

Series: Born to Be a Pilgrim

Lesson I: The Long Road

Lesson Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Identify typical patterns of spiritual development.
- Describe their own spiritual development or path so far.

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Pens, pencils, and/or pencil crayons
- ☐ Scrap paper
- ☐ Plain paper
- ☐ Board and markers

Lead In:

Tell the students that you have a message from the writer of this next series, *Born to Be a Pilgrim*. It is a special message that was written specifically for them and they will have to help decode it. They will need a pen and a scrap piece of paper to decode it.

When I was twenty three, I left my home in suburban Ontario to do what thousands of Christ followers had done before me, to walk the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrim path to the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela. I left with a guidebook to the French route, with a carefully packed backpack, and with a very good friend. I left like a true pilgrim.

If you grew up in a Baptist home like I did or maybe in a home without a particular faith tradition, you may not know what a pilgrimage is. A pilgrimage is a journey or a trip, often with its destination in a place that is considered special or sacred, such as Jerusalem, the Holy Land, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, or Canterbury Cathedral. Pilgrimage can take many forms and serve many purposes. The Camino de Santiago is usually walked on foot and although there are many paths, they all lead to the ancient and significant city of Santiago de Compostela. People walk for days, weeks, and months to reach the city, some returning many times in their lives. They walk for all kinds of reasons. I walked because I thought God was asking me to. I thought God had something to say to me or teach me on the road. And God did.

I am writing this series with my pilgrim experience in mind. That's why it's called Born to Be a Pilgrim. It has four parts in it and each part is based on a question that every pilgrim needs to answer. They are questions about real-life pilgrimages but also questions about faith pilgrimages. I want you to work with the person next to you to guess what the four questions are, questions that every pilgrim needs to answer before she or he sets out. I have left some clues in this message that will help you. Go!

Give them a minute or two to guess and then tell them the correct answers and ask them to count how many they got right. The correct questions are as follows (other questions

might be good but they don't happen to be the questions I chose—don't get too caught up on this part):

- 1. Where am I going?**
- 2. What path or route will I take?**
- 3. What will I take with me?**
- 4. Who will I walk with?**

Task One:

Say something like, *Good work. In each lesson in this series we are going to focus on one of those questions. Only instead of talking about a literal walking-type pilgrimage, we are going to focus on our spiritual journey. This is where we will begin tonight, with our spiritual journey, which is one way of describing the life of faith that we live.*

Ask, how many of you have had ups and downs in your spiritual journey or your life of faith? Allow students to raise hands or give answers.

Ask, when do the ups and downs usually happen?

Allow students to answer. Common answers might be retreats, camps, baptism, conversion (ups) and summer, post-retreat, university, moving to a new place, pastor or leader leaving (downs).

Ask, do you think that these ups and downs go away as you get older?

Allow students to struggle with this and disagree if necessary. In the following tasks they will continue to think through this.

Task Two:

Group the students in groups of three or four. Tell the students that they are going to have an opportunity to draw a representation of their spiritual journey. You are going to give them plain paper and pens/pencils/pencil crayons. They could represent their spiritual journey as a map, a line graph, or a more complex image if they choose. The drawing or diagram can capture important events, people, times, and experiences that shaped their spiritual experiences. If this is very different or new for your students, you will need to show them an example. You could do your own or a made up one on the board. Tell them to draw secretly at first (not to tell their group members what they are drawing). Give them the paper and drawing tools.

When they are finished, ask them to show their group members their diagram but not explain it. Ask the group members to guess what the drawing represents.

When that is done, ask a few people to share some common elements or themes that existed in their groups.

Task Three:

Now tell the students that they are going to imagine where their map or drawing might lead them in the future. It would be helpful if you could relate your own journey, highlighting some of the differences between teenage spiritual journeys and adult ones. For example, adults might have fewer peaks and valleys in their faith, but they might face more challenging issues (divorce, bankruptcy, the loss of a child or spouse, etc.). Try to have them imagine or predict some of the possible factors and circumstances that might affect them later. The reason for this is to help students look outside their teenage experience and think about their faith as a long-term experience.

Allow students to adapt their drawings. They may need more paper or can use the back. Have them share these in their groups and identify some of the common concerns, questions, of themes from this task.

Ask some students to share the common concerns, questions, and themes that they discovered in this part and allow for some guided conversation on “faith for the long haul.”

Closing:

Bring the lesson to close and pray for one another and your spiritual paths in life. Consider giving this well-known Celtic Christian benediction to end:

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.