

INTRODUCTION

To Be a Pilgrim

*He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement
shall make him once relent,
his first avowed intent
to be a pilgrim.*

JOHN BUNYAN



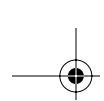
“We can’t name him that,” my mother pleaded. “The poor child won’t have a single friend in all the world!”

My father relented. “Calvin Augustinus George’ doesn’t really roll off the tongue.”

After pondering hundreds of baby names, they finally arrived at a decision. “We will name him for a pilgrim—Christian—from John Bunyan’s book *Pilgrim’s Progress*.”

Pilgrim’s Progress smells of prison, for it was written in one. Thrown in jail for preaching the gospel without a license, Bunyan wrote a story in his cell. It is a story about life’s deepest questions, primarily, “What must I do to be saved?”





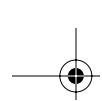
The story begins with a burden. Christian wakes up with a heavy load on his back. He doesn't know where it came from or what it means, and no matter how hard he tries, he cannot remove it. It is singed to his shoulders. To make matters worse, he reads in a book that his city is going to be destroyed with fire, and his family thinks he's crazy. But one day while he is walking through a field, a man named Evangelist points him in the right direction. He tells Christian of a city, a Celestial city, he must travel to. Unable to tolerate his burden any longer, Christian embarks on a journey.

Along the way he meets many characters—Worldly Wise Man, Goodwill, Hopeful, Faithful, Great-Heart. He travels through many terrains—a slough of despond, a hill of difficulty, a valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes he stays on the path, other times he strays. Demons plague him, friends betray him. But suddenly he sees a cross. It's on a hill far away but not out of reach. As Christian kneels before it, the burden on his back rolls away. He is overjoyed! At last, he's free! With a map in his hand and a skip in his step, Christian journeys home.

Pilgrim's Progress paints a picture of pilgrimage. Every element of the journey is smeared on the canvas: temptation, faith, forgiveness, danger, trust, courage, risk, friends, enemies, battles and victories. It represents a Christian's passage from death to life, from hate to love, from sin to grace. It teaches us about the burden of backsliding, the frustration of failing and the consequences of deviating from the straight and narrow path. In 1678, *Pilgrim's Progress* escaped the Bedford prison and began its own pilgrimage, traveling through the centuries as a bestselling Christian narrative.

In a society that struggles to discipline itself, Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline* opens our eyes to the importance of spiritual exercise and inward conditioning. Why are spiritual practices so important? According to Foster, "The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm."¹ In a culture in which superficiality governs our lives and actions, spiritual disciplines urge us to reconsider what it means to be a Christian and a pilgrim.





Spiritual disciplines call us away from a bloated faith that doesn't let us squeeze the Savior into our schedules. They call us away from an anorexic faith in which we fail to absorb sufficient nutrients for spiritual health. They call us away from a bulimic faith that compels us to binge on Christian beliefs on Sunday morning but to purge them up on Monday morning. A regular diet of spiritual disciplines gives us the health we need for communion with God, the stamina we need to advance his kingdom, and the strength we need to battle the world, the flesh and the devil.

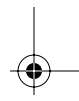
The purpose of this book is to introduce the body of Christ to the spiritual discipline of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is an ancient practice in need of modern discovery—a physical, emotional and spiritual journey that goes inward, upward and outward.

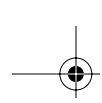
We live in an age that sees people drowning in questions, searching for answers and starved for purpose. Pilgrimage is a spiritual practice that reminds us of our sacred purpose—to grow closer to God. Whether we choose to believe it, we are all on a journey. The trail winds and wiggles through this world, often obscured from view, but life's deepest questions are answered along its gravel.

Our culture craves immediate gratification—instant coffee, instant oatmeal, instant emails, instant messaging. Words like *patience*, *steadfastness* and *commitment* sound strange to us. We replace slow modems with high-speed Internet access. We refuse to drive the speed limit. We hate waiting two hours in the hot sun, even to ride a roller coaster. Fast food is not fast enough. Sermons are not short enough. The push of a button cooks our dinner and the twist of a knob dries our clothes.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus frequently puts his schedule on pause to restore and rejuvenate his spirit. His disciples, too, are called to this task. Look at them. They are weary from preaching, teaching and healing all day. Their daily planners are bursting at the seams. But Jesus says, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31).

Two thousand years later, in a world burdened with busy schedules, Jesus invites us to take a journey. He asks us to depend on his guidance and nav-





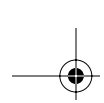
igation. He urges us to abandon our self-confidence and give ourselves to sacred serendipity. To this end, we sing with the hymnist B. B. McKinney, “Wherever he leads, I’ll go.”

According to Webster’s Dictionary, a pilgrim is one who “journeys in foreign lands.” As pilgrims we are not tourists, casually meandering through a city. Nor are we nomads, aimlessly wandering through the wilderness. We are sojourners, seekers of the city “whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). We might own a house, but it is more a hotel than a home. We might claim a nationality, but our true citizenship lies in heaven. We might drive to work every day, but our real journey is to Jesus. With Paul we press on to win the prize, homeward bound as if we belong to no other place. We live in a time of transition, pushed by the past, pulled by the future, but plastered to the present. Truly, we are strangers in this land.

Pilgrimage has long been a discipline for practitioners of the world’s major religions. Muslims make pilgrimages to Mecca, Buddhists to Mount Kailash, Hindus to Kedarnath, Jews to Israel, and Christians to Rome. Pilgrimages occur even among those who are not affiliated with a religion. Some civic and secular destinations include the national monuments in Washington, D.C., the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Colosseum in Rome, Stonehenge in England and the pyramids in Egypt. Pilgrimage is deeply rooted in the soil of the human soul. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and although most people recognize that they are on a journey, many travel without consciousness of their destination. These are pilgrims unaware, forced into the future by the ticking of the clock and dragged along by the winding chains of time.

Pilgrimage belongs to the deepest impulse of the evangelical tradition—reformation. A medieval theology incorrectly viewed pilgrimage as credits to a purgatory account—the more trips you take, the less time you bake. However, the grace-based theology rediscovered by Martin Luther and the other Reformers revises our understanding of pilgrimage as a discipline of sanctification, not justification. Pilgrimage does not save us. Rather, it is a grace that reminds us that salvation is a journey with Christ as our guide and heaven our goal.





Pilgrimage itself is undergoing its own reformation. Protestants are discovering it for the first time, and Catholics are recovering a biblical interpretation of it. Pilgrimage is ecumenical, uniting the entire body of Christ. There are many limbs in this body, each uniquely useful and beneficial, but they are all moving in the same direction. Heaven awaits the heel just as much as the head, hand and heart. Pilgrimage belongs to the whole Christian community, for its origins are found directly in Scripture. From Abraham to the exodus to the visit of the Magi, sacred journeys are deeply ingrained within the biblical narrative.

Pilgrimage is my passion. From a very early age I traveled the world with my father. Sometimes my mother and sister joined us for the journey, but most of the time, it was a father and son event. On our trips we visited missionaries and encouraged churches, and in our quest for spiritual discovery we found that God moves in many mysterious ways. He is active in other continents, and I quickly realized that the church is much bigger than I ever thought it could be.

We voyaged to distant lands and different cultures, to pilgrimage sites in dozens of countries. From mossy castles to ancient monasteries, we followed the footprints of thousands of pilgrims who had gone before. These adventures exposed me to other traditions within the spectrum of Christianity—limbs beneath the head of Christ I had never known. Their disciplines and customs were strange, but each one taught me something special about the Christian journey. They did not breach the walls of my denominational convictions; rather, they solidified them. Pilgrimage after pilgrimage, God grew bigger in my eyes, more transcendent, multicultural and internationally involved. One day I realized that the children's song was right: he really does have the whole world in his hands.

In this book are my most meaningful pilgrimages—memories that have defined and refined me, sacred travels that have opened my eyes to a global Christianity and a global God. I invite you to walk with me through Europe, Asia and Great Britain; through Protestant, Catholic and Celtic traditions. Along the way, may we discover again what it means to be a pilgrim.

