

“Walking Home: From Eden to Emmaus” by Margaret Guenther

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A Small Group Discussion Guide

by Sharon Ely Pearson © 2014

Introduction: Where Have I Come From, and Where Am I Going?

1. Where is “home” and do you ever go back? Can you go back?
2. What’s the most grueling journey you’ve ever been on? (figuratively and literally)
3. What’s your favorite mode of transportation?
4. Compare biblical vs. present modes of transportation.
5. What do you “notice” (watch) when you travel?

Chapter 1: You Can’t Go Home Again (Adam & Eve)

1. How you ever been driven out of a place?
2. What if Adam & Eve had not been removed from Eden?

Chapter 2: Don’t Look Back (Lot’s Wife)

1. What have you been tempted to look back at on your life’s journey?
2. Have you ever chosen to leave or flee home (or any location)?
3. What is it like to leave home when you don’t want to?

Chapter 3: The God Who Hears (Hagar)

1. Have you ever taken a dangerous trek?
2. Have you ever been rescued by a stranger? (“angels unaware”)

Chapter 4: Are We There Yet? (Abraham & Isaac)

1. Have you ever gone on a trip (long or short) that you didn’t want take?
2. What do you think each of the characters thinking? (before and after)
3. What is a “trust walk” like?

Chapter 5: Take Off Your Shoes (Call of Moses)

1. Has anything ever drawn your attention away from a task you were doing that was out-of-the-ordinary, impelling you to turn it aside and investigate further?
2. Why are we called to approach the Holy unguarded, in all our human vulnerability?
3. Is the command from the bush a reminder to put us in our place, or is it an invitation to feel at home, to come closer without fear? (p. 34)
4. When have you had to take your shoes off?
5. What is hallowed ground for you?

Chapter 6: The Way Out (The Exodus)

- “Slavery of all kinds can be seductive, if only because it makes life seem predictable.” (p. 41) Agree or disagree?
- “If we are spiritually alive, we keep repeating in our own small way the pattern of sanctuary, slavery, escape, and arrival in the promised land – and not just once but several times during a long lifetime.” (p. 42)

- Have you ever had your Canaan (land of milk and honey) turn into Egypt (slavery)?

Chapter 7: Walking Into Exile (Exile)

- “Exile happens when home is no longer home.” (p. 47-8)
- What traditions from the “homeland” have been passed along to you?
- When have you eaten “another’s bread” that has not seemed right? When have you felt like an alien?
- Have you ever been in a place where you were not wanted?
- Who are the exiles that live among us?

Chapter 8: Head for the Hills (Mary’s Visitation to Elizabeth)

- What is it like to receive unexpected / impossible news?
- Have you ever had to travel a distance to share news with another person that could not be shared via phone or e-mail?
- How can each of us be “pregnant with God”?
- How can we be “welcoming presences”?

Chapter 9: His First Walk (Flight to Egypt)

- How do you recognize the voice of authority?
- How is exile the same as safety?
- Have you ever had to prepare for a hasty trip – to an unknown destination?
- Have you ever experience being a stranger in a strange land?

Interlude: Jesus’ Walking stories:

- What do the stories connected with Jesus have in common?
- What is the essence of each story?
- What journey / walk are they about?
- What part of our own life’s journey do they compare to?
- What is the cost of venturing out on a journey? What is the promise?

Chapter 10: A Day Trip with Consequences (The Transfiguration)

- When have you been invited on a walk / hike where you did not know the final destination? What surprised you along the way?
- What’s it like to be part of an invited few? What’s it like to be left behind?
- What does the author mean, “Pay attention! This is no ordinary walk in the sunshine. If he is transfigured, then you are transformed. You won’t be the same again.”
- Is it easier to walk up a mountain or down?

Chapter 11: Tips for Travelers (Discipleship)

- How were the disciples able to walk away from “everything” and follow Jesus? What does it take (or not) to do that? Has there been anything in comparison in your life to this?
- What does it mean to travel unencumbered?

- What do you hold onto that you feel you should be letting go?

Chapter 12: A Walk Interrupted (The Good Samaritan)

- What's it like to be interrupted?
- Have you ever had plans (or something) interrupted with unexpected consequences? How did it change you? What was disappointing? What was life giving?
- Thoughts: The analogy of Jesus being the one on the roadside, beaten and left for dead, passed by.

Chapter 13: Turning Around (The Prodigal Son)

- Is this a story about a rite of passage?
- Bottoming-out; metanoia; repentance; self-awareness – how are these a part of life's journey? Do you need to experience them to 'grow up'?
- The human condition – life's walk between thresholds

Chapter 14: No Turning Back (The Road to Jerusalem)

- Do you recall a time when you've "set your face"? What were the circumstances? What did it feel like?
- What is the "real" walk of life? How do we focus our lives on the important "roads" or tasks ahead of us?
- What does it take to "set one's face" on something that is not easy, may be dangerous, or not safe?
- Where (or what) is your Jerusalem?

Note: Jesus' followers were called "Followers of the Way" before the word "Christian" was used. What is the Way we are being called to follow?

Chapter 15: Just a Few Steps (Bartimaeus)

- Homeless at the side of the road seen is an opportunity for blessing. How do we move this story to our locations/circumstances today?
- Is there meaning in Bartimaeus' leaving his cloak behind and following Jesus?
- Bartimaeus can't see the path, but he heads out anyways.
- What is our blindness?
- "To sign on the walk demands that we say what we need from Jesus." (p. 115)

Chapter 16: Dead Man Walking (Crucifixion)

- What does it mean to "take up one's cross"?
- What did it mean for Jesus to take that last walk?
- How does the work of Sister Helen Prejean ("Dead Man Walking") with death-row inmates connect with this chapter?

Chapter 17: The Miracle of the Chance Encounter (Walk to Emmaus)

- What is the purpose of walking, besides getting from one place to another?

- How do stories help us hold onto things: people and events? Has this happened with you?
- When have you had a chance encounter with the holy?

Overarching themes:

- What do these stories have in common?
- Where are you on your walk / journey?