

A person wearing a dark, hooded robe is walking away from the camera on a gravel path. The background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise over a field, with the sun low on the horizon. The overall tone is warm and contemplative.

WORKBOOK

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*Pilgrimage of
Renewal*

A Lenten Retreat

LISA DEAM AND SOPHFRONIA SCOTT

Pilgrimage of Renewal

Welcome! In this seven-week series we will use the inspiration of the spiritual practice of pilgrimage as a shape for a Lenten practice. The worldwide pandemic has disoriented many of us spiritually as well as socially but Lent and its focus on reflection is an ideal time to find your way back to the path that connects you to God and to your own deep well of spirituality.

We've created a retreat experience that we hope will allow you to recover your spiritual bearings. Guided by the wisdom of great spiritual minds such as Thomas Merton, Margery Kemp, and Saint Francis of Assisi, we will follow in the footsteps of pilgrims of old who walked thousands of miles to feel closer to God. While such a journey is not possible in a pandemic world, we can travel virtually with each other. We hope this workbook, which features quotes from Lisa's book, *3000 Miles to Jesus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life for Spiritual Seekers* and Sophronia's book, *The Seeker and the Monk: Everyday Conversations with Thomas Merton*, will be a tool of reflection for your pilgrimage. Use it to journal, to draw, and to find your footing on the path we'll walk together. We are grateful to be your companions in this adventure.

LISA DEAM AND SOPHFRONIA SCOTT

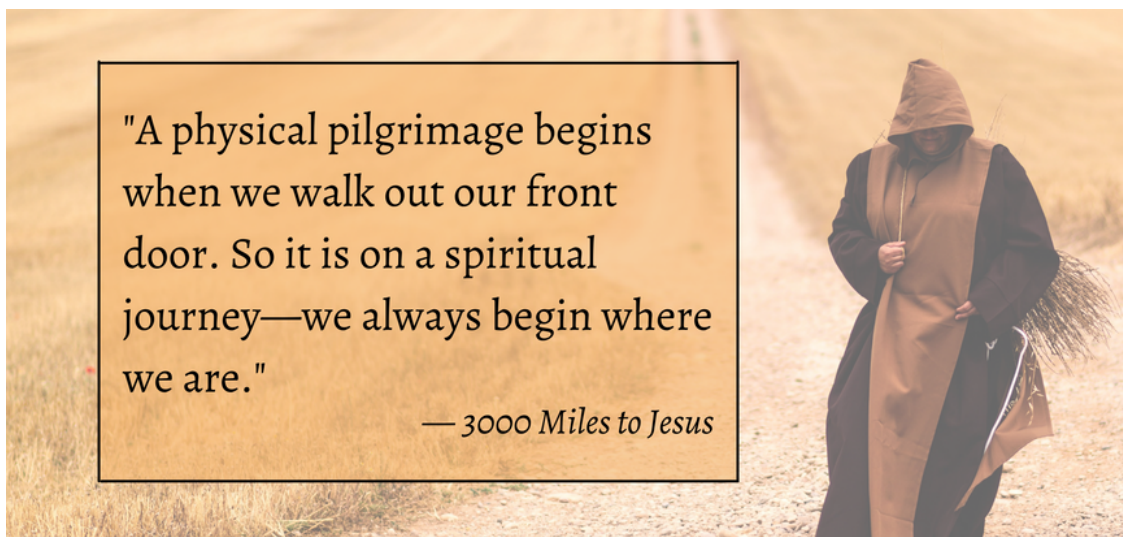


1 Our Starting Point

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. - Psalm 84:5*

We are about to begin a journey of renewal, a journey reconnecting us to God and to our spiritual life. It will be adventurous, challenging, and deeply rewarding.

A new journey can also be daunting. You may have lots of questions: Will it be *too* challenging? How do I prepare? What if I don't feel ready? Rest assured that no insider knowledge or special background is required to take this pilgrimage. You don't need to have your act together or to already be part-way down the road. Just begin where you are. Begin with your desire to reconnect to God and your commitment to see the journey through. Then step out in faith. The path will be there, waiting for you.



Questions to Ponder

- What led you to participate in this pilgrimage of renewal?
- Do you find new experiences and new journeys unsettling or invigorating?
- Are you ready to make a commitment to see your journey through? Pray that God will give you the ability to step out in faith.

Activity

The starting point for a physical journey is your house – your familiar surroundings with all their comforts and, yes, their need for an upgrade here and there! Your journey of renewal begins in your spiritual house. How would you describe the spiritual surroundings where you find yourself right now? Write or draw your response in the space provided. For example, draw your spiritual house. What does it look like? What rooms are in it? What would you like to add or upgrade?

2 The Destination

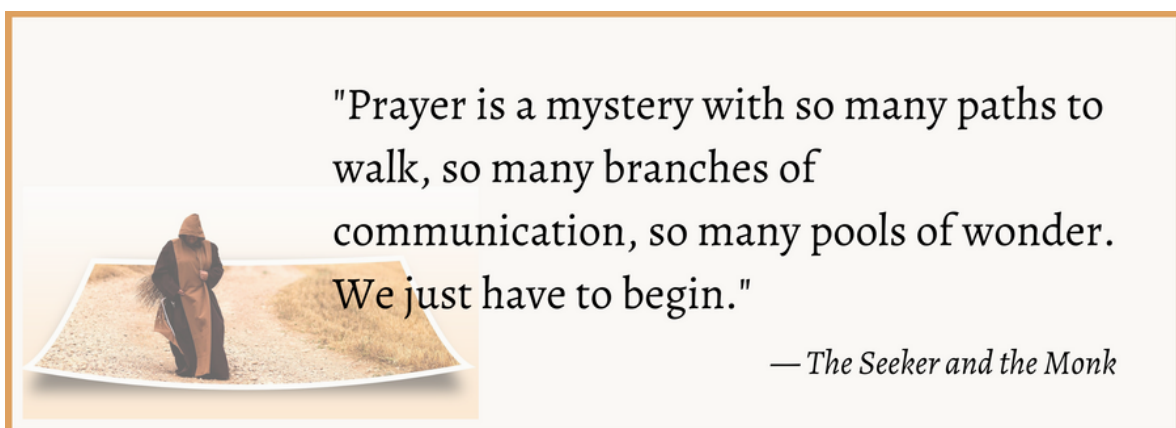
Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Genesis 32: 24-28

If we were traveling for our pilgrimage, the destination would hold excitement and that excitement would draw us on. We would eagerly await Jerusalem or Canterbury or Santiago de Compostela. But, thanks to the pandemic, this is a different type of pilgrimage. We can't travel, yet we are going somewhere. We're seeking a reconnection, a recovery of spirit that may have been lost in all the months of quarantine. We have strayed far from something. How do we know that we've returned? We can imagine our destination. We can focus on what it will be like when we've drawn closer to God once more.

This is a tricky thought because our journey toward God is lifelong and ongoing. For now, let's think about the times in the past when we felt close to God and what exactly it felt like. Will you recognize that feeling again?

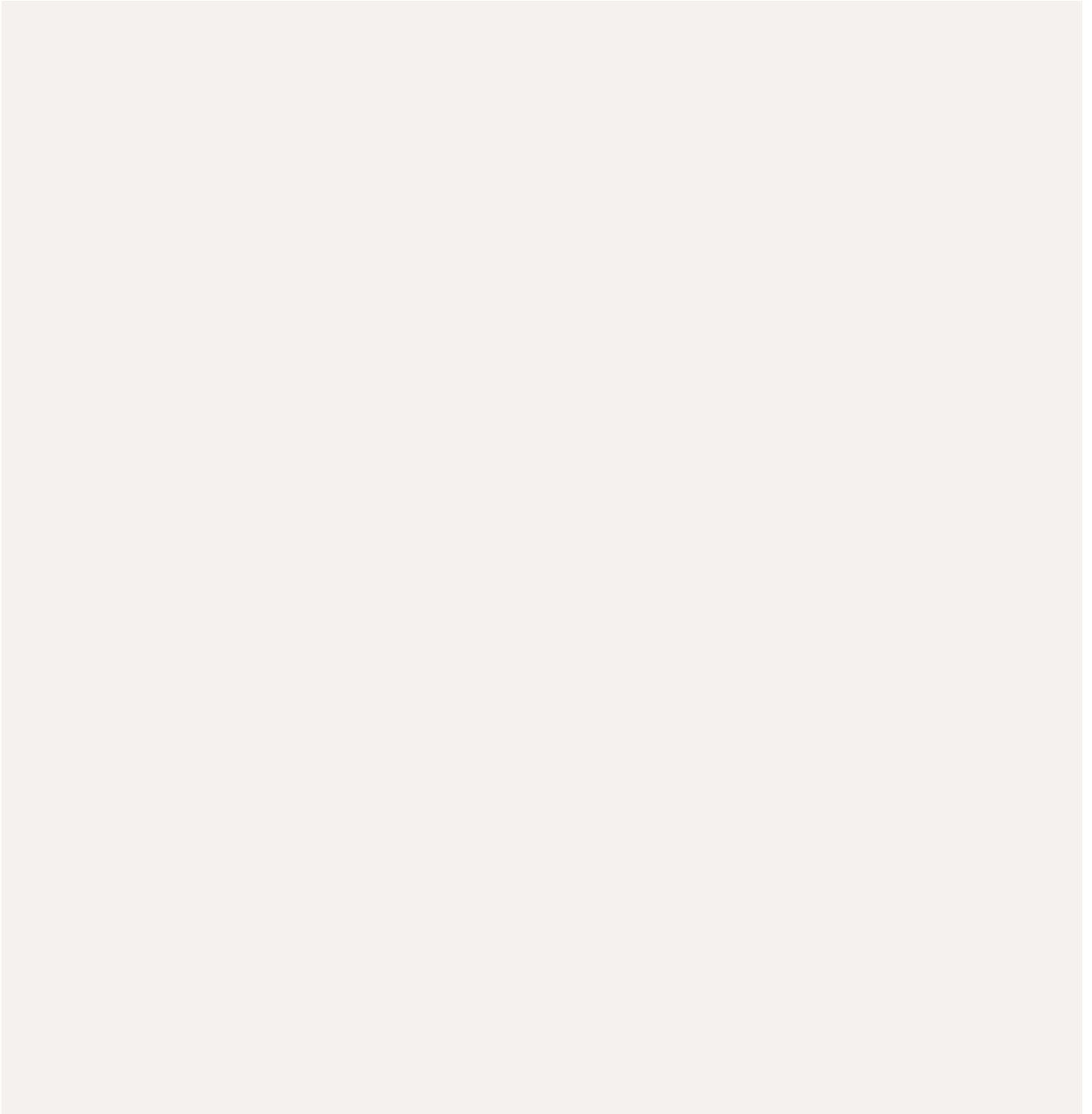
Questions to Ponder

- What has been your experience of being in relationship with God?
- Did it feel like a fight or a struggle, like Jacob wrestling with the mysterious angel?
- Did it feel like a hero showing up and saving the day or more like the love of a friend or relative?



Activity

Use the space to draw a symbolic representation of an experience of God. Think about the images you've chosen. How might this image become a marker or a milestone for you on our pilgrimage, something that signals getting closer to your destination?

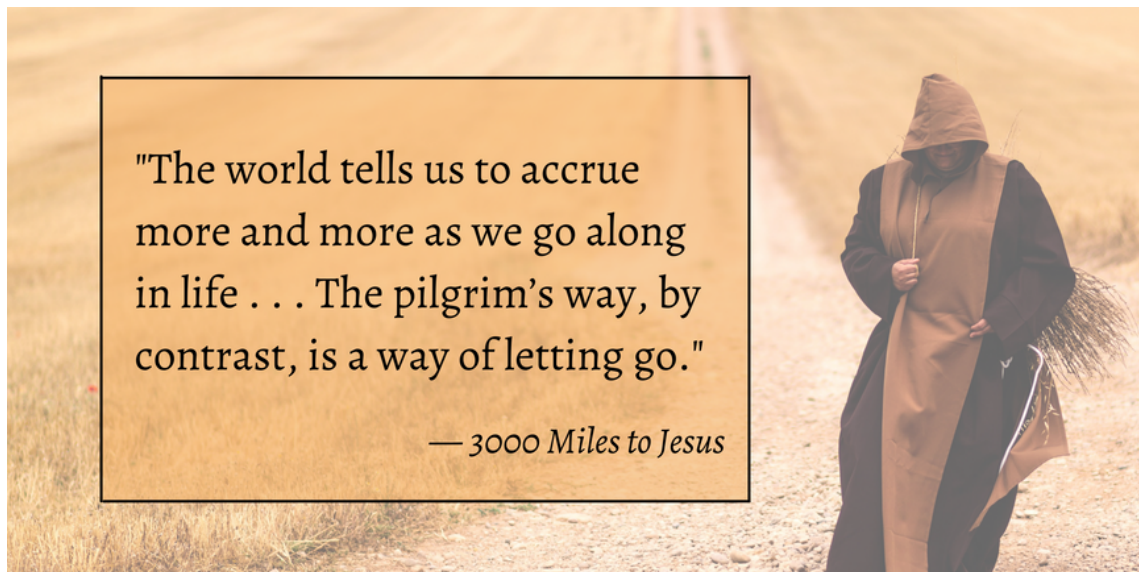


3 What We Leave Behind

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. – Phil. 4:6

Have you ever packed for a lengthy trip? If so, you know that what you leave behind is as important as what you take with you. Packing too many things will weigh you down and make travel more difficult.

The same is true on our pilgrimage of renewal. As we head down this road, we don't want anything to hold us back! Prayerfully reflect on whether you're carrying extra baggage that might weigh you down. Are you anxious about taking a journey that could challenge or change you? Are you burdened by your efforts to earn God's love or by a big load of guilt and shame? Loosening our grip on all our baggage can be difficult; we're so used to carrying it around. Fortunately, we're invited to cast these anxieties upon God. We don't have to travel our road weighed down by shame and worry but can instead ask God to free us of everything that hinders our spiritual journey.



Questions to Ponder

- What anxieties or points of resistance do you have as we take this pilgrimage of renewal?
- Have you ever regretted holding on to something (a possession, an attitude, etc.) for too long?
- In what ways might "letting go" be a spiritual resistance to our consumer-driven culture?

Activity

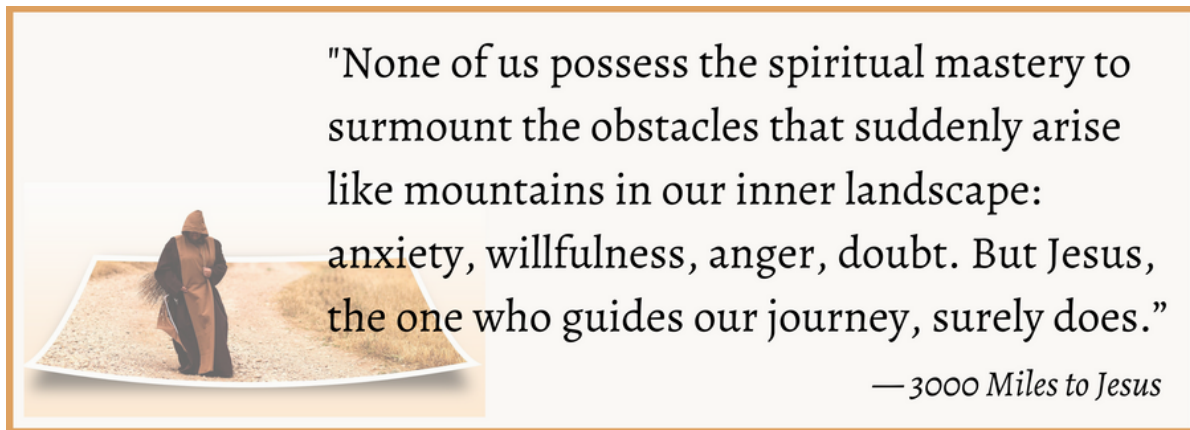
Pilgrims and other travelers often make a packing list as they prepare to take a trip. In this exercise, you're invited to make an unpacking list. What things do you need to leave behind as you walk this journey? Make your list below. You might also envision yourself taking these things out of your suitcase or backpack, one by one. See how much lighter you feel!

4 Obstacles Along the Way

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. – Joshua 1:9

A physical pilgrimage often involves challenge and hardship. In her book *3000 Miles to Jesus*, for example, Lisa relates the difficulties faced by medieval pilgrims as they traveled to Jerusalem. Pilgrims walked thousands of miles through difficult terrain; many of them even crossed the Alps on foot, in the middle of winter. Yet in faith they kept going!

Our spiritual pilgrimage also crosses rocky terrain. As we journey toward renewal, we might encounter mountains that rise up before us. These mountains represent the obstacles that stand in our way – fear of entering unknown territory, for example, or guilt over some of the wrong turns we've taken in the past. Be assured that such obstacles are a normal and expected part of the pilgrimage path. Spiritual growth often involves a certain amount of struggle—but the struggle means that we're moving forward. Keep looking ahead to your destination, the one you envisioned two weeks ago—this will give you courage. And remember, always, that God goes with you every step of the way.



"None of us possess the spiritual mastery to surmount the obstacles that suddenly arise like mountains in our inner landscape: anxiety, willfulness, anger, doubt. But Jesus, the one who guides our journey, surely does."

— 3000 Miles to Jesus

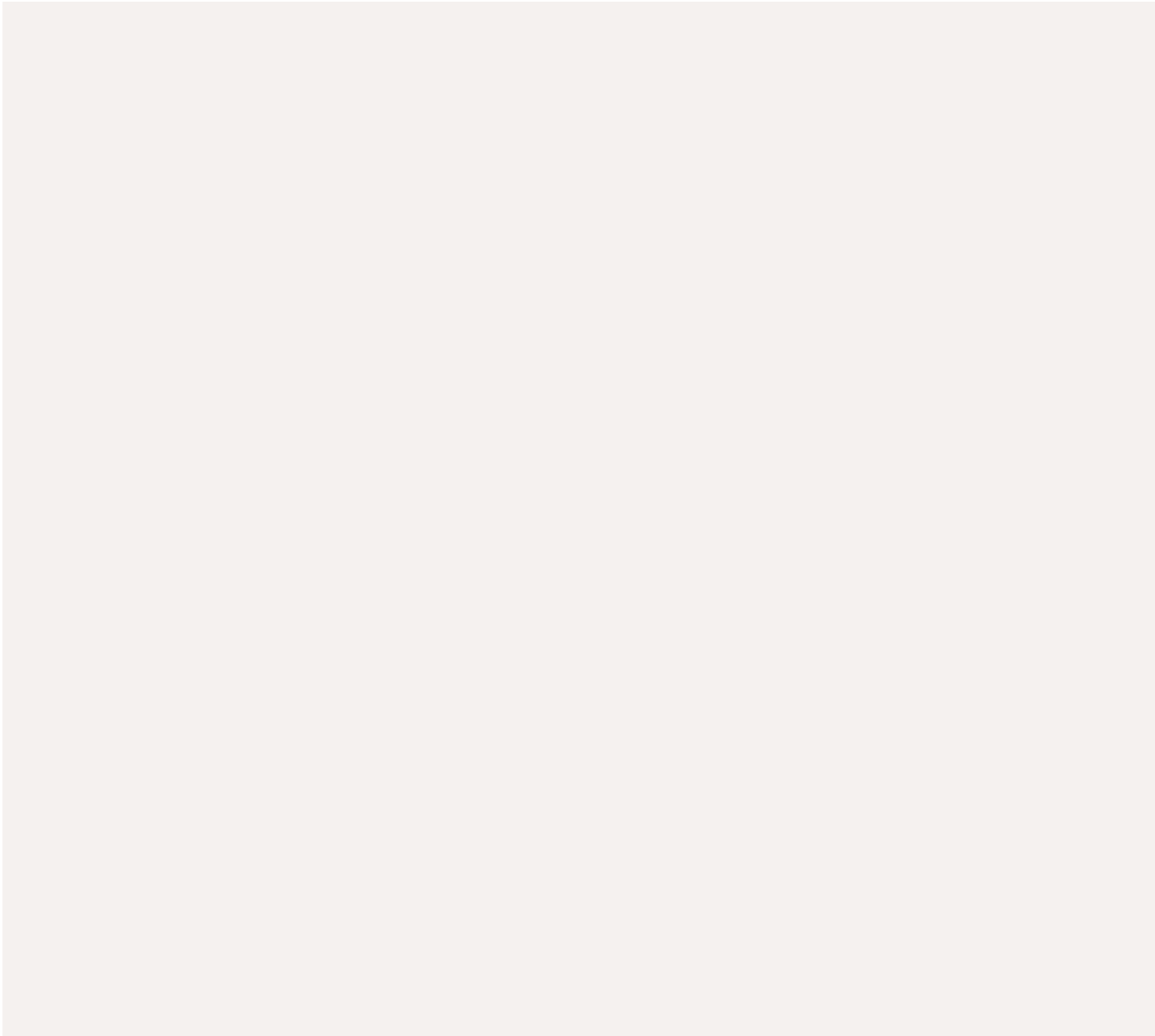
Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever wanted to turn back on a physical journey because of difficulties you encountered? If so, what kept you going?
- What are some of the mountains that rise up in your path as you take your pilgrimage of renewal?
- How might recalling the destination you envisioned at the beginning of this journey be an exercise in courage when the going gets rough?

Activity

The Christian tradition has a number of mantras – short prayers or sayings to focus the mind. Such mantras can give us encouragement on our spiritual pilgrimage. The 14th-century mystic Walter Hilton wrote a mantra to give pilgrims strength and resolve on their journey: I am nothing; I have nothing; I desire nothing but the love of Jesus alone. Another Christian mantra is the Jesus prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me.

For this week's activity, write your own prayer or mantra to say when you meet obstacles on the journey. What prayer or short phrase would give you the most encouragement to keep going?



5 Companions for the Journey

*“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Jacob, my friend...” Isaiah 41:8*

The concept of spiritual friendship can feel like fog in the hands—hard to grasp, hard to seek. Maybe the difficulty in finding and appreciating such friends helps us to remember that God is at work here. There’s something of the divine in how a friend shows up. In his book *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Thomas Merton quotes his friend Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher, who acknowledges special connections are truly a blessing: “One is paid for one’s trouble by that which is best in the world, that marvel of those friendships which God awakens and of the pure fidelities which He inspires and which are like a mirror of the gratuity and generosity of His love.”

Spiritual companions are necessary for our pilgrimage because, as Merton notes, they are like a compass locating our soul’s home. As a young man he recognized this necessity after spending time volunteering with a group of like-minded people at a community center in Harlem. “I needed to be with people whose every action told me something of the country that was my home: just as expatriates in every alien land keep together, if only to remind themselves, by their very faces and clothes and gait and accents and expressions, of the land they come from.”

Such friends also point to where we’re going. Connecting with spiritual friends renews our desire for spirit, hence placing us firmly on the road to the destination of our pilgrimage.

Questions to Ponder

- How can your human friendships help you cultivate a deeper friendship with God?
- Reflect on a relationship in your life that has affected you deeply. What was it about the person that you loved, respected, and admired?
- What gifts do you receive from having such a friend?

"In my spiritual friendships, our conversations provide insight I wouldn't have come to on my own. We recognize each other's gifts and encourage each other to use them. I'm more inclined to try something new, to take a risk."

— *The Seeker and the Monk*



Activity

When was the last time you spent quality time with an inspiring, spiritual friend? What would happen if you set aside a regular time to talk to such a friend, even if it's on Zoom?

For this week's activity, make a list of your spiritual friends. If you don't connect regularly, make plans to do so. Notice how you feel after your interactions. Allow these relationships to help you grow and move toward your spiritual destination. If you lack spiritual friends, write down what changes you can make in your life that may allow you to find or attract such companions.

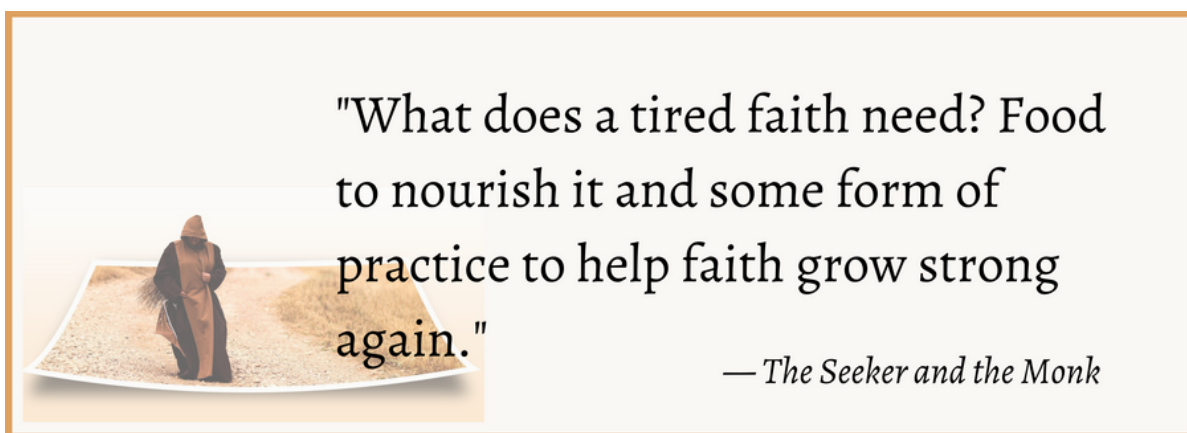
6 Practices of the Spirit

*"I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in your words.
My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may
meditate on your promise." Psalm 119:147-148*

How does one strengthen a prayer life? Maybe we can take a cue from professional athletes: quality practice. Just as they have to practice well to play well, if we cultivate a strong prayer life, we will be strong in prayer. It starts with the discipline of routine. After he moved to his hermitage, Thomas Merton maintained the practice of praying the schedule of the Daily Office as he did in the monastery. He needed it! He knew walking in the woods and being in solitude helped foster his communion with God, but he would still be subject to daydream and distraction.

In his routine the discipline of reading his prayers aloud helped him stay on point. "Solitude—when you get saturated with silence and landscape, then you need an interior work, psalms, scripture, meditation." Note he's talking about sacred text, not philosophy or theology. Reciting the Psalms were of particular importance to Merton. Among the belongings he left behind after he died was a tattered copy of the Psalms in Latin, the pages so well-thumbed they are crumbling and the cover separated from its binding.

In our prayer practice we seek to do a number of things: remember personally how God has acted in our lives, seek to hear God's voice in what we read and, if we're listening to music, what we hear. We consider the life-giving words of Christ and find refreshment. We are revived.





Your Practices

Make two lists: One is a list of practices you have done in the past. The second is a list of practices you haven't done, but you're interested in trying them. It's okay if one list is longer than the other! The list might include:

- Praying the individual version of the Daily Office
- Praying the Psalms
- Praying with prayer beads
- Praying with icons
- Chanting antiphons, mantra-style
- Walking a labyrinth
- Lectio Divina
- Centering Prayer
- Journaling

Research more practices if you aren't sure what to write down.

Next, choose a new practice. Try to choose one that you feel might help deepen your pilgrimage.

Devote a specific period of time to the new activity. You will try it for two weeks, for example, or until the end of your pilgrimage.

Activity

Journal about your experience with the spiritual practice you tried. You can continue the practice or try another. Switch up your practices to keep them spiritually “fresh.”

A large, empty rectangular area for journaling, with a light beige background. This area is intended for the user to write their journal entry about the spiritual practice they tried.

7 Arrival

*"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" – Psalm 91:1-2*

We've traveled a long way on our pilgrimage! We've crossed mountains, overcome obstacles, met new companions, and kept going in faith. Now we arrive at the destination we envisioned some seven weeks ago.

For pilgrims on a journey, the moment of arrival is often full of emotion. In the medieval era, pilgrims wept, shouted, sang, prayed, and fell to their knees upon finally reaching their long-awaited destination. What is it like for you? What do you feel, having taken these steps toward spiritual renewal? Is drawing closer to God a familiar feeling? Or is it something new? Maybe it's like coming home after a long time away. It could also be that, at the end of this Lenten pilgrimage, you sense that something is still missing. That's because the destination we've reached is not "the end." God has more journeys for us to take. We won't be done traveling and growing until we reach the end of life's road.

"Alone with God, our longed-for destination finally before us, we sink to the ground and rest . . . The 'fire of love,' as the pilgrim Margery Kempe calls it, burns within us. Surely, in these moments, our faith is born anew."
— *3000 Miles to Jesus*



Questions to Ponder

- What surprised you the most about your pilgrimage of renewal?
- What parts of the journey led to the most spiritual growth?
- What response does your arrival evoke in you? For example, do you feel like singing? Worshipping? Shouting for joy? Embrace the freedom to respond, perhaps on Easter morning . . . or at any time.

Activity

Find a way to mark the end of this journey of renewal so that you can remember it. You could plant an Easter lily, place a special stone in your garden, or write a poem. The marker you choose can be a means of returning to this journey and to the principles that helped you draw closer to God.

Biographies

Lisa Deam is an award-winning writer in Christian spiritual formation. She's the author of *3000 Miles to Jesus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life for Spiritual Seekers* and *A World Transformed: Exploring the Spirituality of Medieval Maps*. Her print articles have appeared in *The Lutheran Witness* and *The Cresset*, and she is the recipient of a Best of the Christian Press Award from the Association of Church Press. Lisa has a PhD in art history from the University of Chicago and lives in the Charlotte, North Carolina area.

Sophronia Scott (Sophronia.com) is author of *The Seeker and the Monk: Everyday Conversations with Thomas Merton*. As a novelist, essayist, and leading contemplative thinker, her work has appeared in *Time*, *People*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, and numerous other outlets. When her first novel, *All I Need to Get By*, was published, she was nominated for best new author at the African American Literary Awards and hailed by Henry Louis Gates Jr. as "one of the best writers of her generation." Her other books include *Unforgivable Love*, *Love's Long Line*, and *This Child of Faith*. Scott holds degrees from Harvard and the Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is the director of the MFA in Creative Writing program at Alma College in Alma, Michigan and lives in Sandy Hook, Connecticut.

