

PILGRIM PRINCIPLES

a pilgrim's rule of life

7 guideposts and practices for becoming a pilgrim at home and abroad

Introduction: a pilgrim's rule of life

Our lives are governed by systems whether we are aware of it or not. Measured by our daily routines, our priorities, and our worldview, the systems in which we live determine both who we are and who we are becoming. However, just as a pilgrim sets an intention for her journey, engaging in her quest and opening herself up to transformation, we can be intentional about the systems that form our lives. One way we can be intentional is through structuring our lives each day with the quest of the pilgrim in mind by creating and participating in a Rule of Life.

A Rule of Life is a set of guidelines that help us to remain intentional in our interior journeys, daily routines, and communities. Developing and living by a Rule of Life is an ancient tradition practiced by religious communities and individuals alike for centuries. A well-known Rule of Life includes the Rule of St. Benedict, practiced by Benedictine communities for over a thousand years. With the rise of the neo-monastic movement in Christianity today, many modern communities are doing this as well, developing Rules of Life that are both counter-cultural and deeply engaging.

Here I share with you a Rule of Life I've developed with the pilgrim in mind, called Pilgrim Principles. Written through the lens of pilgrimage, this Rule allows us to maintain the posture of a pilgrim both at home and abroad. With each principle, I offer suggestions on how to put it into practice.

It is my hope that you are inspired by this Rule and the suggested practices, and that you will engage them and make them your own. It is important to note, however, that a Rule of Life is not something that we strive to achieve, but rather a basis from which we live. As you begin to apply these Rules, be sure that you begin your practice from the place where you are. If you do, I am confident you will discover the pilgrim inside.

Journeying with you,

*Lacy spiritual director + guide
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The First Principle

A PILGRIM LOOKS FOR THE SACRED IN THE QUOTIDIAN

quo•tid•i•an [kwo-tid-ee-uh n], adjective

1. daily
2. usual or customary; everyday
3. ordinary; commonplace

In essence, *quotidian* refers to the everyday, ordinary moments that we all face — and must attend to — many times each day: cooking meals, commuting to work, buying groceries, taking care of our families, our bodies, our homes.

You know these moments well, right? Some are like second nature; others feel like perpetual to-dos. And yet, these very moments which are necessary in our lives are fertile ground for Sacred Encounter if we approach them with intention. In fact, that's why I use *quotidian* rather than *ordinary* — because it's not basic; such a strange and beautiful word awakens curiosity and calls us toward something more.

The pilgrim knows this and practices awareness in the ordinary moments each day, delighting in the Divine mysteries and manifestations that surround him, whether it is a bulb sprouting in her garden in the cold days of early spring, the laugh of a loved one at the dinner table, or the face of the homeless person whom he passes on her way home from work. The pilgrim believes all that surrounds him holds significance and can tell her something of the Divine.

It is especially important for the pilgrim to cultivate awareness of the Sacred in the everyday because the journey for the pilgrim is always a journey toward the Sacred, whether abroad or in daily life. When finding delight in the Sacred each day, the pilgrim is blessed by and recognizes that which is Sacred, whether in the mind through thanksgiving or with action through engagement.

PRACTICE

Turn a daily and mundane task into a ritual. For example, when you wash your face each morning, splash your face three times — in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By doing this you are reminded of the cleansing powers of water and invite God's presence into your daily tasks, setting your intention for the day to come.

*Where else in your daily life can you add meaning
and create a ritual of your own?*

The Second Principle

A PILGRIM PRACTICES SOMATIC SPIRITUALITY

so•mat•ic [soh-mat-ik], adjective

1. of the body; bodily; physical

It is the body that carries the pilgrim from one place to another and the senses that serve as a conduit for the many cultural and spiritual experiences that permeate her being along the way. Even in the interior journey, the pilgrim knows that external sensations can help guide her to her core. In fact, if there weren't any bodily significance in physical pilgrimage, then it wouldn't serve as such a powerful metaphor for our journeys in life, would it?

This is where somatic spirituality comes in. Somatic spirituality is simply a faith that incorporates the body as a vital participant and resource in our spiritual search.

Need an example? If you grew up in a Christian family, it is likely that you have been trained spiritually in words, whether by reading the Bible, Scripture memorization, conversation, or prayer. While each of these things is valuable, some days you might find yourself feeling exhausted by all of the words, longing to practice a faith where you can connect spiritually – and sometimes far more profoundly – in other ways. God did not create us with only a mind and call us “good” – God also created us with bodies that can be vessels of spiritual expression as well as reception.

Our bodies carry just as much wisdom and insight as our minds. In fact, our bodies have the ability to tell us truths about our condition that our minds won't allow to surface as we try to maintain control. The pilgrim on a physical journey knows this truth, engaging holistically in the practice of pilgrimage by incorporating not only the mind, but also the body in her spiritual search.

PRACTICE

Walk a labyrinth. If you don't have one nearby, follow a simply walking path. Start at home, walk toward your destination (the “center” of the labyrinth), and then return home by the same path. When walking toward the “center,” contemplate your journey toward God. Once you reach your destination, pause for a while in the presence of the Divine. As you return home, ponder how you will integrate your Sacred Encounters into everyday life.

How does your body communicate in ways words cannot?

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The Third Principle

A PILGRIM IS A GOOD STEWARD OF RESOURCES

To some, being a good steward of resources has nothing to do with spirituality. In fact, many people don't think about being good stewards of their resources at all. You might say that they are unaware of the value of the resources at their disposal. But awareness is a key practice for the pilgrim, and in fact is a necessary part of each Pilgrim Principle. The pilgrim who is aware of the true value of his resources knows that they are gifts from the Divine — tools that may seem inconsequential, but can help her along the journey.

Consider the ancient pilgrims in the Middle Ages, who would be gone for months or years at a time with the revered purpose of journeying to a Sacred site. While their goals were spiritual in nature — well beyond the practical realm — their basic needs still had to be met. They knew that somehow the necessary resources would be provided and that their basic needs would be met in one way or another. Having set every- thing aside to make the journey, these pilgrims were simply grateful for any resource given, considering it provision from God.

Today, many of us have more resources than we could ever need. Indeed, it's a blessing to have abundance, but to truly be aware of this abundance, we must also practice good stewardship, and this starts at home.

What does it mean to be a good steward of resources? It means practicing presence and recognizing you have time in abundance. It means offering your unique gifts to the world and using them as tools in your journey. It means not spending more money than you have and giving freely of what you do have. It means regularly purging yourself of unnecessary possessions and only holding on to things that are useful, whether in a utilitarian manner or simply because they bring you joy and delight. And, of course, it means awareness of our responsibility for the earth, which has been left in our care.

PRACTICE

Create an "out-box" in your home in which to put things to give away or sell. Each day, find one object taking up space in your home that you no longer need to "carry with you" in your everyday life and put it in the out-box. At the end of each month take these items to a local thrift store or put them up for sale on Craigslist. You can then save the money or donate it to a charity that shares your values.

Where else could your journey benefit from more simplicity?

The Fourth Principle

A PILGRIM IMMERSSES HERSELF IN CULTURE

There is a reason why the pilgrim's journey involves going somewhere else. In order to experience transformation, the pilgrim must become vulnerable – she must expand her edges, crossing borders into new and unfamiliar territory. When the pilgrim journeys to a place beyond what she calls “home,” her senses are heightened, her vulnerabilities are brought to the surface, and her perceptions are tested. In allowing these different parts of herself to come to the surface, she is able to be fully present in her journey amidst the discomfort and uncertainty, the mystery and the beauty.

As a traveler, the pilgrim is exposed to many cultures. But she will have the most valuable and transformational experiences when she is fully present with the things that might be unfamiliar, engaging with and learning from the culture in which she is traveling. It is often this very engagement with a new and unique culture that makes pilgrimage a Sacred experience.

When the pilgrim practices being open to the differences that surround her within another culture, she is also receptive to the new things she is discovering about herself, as well as the Divine. This not only impacts the pilgrim's journey abroad – it also informs how she encounters her own culture and how she engages the differences present within herself and her experience of God when she returns home.

For the pilgrim at home, the reverse is also true: by immersing herself in her own culture, she is prepared to practice awareness and engage with new cultures when she journeys beyond her borders. The pilgrim at home practices this by being active in the culture of her own community and by being aware of and celebrating the uniqueness it has to offer, both today and throughout history. With this intention, something beautiful happens: whether at home or abroad, the pilgrim who immerses herself in culture becomes a part of a greater story.

PRACTICE

Many people today live in gentrified neighborhoods and surround themselves by those who are just like them. Journey outside your bubble in order to encounter the other faces of your community by exploring a new neighborhood, taking public transportation, or learning the customs or language of a member in your community whose traditions differ from your own.

*How does encountering those who are different than you
expand your view and experience?*

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The Fifth Principle

A PILGRIM CREATES DAILY RHYTHMS TO GROUND HIMSELF

A pilgrim is someone who is rooted and centered with a solid foundation that stability, particularly in the midst of chaos and uncertainty. This is not so different from the root system of a tree. Though unseen, the root system is vital to the tree, establishing it and sending it nourishment. Even when the limbs are shaken violently in the wind, the tree remains in place, all because it is grounded by its roots.

Walking the road to Santiago de Compostela or simply walking to the bus stop on our daily commute, we are all pilgrims on a journey. And whether we want to admit it or not, chaos can show itself on each road we travel, always uninvited and often throwing us off course. The pilgrim knows, however, that it is only through facing these trials and laboring through the chaos that transformation can take place and new life can be born. And so, in order to remain rooted through the journey's challenges, like the roots of the tree, the pilgrim establishes daily rhythms to remain grounded.

One valuable way for the pilgrim to root himself is by establishing a daily rhythm centered on awareness and spiritual practices. The pilgrim who creates a daily rhythm commits time each day for regular and deepening spiritual engagement—a rhythm which, like the nourishment of water for the tree, creates stability and facilitates growth. The pilgrim also knows the importance of cultivating time each day for self-care, searching within himself to determine his present physical, spiritual, and emotional needs and committing to honor them.

When the violent winds in life threaten the pilgrim's path, the pilgrim has deep roots that he can depend on because of his daily rhythms. In the midst of challenges, these daily rhythms in the pilgrim's life help to ground the pilgrim, calling him back to awareness and intention.

| | |----------| | PRACTICE | |----------|

Allow your time of spiritual practice to also be a time of self-care. Make yourself a hot cup of coffee to help you wake up, find a quiet place, and consider adding to your practice something you enjoy doing but don't often find the time to do, such as writing, painting, or playing a musical instrument. Nourishment of the self is nourishment of the soul, nourishment of the soul is nourishment of the spirit, and God delights in nourishment.

What else do you need to help you thrive when trials arise?

The Sixth Principle

A PILGRIM CARRIES HERSELF WITH CURIOSITY

Curiosity is vital for the pilgrim on a journey. In fact, it's built into the fabric of her being. At her core, the pilgrim is a seeker, and although it might not seem like it at first, there is a difference between seeking information for knowledge—a common, one-dimensional quest—and seeking it in order to guide one's life. The difference is that the seeker who wants knowledge is on a quest to collect information, while the seeker who searches for guidance is fueled by her curiosity.

Today, curiosity is something often only associated with children (and even then it is sometimes discouraged). Many of us have forgotten how to be curious and have consequently stopped growing, for growth and transformation are fueled by curiosity. However, even Jesus himself encourages curiosity in his followers in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Though this verse might sometimes be interpreted as Jesus saying he will provide for our needs, interpreting it as welcoming curiosity takes its meaning far deeper and makes its possibilities seemingly endless:

Why do we ask? Because we are curious.

Why do we seek? Because we are curious.

And why do we knock? Because we want something behind that door (also, we're very polite).

Through this interpretation, Jesus is essentially saying: "Ask and you will be given answers to things you never would have known otherwise; seek and you will find me in unexpected places; knock and you will be welcomed into a world of wonder and possibility." Asking, seeking, knocking—this is the work and the blessing of a curious pilgrim, and it is required at each stage of the journey.

PRACTICE

Write down your questions about life and faith, and don't attempt to answer them. Instead let them be for a while. It just means you're curious! When you are able to be curious about your deeper questions, you'll be surprised where answers, clues, or inklings appear in your daily life. Of course, maybe there's not an answer (at least in the clear-cut way that we often prefer them), but that doesn't take away the significance of the question. Perhaps it makes the question even more valuable.

Which quests might your questions be inviting you to undertake?

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The Seventh Principle

A PILGRIM SEEKS TO KNOW HIS INNER WITNESS

The Inner Witness is that place of interior retreat and rooted-ness—the place of both the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the True Self—and is precisely what inspires our search for the Divine.

This is the common search of all humanity, and yet many do not know their Inner Witness—their truest self and their source of connection to the Sacred. From the pain and brokenness that inevitably accompany life, they have come to believe God is not real. Or perhaps they have been told that God is real—and even believe it—but they do not truly know God, because they are told that the Image of God within humanity only existed at the time of creation, not that it is something that we all bear and have access to each day.

One religious denomination that recognizes the imprint of the image of God on humanity is the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Christianity. According to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine known as *theosis*, the purpose of life is the uncovering of the image of God—or *imago Dei*—within each one of us. It is a lifelong journey into the likeness of Christ, who is both fully human and fully Divine.

A good way to describe this is by the metaphor of polishing silver. Like magnificent silver, the image of God is embedded within each one of us, though it has been tarnished by the pain and brokenness within the world. The journey to uncover the image of God within us is like polishing the tarnished silver, and with each intentional movement we reveal more of our true selves as image bearers, and more of the Divine, whose image we bear.

No matter the journey, this is the essence of the pilgrim's quest. Led by the Sacred Guide, the pilgrim who seeks to know his Inner Witness journeys toward his true essence as an image bearer and consequently also the Divine.

PRACTICE

Pay attention to your dreams. Belief in the power of dreams might seem too new-age for many Christians today, but you can't deny that the medium of dreams for communicating a message or reality was often used by God in the Bible. Dreams exist beyond our control, and therefore it is often said that dreams tell us things that we are unable or unwilling to recognize otherwise. Our dreams are thus a valuable medium of communication for our Inner Witness, where our True Self and the Holy Spirit can join together to freely speak their truths.

Where do you encounter the wisdom of the Inner Witness?

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