



Session TWO: Finding Our Way

1. Read

Read the chapters "The Other Side of Silence," "Maps," "Mazes," and "Relics" (Pages 24-53) in *The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life* by Jim Forest.

2. Chapter summary

Daily life in our time, especially if we live in cities, can be very noisy. We are bombarded by music and messages, and rarely find space for silence, contemplation, and prayer. In "The Other Side of Silence" we are invited to ponder our feelings about silence and to open our ears and our hearts to listen to God in the midst of such silence.

In the chapter on maps, the author offers the striking example of the Psalter Mappa Mundi (Psalter world map - Wikipedia), in which the goal is not to depict the exact shape of countries, continents, and oceans, but to present the known world through a biblical lens. For example, Jerusalem is placed in the centre because the most important event in salvation history took place there – Christ's victory over death. Forest demonstrates that maps reflect the priorities, world view, and ideology of their makers. Maps may be important tools for some pilgrimages. Which ones we choose and whether and how we use maps impact our journeys significantly. Maps invite us to consider where we are going and where we are drawn. Some of us may be seeking quiet spaces, whereas others might be looking for action and adventure.

Modern Map Project: Naonaiyaotit Traditional Knowledge Atlas

In 1995, the mining company BHP Billiton was asked by the Canadian government to hold the Traditional Knowledge of the Dene and Inuit peoples in equal weight to western scientific tools in their environmental assessment of their Northwest Territories diamond mining project. The mining company worked with local Indigenous communities to create a mapping project which provides a computer-based database of the territory that both surveys the area and shares the stories of the community's connection to the land. This atlas contains a stunning series of maps which share the Traditional Knowledge of the Kitikmiut, an Inuit group in Nunavut, describing weather patterns, wildlife migration routes and cultural practices. More than maps showing the geographical terrain, these maps preserve history and lift up the beauty of a people.

To learn more visit: [Naonaiyaotit Traditional Knowledge Project Atlas \(ntkp.ca\)](http://ntkp.ca).

Mazes or labyrinths provide a tool for reflection and prayer. Describing the meaning of the labyrinth at the Cathedral of Our Lady at Chartres, which has been reproduced in many other locations, Forest invites us to consider the labyrinth as a metaphor for our Christian journey through life: "Follow the path of the gospel, and the mercy of God will finally bring you to the heavenly Jerusalem, the kingdom of God, no matter how many turns you make along the way." (Page 45)

A Maze vs. a Labyrinth

The difference between a maze and a labyrinth is very noticeable to anyone who has spent time in both. A maze has many paths; to reach the centre is a contest between the maker of the maze and the walker. The maker wants us lost. The challenge to successfully find the centre and return requires us to make choices and to use our rational, analytical minds. A labyrinth has only one path. There are no choices to make. We can't make a wrong turn. This allows our rational mind to relax. In the Labyrinth, we're invited to make a spiritual shift from a life of 'doing' to a life of 'being'. In the labyrinth, we're invited to give ourselves permission to just 'be' so we can pray, meditate, sing, plan, focus on a question, or just be silent. There is no right or wrong way to walk a Labyrinth. The focus is on the experience, not a goal.

The chapter on Relics may be the most uncomfortable one for Reformed Christians because relics are not part of our usual religious practice. However, relics have been important for many Christian pilgrims. Forest acknowledges our potential skepticism and argues that relics can “deepen relationships between us and those who have gone before us.” (Page 51) They are tangible objects that help make real what before may have seemed merely mythological.

Relics

For the faith communities that maintain a tradition of relics, they are physical objects of religious significance that help the believer connect with the history of their faith tradition and be drawn into the holy. Most relics are objects such as the bones or body of a saint or an object that a saint owned or touched. For the faithful that venerate these objects, relics provide a tangible connection to the saints and their lives lived in Christ. The tradition of relics is held most commonly by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, but this practice is also found in Buddhism and Islam.

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 Other Side of Silence

1. Think of the quietest place you can find to go for a walk or sit in your community. As you spend time in this place, listen. What do you hear in the quiet? (If you normally listen to music or a podcast as you walk, leave your portable noise at home.)
2. Silence is an essential dimension of icons, which serve as wordless translations of the gospel.” (Page 30) “Take enough time and a good icon will help quiet your mind. As you move beyond intellectual exploration of an icon’s content, it may awaken a longing to pray. It may even assist you in resolving a problem you have been struggling with.” (Page 31)

Choose an icon and sit quietly gazing upon it. You are not worshipping the icon but allowing it the time and quietness in which to communicate its message to you. What did you hear in the silence with the icon.



Icon suggestions

The Trinity (painted by Andrei Rublev), Christ Pantocrator or
The Nativity
(painted by Andrei Rublev).

The Trinity by Andrei Rublev (Creative Commons Licence)

b. Maps

Choose a place to walk or drive for which you have a map. It could be a public park, a zoo, a trail, or a neighbourhood in your city or town. Study the map a little and plan your route before you set out. Then take note as you travel: What do you see that isn't marked on the map? What do the choices of the map maker indicate about their priorities, worldview, or ideology? What would you add if you were drawing the map?

c. Mazes

1. Many churches, parks, and other locations have outdoor labyrinths available for the public to walk. See if you can locate one in your community. Ask others in your church if they know of one, or use the [World-Wide Labyrinth Locator](https://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth): <https://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth>. Go and walk the labyrinth. If you want some ideas for how to pray/meditate as you walk a labyrinth, this [site](https://godspacelight.com/2011/08/26/tools-for-prayer-walk-the-labyrinth/) has some good suggestions: <https://godspacelight.com/2011/08/26/tools-for-prayer-walk-the-labyrinth/>
2. Finger Labyrinths are also helpful spiritual tools. For a free downloadable copy of a finger labyrinth and access to regular online finger labyrinth retreats visit: [Home of the Labyrinth Movement \(veriditas.org\)](http://www.veriditas.org)

d. Relics

Do some research and find out if there are any relics in the community where you live. Many Catholic churches and Orthodox churches will have relics in their churches, often contained in the altar. Make a pilgrimage to visit one of these relics. Even if the relic is not "on display" speak to the clergy or other church staff about its significance. How might this relic help to connect you or others to those who came before?

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. "To listen is always an act of being silent." (Page 26) Discuss the implications of this statement for conversation, dialogue, and prayer.
- b. What is your experience of silence? Does it feel comfortable or awkward? Review Forest's list of various kinds of silence on pages 27-28. Which of these types of silence is familiar to you? How does your experience of silence affect your desire to seek it out or to avoid it? How do you feel about times of silence in worship?
- c. Do you enjoy using a map and planning your route, or would you rather wander and see what you find? Explain your reason.
- d. What's the difference between using a GPS for directions versus a traditional map? What do you gain or lose because of your choice?
- e. The chapter on mazes introduces a little confusion of terms as Forest refers to the "maze" at the Cathedral of Our Lady at Chartres, which most sources refer to as a labyrinth. The general consensus is that labyrinths have a single continuous path which leads to the centre, and as long as you keep going forward, you will get there eventually. Mazes have multiple paths which branch off and will not necessarily lead to the centre.

Regardless of the term used, the pathway at Chartres includes a "unicursal path of white stone [with] no blind alleys, traps, pits, dead ends, or secret chambers." (Page 44) Forest rightly suggests that walking it is "a reassuring experience. While there are many twists and turns, with the pilgrim often being led away from the goal, whoever stays on the path ultimately reaches the center." (Page 44)

- f. Is this a good description of your journey in life? Or does your life feel more like a maze with multiple choices and the potential of getting lost? What difference does it make, whether you can see the whole path from above or if you can only see what is right in front of you? What gives you the assurance of reaching your life's goal?
- g. "Pilgrims tend to be people who value relics and seek them out with reverence, but these days many visitors to churches that exhibit relics regard such items with raised eyebrows and condescending smiles. Such skepticism is widespread in our culture." (Page 48) How do you feel about relics? Did reading the chapter open your eyes to another perspective?

6. Scripture connection

Read 1 Kings 19:9-15.

The Prophet Elijah is running for his life from Jezebel who is threatening to kill him. He flees into the wilderness, sits down under a tree, and prays that he may die. He is giving up. But an angel comes and gives him water and food, and eventually he gets up and goes to Horeb, the mountain of God.

What do you think Elijah experienced in the sound of sheer silence? Have you ever had a similar experience?

7. Prayer

God of journey,
Jesus Christ, our Way,
Spirit, our Guide,
we thank you for guiding us on our journeys:
for your still, small voice encouraging us forward,
for reliable directions in Scripture,
and for the witness of those who walked this way before us.
We thank you for the journey itself,
remembering that even though there are twists and turns,
you assure us that we will reach our destination,
our home that is in you. Amen.

8. Song suggestions

"We are pilgrims" sung and played by Peninsula United Church:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6kmTcDXQtE>