

Pilgrimage – Summer 2020

Introduction

This booklet is here to help individuals and local churches to consider the concept of pilgrimage and its significance for our lives as everyday disciples of Jesus. We'll consider prayer on the ordinary days, pilgrimage where you live, pilgrimage through labyrinths and pilgrimage without travelling.

At its heart, pilgrimage is about engaging in prayer and reflection through the process of journeying. In that sense, we are all on a pilgrimage of faith through life. We are learning more about God and ourselves as we navigate our way through all that life holds, seeking to Walk the Way of Jesus as we live the life of Jesus today.

This image of the reflective journey has been at the heart of the Christian life since biblical times. Perhaps it was most famously developed by John Bunyan's book *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which explores a journey along the difficult path between our own thinking and living, and that to which God calls us.

After the Reformation, interest in pilgrimage waned until a renaissance in the last 50 years, when people started to express an interest in travelling to places of holy significance, such as Lindisfarne (Holy Island), Iona and Israel/Palestine. All but abandoned, famous pilgrimage routes, such as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain, have grown in popularity once again.



Following a pilgrimage route demands discipline and hard work, but pilgrims trust that their experience will be intensified and their perceptions will deepen as the road narrows towards its destination. The invitation to the pilgrim is to listen to the echoes of their own heart, leading them on a journey, through examination of themselves, to affirmation and freedom to be the person God calls them to be.

The Gospels describe the Christian way as the narrow way. This is not to say that Christianity is about rules and prohibitions, but rather that Christians, as pilgrims, trust that sticking to the Way of Jesus, even when it might feel difficult, will yield a deeper kind of living and a more profound way of loving and being loved.

In past times, holidays (Holy Days) in the Christian calendar meant travelling, often quite large distances, to celebrate a festival. However, we do not need to go on any specific pilgrimage or route to experience the growth that comes from spiritual discipline, reflection and the freedom of forgiveness. This comes through the natural rhythm of our worship and devotional lives.



Prayer on the ordinary days

Most of us know what it means to be brought to our knees in prayer in a crisis, but most of us also struggle to keep prayer going in the ordinary days of our lives. However, it might be that prayer on those days, the humdrum, routine kind of days, is prayer that will feed us and sustain us so that we are ready for whatever life brings.

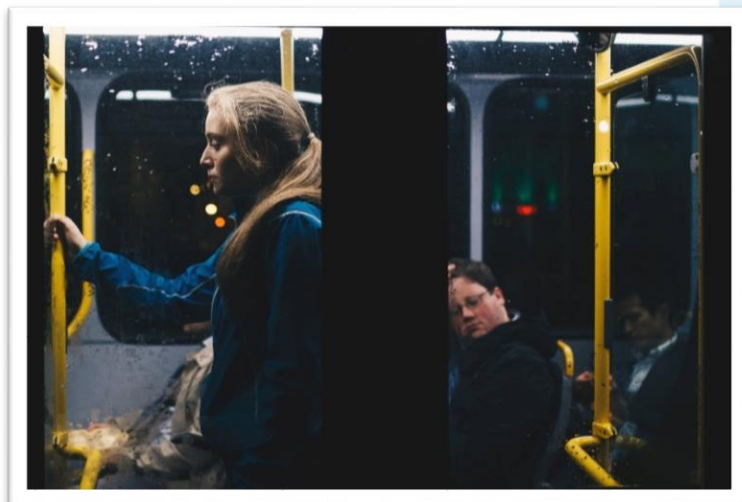
Part of the witness of the Reformed tradition is the resolute conviction that God is present and prayer is true in the ordinary days and the ordinary places of our lives, in the home and the factory, the library and the hospital, the

working days and the not-feeling-quite-so-well days. That's exactly why one of the Reformers, John Calvin, famously locked the church doors in Geneva when public worship was over. He wanted the people, who really are the Church (not the building), to discover God's presence in their homes and in their work. The church building was not the only place of prayer, but the bed, the table and work bench even more so. This wonderful insight may inspire us, who don't spend all our days in a church building, to learn to pray every day.

The Reformed tradition has sometimes been criticised for playing down the Christian festivals (some of our forebears even disliked Christmas), but what they positively encouraged was the discovery of a faith and a life of prayer that could be vivid and real on the ordinary days. Faith, as indeed life generally, is not all about festivals and high moments and drama. It's not so much about the earthquake, wind or fire, but about the little voice in the midst of the ordinary moments, the ordinary things, of our lives and days.

Ikea has a slogan about 'the wonderful everyday'. Prayer on ordinary days is about discovering the wonder of God in the ordinary rhythm and experiences of all our days. Even a day when the weather is grey and work is dull can be infused with the glory of God. Prayer can be a way of touching the divine within the all too human realities of our days. Such prayer can nourish us and hold us through life, so that we don't just end up wanting to *escape* the everyday, but we find ourselves *living in it* more fruitfully and more joyfully. Try praying through your day as follows:

- Waking:** Good morning God!
Good morning world!
Give me grace to welcome the day,
to embrace what comes
and to make a difference.
- Breakfast:** Thank you, God,
for food at my table,
and a cup that is full.
May my day begin with thanksgiving
and my prayer be steeped in gratitude.



Midday: In the midst of my day,
I pause to remember that you are with me.
Let me draw breath and be still,
lest I be overwhelmed by events.
I turn once more to you, God of love,
and reach out for your hand.

'Tea' time: O God, who created us for the dignity of work,
I pray for all who are working hard today;
in fields and factories,
on land or sea,
in offices and schools,
with brushes or with books,
in hospitals and homes,
with joy or struggle.
May all your people
know the reward of labour
and may the world be fruitful.



Dinner: O God of all,
I pray for the wellbeing and
flourishing of those I love,
for my family and my friends,
and all those whose company I treasure.
May I bring them joy and be a light to them,
as you are light and joy to me.
I pray for them, from love, before you.

Close of the day: O God, I thank you for this day.
I remember with joy
all that has been wonderful.
I offer to you with sorrow
all that I could have done differently.
I pray for those people and situations I have met today
where change is needed.
All these things, I hand to you,
in confidence and hope.

In the night: God, who is light in the dark,
bless my sleeping and my waking,
that I may sense your loving presence
and find the peace for which I long;
tonight, tomorrow and always.

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Pilgrimage where you live

A pilgrimage to a famous holy site can be wonderful, and many people find such a journey life changing. It's often said that 'the place works upon the pilgrim'. Places have stories and places evoke memories and histories that can challenge and inspire us. However, throughout the centuries, the Church has recognised that not everyone can travel far. So, there have always been ways to make a pilgrimage very close to home.

If you are unable to travel even short distances, have a look at the sections on labyrinths and pilgrimage without travelling.

If you are able to travel around your local area, you might go on a prayer pilgrimage in your town or village.

Begin your pilgrimage in the (or a) church. Sit down and take a moment of silence to remember the whole congregation and offer to God any particular people or needs that come to mind. Listen in the presence of God.

Next, walk into the centre of the place you are, where the roads cross or where there is a central square. Take a moment to look and listen to the sounds of this particular place. See the people walking past, carrying concerns. Listen to the talk and the traffic, or listen to the silence. Pray for this place, whose life you share, and ask God to bring blessing, peace and joy.

Go to the shop, or shops, to the places where money is made and spent. Give thanks to God for the food you enjoy, for the people who grow it, transport it and sell it. Pray that your spending of money may bring good news for those who need it most.

Find the place where people enjoy the natural world – perhaps a park or a footpath. Enjoy the beauty of the flowers, lawns and trees, the sound of birds and people. Thank God for all creation and pray for the sustaining of the earth that is our common home.

Find some water, a river or reservoir, lake or sea. Remember the words of the psalmist who believed that God walks with us beside the waters, and remember that God is with you. Be refreshed by a moment of silence and accept the gift of this place.

Look for a building with a plaque on it, a building with some history or a story to tell. Reflect on all that has made this place significant over the years and know that you are part of the story too. What will you give to the place where you live?

Find your way back to the (or a) church, or to the place from which you set off. Ask yourself how the place where you live shapes your life as a disciple of Jesus. What do you want to ask God to bring to this place?



A prayer:

O God who belongs to this place,
accompanying its people through the years,
walk with me on the roads and paths,
and through each day of my living here.
Show me where you already are,
that I may meet you again
in this place, made holy by your presence. Amen

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Labyrinths

Adapted from the [Pilots Worship Materials 2018](#) and the [Vision 4 Life Prayer Toolkit](#)

When we can't travel on a pilgrimage far from where we are, or find somewhere close to us, one way in which we can still engage with the reflection, solitude and journeying aspects of pilgrimage is through the use of a labyrinth.

Labyrinths are a bit like mazes, except they offer a single path into the centre and back out again, so there's no way to get lost in one. They have been used as an alternative to pilgrimages for centuries, as they don't require you to travel anywhere but still give you an opportunity to travel on a journey for reflective purposes.

Labyrinths were popular in the Middle Ages with those who couldn't travel to the Holy Land, or on another pilgrimage route closer to them. A famous example survives in Chartres Cathedral, France. Built around 1200 CE, in the floor of the central nave, it is often now hidden under chairs, but cleared for pilgrims to walk on Fridays from Lent to All Saints' Day (except Good Friday). It can be walked as a pilgrimage, a questing journey with the hope of becoming closer to God, or for repentance (traditionally walking on your knees).

On using a labyrinth at a Christian conference in a time when they needed silence and reflection, one person said: 'Late one night whilst my father was in hospital, I walked a labyrinth. I had been worried about him and distracted during the evening prayers that had not really settled me or sunk in. But I found the labyrinth in a quiet part of the garden and in the quiet dusk, I put down my things and began to walk around it. I concentrated on slowly putting my feet one in front of the other as I wove my way around. In the centre of the labyrinth was a small, bubbling water fountain. The gentle musical sound accompanied me as I walked. I began to feel calmer and when I got to the centre I spent several minutes first watching the water bubble up from the fountain and then taking some in my hands and letting it fall on my arms, my face and my head. With the water gently dripping from me, I walked out of the labyrinth.'

With so many churches and places having their own labyrinths, including National Trust properties, it is highly likely that you will be able to find one in your own region to visit, but if you can't, you can either draw one to follow with your finger, or you can build your own. Click [here](#) for instructions.

Why not organise a temporary labyrinth in one of your church halls for people to try out? You could try incorporating reflective points or items into the labyrinth for people to stop and think about while they travel. If you do this, remember to provide enough room for people to stop and reflect without blocking others who may wish to carry on walking. It is important that everyone feels able to walk through the labyrinth at their own pace, without rushing.



Pilgrimage without travelling

Pilgrimage doesn't need to involve a physical journey. It is very much about engaging in a prayer and reflection in whatever place or situation we may find ourselves. It is a matter, not only of the body, but of the mind, the heart and the imagination.

If you're unable to travel, as well as trying out the labyrinth section of these materials, you may wish to consider taking the format offered in the 'Pilgrimage where you live' section to organise different stations in your local church hall, for example, with photographs, stories, memories and other special items from the different places in your community (e.g. sweets from the local shop, fallen leaves from the trees in the square or a menu from the cafe). Members of the church and local community could then be invited to come along and walk round the stations at their own pace, being encouraged to think about the different places in the community, the people there, and how we can best pray for and support them.

For those unable to leave their homes, perhaps a folder could be created of photos and memories from the local area for elders to take with them on house and hospital visits. This could help people who might not otherwise be able to participate to join in the reflections and prayer, bringing the pilgrimage to them.

If you need inspiration, or are unable to obtain photos of your own, John Potter has created a collection of ready-to-use photographs looking at different elements of journeying, beauty and creation, with accompanying instructions on how to set up a display of the photos, and a series of reflective questions to consider prayerfully as you explore them. A guide for this can be found [here](#) (© John Potter). Please [email](#), or call 020 7520 2718, if you'd like high quality versions of the photos to display. Dunamis UK also have a series of six reflections on different aspects of 'Prayer – The Walk of Encounter', which can be downloaded [here](#) (© Dunamis UK).



There are also many ways of engaging in personal prayer and reflection which, as well as helping the individual, help those who are being prayed for/with and, ultimately, the growing of the kingdom of God.

Pray a short prayer at each meal, as you get up and as you lie down to sleep and you've made maybe five moments of prayer to reset your day and to touch the glory that lies hidden behind the grey. See the section above looking at prayer on the ordinary days.

Wear a Walking the Way prayer cord with knots around your wrist and let it remind you of the presence of God as you touch it. Please [email](#), or call 020 7520 2718, to order them.

Kneel once each day, to remind your body that it is made for praise.

Keep a picture of Jesus or a cross on your wall.

Follow the [URC's Daily Devotions](#).

Whatever works, bring prayer into your day like a pulsing beat and let it reframe your life. God is always there, every day.

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