

Finding the Faith Gene

TRAVELING WITH BROOKE TAYLOR



Brooke Taylor's radio career began in her teens, and she soon found herself crisscrossing the United States through numerous top-forty and country radio stations as a morning show personality. "Growing up as a young woman in pop radio was a dangerous combination of secular culture and spotlight. It was easy for me to stray from my faith. I come from a long line of deeply pious Catholics. My Mother's faith was in her DNA. I always used to joke and say 'She had a Holy gene, I think it skipped a generation.' I just didn't think I had the same faith," says Brooke.

Brooke moved to North Carolina for a job in 2000, where she met and married Jim, a US Army soldier stationed at Fort Bragg, that same year. There, she gave birth to their first son only three days after the September 11, 2001 attacks. She and Jim were new parents in a new world and waited together to hear if Jim would be called to battle.

After his service ended, Brooke and Jim briefly moved their young family to Wisconsin for another radio job. Then, in 2005, 95.5 The Fish, a Contemporary Christian radio station in Cleveland, Ohio, offered her a morning show position. It was an opportunity that proved providential.

The Fish was a very different place for Brooke to work. Her coworkers challenged her to own her faith rather than stray from it. "These people were concerned for me; they wanted to save my soul." And as she strove to answer their challenges, it proved to be life changing. For the first time, she investigated church history, the early church fathers, and the beauty of the Catholic Church.

"It was then that I had an encounter with the living Christ, and I fell in love!" says Brooke. The prayer of Fr. Pedro Arrupe was realized in me."

*Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.*

Brooke and Jim continued to grow their family and were called by the Holy Spirit to Poland, where they adopted their fourth child. As if this weren't enough, Brooke began to feel the call to lead pilgrimages. As a mother and an introvert, pilgrimage seemed like an impossible challenge. "When you feel the call to pilgrimage, it's so easy just to put it off or not respond because there are a million demands on our time, but for me, there is no question that those have been the most regenerative times of my life."



"You are going for all those who cannot go. Your stories will inspire not only your faith but the faith of so many others."

– Brooke Taylor

"Through our adoption, I learned anew, that God often calls us out of our comfort zone. Over and over again we see this in sacred Scripture, but we are stiff-necked people! At least I am. So, each time He calls me out of the boat, I must trust Him. He never fails to dazzle me beyond all my imaginings."

Taking time away from her family to lead pilgrimage isn't always easy, but it is a privilege. "I recognize that when I go on pilgrimage, I carry my family with me. It's the greatest privilege of my life because I represent our family, and what an honor that is. It is challenging to figure out the logistics, but it is absolutely worth it because I bring the stories back with me. I tell this to my pilgrims as well. 'You are going for all those who cannot go. Your stories will inspire not only your faith but the faith of so many others.'"

Bringing those stories back to her family has helped to bolster all their faith. And now that her children are getting older, they are beginning to learn the power of pilgrimage as well. Her son recently accompanied her to the Holy Land and returned to his Model UN club with a more informed perspective on the Middle East's challenges. "We ran the Jerusalem (half) Marathon for persecuted Christians. My son was deeply moved by the plight of our brothers and sisters facing oppression and violence because of their faith in Jesus Christ."

"We often don't hesitate to plan a trip to Disney World or a ski resort, or plan a beach vacation, and if we enjoy those trips, that is just a taste of what you experience on pilgrimage. There's a fusion of sensory experience that our heart longs for and the realization that this is a sacred journey, that we are homeward bound."

Her years as a radio personality and journalist have given Brooke a unique perspective on faith and how people find theirs. Brooke is naturally an introvert, and the idea of traveling with a group was intimidating at first. But Brooke has learned that "being tested isn't always a bad thing." She has leaned into the process and let Him lead the way.

How does she lead so many pilgrimages as an introvert?

"It is a fantastic exercise in the intimacy of what can happen in a group. You begin as strangers, and by the end, you are family. We have an unexplainable bond. I realize now, that God used my years in radio to prepare me to lead pilgrimages. As a contemplative, I write meditations and tell stories that help our pilgrims process the experience of pilgrimage."

"If there's a quickening in your spirit...if there is a call, then we have to give our 'yes' and go. It's going to be a challenge, and you might not see how it's possible, but when we commit to something and give ourselves to it, it is amazing to see what God can do. It's not just one trip you take for ten days; it's for a lifetime."

How should one approach the act of pilgrimage?

Brooke has some suggestions:

- 1 "Carry prayer intentions** with you. It is an honor to carry the petitions of friends and family with you. My family can't always travel, but I can, so I bring them with me."
- 2 "Understand that pilgrimage** isn't just the tour. The journey starts before you step foot on the airplane and continues long after you get home. You see the fruits of the journey for a lifetime."
- 3 "Pack a few questions.** What are some things that you would like to ask God? What are you hoping to learn about yourself or your faith? There is an openness that you come to pilgrimage with, and that allows you to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit better."

