



GO ON A PILGRIMAGE



45 Minutes



Adults



Newcomer Friendly



Introspection

Overview:

How do we become pilgrims, how do we understand living in our Last Third as the most important pilgrimage of our lives?

Materials & Setup:

You need devices and internet access to read, share, and print the article, *The Last Third of Life*, by Jane Marie Thibault and Richard L. Morgan.

The Last Third of Life

From age 60 to 90 and beyond, people face a time of special challenges and opportunities to draw closer to God. The excerpt below is from a new book offering readers Bible-based meditations that address 7 tasks essential to living the last third of life with purpose.

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Scripture: “Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage”

(Gen. 47:8-9, KJV).





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“Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage” (Ps. 119:54, KJV).

Many people have adopted the term journey as the metaphor for life in the later years. Webster defines journey as (1.) the act of traveling from one place to another; trip (2.) any course or passage from one stage or experience to another. While these definitions validly describe life from a secular viewpoint, they seem to imply that living the later years is a linear process, without goal, meaning, or intention. The term pilgrimage better describes the life course for the Christ-follower. Wikipedia defines pilgrimage as “a journey or search of great moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person’s beliefs and faith. . . . A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim.” The terms pilgrim and pilgrimage imply a life of meaningful intent and spiritual intensity, a far more vital way of looking at the experience of the last third of life than journey.

We envision later life not as a random series of events to be endured and adapted to but as an intentional movement toward God. Not just a journey but an intentional, sacred search for our Beloved. When seen in that light, whatever and whomever we encounter each moment of each day becomes an encounter with the holy, an event that can transform us, a signpost pointing the way, leading us to our ultimate leap into God’s embrace at our death. So in the Last Third, death is our sacred destination, not a place to be feared. The gates we discuss represent significant milestones on the path as well as portals through which we must pass to proceed to the next stage of our pilgrimage.

How do we become pilgrims, how do we understand living in our Last Third as the most important pilgrimage of our lives? The decision to go on a pilgrimage is uniquely our own. If we re-envision aging as a pilgrimage and ourselves as pilgrims, (1) we choose to realize that we no longer have to maintain the illusion that we are young. We don’t even need to use the qualifying euphemism “young at heart.” We discover that what was once appropriate for our 30s, 40s and 50s no longer serves us well in our 60s, 70s, 80s and 90+; in fact what was useful earlier may actually impede our growth in later life. (2) We acknowledge the limited nature of time; every moment brings an opportunity to experience God more fully. (3) We choose to believe that we are not only aging, but we are following a call to advance—to go forth from the known and the comfortable into the unknown and often uncomfortable, perhaps even painful. (4) We choose not to retire from life but to re-fire into new life. (5) We choose to interpret all the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual changes as new territory to traverse in our advancement. (6) We choose to see this as our final pilgrimage—the one that will ultimately lead us to our Beloved, our Source. (7) We are willing and eager to invite others to come with us and to help them along, just as we are willing to allow them to help us reach our sacred destination of heaven.



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Questions for Reflection

What have been your metaphors for aging?

Have you ever been on a pilgrimage? Do you know anyone who has?

How do you resonate with the interpretation of the Last Third as a pilgrimage?

In what ways do you envision yourself as a pilgrim?

Looking back, what allows you to reinterpret your aging experience as a pilgrimage?

Credits:

Excerpted from: Pilgrimage into the Last Third of Life: 7 Gateways to Spiritual Growth
by Jane Marie Thibault and Richard L. Morgan.

Permission pending.

Discover more activities in the Spiritual Deepening Library:
www.fgcquaker.org/SDLibrary

