

Exploring the Bible through Pilgrimage

TRAVELING WITH TINA RIPPERGER



Tina Ripperger was born in Texas and grew up between Minnesota and Virginia. Church was a big part of her family life. She jokes that she “learned to count by turning pages in the hymnal.” Her mother continued to keep her accountable to her faith even as Tina moved around the East Coast through college and her early career. Every time Tina landed in a new location, her mother was quick to ask if she had found a church.

Deep faith was passed down through Tina’s family. Her great-grandfather was a circuit preacher in Texas, and her grandparents were also deeply faithful and had even gone on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1971. Not only was her family deeply faithful, they were Texans. So when she met the right man—naturally he was from Texas—they put down roots in the Lone Star State, found a church, and began to raise a family.

Her great grandfather’s Bible, along with pictures, souvenirs, and stories from her grandparents’ pilgrimage to the Holy Land continued to encourage Tina in her faith journey. But they weren’t her story yet. And as much as they comforted her, Tina eventually found herself in the throes of a self-described “crisis of faith.”

“I was done with church, but I didn’t want to be done with church,” Tina remembers.

So she prayed for God to give her something to draw her back. That Sunday she was asked to lead an in-depth Bible Study, which she did for the next four years. The call back to the church through leadership helped for a while, but eventually she struggled again with a waning desire to continue in the church. So she prayed again for something to keep her engaged. And that’s when the call came - quite literally.

Tina’s mother, recovering from surgery, had to forgo a trip to the Holy Land with a family friend. The friend called Tina to commiserate over the news that she would have to cancel as well, because she didn’t want to travel alone. “Unless, you want to go with me?”

The idea blindsided Tina. Her husband was walking beside her while she took the call and overheard the conversation. Tina looked his way and before she said a word, he told her, “Just go.”

“But what about the kids?” who were five and seven-years old at the time.

He encouraged her further, “We’ll figure it out. Just go.”

“I treated the whole trip as a gift. I was just going with [my friend] to help her out. I was just going with her so she didn’t have to go by herself,” says Tina.



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– Tina Ripperger

But as they traveled, Tina began to realize the truth of the gift she was taking part in. “God never really gives you anything that’s just for you to keep for yourself. You’re expected to share it.”

Edita Krunic, the President of Select International Tours, was on the trip. When she asked Tina if she was interested in leading a group of her own, Tina knew that God had just answered her prayer by giving her a mission.

Tina’s pastor, John Harman, was so excited for Tina to go on the trip, He knew it would be a life-changing experience for her. What he didn’t expect was for her to return on a mission to return to the Holy Land with him and a group of pilgrims. There were many schedule challenges, and John was hesitant at first to commit, but Tina moved forward with the planning and eventually John relented and accompanied her on the pilgrimage. That first trip convinced them both that pilgrimage was a ministry they needed to be involved in. They began planning their next trip on the ride home.

While Tina had always struggled with understanding the parables, this first trip had an outstanding side-effect. While flying home, she re-read the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ time in Capernaum and realized that she could now picture the scene in her head. Suddenly the Bible jumped off the page and into her very being. Things that had seemed distant or confusing, began to make sense. “I could see the whole scene in my head,” she says.

Tina is quick to point out that pilgrimage is not only for adults. In fact, her youngest daughter (an 8th grader) accompanied her on her last trip to the Holy Land. “She really picked up a lot about the culture as well as the Biblical aspects of [the pilgrimage].” That trip has changed the trajectory of her life and has already begun to ground her faith in ways she might not have experienced otherwise.

Pilgrimage has “...a way of teaching people, sharing the Gospel, and connecting to us our faith through travel,” which is why Tina and John named their ministry Faith Connections Travel. “This is not just a ‘trip.’ If you’re going to go, you need to prepare yourself. You can’t just rely on tour guides. You need to understand where you’re going, which is why we teach pre-trip classes.” These classes go deep into the Bible, history, geography, and even the geology of the Holy Land. So when you travel on a Faith Connections pilgrimage, you are better prepared to take in all that you are seeing and learning through the teaching of the guides and pastors that travel with you.

How should one approach a pilgrimage differently than a vacation?

Tina has some suggestions:

- 1 Treat your fellow pilgrims** like family. Your actions—or inactions—can affect the whole group; keep that in mind. Remember, pilgrimage is a gift, and God gives us gifts to share. What is He asking you to share and with whom?
- 2 Be prepared to** be patient and watch for God’s direction in inconveniences. If the electricity goes out, maybe He’s telling you it’s time for bed. If the bus is late, maybe He wants a few more minutes with you in prayer.
- 3 Your pilgrimage begins** long before you board a plane. Start to learn about the people, places, and things you will see while traveling. Read the Biblical accounts and then re-read them after your trip. You’ll be amazed at the difference in how you read them.