

Along the Way

Pilgrimage. A journey. Reflection. Seeking. Defining. Refining.

The morning began easily enough. The path was easy – paved and flat. Day One of my walk along the ancient path, the Camino de Santiago. I'm walking the Camino in pieces right now, trying to get a feel for the distances a person can walk in a day, the difficulty of the Way, and to do a little of my own introspection and connecting with God. I know I am called to make this pilgrimage, and I know I am called to walk it alongside others as they journey deeper in their spiritual lives. So I begin to walk…

Easy, slow, flat. Lots of time to think and to pray and to wonder about God and Creation. Soon enough, the road changed. What had been easy going, exciting even, now turned to a narrow, dirt path that had endured months of rain. What had been easy was now a muddy mess, full of ruts and deep puddles. My feet were becoming heavier with each step as they collected layer after layer of sticky mud. I was now carrying the extra weight of wet earth, weight that was quickly tiring me out. I began looking for ways to avoid the ruts and step off the path, ways to make it less messy – honestly, ways to make it easier. How could I detour this difficult place? I was discouraged.

Isn't that just how life happens? Isn't this how life as a cross-cultural witness / missionary goes? So exciting at first. The way seems easy. We are focused on God, on the path, on everything around us. Then, somewhere along the way, it gets tough. It gets messy. It gets hard. We start carrying added weight of problems and we start looking for ways around them, ways to detour the messiness of doing life and ministry in the midst of the yuck.

I trudged on, determined to move through this. Determined to get to a better place, all the while talking to God about what He was trying to teach me.

I came to a valley and found a small town, a refreshing place to take a few moments rest and reflect of my day so far. I thought about all of the people who have been walking this Camino before me. For hundreds of years, people have been walking this particular leg of the Camino from the Mediterranean Sea to Santiago de Compostela, making the ancient pilgrimage of St. James. The Mozarabe trail was used by early Christians as they crossed from the south up through the Moorish (Muslim) kingdoms of Spain. I'm walking on hallowed ground.

Not too much further into the journey, I pass the caves of an early Mozarabe church. Sacred ground. Sacredness of place. Standing in front of caves where early Christians congregated for a thousand years.

As I continue to walk, I am overcome by the enormity of the lives that have passed this way before, searching for something, for Someone, for connection. It occurs to me that the trail is so well marked, marked by those who have been here before, who have trodden these paths and who led the way. Even though they are no longer in this place, even though they are not physically present,

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they are here – showing me the way, encouraging me forward. Another lesson for me to ponder as I walk.

Do you know how long a day is, when you walk on a path for literally the entire day? There is a lot of time to think, to connect with your soul and with God.



I came to a place where the path split in to two distinct directions, and suddenly the markings were not clear. Which way is correct? Which way should I follow? One led uphill, yet seemed to go in the correct direction. One seemed easier and led downhill, but I had my doubts about it. I chose to go uphill, but continued to not be sure of my choice. Had I chosen wisely? Had I made a poor decision? Would this lead me in the correct direction? Is this the right way? So often I have asked myself these same questions in my walk with God, in my calling and service, and now I find myself asking them in quite a literal sense… am I headed in the right direction?

I stopped to pray all of my questions out to God, to pour out my doubts and to seek His guidance. Then I continued along the path I had chosen, only to turn a corner and find the trail marker – that beautiful yellow arrow and the yellow Camino de Santiago seashell that marks the way. Thank you, Father. I continued forward.

As late afternoon approached and the day began to show signs of coming to an end, I became ever aware of my timeframe. I had a goal and a schedule to meet. I had a rendezvous point to get to for a pick-up, and I had to pick up my pace. And just like that, the *camino* changed. The views around me were beautiful, but I didn't have time to really look at them. I became frustrated with the clock. I wanted to stop and see my surroundings, to soak it all in, but I felt pushed by a schedule I had set for this day. I was rushed to finish. I began to push myself, to move too fast. This part of the trail is a series of uphill and down, and it began to hurt. It began to get so hard. I was no longer enjoying this walk. I was no longer communing with God. I was exhausting myself. And even in this, I began to see another life lesson to be learned on this Camino pilgrimage. How often do I move too fast, do I push myself to attain a goal or finish at a certain time? How often do I hurt myself in the process? In my rush to complete, do I miss the opportunity to enjoy the way? To enjoy Him?

In my rush, I actually missed the trail marker. I took the wrong path. I got off track. And for a while, I was lost. I finally found my way to the rendezvous point. How is it possible to learn so much from one day on The Camino?

Many thousands walk the Camino de Santiago every year, looking for some way to connect on a deeper level. For some, it is a deeper connection with God that they seek. For some, it is to fill a void that they can't quite put their finger on. For some, it is a last ditch effort, a desperate attempt at finding faith and the elusive thought that Jesus might be real. People come, but who will walk with them? I will.

I continue to walk the Camino de Santiago-Mozarabe in pieces as I prepare to walk the Northern route in June. I have been invited, as a counselor, coach, and fellow Follower of Jesus, to walk the Camino as an outreach to pilgrims, listening to them, building relationships with them, and accompanying them in their journey to connection with Him. Care to join me on the journey? Give me a call or drop me an email and let's plan to walk The Way together!

~Billy

The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life.

We need silence to be able to touch souls.

~Mother Teresa

Spain is a tough place. Post-Christian Europe. Catholicism is falling. The evangelical / protestant church is not growing fast enough. Muslims outnumber evangelicals by more than double and rising. Millions of people openly claim to not believe in any God or spirit. Unemployment is high. Hundreds of thousands of young adults left Spain last year in search of work in other countries. Churches and cathedrals are being shut down and sold to businesses, turned into bars and casinos, or left empty. Relationships are difficult and slow to build here.

Pray for Spain! **Pray** for more mission workers. **Pray** for relationships to open up. **Pray** for new believers. **Pray** for the many Latin American immigrants who are on fire for Christ and are now living in Spain… **pray** that God would ignite their passion and their confidence and help them to carry the word to their host country of Spain. **Pray** for cities and towns and villages that do not have a witness, do not have a church… **pray** that God rises up workers and believers who are willing to GO and LIVE and SERVE and LOVE in places where the gospel is not present or heard.

Please **pray** for us as we live among our neighbors in Antequera. Please **pray** for us to shine and share the light of Christ with others. **Pray** for others to see something different in us. **Pray** for our work as we build up believers and disciples and help them gain the confidence to share with others. **Pray** for us to be healthy– spiritually, physically, emotionally, and relationally. **Pray** for us to experience rest, in order to have the strength to serve.

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Many great stories and happenings occurred "along the way" in the Bible. God seems to be very interested in using the "in between times", the times of transition, and the times between here and there to do some amazing work in people and through people. Transformation happens along the way!



[11] On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ~Luke 17:11 begins the story of Jesus and the lepers.



Numbers 22 tells of the story of what happens between a stubborn man and a donkey along the trail.

The entire story of the Exodus from Egypt to the promised land occurs en route… in the in-between time of getting from one place / situation to another.

The Good Samaritan story takes place along the road.

Jonah was along the way… running from one place to another… when God does some serious work in him and in those around him.



Early church cave, used by Mozarabe Christians for over 1000 years.

The road to Emmaus turned out to be a powerful walk for a few travelers. Luke 24: 12-14



Saul (Paul) was on his way to Damascus when he was struck blind and had the transformation of a lifetime. Acts 9

Phillip was between Jerusalem and Gaza when he had a divine appointment with an Ethiopian man. Acts 8:26-40



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Laurie works with two different groups of immigrant women each week. They study the bible together and build discipleship relationships. Most importantly, they are family to each other during the tough times of being immigrant women in a foreign land. Here, Laurie is pictured with several of her Brazilian friends from one of the study groups.