

## Discussion questions

### Ready Pilgrim? (Pilgrimage Part 1) 03 - 30 June 2018

A pilgrimage is a chance to stretch the legs and the imagination, to walk both towards God and with God.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Ready Pilgrim?](#) resource pack to help adapt the material for small group work. These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

| Part 1: The moment of departure   |  |  |
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| <p>This month we are exploring the idea of pilgrimage. Here are some initial questions to get the ball rolling...</p> <p>What does the word 'pilgrimage' mean to you? What associations does it have?</p> <p>Have you ever been on a pilgrimage?</p> <p>If not, does the idea appeal to you at all?</p> <p>Are pilgrimages <b>ordinary</b> or <b>extraordinary</b>?</p> | <p>Read Psalm 81: 1-10</p> <p>Even if we go somewhere far away, that's entirely new and strange, leaving everything we've known behind - we can't be out of range of God. There's nowhere we can go where God can't hear us.</p> <p>In the ancient world gods were often like phone networks - they had a coverage area. Stray too far and the signal would start to drop. Deities were often understood to be fixed to specific locations. People would travel to holy sites to get better 'reception'.</p> <p>But what emerges in the Bible is a growing understanding that God is not limited to any physical location. This could make the concept of pilgrimage somewhat ironic in a Christian context. Why set out on a journey to somewhere holy if God is already with you? Why travel to a holy site to be close to God if God is all around?</p> <p>What's the point on going on a pilgrimage?</p> | <p>Read 2 Corinthians 4: 5-12</p> <p>Setting off on a pilgrimage can feel daunting and intimidating. Perhaps the journey itself will be demanding, or perhaps we don't feel 'holy' enough to be the sort of person that goes on a pilgrimage.</p> <p>Paul was speaking to the nervous and self-conscious in the reading above.</p> <p>What does it say about God that he has placed treasure in clay jars?</p> <p>How do you feel about being compared to a clay jar?</p> <p>A pilgrimage is an inner journey as well as an outward one. The mechanical aspect of walking frees the mind to take stock and creates space to listen to God. What are other ways of achieving this without travelling?</p> |

| Part 2: Turning to God  |  |   |
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| <p>Read Psalm 138: 1-3</p> <p>Even though God is all around - going on a pilgrimage is as an act of physically turning towards God. Our bodies and minds are closely connected and physical movement can focus our attention in a new way.</p> <p>Think about the physical act of bowing down in verse 2. What happens mentally and emotionally when we literally move our bodies, to bow towards God?</p> <p>Do you ever physically 'turn to God'? If so, where do you picture God? Do you look up? Look East? Look at a cross? Close your eyes? Look at a sunset?</p> | <p>Read Genesis 3: 8-15</p> <p>Shame and guilt make us physically turn away from others and when someone shocks or offends us we shun them by turning our bodies away from them.</p> <p>If we can turn <i>towards</i> God we can turn <i>away</i> from God. If we can in some sense, walk <i>towards</i> God, then we can walk <i>away</i> from God.</p> <p>Have you ever felt yourself moving or turning away from God, not as a metaphor - but literally turning away from God or from where you feel God might have been leading you?</p> | <p>Read Mark 3: 31-35</p> <p>The process of turning towards God, perhaps of setting off on a pilgrimage, might result in us turning away from what we have known.</p> <p>In the reading above Jesus does not reject the concept of family but he does radically redefine it. Jesus was on a pilgrimage that was calling him to something new - he was not going to be held back by guilt and obligation.</p> <p>Have you ever felt called to do something - to set out - but been held back by responsibilities, commitments, and duties?</p> |

| Part 3: Regret, reluctance, turning back?  |  |  |
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| <p>Read 1 Samuel 16: 1-5</p> <p>Pilgrimages are by their nature difficult; an easy pilgrimage is not a pilgrimage. Pilgrimages turn us into pilgrims and this process can be full of regret, reluctance, and a desire to turn back.</p> <p>Sometimes there's nothing else for it but to fill your horn with oil and set out!</p> <p>Have you ever had a moment in your life when you have taken a step/jump/leap (ticked the box, signed on the line, sent the form...) - without being sure - because you knew you had to go for it before you turned back?</p> | <p>Read Psalm 92: 1-4</p> <p>In this Psalm it is simply stated that it is 'good' to be thankful, to sing, to give thanks. Both expressing gratitude and singing can unwind us, short-circuiting the vicious overwhelming circles of stress and anxiety we sometimes find ourselves in.</p> <p>How do you break the cycle of worry when you are feeling anxious?</p> <p>Many, when they are stressed, fortify themselves with a song, by humming a tune or mumbling the words, when they are up against it. The tune does some of the work for us, carrying us along when we feel unable to. Are there songs you sing or hm to yourself to overcome nerves?</p> | <p>Read 2 Corinthians 5: 14-17</p> <p>The 'love of Christ urges us on' offering the opportunity to absolutely everyone for a fresh start, a clean slate, a new leaf.</p> <p>We humans are persistent, we keep trying even against the odds, we keep loving but sadly so much love in the world is abused, misplaced or left to curdle - but Jesus' shoulders are able to bear the weight of our love, our hopes, our expectations.</p> <p>How do you draw strength, to help you round the next corner, the next stretch, the next 30 seconds?</p> <p>Do you pray at times like this? If so, how?</p> |

## Part 4: Being ready for anything vs. being prepared for anything...

Read 1 Samuel 17: 32-40

In the reading David chooses to travel light rather than encumbering himself with heavy equipment. He's got what he figures he needs to be ready, but he's hardly prepared for any eventuality.

What kind of packer are you?  
Everything but the kitchen sink?  
Or simply a toothbrush, a pair of pants, and a prayer?

Is there a difference between being ready for something and being prepared for something?

Read Mark 4: 35-41

In this reading, the disciples, many of them experienced fishermen, were *prepared* for the storm. Jesus was *ready* for it.

Have there been storms in your life that you felt you were prepared for but when they came you realised you weren't at all ready?

Conversely, have there been times in your life where you weren't at all prepared, but when it came down to it you realised you were ready?

Read 2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

Paul's answer to all the sorrows our hearts endure - is to open our hearts wider! It is natural to shut down in the face of hurt and rejection and adversity but Paul urges instead to hold nothing back, to double down, to love all the more.

We cannot be prepared for all that we will experience, in a pilgrimage or in life, but we can ready ourselves - by opening our hearts a little wider.

We cannot prepare for all the emotional twists and turns of life, but how can we be ready for them?

What are some practical ways that we can open our hearts wider?