



Bunyan's Birthplace, Elstow

Editor's Notes

Why is the Pilgrim's Progress so Popular?

What should be said about this book? It has certainly been a family favourite for generations. It has gone through countless editions, and various guises and is still, in its original text, one of the grand Christian classics. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is loved not only for its poetry, adventure and graphic story line but also for its deep spiritual insight into the condition of man, the Christian walk, salvation and the eternal destination of both the unsaved sinner and the forgiven saint.

What is it about John Bunyan's book that ensures that it is still being read today? One reason is simply its wide appeal. Whatever age or stage you are at in life or in your Christian walk you will find something in the story that you will enjoy and that will make you think.

If you are looking for an exciting read - you need look no further than *The Pilgrim's Progress*. There are fearsome lions that are actually chained, gruesome giants who are tricked at the very last and terrifying monsters that vanish with the morning light under the comfort of the King's own words.

Every one of Christian's experiences can, on further inspection, be seen in our own lives. The child who is afraid of the dark can relate to the valley of the shadow - as can the man or woman who dreads the prospect of death. The man who worries about his future can relate to the temptations that face Christian and his fellow pilgrims along the way. There is always the option to take the easy but dishonest route.

On a daily basis we struggle as Christian does in the pages of this book.

Why not take the money and turn a blind eye?
Do I have to stand up for Jesus when all my friends make fun of me?
If only I didn't keep making these stupid mistakes?

Worldly Wiseman, The Atheist, Ignorance. On closer inspection many Christians, young and old will recognise peers, colleagues and even family from amongst these characters.

Throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress* then we can see Christian and others struggling with the same troubles. We see them tackle these problems head on. We see them run in the other direction and we see them fail as well as triumph in the end.

The Pilgrim's Progress is always realistic, for all that it is an allegory and a work of fantasy. Christian undergoes remarkable deliverances and is miraculously saved from many difficulties - but he does face difficulties, he has to struggle, he makes mistakes and suffers the consequences. We can all relate to that. Bunyan's work combines fantasy, allegory and realism. *The Pilgrim's Progress* teaches us deep spiritual lessons through a strong biblical emphasis. This is evident by the number of scripture references you will find throughout the text.

The book was originally published at a time when there was not much of a consensus regarding punctuation. So while keeping most of the original vocabulary the text has been edited for ease of reading. Speech marks have been inserted and where necessary occasional references are included so that it is clear to the reader which character is speaking. This has not changed the original text 'one whit' ... or at least not in a way that spoils the style and content of the material.

Use This Book During Family Times

The Pilgrim's Progress can be read during family times, on quiet afternoons as an alternative to the video or DVD, or on long evenings when you don't mind exciting the children too much. Just make sure you don't end on too much of a cliff hanger!

Reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* is like reading a code in story form. Which is one reason children enjoy the book. It's an adventure, a mystery and a puzzle all in one.

Reading the book in sections is a good approach. You will notice that the book is divided into parts - each of these parts can be divided down further. It all depends on what time you have available. Just watch out for the entrance or exit of a character. Use that as useful spot at which to conclude your reading - until the next time.

Reading the story as a straight adventure is one approach. But to get the most out of this material you really need to think on your feet a bit, look up one or two of the scripture references and start applying this material to your own life. Some pointers towards starting a discussion time are:

1. If a character is mentioned in the story does this character exist in your own life?
2. Do you know someone who raises the same arguments?
3. Do you yourself behave like him sometimes?
4. What do you think God's opinion is of this behaviour?
5. Have you had times of failure and triumph like Christian?
6. When a Pilgrim does or says something that differs in some way from his companions, investigate this further. Who is in the right? Who is following God's way?
7. As you go through the book think about the main characters such as Christian, Faithful and Hopeful. How do they live up to their names?

Unusual Words and Phrases

You may be concerned about the old style language but where words need further explanation a large number of these will be included in the dictionary at the back, particularly those that are more dated. There are also several unusual phrases that need more detailed explanation. These are highlighted in the text by asterisks and footnotes. There is a section at the end of the book which will help explain these to you.

As you read *The Pilgrim's Progress* use creative expression. When the story is exciting, sound excited. When Christian is in deadly peril, sound frightened. And when there has been a great victory - joy and triumph should be reflected in your whole demeanour. Do this and you will find that the story flows on its way and transports you to another time and world. Your listeners will understand the story better as well. It will eventually seem normal for Christian and Hopeful to speak in the way they do. After all they are wearing armour and battling fiends of the worst nature. It would not be fitting for these pilgrims to talk as though they had just come out of a shopping mall.

Familiarising children with Classical writing styles opens up their minds to the richness of language as well as the beauty of poetry and the truth of scripture. If you are reading this book to young children - read for yourself the next night's chapter, the day before. Remember that you don't have to read all of a section in one sitting. Divide up the reading into chunks and read what you feel your family or audience can cope with.

There are things you can do to extend the fun. Keep a note of the different places you visit throughout the book and draw a map of the imagined route that Christian and his friends may take. You can include as part of the family time - a travel journal of the route to the Celestial city. Many of the places that Christian visits have a great significance for Christians. There aren't any who have not had a direct experience of the Slough of Despond and The Hill of Difficulty. Both these places reflect the troubles and the struggles we face in our daily lives.

If time allows you can reinforce the story with a game or drama. Let the children pretend to climb the hill of difficulty or make a scroll of their own. Focus on the excellent 19th Century artwork that has been reproduced in this edition. Discuss amongst yourselves how the artists have portrayed the scenes and characters. What can you tell about the individuals or places by studying the artwork? For another practical, hands-on activity read up on the armour of God and model some of the different pieces when you read about Christian fighting Apollyon. Discuss how you use the different pieces of God's armour in your own daily battles. The options are only as limited as your imagination.

Use This Book During Personal Devotions

Take advantage of the extra study sections in this publication during your family discussion times or personal readings. Zone in on the characters and places. This will help to get a clearer picture of the lessons behind the story.

Realise that this book has a wide readership and can be used in different ways with different people. If you were familiar with this book as a child - look again - you are bound to discover something new. Mature Christians often appreciate a different way of looking at things and this is what allegorical fiction is. But although in one sense *The Pilgrim's Progress* is fiction - it is also fact. As many who read it recognise themselves and others in its pages and cherish the teaching and understanding that it gives them.

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