, had committed suicide. The pressure of studies in a life devoid of meaning sends many a young man or woman in search of extinction. The hall was full and the eager minds, hungry.

On the final afternoon I gave a gentle invitation to seek God, if that was indeed the hunger of the heart and to turn their lives over to Jesus Christ. If the after-meeting conversation was any indication, several responded to the tugging of the Spirit of God.

This is the reality in campuses where we go. The best education possible and the freedom to live any way one chooses has not satisfied the soul. Some talked of their sexual struggles, others of their intellectual ones, still others of their religious turmoil, and so it went. I had the privilege of praying with several. On the final two days our whole itinerant team was present to record our new RZIM curriculum for worldview and apologetics, to be released in the fall of this year. When I finally got onto the plane to head home, I realized that my colleagues may have asked their question on my diet in jest, but the truth is that my diet of seeing and hearing from people in key places asking hard questions keeps my heart energized to bring the answers of Christ.