

Transforming Life and Faith

by Carol Schersten LaHurd

A new life partner, a new child, a new job, a new home: most of us recognize how our lives are changed by these experiences. In “Transforming Life and Faith” we will consider how our lives and our faith journeys are transformed by the events we experience and the people we meet. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, and especially in Acts of the Apostles, we will read about people who have life-changing experiences: Paul on the road to Damascus, Moses in the wilderness of Midian, Lydia praying by a river in Macedonia, an Ethiopian man traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza. We will watch them turn to and with God as their minds, hearts, and daily lives are altered. And we will reflect on the ways we, too, have been and will be transformed and called by God to serve God’s mission in the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carol Schersten LaHurd is a lifelong teacher: Red Cross swimming lessons, high school English, parish education, and, for the past 30 years, biblical studies, Islam, and interfaith relations in colleges, seminaries, the church, and the wider community. After earning degrees from Augustana College (Ill.) and the University of Chicago, she received a Ph.D. in New Testament from the University of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Carol has published many scholarly articles and book chapters on biblical and interfaith topics and has experience in inter-religious and ecumenical relations. With her family she has lived in Damascus, Syria, and Sana’a, Yemen, where she taught and did research on women in Islam.

She is author of “Luke’s Vision: The People of God,” the 1998 Bible study for *Lutheran Woman Today* (now *Gather*). Currently she teaches part-time at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and is educational outreach consultant for the seminary’s Center for Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice.

For her own personal transformations, LaHurd credits close reading of the Bible, a lifetime in a dozen Lutheran congregations, a host of inspiring students and teachers, travel and living abroad, friends of all religions and no religion, and her extended family.

SEPTEMBER 2014—MAY 2015

THEME VERSE

“... be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

—Romans 12:2b

September **SESSION 1: TRANSFORMATION AND CONVERSION**

Our lives and our faith journeys include a series of transformations. “...Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.” Acts 9:15

October **SESSION 2: WE ARE CALLED**

Along with Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus’ disciples, God calls us to faith and service. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’” Isaiah 6:8

November **SESSION 3: TRANSFORMATION TAKES TIME**

Just as Moses and the Israelites gradually came to believe in God and obedience to God’s covenant, our Christian beliefs and practices develop over time. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30–31

December **SESSION 4: FAITH IN THE FAMILY**

Spiritual growth happens in communities—home, congregation, school and anywhere people share their experiences of God. “When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.’ And she prevailed upon us.” Acts 16:15

Jan/Feb 2015 **SESSION 5: REPENT AND FORGIVE**

In repentance we turn our hearts back to God to receive forgiveness and learn to forgive others. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

SESSION 6: MAKING CONVERSION LAST

The Bible and the communities we live in can cause and nurture spiritual transformation. “He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:38–39

March **SESSION 7: SUFFERING AND ENDURANCE**

We do not seek suffering, but it is inevitable in human life. How we deal with suffering can lead us to new trust and understanding and new ways of being ourselves. “... we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Romans 5:3–5

April **SESSION 8: INSPIRED BY THE RISEN LORD**

Jesus’ death could have caused a prolonged time of great doubt for his followers. But Jesus’ resurrection cemented their commitment, energized by the coming of the Holy Spirit. “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” 1 Corinthians 15:3–5

May **SESSION 9: THE CHURCH TRANSFORMING AND REFORMING**

The Jewish and Gentile Christians in Acts 15 became the church when they learned to join together as one body by transforming themselves for the sake of the gospel. Their example can inspire today’s church. “... I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.” Acts 15:16–17



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Study Resources

The only piece essential for the “Transforming Life and Faith” study is a subscription to *Gather* magazine; however, the following companion pieces add depth to the study. (These will be available in May 2014.)

LEADER GUIDE

The Leader Guide provides the Bible study leader with additional background information not found in *Gather*. Included are tips on how to lead the discussion, instructions for activities and more.

ELCAW01040 \$7.95

COMPANION BIBLE

This handy volume puts the study texts in one convenient place. Printed in an easy-to-read size, it offers biblical texts for every session.

ELCAW01041 \$3.95

BOOKMARK

The “Transforming Life and Faith” bookmark is a terrific way to promote the Bible study and makes a great gift for group members. Sold in packs of 12.

ELCAW01042 \$3.75

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Applicable sales tax and shipping charges will be included when an order is placed. Call 800-638-3522, ext. 2580, or visit <http://resources.elca.org/Products-Women.html> to order. Sign up for an online account and search for WO Bible studies.

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by Dr. Diane Jacobson

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