

Peacemaking in the Middle East

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This article is a compilation of posts written in the spring of 2011 for [Peacemaker Ministries](#).

Arrival in Lebanon - April 25

By the grace of God, I arrived safely in Beirut, Lebanon, on Monday evening, April 25. The first two weeks of my trip were arranged by Manfred Kohl (who serves on our Board of Directors) and his wife Barbara, who wanted to introduce me and our three other companions to the rich history and spiritual dynamics of the Holy Land. They have planned an intriguing schedule of travel for us through Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. At the end of this tour, Lord willing, I will fly on to Cairo to join Chip Zimmer (our VP of Global Ministries) for a week. We are looking forward to meeting with Christian leaders there and speaking at a conference of leaders from the Anglican, Coptic Orthodox, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic Churches.

My first day in Lebanon was an eye-opener. I spent most of Tuesday with the leaders of the Lebanese Society for Educational & Social Development (LSESD) and the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS). One of the professors I met (*I will not give many names in my reports*) was especially thoughtful; his remarks helped me begin to understand the delicate nature of Muslim-Christian relationships. Here is a bit of what he shared:

- The historical enmity between Islam and Judaism derives in part from the fact that neither religion has a robust “theology of reconciliation.” This lack lies at the root of the thousands of years of unresolved hostility that have existed between Judaism and Islam, and between the many factions within Islam itself. What a powerful incentive this realization should be for all Christians to pray for the spreading of the gospel of Christ throughout the Middle East!
- The Q’uran has a strong emphasis on the mercy that Muslims hope to receive from Allah. Mercy is wonderful, but it is “one directional.” It flows only from the high to the low, from the strong to the weak, from the master to the slave. It never flows both ways. Love, on the other hand, which is fully revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, is intended to be two-way. God loves us, and by his grace we can love him. By that same grace a slave and master can love each other, as can a poor man and a rich man, a weak man and a powerful man. Love opens the way for two-way relationships of mutual respect, care, responsibility, and equality, which are essential for a viable democracy.

As I have reflected on this, I’ve realized that the spreading of the gospel in the Middle East, with its theology of reconciliation emphasized in the New Testament, could contribute to the rise of true peace. The love of God expressed in Christ can promote the healing needed for lasting democratic change.

And how might Muslims, especially those who are more moderate, be encouraged to embrace biblical concepts of reconciliation and love? First, as a result of prayer that God would move in their hearts through common grace to give them an understanding and appreciation for these

qualities, which are so much a part of his character and glory (see Exod. 34:6-7). And second, by praying that the Lord would give his church in the Middle East and all believers around the world the grace to live out these qualities of love and reconciliation in our relationships with one another and with our neighbors, Muslim or otherwise.

The need for the church to lead by example hit me powerfully as I gave a lecture on biblical peacemaking at ABTS on Tuesday evening. While talking afterward with students, faculty, and local pastors, I learned that unresolved conflicts are wreaking havoc in many Christian marriages, churches, and ministries in Lebanon. I heard stories of divorces (sometimes high-profile church leaders), estranged families, domestic abuse, fragmented churches, and conflict in the workplace and with neighbors—and I was powerfully reminded of stories I hear when I speak in the U.S. and in other countries.

But the stakes here are especially high. If Christians here learn to live out the reconciling power of the gospel in their personal relationships, they can play a significant role in promoting reconciliation and healing among their Muslim neighbors.

So, please pray for the church here and for me as I travel through the region in the days ahead. Please pray that God would help me to discern what role he would like Peacemaker Ministries to play in this process. I want to learn from others' experience and wisdom and discern ways that we might be able to work together to play some small part in fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah:

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." (Isaiah 19: 23-25, NIV)

More Adventures in Lebanon - April 30

So many adventures in just a few days! Here are just a few:

- Having a Lebanese driver who likes to pass the car in front of him on a two-lane highway, while that car is already passing the car in front of him! Yup, three cars side by side on a two lane highway ... with a fourth car coming straight at us. We survived the first time, then the second, then the third ... and finally I realized that this is simply how people get around in this fast-moving country.
- Visiting Jeita Grotto, an enormous cave complex found only recently, just a few miles north of Beirut. Its size reminded me of the caves of Moria shown in the movie *The Fellowship of the Ring*. But instead of being dark and foreboding, this cave is stunningly beautiful, sculpted by the hand of God from molten rock.
- Standing on the parapet of the Crusaders' fortress in Byblos, the oldest city in the world, and looking down at ruins left by 17 different civilizations over the past 8,000 years

(including Phoenician, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Hyksos, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and French). Civilizations come and go but the Word of the Lord stands forever!

- Having lunch in a café just eight miles from the Syrian border, in a town whose loyalties lie with Hezbollah. Even though both of these terms raise apprehensions in most American hearts, I felt completely safe. Every person we met was warm and friendly, and many were eager to have a conversation with “an American.” I know there are intense and often deadly politics rippling throughout this land, but my impression is that the vast majority of people simply want to have a job, raise a family, and live in peace. May God grant that wish.
- Walking through the ruins of Baalbeck, an enormous Roman temple complex in the Bekaa Valley, over the mountains east of Beirut. This is the largest and best preserved Roman temple left in the world. It took 250 years to build, and appallingly, the work was accomplished by ten generations of 100,000 slaves. Some of the foundation blocks weigh 800 tons (1.6 million pounds). Hundreds of granite columns weighing several tons each were transported all the way from the upper Nile in Egypt, being dragged on bronze rollers 250 miles from the Mediterranean coast. As we walked through this incredible complex, one of my companions, Ray Cureton, had a profound insight. Given the awe-inspiring size of this structure and the political power and religious devotion of those who built it, just think how courageous the apostle Paul was to walk into cities with such temples and boldly proclaim, “I will tell you of the one true God, who made the heavens and the earth ...!” May God give all of us such faith and boldness in proclaiming the Savior of the world.
- Witnessing the amazing contrasts of Beirut itself. When we drove downtown for dinner, we passed shelled out hulks of buildings that have still not been repaired since the 2006 Lebanon war. And yet just a few blocks away is a gleaming complex of new office buildings, stores, and restaurants that rival the most modern of cities. Everywhere we walked there were laughing children, smiling parents, and romancing couples ... some robed in stylish but traditional Muslim dress, and others in blue jeans and the most modern of fashions. People from very different faiths live peacefully in a city that has been repeatedly reduced to rubble during religious wars.

Please pray that our visit here will contribute in some small way to the Church’s ability to promote and preserve this peace between the diverse peoples of this land, but more than that, to give witness to One who is building a kingdom that will last forever.

A Visit to Jordan - May 2

On Thursday we flew from Beirut to **Amman, Jordan**. The people here are warm and energetic. Their exuberance is vividly illustrated by a marvelous dance that was videotaped at their national airport—the [video](#) has been viewed nearly a million times!

We were greeted at the gate by our Muslim guide, **Nazir**, who whisked us through customs and saw to our every need for the next two days. He explained that because Jordan has no oil reserves or other major natural resources, the country has invested in educating their people. Many Jordanians go on to get advanced degrees and serve as engineers, doctors, and lawyers in other countries, sending much of their income home to support their families and the development of their country. We stayed in a new part of the capital, where all of the buildings are made with well-fashioned limestone, which maintains comfortable inside temperatures year round.

On Friday we drove south from Amman to **Madaba, the “City of Mosaics.”** The churches in Madaba are renowned for their mosaics; the most famous is in the Greek Orthodox Church and contains over two million pieces of colored stones. We stopped in a local school for a demonstration of how mosaics are made. A 3’x3’ mosaic can take one person five weeks to construct! A disabled artisan showed me a beautiful piece he had just completed. He explained that he is one of many people the government has trained to build mosaics at home as a means of fulfillment and livelihood. Really cool!



From there we drove west through the land where **Ruth the Moabitess** lived before she journeyed to Israel with Naomi. I tried to imagine the faith and courage she must have had as she walked the dusty hills with her mother-in-law to a distant and uncertain land. Her commitment of loyalty to Naomi and the living God has always been an inspiration to me:

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

We soon arrived at **Mount Nebo**, which sits on the edge of the high plateau to the west of the Jordan Valley. It was here that God brought Moses so he could look across the Jordan into the Promised Land before he died. The site is marked by a church dating to the 4th Century, whose floor is covered with incredible mosaics. As we stood on the crest of the mountain looking west, we could see the green valley of the Jordan, the Dead Sea, Jericho, and the hills of Jerusalem in the far distance. As I gazed across this panorama, I wondered how Moses felt when he stood there thousands of years ago, knowing God was about to fulfill his promise to bring his people into their promised home, yet at the same time realizing he would not journey with them but would die and be buried on the mountain. It was a sobering moment for me. I prayed that God would give me a measure of that same faith and obedience, so that I can energetically fulfill all he has called me to do, and yet be glad to hand off the work of leading Peacemaker Ministries to a new “Joshua” someday.



The next morning we drove north of Amman to a retreat center, where I gave a two-hour talk to a gathering of faculty, students, and pastors associated with ***Jordan Evangelical Theological***

Seminary (JETS). This seminary graciously published our Arabic translation of *The Peacemaker*. We had a wonderful time together, exploring ways that they could live out biblical peacemaking in their families, churches, and communities as a witness to fellow believers and their Muslim neighbors.

Our guide sat through the entire talk, hearing the gospel repeatedly as I explained how it informs every aspect of peacemaking. He warmly accepted an Arabic copy of *The Peacemaker* when we parted at the Jordan/Israel border later that afternoon. Please pray with me that God will use our time together to open his heart to the love of Christ.

Saying goodbye, we cleared customs and crossed the ***Jordan River***, whose waters have flowed through the history of the Bible. So many of the heroes of our faith crossed these banks, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, John the Baptist, and Jesus. As refreshing and life-giving as these waters have been to generations of people, I thought of the greater life and refreshment all people can find in Christ himself, who poured himself out to give us “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” so that we will never thirst again.

Time in Israel (Part 1) - May 6

Web access has been limited the last few days, so I’ve not been able to get my reports out as quickly as before. I’ll divide our time in Israel into two reports.

We crossed the Jordan on Saturday, April 30, and drove through miles of well-irrigated fields to ***Tiberius***. This beautiful town rests on the western shore of the ***Sea of Galilee***. As I stood on my balcony looking over the lake at the Golan Heights that evening, I was moved by the realization that Jesus looked up the same waters and green hillsides as he traveled this region during the early days of his ministry. Chilly as the waters were, I had to take a swim in the lake that was so much a part our Lord’s life.

Sunday morning we drove a mere 15 minutes to the ***Mount of Beatitudes***, where Jesus delivered his “Sermon on the Mount.” Sitting in the shade of a large tree on the top of the hill (Jesus probably spoke from the foot of the hill, which is shaped like an amphitheater), I read Matthew 5, 6, and 7 as though for the first time. Inside the chapel, I took special note of the stained glass window that read, “Beati Pacifici” (Blessed are the peacemakers). “May this be true,” I prayed, “especially in this troubled land.” Our group of six then gathered in a cool garden for devotions and a communion service that I will remember for the rest of my life, for this was a place walked by the very One who gave his body and blood for me.

Returning to our van, we drove to ***Capernaum*** within 5 minutes (everything was so close!). There is little certainty about the exact location of many biblical sites, but this a place where scholars and archeologists generally agree that they have located the actual foundation stones of Peter’s home and the local synagogue. Rivers of grace flowed through our Lord in this

community. He called Peter, James and John out of their boats to become fishers of men. He healed the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, and the paralytic who was lowered through the ceiling. He called Matthew out of his tax collector's booth into apostolic ministry. And he traveled and taught in all of the towns surrounded the lake. I sat alone on the edge of the lake, where Jesus may have stood when he called Peter to beach his boat, and read Matthew 8 and 9 with a whole new appreciation.

On Monday, we drove to **Mount Tabor**, where Jesus was transfigured before his apostles, giving them a foretaste of what we can look forward to on the day of our own resurrection. Looking out from the crest of the mountain, we could see the fertile Jezreel valley, rich with crops and memories of many Old Testament events, including Elijah's race with the chariot of Ahab, the stealing of Naboth's vineyard, and Jezebel being devoured by dogs.

A few miles away, we entered **Nazareth**, where Mary was told she would give birth to Immanuel, and Jesus learned to be a carpenter. As in all of the holy sites in this land, a grand church has been built over the supposed site of the annunciation. Its walls are decorated with dozens of beautiful mosaic and painted pictures of Mary and the baby Jesus. As much as I respect the significance of this stone building and the labor of love that went into its adornments, I found something even more wondrous in Nazareth: **living stones**. I spent most of the afternoon with an old friend, Botrus Monsour, Director of the Nazareth Baptist School, his brother Badir, a local businessman and prominent church leader, and Badir's remarkable wife, Rula. Their family roots go back many generations in this land, and in spite of the pressures that come from being a "minority within a minority" (Christian Arabs), they are passionate about giving witness to our Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, they are fulfilling the promise given in 1 Peter 2:4-5:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

All three of these people impressed me, but I especially admired **Rula**. A petite and soft-spoken woman, she earned a law degree before marriage, and then earned a master's degree in conflict resolution and mediation at Tel Aviv University while serving her husband, raising three small sons, and working as a public prosecutor for 13 years (the first Arab female in Israel to hold such a post). She recently quit her prosecutor's position to pursue a vision God has laid on her heart to promote biblical mediation and peacemaking. She will begin by teaching a course on biblical mediation at a local seminary and is gearing up to pursue a doctorate in this field as well. I see in her a humility and faith that reminds me of the Canaanite woman mentioned in Matthew 15:21-28. Like this woman Jesus highly commended 2,000 years ago, Rula is pressing through numerous social barriers and boldly seeking Jesus' blessing on her vision to bring healing to her land through gospel-centered peacemaking. Please join me in praying that God would strengthen and guide her in pursuing this vision, and show me how Peacemaker Ministries can assist her.

On Tuesday we drove across the country to the scenic Mediterranean city of **Caesarea**. This was where God commanded Peter to extend the gospel to the Gentiles (Cornelius, Acts 10), and where Paul later spent two years in prison waiting for Jewish/Roman justice to run its course (Acts 24 and 25). Much of the ruins of ancient city are still visible, hinting at a magnificent palace, full-sized hippodrome (for games and chariot races), and a theatre that could accommodate 4,000 people. The world-conquering grandeur and power of Rome was on full display in this city as Paul was brought through its gate in chains. And yet he was not the least bit intimidated. When he stood before the Jewish high priest, Roman governors Felix and Festus, and Jewish King Agrippa and Bernice, with his life literally on the line, Paul never softened his message. He consistently and boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord of the world. May God grant the Christians in this region and us grace to be as bold as Paul whenever God grants us the opportunity to speak of the love of Christ.

Time in Israel (Part 2) - May 9

We arrived in **Bethlehem** on Tuesday, May 3, and stayed in the guest house at Bethlehem Bible College for four nights. On Wednesday morning we visited **Manger Square** and the **Church of the Nativity**, reportedly the site of the cave where Jesus was born. We then spent time at the **Shepherd's Field**, contemplating what the shepherds (most of whom were probably just boys) must have felt as the angel appeared before them declaring, *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people! Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

That afternoon we drove into **Jerusalem** and visited several historical sites. We started at the **Western Wall**, the remnant of the ancient wall that surrounded the courtyard of the Jewish Temple. Hundreds of people crowded the square, some wearing Orthodox caps and shawls, others in western shorts, and still others in Israeli military uniforms. We moved on to the **Garden of Gethsemane**, where our Lord agonized in prayer before his ordeal on our behalf. We then walked the narrow alleys of the **Via Dolorosa**, where Jesus carried his cross, finally aided by Simon of Cyrene (the exact course is disputed).



Instead of going to the churches built near the traditionally accepted site of Calvary, we went to the more recently discovered (1883) **Garden Tomb**. This area lies just outside the city wall and includes a rocky cliff that looks like a skull, an enormous underground cistern (needed to water a garden), and a tomb that matches the description given in Scripture. No one can prove which of the various sites is the place of our Lord's death and burial. Nonetheless, this particular location gives one a sense of what our Lord's surroundings were at that time, and provided a place of sober meditation on his supreme act of love and sacrifice for us. Our group was given a small alcove for a time of devotions, during which Ray Cureton, the pastor in our group, gave a

dramatic reenactment of how Peter might have described his betrayal of Christ, and his gracious restoration. We concluded our time in the garden with another meaningful communion service.



As I reflected on the many historic sites we had visited in the last few days, and the ongoing struggle by three world religions to retain access to these locations, I gained a new perspective on what makes this place “holy.” As special as this land is because of its place in the unfolding of God’s redemption plan, to me it is not so much the “Holy Land” as it is *“the Land where the Holy One walked.”* And as special as that is, I find greater joy in knowing that he is now living and working and advancing his

kingdom through millions of people who call on his name, whether they walk the mountainous lands of Peru, the hot jungles of the Congo, or the crowded streets of Beijing. He is alive! And his kingdom covers the whole earth, encompassing people from every tribe and tongue. Praise be to his name!

Thursday morning I had the privilege of giving a **message on biblical peacemaking** to the faculty, staff, and students of Bethlehem Bible College. Although we come from very different cultures and experiences, their smiles and laughter told me they related to the everyday conflict examples I used from my personal life and my experience as a mediator. I had many delightful talks with various individuals during the four days we stayed at the college’s guest house. They taught me much about the history, struggles, and hopes of the Palestinians in the West Bank (which includes Bethlehem). Although the city is surrounded by a 30’ wall and struggling to survive economically, all of the people I met at the college, in restaurants, and on the street were gracious and friendly. During each of the four evenings, I walked around town getting a sense of the community, sometimes talking with young men from the local refugee camps, whose demeanor did not change a bit even when they learned I’m an American. I felt safe no matter where I was.

My heart aches over the tensions and divisions that plague this country, and I am looking forward to returning next March to speak at the second **“Christ at the Checkpoint”** conference. The sponsors’ hope is to bring together many different speakers and perspectives on the historical, religious, and political conflicts that need to be resolved in order to restore God’s shalom to this unique land. I have a lot of studying, praying, and thinking to do in order to contribute in a meaningful way. Please pray for me and this conference. I am eager to expand my understanding and love for the people who live here.

In the Judean Wilderness - May 10

After my talk at the college on Thursday, we headed east into the **Judean Wilderness** on a new highway designed to link Amman with Tel Aviv, giving Jordan access to the Mediterranean Sea (fruit of the good relationship between Israel and Jordan). When they say “wilderness” they mean “wilderness.” Miles and miles of sweltering desert without a bush or blade of grass. This was where our Lord fasted for forty days and was tempted by Satan. Unlike the first Adam, whose every need was met in the garden, Jesus, who was lonely, starved, and thirsty, withstood the test, perfecting an obedience that has been credited to all who trust in him.

We passed through **Jericho**, a green oasis in the desert, thanks to a spring flowing from the nearby mountains. Looking to the east, we saw Mount Nebo, where we stood just a few days ago looking down on the Jordan Valley just as Moses did centuries ago.

Within the hour, we arrived at **Qumran**, where 972 texts from the Bible and other extra-biblical documents were found in eleven different caves between 1947 and 1956. Forty percent of the scrolls are copies of texts from the Bible, and date from 150 to 70 B.C. They confirm how God has maintained the accuracy of Holy Scripture for century upon century.

We then drove further south and took a cable car to the top of **Masada**, a 1,300-foot high plateau next to the Dead Sea that housed one of the many palaces built by Herod the Great. During the first Jewish-Roman War (66-73 A.D), the last of the Jewish rebels fled to this fortress to avoid Roman capture. They were besieged for months by the Tenth Roman Legion, which built a dirt ramp up to the western wall (300 feet above the adjacent hills), which they assaulted with a tower and battering ram. Realizing that they would be overcome in the morning, the 960 Jewish rebels in the fortress killed themselves (with the men killing their own wives and children) rather than come under the torture and slavery of the Romans. In memory of their bravery, all members of the Israel Defense Forces are sworn in on the top of Masada, repeating the declaration, “Masada shall not fall again.” I prayed that God would help me to understand a people whose lives have been shaped by so many centuries of oppression and adversity.



Our last planned stop on our tour was the **Dead Sea**, a popular resort area at the south end of the Jordan Valley. Donning our swimsuits, we waded out into the opaque waters, where dozens of people were covering themselves in the mud that is supposed to have medicinal benefits (some people stay at local spas, covered daily in mud, for three or four weeks). I passed on the mud, but enjoyed floating around, high in the water due to its density.

Friday was a day to relax, catch up on email, do laundry, and wander the shops in Bethlehem. **Jeannine and Ken Krushas**, a delightful couple in our group who run a bed-and-breakfast near Boston, MA (which has been commended by Martha Stewart, www.OnCranberryPond.com), joined me and our new friend from the college, Samar,



in searching out bargains we could take home to friends and family. Jeannine and I kidded each other mercilessly throughout our ten days together ... and it took me that long to realize that “Yea, Yea” is simply a Massachusetts version of “Verily, I say unto you.” When we part ways, I’ll miss her and her teddy-bear-friendly husband, Ken, as well as Pastor Ray, Barbara, and our unflappable tour guide, Manfred, at least until our next adventure.

I have a lot to sort through, digest, and ponder in the days ahead. So many preconceptions have been toppled, so many mental pictures have been repainted in far more vivid colors. I pray all of this will lead to a deeper walk with my Lord and a great passion to be an instrument of his peace wherever he chooses to send me.

Lord willing, my next report will come to you from Egypt, where Chip Zimmer and I are scheduled to spend three days speaking at a conference of leaders from the Anglican, Coptic Orthodox, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic Churches. May God give us wisdom and creativity to advance his kingdom in the “Land of the Pharaohs.”

Ending the Journey in Egypt - May 13

What a trip this has been! Although the news has been full of stories of demonstrations, violence, and burning churches in the Middle East, I have spent three weeks *safely* getting to know some of the most wonderful Christians I’ve ever met. Believers here in **Egypt** are certainly concerned about the turmoil that surrounds them, but they are also confident in God’s protection and His plans to use these events to advance his kingdom. The following is an account of what Chip Zimmer, our VP of Global Ministries, and I experienced in Egypt.

I arrived in Egypt on Saturday evening, and joined Chip, who had flown in the day before. We were hosted by Dr. Mouneer Anis, the Anglican Bishop of Egypt and Archbishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East. After worshipping at All Saints Cathedral on Sunday, Dr. Mouneer’s chaplain, Rev. Drew Schmotzer, drove us to the beautiful Coptic Orthodox Anafora Retreat Center north of Cairo, stopping on the way to visit St. Macarius Monastery, one of the oldest Orthodox monasteries in Egypt.



We had come to hold a three-day peacemaking conference starting Monday with leaders of the Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic Churches in Egypt. Tragically, Sunday evening turned **violent in Cairo**. Demonstrations incited by Islamic extremists resulted in the burning of two Orthodox churches, the death of twelve people, and the injury of another 250.

(One of those killed was a guard at a church who, with a knife at his throat, refused to renounce Christ.) Fearing that the violence might spread, Dr. Mouneer and many of the other denominational leaders were compelled to stay in Cairo and meet with Muslim leaders to investigate the church burnings and issue a joint declaration condemning the violence. Thankfully, the crowds dispersed and no further demonstrations occurred during our visit.



These events delayed many leaders' arrival at the meeting and kept some in Cairo all week. Even so, we ***began our teaching Monday morning*** with twenty-five Anglican leaders and one Roman Catholic lay woman, and were joined later by Dr. Mouneer, a Roman Catholic priest (who is the communications director for the Catholic Church), and a woman from his church. These brothers and sisters gave Chip and me three of the most stimulating and rewarding days of training I've ever experienced.

Three excellent translators took turns converting everything Chip and I taught into Arabic. Wanting to contextualize the material, we had prepared three detailed case studies. All that we taught we applied to these three scenarios. We were delighted with the level of engagement of the entire group. Beginning with the first session, they jumped wholeheartedly into the case studies, freely sharing their thoughts, questions, and wisdom. We learned a great deal from them about conflict resolution in Arabic culture and how we can adapt our resources and training to be of value to the church in this country. Chip and I are deeply grateful to God, and can't adequately thank our families and friends for praying for us. We are already discussing plans to bring another training team back to build on the work we did this week.

On Thursday, Chip and I visited the ***Great Pyramids*** of Egypt, which are the only remaining members of the "Seven Wonders of the World." Incredible structures! Our guide told us that the revolution has drastically cut tourism to Egypt. The pyramids are normally surrounded by thousands of tourists. When we were there, we saw no more than 30 or 40 at a time. My heart went out to the dozens of guides, vendors, and camel drivers who approached us hoping to earn a little income to take home to their families. It grieved me to think the great toll recent events have taken on thousands of innocent people who just want to live normal lives.

We drove back through ***Tahrir Square*** in Cairo, which was peaceful, filled with normal traffic. Nearby, we saw the burned-out high rise building owned by one of the former president's sons. Anger against the president and his family has been building for 30 years, and I suspect that it has not yet been fully vented.

We then went to the ***Evangelical Theological Seminary*** (ETSC) and enjoyed a lunch with its president, Dr. Atef Gendy, who shared his



insights on the challenges and opportunities Christians face in Egypt. Egypt has the largest percentage and total number of Christians of any Muslim country in the world. Up to 15% of the population is Christian; of Egyptian Christians, 90% are Coptic Orthodox. Although Egypt is rated as one of the twelve worst countries in the world in terms of religious violence, the believers I talked with are hopeful that God will work through recent events to bring them relief. Among other things, they are praying that the recent violence will show the general population what will happen if Islamic extremists gain power in the new government, and will convince Egypt's citizens to support moderate leaders.

After lunch, I was invited to present a ***one-hour introduction to biblical peacemaking*** to the school's staff and faculty. Even though they live in the context of major religious and political conflicts, they realize that the most frequent conflicts they encounter are in their families, churches, and workplaces. As a result, they responded enthusiastically to my talk, and we finished our time together exploring ways we could work together to provide peacemaking training to the seminary's student body and the leaders of the 340 churches connected to the school.

Today (Friday morning) Chip and I woke early and ***walked the streets of Cairo*** for awhile. Throughout our visit every person we've met has been friendly, even when they learned we are Americans. Some of them have gently asked, "Why won't America be more supportive of Arabs? We want to be your friends. We know that your influence can do much to bring peace and justice in our land." This is not the picture most of us get from the nightly news. I have much to think about and many more people to talk with before I come back to the region again next March to teach at major peacemaking conference in Bethlehem. I would appreciate your prayers for me in my need for greater understanding.

Lord willing, I'll be on a plane headed home when you receive this message. After reflecting on all we experienced during the last three weeks, I hope to send one more letter to you in a week or two, summarizing the lessons we learned on this trip and the ways we hope to continue to serve the body of Christ in the Middle East.