



About the Author *Norma J. Roberts*

How we each come to understand God and connect to scripture is often shaped by our experiences, our world view, and how we've been invited to approach scripture. This is certainly true of my own journey and experience of transformation. Some of that journey you will encounter in these pages, so there are a few things you may want to know about me.

My name is Norma Roberts. I grew up in a small town in Kansas during the 40's and 50's. My family was active in the Baptist church so that is where my faith was nurtured. My mother loved to read and two of my favorite books were Bible stories. One of them my mother read to me and the other one I could read for myself. My church took scripture seriously, but didn't provide space for asking questions, which eventually led to my seeking another place. One of my favorite songs was a missionary hymn, *"I'll go where you want me to go dear Lord. I'll be what you want me to be."* Going and becoming are still two major themes in my life. I grew up thinking I'd like to be a missionary although I suspect that early thought was shaped by my fascination with the stories of missionaries and my curiosity about other people and places.

My life has been shaped by many people and experiences. Often it has been teachers who've shown me the way. Two transforming events which occurred in high school profoundly affected my faith and yet at the time they were hardly a ripple. As a junior in high school I began to discover the importance of the Catholic Church protecting the scriptures and keeping the Christian faith alive. Baptists who wanted to trace their heritage to the first century were in reality deeply indebted to the Catholics. The second event took place about the same time in a church school class as we were studying *"Love the Lord your God with your whole being."* I'd heard it many times before, but it seemed to connect in a different way with Jesus' practice of praying "Our Father." At that point I began to use God language more deliberately, something I still do. So if at some point in a study you'd rather use Jesus language or spirit language, please do so. Use the language which will speak to your heart.

While I hadn't grown up in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, I admired their pastor in my home town a great deal and was indebted to him for his help which led to my going to Phillips University as a Junior. There I joined Central Christian Church in downtown Enid. I also met Bud, my husband of nearly 47 years. I wanted to teach high school English and Phillips offered a good program in secondary education. But the missionary idea came back when I started dating Bud and he was quite clear he wanted to serve overseas. A year after we were married we became part of the missionary candidate program of the United Christian Missionary Society which led to many of the people and places which have continued to shape our lives. We had the opportunity of going to Christian Theological Seminary with all the richness of being able to pursue many avenues of faith and learning. Many of the people who appear in Disciples history were for me real people from whom I learned the importance of nurturing a connection to God. A few of whom you will meet in this study. Because I hadn't grown up among Disciples and my contact with local churches was somewhat limited it was the people at UCMS and CTS who taught me about Disciples. People such as Mae Yoho Ward, Virgil and Florence Sly, Ralph and Maxine Palmer, Joe and Win Smith, as well as teacher, Ronald Osborn, James Carley, and Lowell Colson and my in-laws, Ned and Jewell Roberts. One of my favorite lines comes from one of Mae's prayers *"I have been given my own unique opportunities to live a fully crafted life."*

I have indeed been given many opportunities and am among those I'd called truly blessed. That isn't to say life is always easy. It's not. But at every step God has been present and even if I do not see it at the time, I experience God's leading toward the next step.

Bud and I have three children, two of whom are married and one is thinking about it. We have 4 grandchildren, 2 girls, 2 boys. One of the more educational experiences of our years in India was the adoption of our older son who came to us from Jackman Memorial Hospital in Bilaspur, India. Our daughter was two years old when Toby came to our house. Our younger son was born four years later. There are many stories to tell about the years we spent in India, but those will wait until my book, *Off the Edge of the Map*, is finished.

Bud and I have often quipped that it was living in India that pushed us to really grow up. We both taught in the Cuttack Theological College, Cuttack, Orissa, worked for the Student Christian Movement of India in Bangalore, and spent a year in a work/study program in psychotherapy at the Christian Counseling Center in Vellore. Living and working in Orissa we had to learn Oryia which certainly affected how I view language and culture. I went to India as a Christian and came back a more committed Christian, but with a much broader view of the world and a deep appreciation not only for Christians, but for all God's children. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Jesus also said, "I have other sheep, you do not know" I'm pretty sure, I've met a number of the other sheep.

When we returned to the U.S. we spent a year studying at Western Institute for Group and Family Therapy, were then ordained by the Christian Church in Northern California and Nevada, and became co-pastors for 8 years in Lodi, California. That experience certainly nudged my own journey of transformation and put me on a journey that has led to my continuing to learn about change and changing, what may help, how congregational transformation takes place. We also served as co-pastors in North Platte, NE, before I became an Associate Regional Minister of the Christian Church in Illinois/Wisconsin and Bud became a full time counselor /psychotherapist.

The last few years I was at CCIW I was given opportunities to work with congregations and pastors dealing with transformation. I became a trainer for Healthy Congregations and did a Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction at San Francisco Theological Seminary. Since then I've added Bridgebuilder training which is a process for helping congregations deal with conflict. In each phase of my journey I am very aware that God has been present, often providing encouragement and guidance through many who carry the name of Christian. I also think God recognizes I have a stubborn streak and has more often invited and nudged me toward things rather than a direct, "Do this!"

When I was looking at retirement, I knew I didn't want to sit around. I haven't. I became the coordinator for the *Congregational Transformation Conference, Journeying the Good News Road*. That event has led to a continuing journey, one part of which has been the development of resources, including this Bible study.

At some point Bud and I are planning to join our family who live in Hawaii. But that will be a new chapter, one I suspect God is already shaping.

As you are using these studies, if you would like to contact me, please do. Email will work best. njroberts@verizon.net.



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