

# PILGRIMAGE

## PRAYER ON THE MOVE

**Paul Revall walked more than 500 miles from his old home in the north east in preparation for a new ministry in Portishead. He explains why pilgrimage walking is an intentionally prayerful activity which enables encounter with and transformation by God through the practices it fosters.**

**P**ilgrimage is a spiritual practice which has grown massively in popularity over the past few years, even amongst Baptists! It is often defined as a journey to a destination of spiritual significance. But the journey itself is usually more important than the destination. Pilgrimage is walking with an open heart, with the intention of being transformed. You might want to consider further what makes a pilgrimage different from a long-distance walk and how a pilgrim differs from a tourist.

I have become an enthusiastic pilgrim as I have discovered and walked ancient and modern pilgrim trails in the UK and abroad, and as a result of what God has done on these journeys. I have wrestled with my mortality and my own shortcomings, faced loss and bereavement, been challenged in my discipleship and much

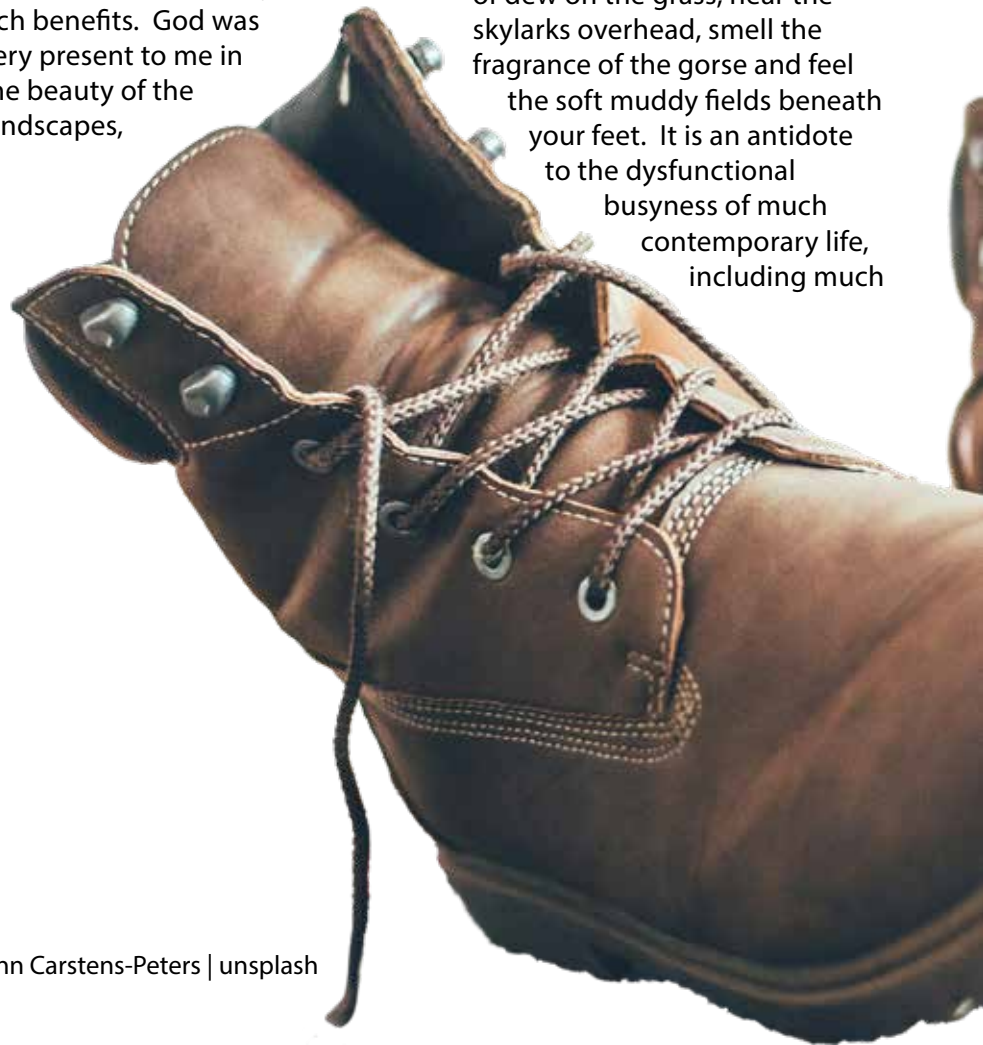
more besides as I have stomped up hills, through forests, fields and historic settlements, and as I have lingered in quiet places of prayer. Being a pilgrim has often been hard work, but the pain has brought much gain.

Last summer I planned and undertook a unique pilgrimage, walking 530 miles over five weeks from my old home in the north east of England to my new home near Bristol. The detail of that journey can't be told here<sup>1</sup>, but suffice it to say the 'Camino Portishead' was a privilege to undertake which brought rich benefits. God was very present to me in the beauty of the landscapes,

the kindness of those who gave me hospitality, in the spiritual centres which I visited, and in the unexpected encounters along the journey.

### SLOWING DOWN

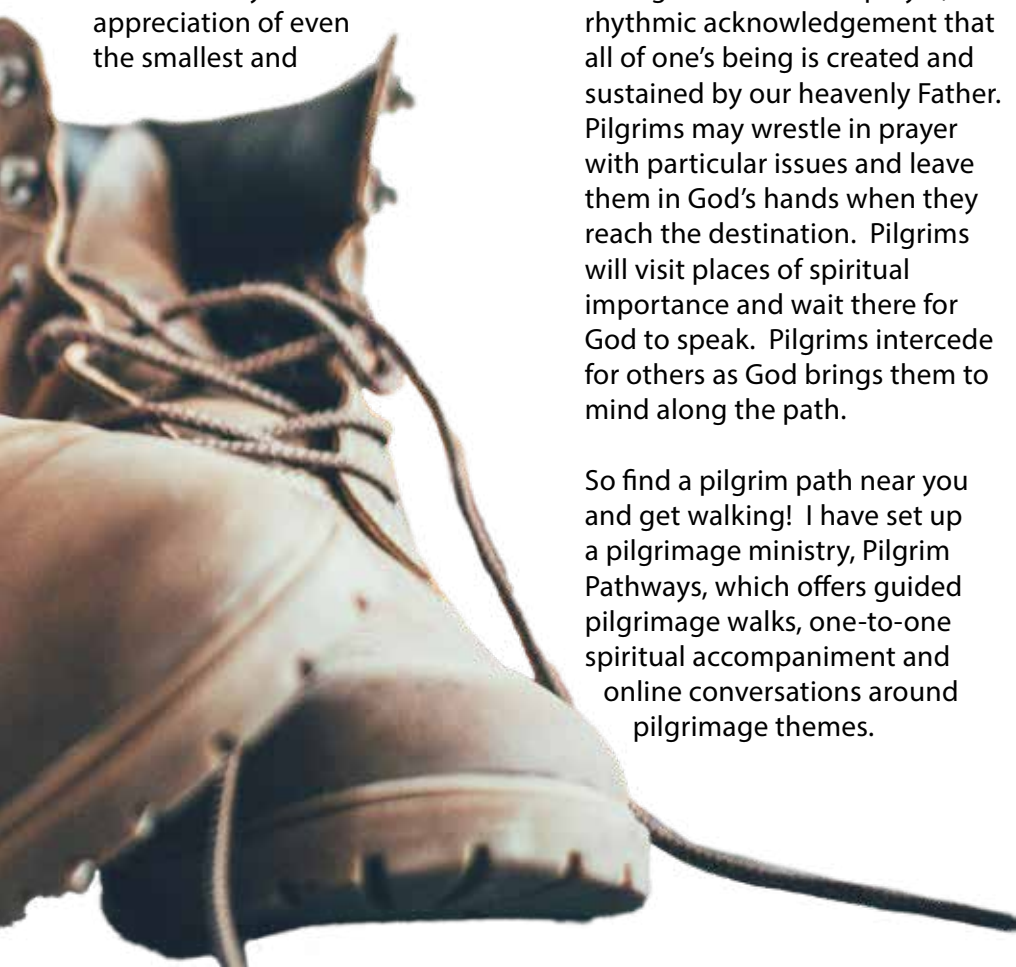
Pilgrimage walking is an intentionally prayerful activity which enables encounter with and transformation by God through the practices it fosters. Firstly, walking is about slowing down and adopting a more healthy pace of life. Pilgrimage pace allows you to notice drops of dew on the grass, hear the skylarks overhead, smell the fragrance of the gorse and feel the soft muddy fields beneath your feet. It is an antidote to the dysfunctional busyness of much contemporary life, including much



of what passes for Christian ministry. By deliberately living slowly for more than a month I found it far easier to begin my new pioneering role without feeling pressure to achieve, perform and make things happen, but to trust that God will bring about his purposes in his timescale, which is so often much slower than mine.

## A SIMPLE LIFESTYLE AND DAILY RHYTHM

Pilgrimage walking necessitates a simple lifestyle, travelling with a bare minimum of possessions that can comfortably be fitted into a backpack. There is a simple daily rhythm: get up, eat, walk, arrive and shower, eat and enjoy conversation, go to sleep. And repeat. The pilgrim comes to appreciate that the most valuable and enjoyable gifts God gives are free and don't require us to possess them: the kindness of a friend, some shared laughter with a companion, a sunset which captivates. Pilgrimage walking fosters a daily thankfulness and appreciation of even the smallest and



easily overlooked gifts which the Creator has made available to us.

## DEVELOP THE PRACTICE OF AWARENESS

Finally, pilgrimage walking develops the practice of awareness: of God, of others and one's self. The time which a long walk offers forces the pilgrim to face deeper aspects of their psyche which are often kept hidden away in the busyness of life. Pilgrimages have helped me to appreciate and value those who are different from me, seeing more of God's image in others, even those whom I find more difficult. And there have been those times when I have become aware of the pilgrim God accompanying me, challenging or encouraging, but most often deepening my awareness of his limitless grace.

Pilgrimage walking can be a means of prayer in many ways. At its most basic level, feeling your own heartbeat, hearing your breath, planting each step on the solid ground - this is a prayer, a rhythmic acknowledgement that all of one's being is created and sustained by our heavenly Father. Pilgrims may wrestle in prayer with particular issues and leave them in God's hands when they reach the destination. Pilgrims will visit places of spiritual importance and wait there for God to speak. Pilgrims intercede for others as God brings them to mind along the path.

So find a pilgrim path near you and get walking! I have set up a pilgrimage ministry, Pilgrim Pathways, which offers guided pilgrimage walks, one-to-one spiritual accompaniment and online conversations around pilgrimage themes.

Do get in touch If you'd like help to walk a pilgrim path or explore spiritual disciplines associated with pilgrimage. *'How blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage'* (Psalm 84:5).



**Paul Revill is a pioneer minister, working with his wife Barbara in Portishead.**

**For more information about his pilgrimage ministry, visit: [pilgrimpathways.co.uk](http://pilgrimpathways.co.uk)**

### A Prayer for Authenticity by Catriona Gorton

From fake jollity that denies reality  
To real joy that transforms it  
From forced smiles that fail to reach our eyes  
To inner joy that makes them shine  
From denial of truth  
To indefatigable joy  
Lead us, God of joy  
Amen.

Taken from *Gathering up the Crumbs*

1 For anyone interested in more detail, I documented my pilgrimage here: [facebook.com/WanderingforGod](https://facebook.com/WanderingforGod)