

Contemplation

Prayer Tool: How to Undertake a Pilgrimage

What?

The practice of pilgrimage can deepen our prayer life. This prayer tool will help you begin to integrate pilgrimage into your rhythms.

Why?

“Solvitor ambulando” (things are solved by walking) St Augustine

Bible Reference:

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength.” Psalm 84:5-7

A quick introduction to Pilgrimage

The largest collective human activity on the earth is pilgrimage. 300 million people around the world take off on a journey of spiritual seeking each year. A quarter of a million do the Camino de Compostela annually.¹

From a Christian worldview this shouldn't be overly surprising. God has never been static. He is always moving and He is always calling people to movement. It seems our Maker has set pilgrimage in the hearts of His image bearers, and as the God-story unfolds, we witness Him calling them to adventures on the tops of mountains and the gorges of deep valleys.

Our Biblical ancestors came to embrace pilgrimage as both an art and a discipline. So should we – for this is how we ‘pass through’ and ‘go from strength to strength.’ We have to actively and often deliberately choose to put one foot in front of the other.

Some things need prayed out, need talked out, need walked out, for as the great Jewish theologian, Abraham Heschel, says, “Faith is not clinging to a shrine but an

¹ Source, BBC Radio 4, Friday 28 August 2015

endless pilgrimage of the heart.”

The outward geographical movement of pilgrimage mirrors the inner journey of the heart, naturally corresponding with the internal processing of change, new beginnings, pain or disorientation.

As we move around physically we can pay attention to our emotions and slowly begin the process of unravelling them.

Do it: Undertake a Pilgrimage

There are many ways to introduce the practice of pilgrimage into your life.

In simple ways you might want to develop a regular rhythm of walking around the local park, driving to a local monastery on your day off, flying to a different country for a few days to meet with friends and visit some sights.

However, at special and transitory points of life, why not plan a longer term pilgrimage?

Maybe you are about to leave school and go to university: spend the summer interrailing, not just because your friends are doing it, but because you want to discover God in new ways and process with Him what your future could begin to look like.

Maybe you are about to approach a big birthday, enter a new decade, watch your children leave home, or retire - why not plan to prayerfully enter this new season of life by setting time aside to allow God to speak?

You may even like to do pilgrimage with a few friends - plan to do the Camino, or climb a few big peaks, or walk St Patrick's trail in Ireland, or take your motorbike across the country?

Whatever it is, think about how you could consecrate the time and space for this intentionally, and as you walk take some notes, journal and externally process with your friends what you are thankful for and what God is bringing to your conscious awareness.

Remember as you walk, like the two on the road to Emmaus, Jesus is walking with you - His presence keeping your heart burning even when you aren't sure it is Him!

Books on Pilgrimage

- The Way of the Lord - N. T. Wright
- The Sacred Year - Michael Yankoski