

A Passionate Convert

TRAVELING WITH SONJA CORBITT



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– Sonja Corbitt



Sonja grew up in the South, in a strict household and was often put on restriction, sometimes for weeks at a time. The only entertainment she was allowed during these times were books, and her mother made sure to provide plenty, especially Bible storybooks. She loved the stories, but she first heard God calling her to Himself at a Southern Baptist revival. Then, at a camp that summer, she accepted Jesus' invitation to follow Him.

Her parents divorced when she was thirteen. The emotional wounds her father had given her were profound, and as a young girl, she struggled to find peace in her faith. It wasn't until several years later that she approached the Church.

Sonja and her husband began to attend a small country Baptist church where her teaching gift was realized. A woman asked her to co-teach a Bible study class, and within weeks the woman handed the course over to her.

The more Sonja prepared for her classes, the more she fell in love with the Bible. Her pastor appreciated her zeal for study and turned the Sunday School teaching over to her. “He gave me his class and lifted me up. He gave me free rein to teach; it was affirming in a very deep way for me.”

Just when the wounds of her past had begun to heal, everything seemed to fall apart. There was a church split. Sonja was blindsided by “the total destruction that occurred in that church” against her pastor and his family. “It broke my heart...and what I was learning in that decade was that God was healing this father wound in me. I knew that God was teaching me about proper authority and how to submit to proper authority. And what these people were doing was pure evil.”

Then one of her Sunday School students converted to the Catholic faith. The young woman was challenging Sonja's teaching with what she had learned in RCIA. “The stuff that she said would stick. And I would go home and try to prove her wrong. And the more I did that, the less I could.” says Sonja.

To understand the woman's arguments, she purchased a copy of the Catechism, what she found within began to change her mind. The Catechism laid out the authority of the Church, and Sonja was able to connect Church teaching with its Biblical foundations. “This is what I'm looking for,” she recalls thinking.

It was time to learn more, so Sonja dressed for Mass one Saturday. Her husband was mowing the lawn.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I'm going to Mass,” Sonja replied.

“What? Are you going to be Catholic now?” he snapped.

Her first pilgrimage had begun.

Sonja was stepping onto a new path. One she was convinced God had led her to. Following His prompting meant leaving everything she knew behind, including a thriving ministry and an upcoming publishing deal. All while her husband was not on board. She followed God anyway.

“I felt like I was splitting my family...yet I knew that God wanted me to come in [to the Church], so I just clung to Mary. She said, ‘yes,’ without Joseph knowing and then waited on God to affirm her faith.”

She jumped back into teaching at the Catholic Church and was soon leading RCIA classes. She was able to convince her husband to come and record her teaching for a potential publishing deal, and within a year of sitting through those classes, he too decided to convert. “Those classes showed him the Biblical foundations of Catholicism,” says Sonja.

By stepping out and obeying God's call to follow, Sonja had set out on pilgrimage. She went out to meet God and found him in the Catholic Church. Her willingness to follow the Lord's promptings, when there was every earthly reason not to, had a profound effect on her faith, brought her children into the Church, and helped her husband to find a deeper faith.

Then Sonja was invited to join a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Select International Tours. She visited all the sites and was excited to see the real places from the stories she had known since her youth. She asked a thousand questions and took in every vista. On a boat in the Sea of Galilee, Sonja heard God clearly say to her, “I just wanted you to see my place.”

It was a moment of realization. “He's sharing himself, not just the place.” Going on pilgrimage is “entering into that deeper relationship with God that He is inviting you to in that place. It is a complete sensory experience. You're tasting it. You're smelling it. You're feeling the breeze He felt blowing over you. It's a completely immersive experience that you cannot get anywhere else.”

Sonja's faith continues to reap rewards. The publishing deal she walked away from on her way to the Catholic faith was replaced with several best-selling books and Bible studies. And pilgrimage has now become a large part of her ministry.

“A pilgrimage is not a luxury. It is so important, I think that it should be right up there with Lent. Every single Christian is called to go on pilgrimage. If you're going to say, ‘no’ to a pilgrimage in your lifetime, then you have to consider that you are telling Jesus, ‘No, I am not interested in knowing you like that.’”

What practical advice would you give pilgrims to have a better trip?

“I always travel carry-on only. I don't bring a hairdryer. I bring one pair of shoes. All of my clothes match so that I can make dozens of outfits. I don't bring anything that I don't need every day. It makes it so much easier to get through airports. You can't lose it. Check-ins are easier. And you never need to worry about getting all your luggage to your room. I make sure that it all goes in one carry-on.”

How will a pilgrimage make a difference in a person's life?

“My faith was vibrant on my first trip and I went so much deeper. I can't imagine what a springboard a pilgrimage would be for someone who has felt lost or apathetic in their faith, or unsure about their place in the church...pilgrimage is an antidote to that.”

What sets your pilgrimages apart from others?

“First, the emphasis on scripture as both information, but also a conversation between you and God. I try to facilitate a more intimate experience with God, through the scriptures, in that place. Second, I'm very available. That personal connection you want to have with your leader; you can have that with me. I'm at your complete disposal.”