



TRY PILGRIMAGE

STARTING OUT: CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION: STARTING OUT FOR CHURCHES

This resource will help you to organize a local pilgrimage suitable for those who have never tried pilgrimage before but want to give it a go. Don't worry if you've never organized or participated a pilgrimage; this guide is here to help you get started. Remember, a pilgrimage is all about the journey and the experiences and encounters you have along the way. So, release yourself from any expectation of needing to 'get it right'. You can't get it wrong!



Things for the Journey

When embarking on journeys, we typically take certain essentials with us. What you bring depends on the nature of the journey, but might include a map, snacks, waterproofs, sensible shoes. We encourage you to plan your pilgrimage as you would any other journey, bringing what you need and encouraging others to do the same. This resource also offers you two additional tools which are downloadable from [Fuel – Try Pilgrimage](https://trypilgrimage.org.uk/):

- A finger labyrinth
- Prayers to say along the way

Finger Labyrinth

A finger labyrinth uses our hands to provide a structured way to engage in prayer. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth is a path you can follow without getting lost. It helps you to reflect on your life journey and has been used for millennia as a spiritual tool.



There are different ways to use a finger labyrinth:

1. Start your journey with a question or something we want to work through or let go of. Acknowledging this at the entrance of the labyrinth is a good starting point. Sometimes it helps to turn the question into a prayer. If you find yourself getting distracted during your journey, return your focus to the labyrinth and your question.

- Where are you now with your question? Track your journey with your finger on the labyrinth.

2. You can plot the various pilgrimage points of your journey onto the labyrinth, noting down thoughts and questions so that it becomes a journal of your journey. While a map shows a physical journey, a labyrinth reflects a spiritual one- a prayer journey. If your mind wanders, use the labyrinth to help us refocus.

3. Questions for the Journey

- Place your finger at the entrance to the labyrinth. Reflect on your current state. How do you feel? Begin to move slowly into the labyrinth. As you journey, consider the twists and turns of life. What are you grateful for?
- When you reach the centre, pause for a moment. Is there anything you need to let go of that's been weighing you down?
- As you make your way back out of the labyrinth, think about the path ahead. What do you need to thrive on your journey of life?

4. At the exit, pause and give thanks for the path you've walked and ask for guidance for the journey ahead.

Prayers to Say Along the Way

We encourage pilgrims to use the writings from the Bible known as the 'Psalms of Assent'. These psalms were likely used by Jewish pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem, a holy city. The Psalms of Assent would help them connect with God on their journey. The Psalms of Assent are included here as an invitation for pilgrims to connect with people, places and God along the way.

Planning Your Route

Think carefully about the length of your journey



THE ROUTE

The route is up to you and will depend on your local context and understanding of your group. We have included various possible pilgrimage points and invite you to mix and match them according to your needs. Start with the initial destination points, then add whatever works best for you and your group in-between. We suggest starting small--choose a short route so that participants (and you as the organiser) can gain confidence and a sense of achievement. Consider including 3-5 additional pilgrimage points on the journey, along with the initial and destination points.

While it may be tempting to start with the most appealing locations, consider beginning with the local pilgrimage points that allow for an easier route. Decide your starting point and destination first before planning the other parts of your route. Think carefully about your destination; you might want to end up where you started or a place that feels 'worth the effort' and rewarding at the end. Some suggested pilgrimage points could also serve as your destination!

The pilgrimage points are explained below. Each point includes suggestions to help you choose a location, guiding questions for your time there, as well as passages from the Psalms of Assent and a prayer. You can choose to guide your group through the points together or allow for self-directed exploration. If the pilgrims are exploring independently, ensure they have copies of the notes, Psalms and prayers!

A few final tips for organising your pilgrimage: Write a risk assessment beforehand and consider access to first aid, as well as the terrain's accessibility for prams, wheelchairs and various walking abilities. Additional resources are available on the website host page (<https://trypilgrimage.org.uk/host/>) to assist you.





The Journey Itself

STARTING OUT

Consider where to begin your pilgrimage journey. It might be from the church, a community gathering spot or building. Are you meeting another group along the way? (We have a pilgrimage point for this).

Once everyone has arrived and the hustle and bustle of introductions and trips to the loo has settled down, gather your group. Take a few moments to mark the time and shift the atmosphere.

- Encourage participants reflect on why they are embarking on this pilgrimage.
- What do they hope to gain from the experience?

If you have a map or route planned, this is the moment to distribute it and explain it to the group. Encourage everyone to survey the route, noting the places you will visit.

If you are using a finger labyrinth, introduce it to your pilgrims. They might want to note the destination, key points along the way, and any questions they're hoping the journey will answer. Encourage them to use the labyrinth to maintain focus if they get distracted. The first question from the finger labyrinth might be useful at this point:

- Place your finger at the entrance to the labyrinth. Reflect on your current state. How do you feel? Begin to slowly move into the labyrinth. As you journey, consider the twists and turns of life. What are you grateful for?

When you and the group are ready, consider reading the following verses and saying this prayer, as many pilgrims have before you. These are verses will be revisited on the journey. Remind the group that they are following in the footsteps of others.

Read Psalm 121 (NIVR)

I look up to the mountains.
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD.
He is the Maker of heaven and earth.
He won't let your foot slip.
He who watches over you won't get tired.
In fact, he who watches over Israel
won't get tired or go to sleep.
The LORD watches over you.
The LORD is like a shade tree at your right hand.
The sun won't harm you during the day.
The moon won't harm you during the night.
The LORD will keep you from every kind of harm.
He will watch over your life.
The LORD will watch over your life no matter where you go,
both now and forever.

Pray

God who sees, thank you that you are my help. You promise not to let my foot slip and to watch over me on my journey now. Thank you that you are always with me: I invite you to walk with me now and reveal things about myself, the places I visit, and about you. Amen.

You might also want to use this blessing:

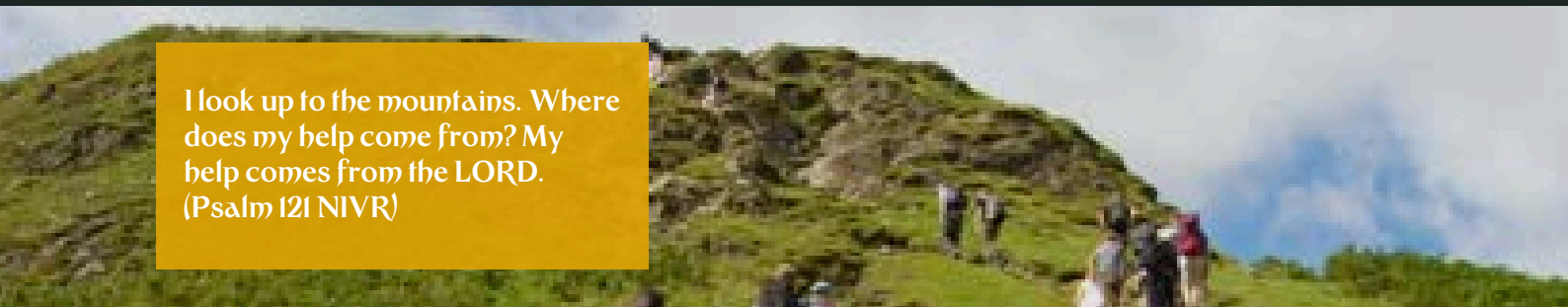
May we encounter the creator in creation.

May we witness creator's power in rivers and wind.

May we experience creator's peace in the shelter of trees.

May our perspective on life be cracked open by awe and wonder.

May we know creator's love in the connection between each of us and the world in which we gently tread.



I look up to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD. (Psalm 121 NIVR)

MEETING ON THE ROAD

If you are travelling with others, take a moment for groups to introduce themselves and share (as much as they feel comfortable) their reasons for trying pilgrimage. As you prepare to set out together, consider reading Psalm 121 again and pray this together as a shared experience.

Pray

God who sees, thank you for sending [NAME] to support me on my journey. Thank you for watching over both of us. We invite you to join us on our journey and reveal things about each other, the places we visit and about you. Amen.

A PLACE OF RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE: A HOLY PLACE

This could be a church, cathedral, chapel or any location with a religious or spiritual story attached to it. It might also be your starting point!

Something that is considered 'holy' transcends the everyday. It can be a special place where people feel closer to God. Ask your group to reflect on what makes a place feel "holy" to them.

When your group arrives at the chosen holy place, invite them to take time to walk around and notice what catches their eye and how they feel about the space. Sometimes, a holy or spiritually significant place can offer a fresh perspective on ourselves.



It's all about the journey...

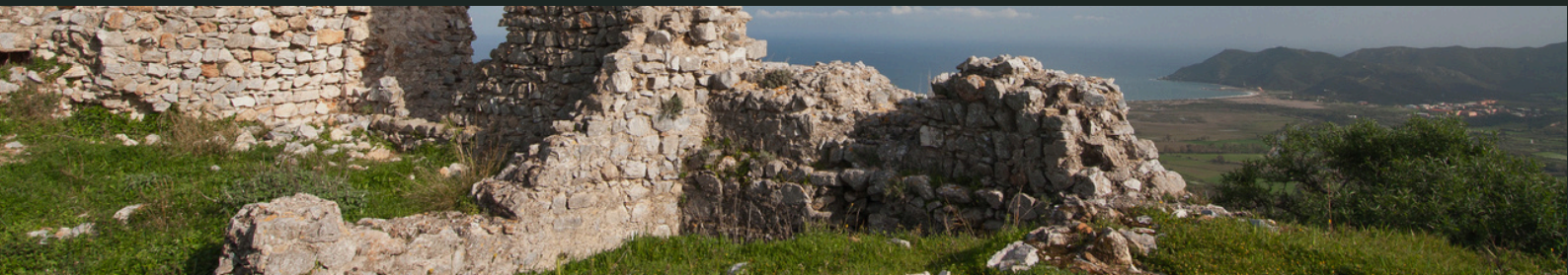
You might want to read the words from the Psalm and pray the prayer.

Read Psalm 131

Lord, my heart isn't proud.
My eyes aren't proud either.
I don't concern myself with important matters.
I don't concern myself with things that are too wonderful for me.
I have made myself calm and content
like a young child in its mother's arms.
Deep down inside me, I am as content as a young child.
Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forever.

Pray

Holy God, I realise that holiness is about having a right view of myself and acknowledging that I am not you. I am not God. I'm sorry for the times when I've tried take your place, when I've put myself in charge. Thank you for accepting me as your child despite my shortcomings. I put my hope in you now. Amen.



A PLACE OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Every place has a story. Its past often influences thought and culture well into the future. Is there a location nearby that holds historical significance? Consider visiting it to better understand the story of the area. This historical location may be a building or local landmark.

When you arrive, invite your group to explore the site. Does it provide any visual clues about its history? What do they already know about it, and what do they notice? How does its history impact them?

You might want to read the following Psalm and say the accompanying prayer.

Read Psalm 127:1

If the Lord doesn't build a house,
the work of the builders is useless.
If the Lord doesn't watch over a city,
it's useless for those on guard duty to stand watch over it.

Pray

God, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, thank you for the sense of history in this place and for connecting me to what has gone before. Thank you that you exist beyond time and have watched over this place and its people. Thank you that you watch over me now. Amen.



A THIN PLACE

A 'thin' place is somewhere where heaven feels closer to earth. For some, it might be somewhere the horizon meets the sky; for others, it could be a holy or spiritual place.

You might not plan your thin place in advance. Encourage your pilgrims to discover it for themselves along the way. When they recognise they are in a thin place, invite them to take their time, notice their surrounding and reflect on what makes it feel thin to them. How and why does heaven seem closer in this place?

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the following prayer.

Read Psalm 125:1-2

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion.
They will always be secure. They will last forever.
Like the mountains around Jerusalem,
the Lord is all around his people
both now and forever.

Pray

Father God, thank you that you feel close to me here. Your word tells me that you are all around me, and I feel your presence here. I am grateful. Amen



A HIGH PLACE

Historically, people have often felt closer to God on a high place. This is probably because of notions about heaven being 'up there', but it could also stem from how high places take us away from our everyday lives, imparting a sense of "otherness." High spaces can provide a different perspective.

What high places do you have locally? They could be mountains, tall buildings, or even car parks—anywhere you can look down as well as up!

When your group are at the high place, invite them to take their time to notice what they can see. What do they observe when they look up? And when they look down? How does this space make them feel? Does it offer a different perspective?

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the prayer.



Read Psalm 123:1

I look up and pray to you.
Your throne is in heaven.

Pray

God of heaven, grant me a fresh perspective on this place, on the people around me, on myself, and on you. What do you want me to see from here that I might not normally notice? Amen

A CHALLENGING PLACE

What comes to mind when you think of a local challenging place. Perhaps it's a location that feels difficult for you, or somewhere with a challenging history. A pilgrimage offers an opportunity to confront our challenges and reflect on them.

When you are at a challenging place with the pilgrims, invite them to consider what makes it challenging for them. Is it the place itself or their experience of it? What challenges are they currently facing? Do those challenges feel bigger or smaller in this space? Who or what do they turn to for help?

Pilgrims may find the second finger labyrinth question helpful at this point:

Place your finger on the centre of the labyrinth and pause for a moment. Is there anything you need to let go of that's been weighing you down?

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the prayer. As you do, invite the pilgrims to offer their challenges to God, asking for His help. If there are stones accessible, people may want to lay one down as a reminder that they have given their challenges to God.

Read Psalm 123:1

I look up to the mountains.
Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord.
He is the Maker of heaven and earth.
He won't let your foot slip.
He who watches over you won't get tired.

Pray

God my rock, I bring my challenges to you. Thank you for your willingness to help me, for never growing tired. I find safety and security in my challenges because you are with me. Amen.





A GREEN SPACE

Many people say that being in nature helps them to feel closer to God. What green spaces do you have locally that could be part of your pilgrimage journey? In the countryside, you might be spoiled for choice with scenic options, but even in urban settings, consider the parks, gardens, or other common land.

When you get to a green space invite your group to take their time to truly notice their surroundings. Is it a place they visit often? What do they observe about how this space helps them connect with nature? How does it make them feel? Is connecting with nature familiar to them? What will they take away from their time in this place that will nourish their roots?

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the following prayer.

Read Psalm 121:5-8

The Lord watches over you.

The Lord is like a shade tree at your right hand.

The sun won't harm you during the day.

The moon won't harm you during the night.

The Lord will keep you from every kind of harm.

He will watch over your life.

The Lord will watch over your life no matter where you go,
both now and forever.

Pray

Creator God, thank you for creation and nature. I name now the beauty in the things I see that inspire wonder. Thank you for the sun and moon that bring rhythm to my day, and for trees that provide life, shade, and protection. Please take root in my life now and be my shelter. Amen.



WATER

Water evokes emotions because of what it does; it makes us clean and creates soothing sounds. Many people enjoy connecting with water. For Christians, water is both life giving and cleansing. What sources of water could you include in your route? This might mean lakes, rivers, and waterfalls or streams, ponds and reservoirs!

When you are near water, encourage the group to take time to observe its source. Where does it come from? Is it clean or dirty? Can they hear it? What does water symbolise for them? How does it make them feel? Are there aspects of their lives that need cleansing? They could then offer them to God in this moment.

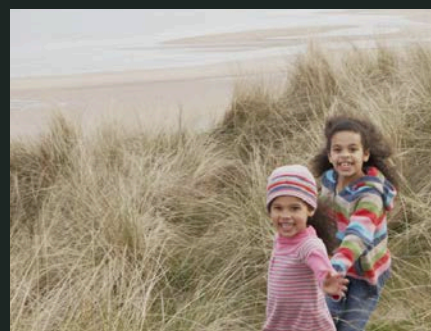
You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the following prayer.

Those who cry as they plant
their crops will sing with joy
when they gather them in.
(Psalm 125:5)



Read Psalm 125:3-5

The Lord has done great things for us.
And we are filled with joy.
Lord, bless us with great success again,
as rain makes streams flow in the Negev Desert.
Those who cry as they plant their crops
will sing with joy when they gather them in.



Pray

Lord of all, thank you for water--the sea, streams, rivers, ponds and even the rain. Please make streams flow in the desert areas of my life and bring new fruitfulness. Amen.



A LOW PLACE/VALLEY

Valleys can also provide us a different perspective. While high places help us see things more objectively, low places often bring challenges closer to our awareness. What valleys or low places could you incorporate into your journey? A low place might be a valley surrounded by mountains or an area in a town or city where tall buildings surround you.

When you arrive at your low place, invite the pilgrims to take time to notice where it is and how they respond to them. Do they feel small and overwhelmed, or small and safe? If the low place reminds them of challenges, encourage them to bring those to God.

Pilgrims may find the second finger labyrinth question helpful at this point:

Place your finger on the centre of the labyrinth and pause for a moment. Is there anything you need to let go of that's been weighing you down?

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the prayer.

Read Psalm 125:1-2

I call out to the Lord when I'm in trouble,
and he answers me.
Lord, I cry out to you
because I'm suffering so deeply.
Lord, listen to me.
Pay attention to my cry for your mercy.
Lord, suppose you kept a close watch on sins.
Lord, who then wouldn't be found guilty?
But you forgive.
So we can serve you with respect.
With all my heart I wait for the Lord to help me.
I put my hope in his word.
I wait for the Lord to help me.
I want his help more than night watchmen want the morning to come.
I'll say it again.
I want his help more than night watchmen want the morning to come.
Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
because the Lord's love never fails.
He sets his people completely free.
He himself will set Israel
free from all their sins.

Pray

God my help, I bring to you now the challenges I face. I name them before you...
Thank you that you hear me and want to help me. Thank you that, no matter how big my challenges seem, you are the Creator of the universe and far greater than any challenge may encounter. I cry out to you now for your help. Amen

A BEAUTIFUL SPOT



People often have favourite spots that seem beautiful to them. Some are widely recognised. What does beauty look like to you? Where can you go that inspires awe?

When you arrive at your chosen beautiful spot, invite your group to take their time to truly notice its beauty. What catches their eye? Do they have a favourite aspect? Is there something that takes their breath away? Sometimes, in the busyness of life, the beauty of the world becomes like 'wallpaper'—blending into the background so that we fail to see it. Encourage the group to recognize it now.

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the following prayer.

Read Psalm 128:5

May the Lord bless you from Zion.

May you enjoy the good things that come to Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

Pray

God who is good, thank you for wanting to bless us and provide good things, abundance. Sometimes it's difficult, and problems can overwhelm me. But in this beautiful spot, please remind me of the good things you have blessed me with and will continue to bless me with. Amen.



A PLACE TO EAT

Some things feed our souls and hearts as well as our bodies. For this part of your journey, think about a local place where you can grab a bite to eat, enjoy a cup of coffee, or simply savour your picnic lunch.

When you reach your eating or picnic spot, take a moment to invite the group to reflect on how they feel. Perhaps they feel relieved to finally stop for sustenance. What are they hungry for in this moment? Are there aspects of their lives that need nurturing? Encourage them to take some time to notice these needs now. What could satisfy these hungers?

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the following prayer.

Read Psalm 127:2

God provides for those he loves

Pray

God, my provider, thank you for this place, and for the food and drink that will nourish me for this journey. Thank you that your word tells me that you provide for those you love and that you love me as your child. Help me to accept that love and trust in your provision for me. Amen



A SECOND HOME

Before you reach your final destination or head home, is there a place you can visit where the group might feel 'at home,' even if they're not? Or perhaps a place where you feel at home and can share why with the group.

When you arrive at the place where you and your group feel at home, encourage them to take a moment to notice where it is and how it makes them feel. Do they feel at home there? What about this place evokes feelings of home for them? What does 'home' mean to them? Homes should be places of safety where we can truly be ourselves, but sadly, this is not the experience for everyone.

You might want to read the words from the Psalm and say the following prayer.



Read Psalm 126:1-2

Our enemies took us away from Zion.
But when the Lord brought us home,
it seemed like a dream to us.
Our mouths were filled with laughter.
Our tongues sang with joy.

Pray

God, who calls us home, thank you for places that feel like home—where I feel safe, known, and joyful. Help me to know what it means to find a home with you. Amen.

THE DESTINATION IS IN SIGHT

Decide on the destination for your pilgrimage before you begin and before plotting the rest of the journey points. It might be where you started, at your church, or another meaningful location. It might be close to home, or somewhere that makes the pilgrimage 'worth the effort'. The destination should help the pilgrims focus and stay motivated, especially when distractions arise, or they feel like giving up. For the Jews this was singing the Psalms of Ascent on their way to their destination, Jerusalem—a holy city that required significant effort to reach, often involving long journeys on foot. As they approached Jerusalem, perched atop a mountain, they experienced both challenge and a sense of achievement.

As your destination comes into view, invite the group to reflect on their sense of accomplishment. Encourage them to slow down and fully absorb the moment. Invite them to recall how they felt at the beginning and why they embarked on a pilgrimage. What questions did they have? Where are they now? How have things changed? Who or what have they encountered on the 'road'? Has the journey transformed them?

You might want to invite the group to pause and reflect using the final finger labyrinth questions:

Use your finger to make your way back out of the labyrinth. Think about the path ahead. What do you need to thrive on your journey of life?

When you exit the labyrinth, pause to give thanks for the path you've walked, and ask for guidance on the path ahead.

Then, mark the end by reading the words from the Psalm and saying the following prayer.

Read Psalm 125:1-2

I was very glad when they said to me,
"Let us go up to the house of the Lord."
Jerusalem, our feet are standing
inside your gates.
Jerusalem is built like a city
where everything is close together.
The tribes of the Lord go there to praise his name.
They do it in keeping with the law he gave to Israel.
The thrones of the family line of David are there.
That's where the people are judged.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Say,
"May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace inside your walls.
May your people be kept safe."
I'm concerned for my family and friends.
So I say to Jerusalem, "May you enjoy peace."
I'm concerned about the house of the Lord our God.
So I pray that things will go well with Jerusalem.

Pray

Lord our God, as my destination comes into sight, I thank you for being with me on this journey. Help me to view it with a grateful heart. I pray for peace in this place and that things would go well. Amen



AFTERWARDS

At the end of your journey, take some time with the group to reflect on how it went. If they made notes on their finger labyrinth, these may assist them now. Invite the group to recall the question they asked at the beginning and/or their responses to the finger labyrinth questions from the journey. The final question might be particularly helpful:

1. Place your finger at the entrance to the labyrinth. Reflect on where you are right now. How do you feel?
2. Begin to move slowly into the labyrinth. As you journey, consider the twists and turns of life. What are you grateful for?
3. When you reach the centre, pause for a moment. Is there anything you need to leave behind that has been weighing you down on this journey?
4. As you make your way back out of the labyrinth, think about the path ahead. What do you need in order to flourish on your life journey?
5. When you exit the labyrinth, pause to give thanks for the path you've walked, and ask for guidance on the path ahead.



Further Questions

- Was it what you expected?
- What did you enjoy?
- What did you find most challenging?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Did you learn anything?
- If you tried pilgrimage again, what would you do differently?

Read Psalm 134 (The last of the Psalms of Ascent)

All you who serve the Lord, praise the Lord.
 All you who serve at night in the house of the Lord, praise him.
 Lift up your hands in the temple
 and praise the Lord.
 May the Lord bless you from Zion.
 He is the Maker of heaven and earth.

Pray

Maker of heaven and earth, I praise and thank you now for the journey I have been on. Thank you for the people and places I have connected with along the way and thank you for connecting me with you. Amen.