

ANCIENT PRACTICE

15 walkers have begun a pilgrimage from Edinburgh to St Andrews, resurrecting a path that was taken back in the twelfth century.

It's called the Way of St Andrews.

Pilgrimages were all the rage centuries ago, and it's interesting that in recent years they are being rediscovered.

One such is the Way of St James, which leads to Santiago de Compostela in Spain - which is now walked by a staggering 100,000 pilgrims every year.

What is fascinating these days is that the pilgrims are not all religious in the conventional sense of the word, but that those participating gain insight into themselves and their lives that makes the venture more than worthwhile.

Not all of us are able to undertake a pilgrimage - especially if it involves a long period of time or arduous physical activity.

A few years ago my friends were astonished to hear that I was going on a ten day silent retreat in Spain. They thought it must be a dare. "*David McLachlan shutting up for ten days?*" It didn't seem likely to them.

It didn't seem likely to me either and I wasn't sure I would survive the first ten minutes let alone ten days.

After a strange forty-eight hours or so, the silence began to kick in and it ended up being a very beneficial time indeed, much to my surprise. A chance to get away from the busyness of life for a short time and have space to reflect on what was most important.

A couple of years ago a television programme called *The Big Silence* followed the experience of five very different people who agreed to go on a silent retreat at a monastery. None of them were practicing Christians. Most were sceptical of the benefits of a retreat. Yet by the end of the period each one agreed that their lives had been changed for the better as a result.

Ancient spiritual practices turn out to be very beneficial for us - maybe nowadays more than ever.

We are living life at a frantic pace. The opportunity to take some time to slow down, to reflect on who we are, what we are doing and where we are heading is something to grasp.

We may not be able to join a pilgrimage but we can all build some time of silence into our days and that in itself is something well worth doing.

David McLachlan

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