

are right now. Take the opportunity of this journey to stop and look round you (or through your windows). Ask children to point out anything surprising or wonderful that they can see.

Pray O God, thank you for all that I can see of your love in creation. Help me to tread the path that is set before me right now, in faith and gratitude. Amen.

Encountering difficulties

'God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.'
(1 Corinthians 10.13)

At some stage on every pilgrimage there may come a time of doubt and difficulty. Perhaps the route will be confusing, or the weather poor, the hospitality indifferent or the landscape harsh. At home, there may be interruptions and distractions. It may seem that the decision to set out was a bad one; insights are lacking and joy has vanished. This is a moment to remember God's past mercies and trust in future ones.

On the other hand, if the journey is easy for us, we should look out for those who find it challenging, and offer practical help and support as a journey companion.

Seeking signs of hope

Look for signs of hope during your journey. It might be a flower on the point of blooming, a smile from someone passing by, or the sight of a gift or

favourite object or photo. You could invite children to find and identify five objects with distinctive smells or colours.

Pray O God, thank you for the light of hope that is held out for us in the person of Christ. Amen.

Arriving

'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.' (Revelation 21.6-7)

Our journey is over, and we have returned to our starting place. But we are not the same – the journey has changed us. The journey stick, real or metaphorical, now carries reminders of our thoughts and reflections. It is a valuable companion for our onward travels, for our journey is not over. We continue onwards in love and hope, towards God who is both our end and our beginning, our journey companion and our destination.

Continuing the journey

Place your journey stick where it is easily visible to you. Every time you pass it, or it catches your eye, pause and pray. Invite children to use the items they have collected to make a collage; or to write a poem or draw a picture of their journey.

Pray 'For all that has been: thanks. For all that is to come: yes!'
(Dag Hammarskjöld)

A summer prayer journey for all ages

'Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.'

(Jeremiah 6.16)

Introduction

The reflections that make up this prayer journey have been designed for people of all ages and spiritual preferences. They can be used alone or with others, in pairs or groups. They could be part of a lengthy walk, a short trail round a house, garden or church, or used while seated in one place (e.g. at home). The entire journey can be completed in an hour or two, or spread over several days. As presented here, the resources are particularly suitable for a self-guided journey, but if you are making the journey as a group it could be 'leader led'.

There are ideas and suggestions in each section suitable for those journeying with children and those who may be housebound. Age is no barrier; indeed an older and younger person journeying together can be an enriching experience for both. All that is required is a pilgrim's heart – one that is open to hearing God speak, and willing to reflect on the experience.

To engage children and adults, vary the activities frequently. Encourage interest in the created world. Ask how what we see in our surroundings can reflect or affect what we are feeling or thinking. Some may enjoy collecting things along

the way, e.g. finding five objects with distinctive smells or colours; or ten items that will fit in a matchbox.

You will need

Some sections include an action or activity that requires props. Depending on how you are making the journey, you may need to prepare these items in advance:

- a sturdy stick (approx. 30cm), and some wool or string; matchboxes (see *Leaving*);
- rough stones (see *What shall I take with me?*);
- five different plants or flowers, and/or a book/app to aid in identifying wild flowers (see *Where am I now?*).

If there is to be a physical journey, it may also be helpful to decide in advance on the stopping points (e.g. a particular place or view on a walk, a piece of art or a symbol within a church building).



fold here



Leaving

'Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."' (Isaiah 2.3)

In order for our journey to make a difference, we must be prepared to be changed. Medieval pilgrims began their journey by seeking a blessing. Before you set off, pause and offer yourself and your intentions to God.

Taking your leave

Make a journey stick to help you remember your experience. Find a stick that is sturdy but not too long (about 30cm), and some string or wool. As you journey, collect any interesting or thought-provoking small objects and bind them to your stick with the string/wool, as a record, and a reminder of your thoughts and reflections. Alternatively, especially if you are staying at home, you could mark each step of the journey by

binding some string/wool to the stick. You could also give out matchboxes in which to collect small items.

Pray O God, bless me on my journey, and give me the gift of a heart and mind open to what you might teach as I travel for the sake of Christ. Amen.

What shall I take with me?

'Do not pack a bag with clothes. Do not take sandals or a walking stick. Be fed and sheltered by those who show you hospitality.' (Matthew 10.10 – *The Voice*)

Anyone who undertakes a long journey by foot knows the dangers of taking too much luggage. It weighs us down, we walk more slowly and become weary. So too in our daily lives – if we bring with us the burdens of angry thoughts and resentments, bitterness and regret, anxiety or fear – we will find our journey through life weighs heavily upon us.

Leaving your burdens

Take a few rough stones in your hands; consider how heavy they are, how cold and how uncomfortable. Are there any aspects of your life that feel like these stones? What would it be like to leave them in God's hands? Are some unavoidable? Name them, putting down some stones to represent leaving those burdens with God, but keeping at least one to remind you of that which God helps you to endure.

Pray O God, help me to lay down the things that weigh heavily in my life; and help me with the burdens that I must carry, confident that you will share this load with me. Amen.

Who am I travelling with?

'Therefore walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the just.' (Proverbs 2.20)

One of the joys of travelling with others is that of sharing conversations and stories, learning from the experiences of others and offering one's own in exchange. Whether you are making this journey on your own or in a group it is certain that you do not travel alone, for you take as journey companions all those who have guided and helped you in your spiritual journey so far. These may be authors of books that have meant a great deal to you, or church leaders or close friends and family members.

Naming your companions

As you journey, name in your heart those who have influenced you. Ask children who they would most like to have as a journey companion. Bind a piece of string/wool to your stick – one turn for each person you name.

Pray O God, thank you for the way that [these people have... *or name them*] touched my life. Help me to live in such a way that my life too might become an example to those around me. Amen.

Where am I now?

'You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.' (Psalm 16.11)

A journey can be a time when we are able to step back from our everyday lives and routines, and examine our priorities and our aims.

Fulfilling your potential

As you walk, or looking round your room at home, find five examples (including images) of a plant or flower, each in a different stage of growth. You could use a book or app to help identify them. Examine each plant closely – whatever the stage of growth, it reveals something of God's love and beauty. What aspects of your life are reflected in these different plants? Are there some habits or activities that you cling onto, even if their usefulness is over? What areas may need nurturing in order to blossom and flourish? Encourage those with matchboxes to find small items for their collection.

Pray O God, thank you for all the times and seasons held within my life; grant me the grace to fulfil the potential you see in me. Amen.

Where am I going?

'Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."' (John 14.5-6)

Picture this scene: 'Through the window, I can see a robin at the bird feeder. His dark, bright eyes are glancing about him as he balances on the swaying perch, pecking at the pellets in the feeder. His whole attention is focused on his task; once completed he flies away, leaving the feeder to another.' Can you see something similarly inspiring from where you are now?

Recognising your surroundings

Tiny miracles are happening all round us, every moment of our lives, but we are often so absorbed in where we are going that we do not stop to admire where we