



Session ONE: Starting the Journey

1. Read

Read the Introduction, The Road, Walking and Praying (Pages ix – 23) in *The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life* by Jim Forest.

2. Chapter summary

In the Introduction, Jim Forest begins by sharing his early interest and exploration of the ideas of being a pilgrim and going on a pilgrimage. Dorothy Day's perspective on pilgrimage is introduced and continues to inform his writing throughout the book: "Every day of one's life and all that happened along the way, planned or unexpected, were segments of a heaven-ward pilgrimage, so long as the guiding principle was to live the gospel and to discover Christ in those whom one encountered." (Page xiii) He includes many stories of his own pilgrimage experiences as he "attempts to look at what it means to be a pilgrim – both as a way of living ordinary life, no matter where you happen to be, and also in the more limited sense of travelling toward one of God's 'thin places,' as places that draw pilgrims tend to be." (Page xvii)

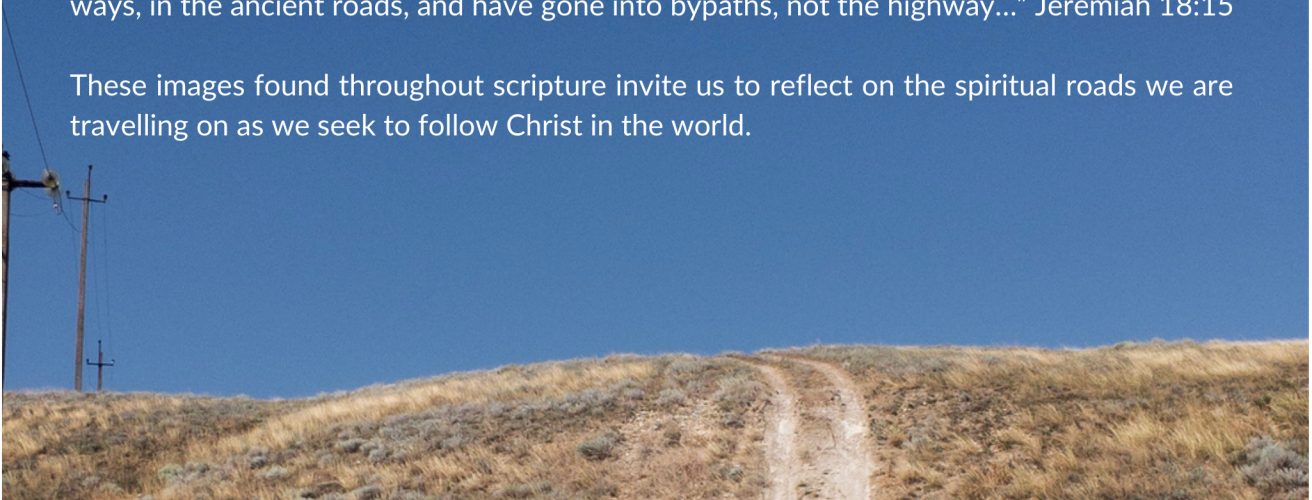
In *The Road*, Forest celebrates the life-giving gift of roads to structure social life, support commerce, and connect people and communities. Going deeper, he declares that "Roads have a sacramental aspect: A road is a visible sign of a hidden unity.

Roads

Throughout the Bible, readers find images of roads and highways. At times, these images are used to provide instruction to God's people. In Isaiah, when God describes the coming salvation for the community of Israel, God instructs the Israelites "to make a way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones..." Isaiah 62:10. These verses use the image of a highway to teach us about our role in making a way and keeping it clear so that others may know the fullness of God's salvation. At other times these images remind us of God's promise to make a way forward even when it seems impossible. "I am about to do a new thing; now a new thing springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the desert." Isaiah 43:19.

While these images often point to God's promise, images of roads and highways also help draw us back to God when we fall away from God's path. In Jeremiah, God laments, "my people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion; they have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, and have gone into bypaths, not the highway..." Jeremiah 18:15

These images found throughout scripture invite us to reflect on the spiritual roads we are travelling on as we seek to follow Christ in the world.



Roads are a map of human connectedness." (Page 3) He also reminds us that the road is a primary metaphor in the Gospels, symbolizing the journey of faith and that early Christians called themselves followers of the Way.

Although spiritual journeys are explored in this book, the chapter on Walking draws our attention to the embodied nature of pilgrimage. Forest says, "Walking is a physical activity that is meant to have spiritual significance." (Page 7) He shares about learning to do "mindful breathing" while walking from a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, and then beginning to practice attentiveness by connecting walking and breathing and prayer.



While Forest focuses specifically on the act of walking, this kind of attentive way of being in the world is open to us at all moments. When we live attentively, each moment is an invitation to a prayer for peace, and to become deeply aware of God's Creation and our place within it.

In *Praying*, Forest explores a variety of forms, postures, and ways of praying. Appropriately for this book, he offers the idea that "Praying goes well with walking, no matter how short or long the path." (Page 17) He also talks about the "Jesus Prayer," as introduced in the nineteenth-century book *The Way of the Pilgrim*, and marvels at the pilgrim's desire to fulfill Paul's instruction to Christ's followers to "pray without ceasing." Engaging in a practice of prayer such as this can lead to an ever-deepening consciousness of knowing that every action and every thought occurs in the presence of God, turning our life into an act of continuous dialogue with God.

3. Engage in a pilgrim practice

Engage in one or more pilgrimage practices. Each practice relates to one of the chapters above. Do each of them on a different day, or choose one that appeals to you.

a. The Road

Go for a walk or travel a path by bike or a road in a vehicle. Choose a pathway or a road that is older (even ancient) if you can. Consider: Who has travelled this path before me? Where were they going? What was their journey like? How has this road connected communities and nurtured life?

b. Walking

Travel through a neighbourhood facing challenges connected to poverty and exclusion as Dorothy Day did. (See pages 11-12) Bring a friend to share the journey, to talk to about what you see and to help pay close attention. Take close notice of things you might not usually pay attention to. Don't hurry. Look for beauty.

c. Praying

Go for a walk or spend time outside. Say the "Jesus Prayer" either aloud or silently as you are on the way:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

(You may also want to adapt it to a shorter prayer or one that speaks to your heart.)
After your walk or time outside, consider: What was it like for you to pray constantly on your journey?

4. Reflect on your experience

Reflect on your experience of pilgrimage and reading together with a group. If you don't join a group, you may want to write in a journal instead.

- a. Share with your group about your experience of pilgrimage this week. Where did you go? How was the journey? What was your experience of the pilgrimage practices?
- b. Share with your group about your experience of reading the chapters assigned for this week. Which ideas, stories, or quotes did you find helpful or inspiring? Were there any sections that you found puzzling, disagreeable or pause-worthy?

5. Further reflection

Select a few questions for further discussion or personal reflection.

- a. What comes to mind when you hear the word "pilgrim" or "pilgrimage"?
- b. Discuss the difference between tourism and pilgrimage? Can the two overlap? What do you think might be challenging or life-giving about bringing together tourism and pilgrimage?

- c. Dorothy Day wrote of pilgrimage as “a way of life, a mode of listening, an attitude that motivated choices, a discipline of being.” (See page xiii) What is the difference between pilgrimage as a journey to a certain place versus pilgrimage as a way of life? How are the two ideas connected?
- d. “Far older than passports, the road is an invitation to cross frontiers, to start a dialogue, to end enmity. Each road gives witness to the need we have to be in touch with one another.” (Page 1) How have you experienced roads as connections between people and communities?
- e. “The road is a primary metaphor... Early Christians called themselves followers of the Way.” (Page 3) What does it mean for you to be a follower of the Way – the Jesus Way?
- f. “Unimpeded walking is one of life’s most ordinary, least expensive, and deeply rewarding pleasures. With little effort, putting one foot in front of the other and going forward can provide a foretaste of heaven.” (Page 9) Have you experienced this to be true? What are the pleasures and the challenges of walking? What is it like when your walking is impeded in some way?
- g. How have you experienced prayer as “paying attention to something or someone other than yourself”? (See quote from W.H. Auden, page 15) To what or who is your attention directed? What helps you to enter into that posture of attentiveness?
- h. Can you pray as you walk or travel? What is that like for you?

6. Scripture connection

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

The Apostle Paul instructed the Christians at Thessalonica to pray without ceasing. Their prayers were to include constant rejoicing and thanks in all circumstances.

- a. Is it possible to “pray without ceasing”? What patterns of daily life might help us move into a way filled with prayer?
- b. Did any of the ideas on prayer shared by Jim Forest appeal to you? (See pages 16-17)
- c. Discuss the “benevolent glances” practiced by a Chicago nun while riding on the bus. (See page 22)



7. Prayer

God of journey, we thank you for Jesus Christ,
who is travelling the way before us
in the world where we live today.
We thank you for calling us to join with you
and with each other on the path of life.
Guide us by your Holy Spirit
as we travel this part of the journey together.
Bless us along the way,
and lead us to our heavenly home. Amen.

8. Song suggestions

“Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey,” sung by Shenandoah Christian Music
Camp: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT_NJyo
You can listen to this song in its original French version:
«Jésus je voudrais te chanter sur ma route»: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQrF9yQ-6cE>