



# An Armchair Pilgrimage

A Lenten Reflection

## Lent, a time of spiritual preparation

**P**ilgrimage is a time-honoured way to gain deeper self-awareness and spiritual insight. The pilgrim will take time out of their usual routine to go on a journey - usually alone and on foot - to a shrine, church or some other sacred place. Around the world there are a number of well-known pilgrimages within Christian traditions. Common to all of them is that the end destination is less important than the insights gained through the journey itself. Undertaking a pilgrimage can be a very rewarding process.

For many people, however, it is logistically difficult to trek highways and byways in search of some ancient monastery or hilltop. Even so, it is possible to apply some of the ideas surrounding pilgrimage to a stationary, inward journey. And Lent is an especially appropriate time for that kind of critical self-reflection.

During Lent many followers of Jesus Christ undertake an intentional spiritual preparation before Easter. This involves personal self-examination, penitence, and a renewed commitment to Christian discipleship.

The culmination of the Lent journey is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Good Friday and the period of confusion that follows on Holy Saturday. On the cross Jesus lays his life down in the ultimate act of service to humanity. Then, on Easter morning Jesus takes up new life in his resurrection, symbolising a renewed hope and the prospect of personal transformation.

This booklet invites you to go on what may very loosely be described as a 'virtual' pilgrimage. It takes some ideas associated with pilgrimage and applies them to the Lenten journey. It is hoped that this may invoke the blessing of God in your life - right where you are!

### *Lent in the Anglican Church*

While the observance of Lent varies between church denominations, it is universally recognised as a time of repentance and consecration. For the Anglican Church, the 40 days of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues up to Holy Saturday, with Sundays excluded. While the Bible does not mention the custom of Lent, its 40 days resonates with other special periods of 40 days recorded in Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11, Acts 1:3). Lent culminates in Easter, when all Disciples of Christ celebrate new life in their resurrected Lord.

## Packing your rucksack

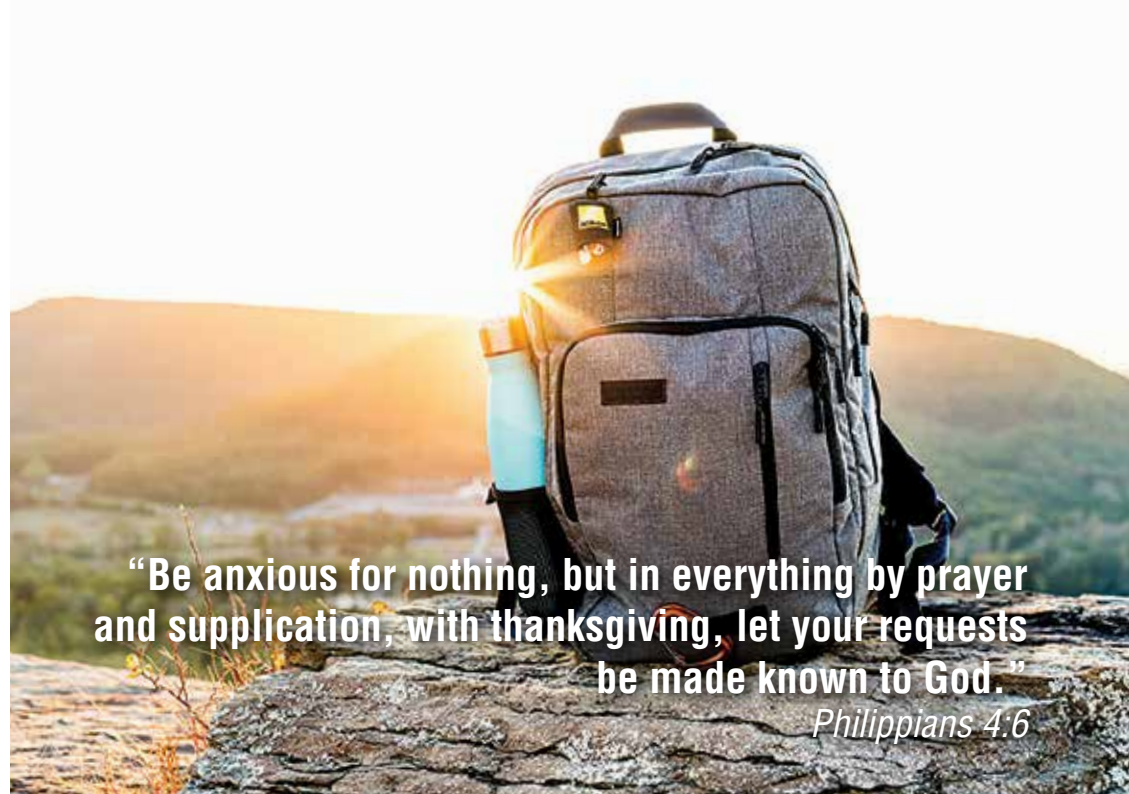
Every pilgrim thinks about what they are going to need for the journey. Travel lightly is usually very good advice. Take only the essentials. A journey with too much to carry will be burdensome and slow. You will be weighed down, restricted, and constantly anxious about your belongings. Packing your rucksack can involve very difficult choices about what to bring and what to leave behind. We each make those choices differently.

Consider the last five years of your life. What are the things that have weighed down your journey and made it more burdensome? What aspects of your life

have been most helpful or filled you with enthusiasm, life and energy? If you were retracing those years, what choices would you make differently? Is there some aspect of those years that you would leave behind?

Looking ahead, what do you imagine for yourself in the years to come? Have you made any goals or plans? Lent is a season for paring back and trimming down. Could you make your journey less cluttered and more God-centred? What might you change for the future?

*Photo: Josiah Weiss [www.unsplash.com/@jsweissphoto](http://www.unsplash.com/@jsweissphoto)*



**“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”**

*Philippians 4:6*

## An agile faith

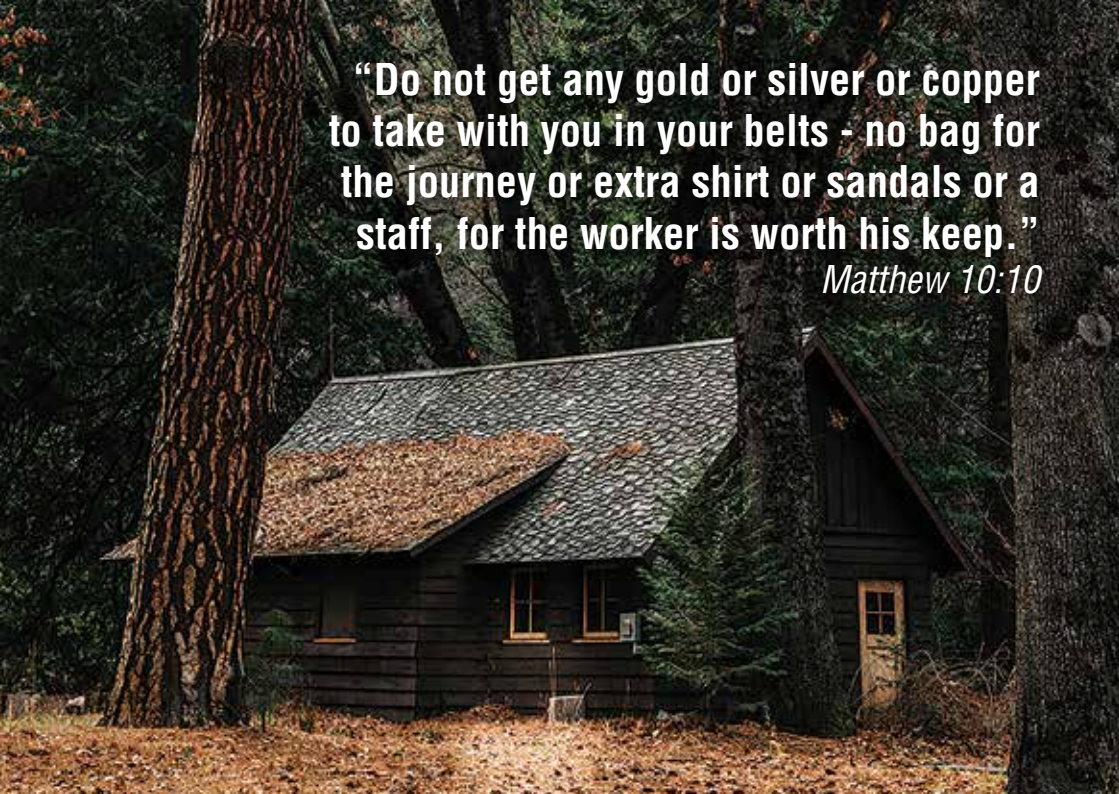
The fact that many pilgrims took very little to sustain themselves along the way was meant to help them rely completely on God's provision. This meant that pilgrims would often rely on the hospitality of complete strangers. This approach seems very counter-cultural today. Many would critique it as showing a reckless disregard for good planning!

Looking more broadly, many Christians struggle to strike a balance between responsible long-term decision making and being flexible in God's service. Some people feel trapped by their comfortable, predictable lives, and may even resent the

loss of freedom experienced when they were younger.

The ministry of Jesus and the disciples was highly itinerant. In fact, the early Christian church has been more aptly described as a movement for good reason. Take time this Lent to think about the way you express your own availability to God. How can you keep your faith open and agile while being firmly settled in one place? What are the things that tether you, and do they prevent you from being available to God?

*Photo: Nathan Dumlao [www.unsplash.com/@nate\\_dumlao](http://www.unsplash.com/@nate_dumlao)*



**“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts - no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”**

*Matthew 10:10*

## Hills and valleys

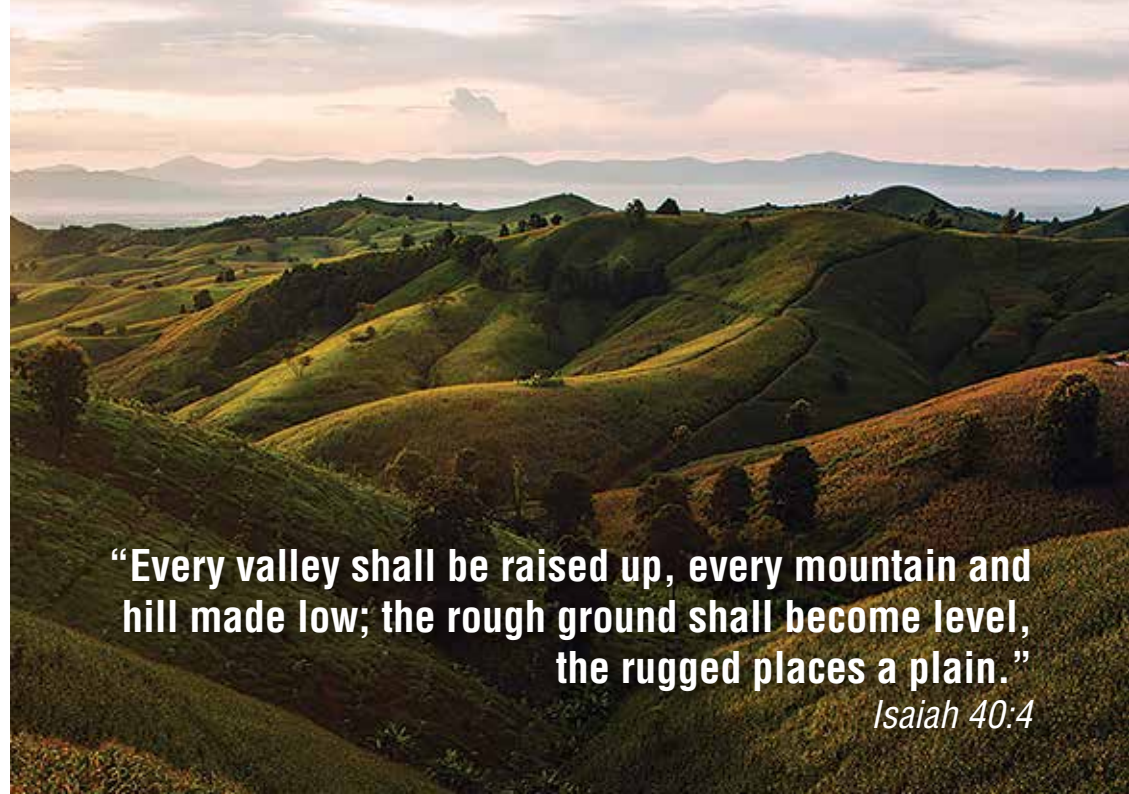
The rhythm of the pilgrimage walk is a marvellous thing. The cadence of your own footsteps can open your mind to God in an almost hypnotic way. Warm feelings may flow as you think about the steady progress being made on your journey.

And yet enthusiasm will quickly dissipate when tiredness and exhaustion set in, challenging your will-power to go on. Every pilgrimage will involve elements of struggle, mental as well as physical. A pilgrimage without struggle is not worthy of the name.

Steep hills will be encountered as a metaphor for life's challenges. As one hill is conquered, another comes into view. God is with you in your journey, although you may not always feel that. There may be no end in sight.

What are the mountains you have conquered in your life, and what can you see ahead? As you think about Christ's journey to the Cross, what do you think enabled him to go on? From where do you obtain your energy and sense of purpose? How do you know that Jesus is truly with you even when you don't feel it?

*Photo: Waranont Wichitranont [www.unsplash.com/@tricell1991](http://www.unsplash.com/@tricell1991)*



**“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”**

*Isaiah 40:4*

## Thin places

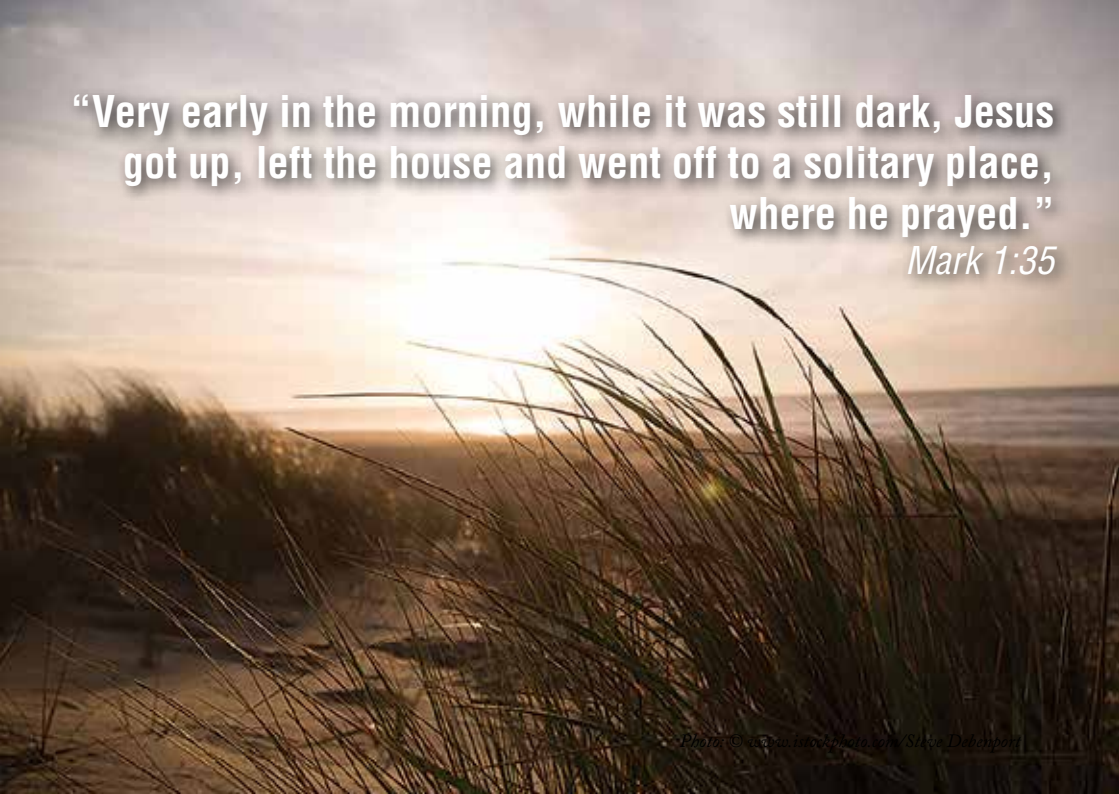
Pilgrimages may take us to places of astonishing beauty. These may be remote, windswept, and ethereal places which echo something of the eternal. For centuries pilgrims have searched out such places and given them a special name – ‘thin places’. They are called this because this is where the distance between heaven and earth supposedly narrows. Thin places are sacred. They are places where pilgrims sense that God is lowering his gaze for moments of deeper encounter.

Most of us have places that are special to us in our own life journey, places that we invest with particular associations and

meanings. Do you have such a place? These may be locations of family or personal significance.

There may also be places where you feel closest to God, your own ‘thin place’. What is it about your ‘thin place’ that is so special? Is there a sacred location in your life to which you habitually return? Thinking now about your day-to-day life, where do you go when you need peace, solitude or quiet reflection?

*Photo: Jordan McQueen [www.unsplash.com/@jordanfmcqueen](http://www.unsplash.com/@jordanfmcqueen)*



“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

*Mark 1:35*

## Bread for the journey

A Christian pilgrimage is both a physical expression of a desire to follow Jesus, and an inward spiritual journey. This requires not just an abundant supply of high-energy snacks, but more lasting spiritual food. During the season of Lent we are reminded that Jesus describes himself as the Living Bread. The deepest and most enduring sustenance in your life will come from Him.

For many, a pilgrimage may resemble an extended conversation with God over a period of days or weeks. It is an intentional journey that will often involve meditation, reading and listening, and worship in

its various forms. Pilgrimages may also involve reflection on the life of those who have gone before. The sheer beauty of the landscape may also speak eloquently to our inner self.

Thinking of your own experiences, what are the ways in which you have been able to draw strength from the Living Bread? Which spiritual activities have been most helpful and life-giving for you? Similarly to a real pilgrimage, in what areas have you wrestled with God about particular themes or topics over an extended period? Or is there something that is troubling you that requires dedicated conversation with God?

*Photo: Mike Kenneally [www.unsplash.com/@asthetik](http://www.unsplash.com/@asthetik)*

**“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”**

*John 6:51(a)*



## Journey's end

**A**t the end of a journey there is often a sense of real accomplishment and joy.

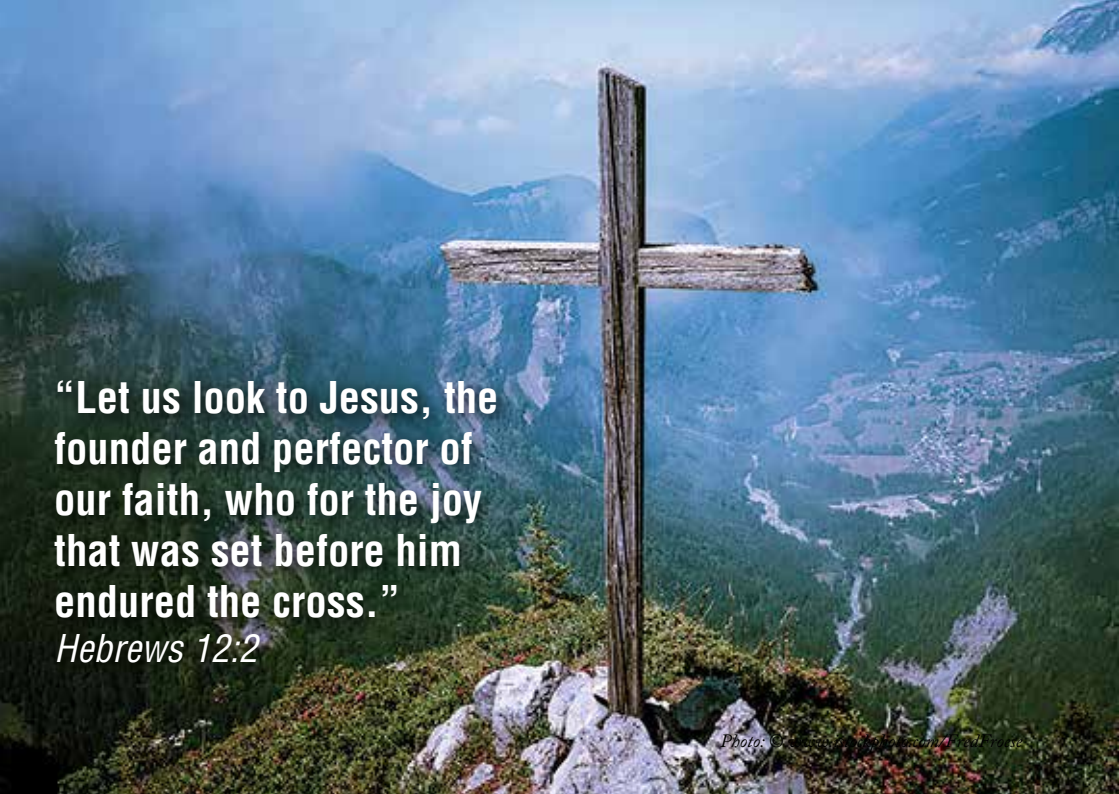
During Lent, we accompany Christ on his journey toward the Cross. That journey is hard and humbling. We can scarcely comprehend that Jesus walks his lonely and tortured path in selfless love for us. As Christians, we know that the story does not end in death and abandonment on Good Friday, but in glory on Easter Morning. On that day we behold the joy of resurrection, a powerful symbol for all of us.

As pilgrims we learn that we are called to pick up our Cross and follow Jesus.

*Photo: Hugues de Buyer-Mimeure [www.unsplash.com/@buguesdb](http://www.unsplash.com/@buguesdb)*

This can be challenging, lonely, and full of uncertainty. And yet a serious personal faith is never one of convenience or short-cuts. It is about faithfully serving the Risen Christ.

As you reflect back on the journey of Lent, what has God impressed upon you this year? Has anything changed for you? Does the image of the Risen Lord inspire you in some particular way for the present or the future?

A wooden cross stands on a rocky peak overlooking a vast, misty mountain valley. The cross is made of two weathered wooden beams. The background shows a deep valley with a winding river, surrounded by forested mountains under a blue, hazy sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

**“Let us look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.”**

*Hebrews 12:2*

*Photo: [www.unsplash.com/@buguesdb](http://www.unsplash.com/@buguesdb)*



At Easter Jesus made himself nothing that we might have abundant life in him. This year the theme for our Lenten reflection is *An Armchair Pilgrimage*. We hope that this booklet enriches the discipleship of followers of Jesus as we approach Easter once again. It contains suggestions as to how we can spiritually prepare during the season of Lent using the metaphor of pilgrimage.

Our work at Anglican Overseas Aid is an attempt to live out the hope of Jesus in response to the brokenness of the world. At Anglican Overseas Aid we believe in working for a just, peaceful and sustainable world. These values are inspired by the Gospel of Christ.

We hope this booklet has helped you reflect on the journey of Lent and the promise of Easter.