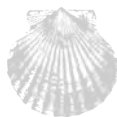


# Keeping Company

*with* Saint Ignatius



Walking the Camino de  
Santiago de Compostela

Luke Larson

Foreword by Chris Lowney



PARACLETE PRESS  
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

2014 First Printing

*Keeping Company with Saint Ignatius*

Copyright © 2014 Luke J. Larson

Copyright © 2014 Foreword by Chris Lowney

ISBN 978-1-61261-519-6

All Scripture quotations in this publication are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.® Use of either trademark requires the permission of Biblica, Inc.®

Excerpts from *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola* selected and translated by William J. Young, SJ (Loyola University Press, 1959). Reprinted with permission of Loyola Press. [www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com)

The Paraclete Press name and logo (dove on cross) is a trademark of Paraclete Press, Inc.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Larson, Luke J.

Keeping company with Saint Ignatius : walking the Camino de Santiago de Compostela / Luke J. Larson.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-61261-519-6 (pb with french flaps)

1. Christian pilgrims and pilgrimages—Spain—Santiago de Compostela.
2. Ignatius, of Loyola, Saint, 1491–1556.
3. Spirituality—Catholic Church.
4. Spiritual life—Catholic Church. I. Title.

BX2321.S3L37 2014

263'.0424611—dc23

2014019346

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

[www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com)

Printed in the United States of America

To Evie, my wife and pilgrim companion.  
Thank you for keeping company with me  
on the Camino,  
and through all of life.

With all my love.



## CONTENTS

F o r e w o r d	by Chris Lowney	7
F I R S T	S T E P S	13
O N E	My Journey to the Camino de Santiago	25
T W O	The Camino Within	33
T H R E E	Bread Fellows and Bedbugs	41
F O U R	Sister Ass Needs to Be Fed	52
F I V E	Mary on the Way	64
S I X	Things to Be Desired	72
S E V E N	A Thin Place	86
E I G H T	Don't Worry	101
N I N E	Make Haste to Help Me	111

TEN	A Banquet Is Prepared	121
ELEVEN	At Home with Ignatius	134
TWELVE	Hearts Burning Within	154
THIRTEEN	Here and Now	160
	Acknowledgments	174
	Chronology	
	of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola	175
	Our Itinerary	
	of Camino and Ignatian Sites	177
	The Beatitudes of the Pilgrim	179
	Notes	181
	Index	184

## Foreword



“Our life is a journey, and when we stop moving, things go wrong.”

Pope Francis said that, though most would not intuitively associate those sentiments with a pope or the Catholic Church. When we stop moving, things go wrong? The Catholic Church of popular imagination seems to be about the opposite: eternal, unchanging truths and finger-wagging at a modern culture that seems to have lost respect for tradition in its endless fascination with what’s new and fashionable.

To be sure, the pope has warned that if we are not grounded in the truths of our tradition, we become aimless wanderers.

But grounded does not mean stuck. And there is a difference between aimless wandering and a purposeful journey, a pilgrimage.

In writing *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*, I came to understand how deeply the imagery of journey, of pilgrimage, has touched the Pope. He was formed as a Jesuit, and pilgrim imagery is deep in the Jesuit tradition. Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuit founder, undertook a life-changing, five-hundred-mile personal pilgrimage from his home in Loyola to the towns of Montserrat and Manresa, both near Barcelona. (I worked with a small group to construct a modern pilgrim route tracing the



path Ignatius followed; modern-day trekkers can google “Ignatian Camino” or visit [caminoignaciano.org](http://caminoignaciano.org) to learn more about it.)

Though Ignatius would never have used such trendy terminology, his month-long trek was a journey of self-discovery. Decades after that trek, while dictating his *Autobiography*, Ignatius was still referring to himself as “the pilgrim.” What’s more, he prescribed the same pilgrim medicine for all future Jesuits: during novitiate, each trainee Jesuit is supposed to undertake a pilgrimage. The requirement, as far as I know, is unique to Jesuit training.

Pope Francis presumably made a pilgrimage during his own training, so perhaps it should not surprise us that journey imagery bubbles up constantly in his talks and writing. Read his talks and note how often words like *journey*, *pilgrimage*, *periphery*, *frontier*, or *margin* all arise. He more than once has said that he far prefers a Church that endures “accidents in the street,” because it is out there trying something new, to a Church that is locked in upon itself. He aspires to a Church that is “bruised, hurting, and dirty” because it is accompanying people where they really live, out in the real world.

Well, some of this mindset may trace directly to his own Jesuit formation, but the idea of life as pilgrimage or journey is not uniquely Jesuit. The Catholic tradition, and indeed every great spiritual tradition, seems to have the same wisdom. Devout Muslims are called on pilgrimage to Mecca; the Torah calls the Jewish people to journey to Jerusalem for the so-called pilgrim festivals; Buddhists and Hindus also recognize the tradition of spiritual pilgrimage. And, if we squinted just a little bit, we

would also see pilgrimage pretty clearly in what we might call the “secular spirituality” of the United States: a visit to a Civil War-era graveyard may be called a tourist visit, but something more profound is happening. We go to honor those who sacrificed their lives, and, along the way, we think about our own lives.

The idea of pilgrimage is so deeply enshrined in human culture, I suspect, because pilgrimage is the great metaphor for life. Life is a journey. We journey from childhood to senescence. We meet new people along the way, get lost at times, discover things we never knew existed, and learn a lot. We hope that we will get to our destination safely, but we also hope that we will grow and learn something along the way.

Still, those romantic notions notwithstanding, we humans typically resist aspects of the journey, because the journey means change, and we don't like change. We all say we do, but the reality, once we start to settle in to our lives, is different. How intimidating to pack up one's life and move to a new city, start a new career, end an unfulfilling relationship and start a new one, break out of the familiar roles that each family member has settled into and, for example, let *her* be the one who makes the plans for a while and let *him* be the one who manages the household finances. The pope told us that when we stop moving—growing, learning, experimenting, exploring—things go wrong. Yet, truth be told, a lot of us stop moving in some ways.

Pilgrimage can be good medicine for that. Luke Larson appropriately invites us all to hit the road. But he wisely points out that “hitting the road” need not mean the 500-mile journey





across Spain that he and his wife undertook to the centuries-old pilgrimage site of Santiago de Compostela. If you have the month, the resources, and gumption to do that, by all means go! (I tried it once, and it remains a life highlight.)

But for many, that will remain one of those “bucket list” dreams that remain forever in the bucket. So, as Luke suggests, do what you can, whether that be walks through unfamiliar parts of the neighborhood, laps around the mall, or a trek from one end of Manhattan to the other, as I do with a few hundred other Catholics each year, ending with Mass at the Mother Seton shrine at Manhattan’s southern tip.

I can’t explain why this experience of purposeful walking changes us and opens us up, but it does. It just does. When I did my own pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, every few days I would run across some New-Age type who would earnestly tell me, “Everyone has something to learn on the Camino.” I would smile and fairly quickly change the subject. I love history, love to travel, am a devout Catholic, enjoy a challenge, and looked forward to the exercise. That’s why I was going. I wasn’t looking to learn something.

Then I got sick halfway through and couldn’t finish. I learned what I have to relearn every few years: it’s not my world. It’s God’s world. I’m not in charge of it. It does not revolve around my plans. And even though I behave as if I can control everything that impacts my life, I know I can’t. The older we get, the more we understand how little we actually do control.

So, despite myself, I learned something on the Camino. And everyone I know who has gone on pilgrimage has told me they

learned something about themselves as well. The good news is that we don't have to wrack our brains in a fervid search for personal revelation. Better if we do the opposite, as Luke suggests. Leave ourselves open to see, listen, and learn, and the insights will come along, in God's good time. After all, it's God's world, not ours.

So hit the road! Whether in your own neighborhood, across Spain to Santiago de Compostela, or along the Camino Ignaciano from Loyola to Manresa, it matters not where you go; it matters that you go. And—to cite the cliché that has by now become hackneyed simply because it is true—it is not about the destination; it's about the journey.

But before you get the chance to savor Luke Larson's wonderful journey, let me offer one last piece of advice, drawn once again from Pope Francis. In a meeting with high school children at the Vatican, one boy spoke of the challenges of growing up and remaining faithful despite the doubts and pressures on a young person nowadays. The pope replied sympathetically, noting that everyone falls along the way. The issue is not in falling, the pope said, but in not staying fallen. That is, get up, and keep going. Don't be discouraged. Failure and difficulty and challenge come to everyone along the way. After speaking to the young boy in this vein for a minute or two, the pope closed with this encouraging message, relevant for all of us: "You won't be afraid of the journey? Thank you."

*Chris Lowney*

*Foreword*



]]



## First Steps



Would you like to take a walk?

This question, this personal invitation really, connotes a desire, not to fulfill a goal or reach a destination, but simply to keep company with someone. I imagine it was one of the first questions ever posed.

“Hey, Eve, would you like to take a walk around Eden with me?”

I also imagine that it was one of God’s first invitations to us. The book of Genesis tells us that God walked in the garden. On the seventh day, God laid down his power tools, slapped the cosmic dust from his coveralls, and set off looking for our first parents among the ferns and fig trees.

Why? Do you suppose he was in the garden to check up on Adam and Eve, to see what kind of mischief they might be up to? That doesn’t sound much like a day of rest to me.

It is not a stretch to assume, as most of us do, that God was there simply to walk and talk with Adam and Eve, to enjoy their company. Respecting human freedom right from the beginning, God would have simply extended an invitation.

“Would you like to walk with me, perhaps in the mornings and evenings when it’s nice and cool?”

These walks were not about getting from Point A, say, the Tigris River, to Point B, the Euphrates. They were simply about spending time together, keeping each other company.



What a mind-blowing image: God the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, the Alpha and Omega, walking leisurely with Eve and Adam for no other reason than he wanted to. It certainly beats the image of God waiting in the wings listening for the crunch of an apple, his one and only cue to enter the scene.

God is not aloof and distant, showing up only when we are naughty or in need of rescuing. No, God created us good—in his very own image in fact—and likes nothing better than to hang out with us. We were created to live in God’s presence. God’s desire is always for companionship with us.

This is no less true for us today than it was for our earliest ancestors. By *us* I am not referring to humanity in general, or even to some grouping of humanity, such as the church.

I am talking about you and me specifically.

God the Father wants to be with you no less than he wanted to be with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. God the Son wants to be with you no less than he wanted to be with Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene. God the Holy Spirit wants to be with you no less than he wanted to be with Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. Take a moment and let that sink in. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit wants to keep company with you today.

The book of Genesis offers the first images of our Creator’s desire to keep company with us. Yet there are plenty of others. Among my favorites is the definitive covenantal summation found in Leviticus: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev. 26:12). Another favorite, from Micah, speaks to what is required of us in that relationship: “To

act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8).

*Humble* comes from the Latin *humus* meaning “earth.” Taken literally, that means we are to walk with God, not with our head in the clouds, but *on the ground*. Emmanuel is indeed with us, not as some ethereal presence, but as a Lover taking a leisurely stroll with his beloved.

In addition to this more literal meaning of *walk*, the Bible also uses the word as a metaphor for living in communion with God. For example, in Deuteronomy, “Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess” (Deut. 5:33) In Ephesians, “Follow God’s example . . . as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1–2). And in 3 John, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 Jn. 1:4).

Would you like to take a walk?

I wasn’t expecting God to saunter up and ask me this in the garden section of Home Depot. Thankfully, God did not. I understand such theophanies have rather dire consequences. No, God chose more typical, and less terrifying, ways to invite my wife and me to take a walk—a pilgrimage, actually—simply for the sake of keeping company with us.

The idiom *keeping company* has a number of connotations. It means spending time with someone so that they are not alone, accompanying or remaining with someone, associating or staying





connected with someone, and being compassionate to someone. It might also mean being passionate, as in the case of a romantic relationship. All of these are applicable to the walk, the pilgrimage, that my wife, Evie (short for Evelyn), and I made together.

Evie and I walked the Camino Francés, or The French Way, one of the most popular and traditional pilgrimage routes of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in the fall of 2010. What is the Camino de Santiago de Compostela? Let's begin with a bit of translation. The Spanish *Camino* translates variously as *path*, *road*, *journey*, or *way*, while *Santiago* combines *San*, Spanish for *saint*, with the Galician *Iago* for *Jacob* or *James*. Thus we get the *Way of Saint James*, one of the most traveled and revered Christian pilgrimages since the beginning of the tenth century. The *Way* leads to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain where, according to tradition, the remains of Saint James are entombed.

Legend has it that, responding to Jesus's commission to take the Good News of the kingdom to the ends of the earth, James traveled to Finisterre—from the Latin *finis terræ*, literally meaning “end of the earth”—and began his evangelizing work on the Iberian Peninsula. After preaching there for a number of years, James returned to Palestine, where he was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa I in AD 44. The body of James then miraculously made its way back to Galicia in an unmanned boat made of stone. The story continues early in the ninth century when a shepherd discovered James's remains in an unmarked cave. He was drawn to the spot by bright stars in the sky. This brings us to the origin of *Compostela*.

It comes from another combination of Spanish words: *campo* and *stella*, *field* and *star* in English, rendering a *Field of Stars*.

During the Middle Ages hundreds of thousands of people began their arduous journeys to Compostela, to this Field of Stars, from wherever their hometown might be in Europe or beyond.

•

Today many, like us, choose to start their Camino pilgrimages from the small, picturesque town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on the French side of the Pyrenees. Forty-eight days later, on the eve of All Saints Day, we arrived in the cathedral city of Santiago de Compostela. We made this five-hundred-mile pilgrimage entirely on foot, carrying bare essentials in our lightweight backpacks.

Why did we do it? The pilgrimage was a way of keeping company with God. It was God who invited us, through myriad elicited desires and converged opportunities, to take a walk with him in the first place. God alone initiates the encounter with God. Yet, although God the Father did the inviting, it was God the Son who logged most of the miles with us. Jesus, after all, has the well-worn walking sandals.

Keeping company with Jesus also means keeping company with his friends. One of the more preeminent of these is Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century founder of the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits. If you want to learn about walking as a way of keeping company with Jesus, he's the expert.

More than anything else, Saint Ignatius and his followers wanted to be in the company of Jesus. The first Jesuits described





themselves using the Spanish word for companions, *compañeros*, bound together into a company, a *Compagnia di Gesù*, which translates into English as *Society of Jesus*. Jesuits are men, priests, and brothers throughout the world, whose singular and unifying desire is to keep company with Jesus.

For eight years I was counted among their number. And, although it has been almost two decades since I left the Jesuits, the inspiration and spirituality of Ignatius remains the matrix for my life and my loves. Like Ignatius, my deepest desire is to companion Jesus, to keep company with Jesus.

While convalescing from a debilitating leg wound in the ancestral home of the noble Loyola family, Ignatius became attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. He listened to his soul's desire to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as soon as he was able. A reproduction of that pilgrimage was to be one of the first communal acts of the early companions of Ignatius. It is fitting, then, that in wanting to revitalize my sense of companionship with Saint Ignatius, I would choose to make a pilgrimage as well. And so Evie and I not only invited Ignatius along with us on the Camino but we dedicated our time in Europe to learning more about his life and legacy.

If I were to choose a saint to companion on a forty-eight-day, five-hundred-mile walking pilgrimage based solely on appearance, I probably would not choose one who is most often portrayed as serious, even dour. Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ, sums up this traditional perception of Ignatius: "He came across as a forbidding personality, icily chaste, intellectually certain

beyond challenge, preoccupied with obedience and endowed with iron-willed self-control.<sup>1</sup>

More contemporary depictions, both in artwork and print, shatter some of these cast-in-plaster images we have of Ignatius. Iñigo de Loyola (Ignatius's baptismal name) was the life of the party as a young, courtly cavalier. He was also a bit of a fi ebrand. There were certainly plenty who wanted to companion him, and to journey with him, after his conversion. So many, in fact, that he formed his fellows into a service-oriented company, which eventually led to the founding of the Society of Jesus in 1540.

On the Feast of the Annunciation in 1534, Ignatius and his fi st companions professed traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, as well as a fourth vow to go wherever they were requested by the pope. They were ordained to the priesthood in 1537.

A reading of Ignatius's autobiography and numerous letters leaves the impression of a man of humility, gentleness, and deep emotion. For instance, he often wept copious tears while praying and celebrating the Eucharist. He had the most ardent love and affection for his ever-increasing band of brothers, as only a saint could. In fact, he is said to have cheered despondent companions by performing spontaneous Basque dances.<sup>2</sup>

Ignatius was no pushover though. He sternly reprimanded any who showed signs of conceit or strayed from the demands of their religious vows, especially obedience. That being said, keenly aware of human frailty, Ignatius exhibited remarkable patience and flex bility as long as he observed one moving toward—or at





least having the desire to move toward—the “praise, reverence and service of God our Lord.”<sup>3</sup> In the mind of Ignatius, that is the one absolute and invariable end toward which all of our actions are to be directed. He did not stop there. The Saint used the Latin word *magis*, meaning “more,” to exhort others to ever greater generosity for the sake of the greater glory to God, *ad majorem Dei gloriam* in Latin.

Ignatius was on the go for much of his life, except for the times when his health or the demands of his role as the first superior general of the Society of Jesus caused him to stay in Rome. He often traveled by foot, even barefoot, as an ascetical practice. A sampling of his destinations includes Azpeitia, Pamplona, Montserrat, Manresa, Barcelona, Venice, the Holy Land, Genoa, Alcalá, Salamanca, Bologna, Paris, and Rome.

Ignatius expected his companions to adopt his pilgrim spirit of “one foot on the road, ready to hasten from one place to another.”<sup>4</sup> To this day, Jesuits are to be contemplatives-in-action, possessing the ability to reflect on the move. “The road is our home,” affirmed Jerónimo Nadal, one of Ignatius’s early companions.<sup>5</sup>

On many of his trips, Ignatius either crossed over or followed the Camino pilgrimage route, so he had occasions to walk, eat, and rest with pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Given his desire to engage in spiritual conversations, and the likelihood of finding other pilgrims predisposed to the same, one can imagine the kinds of interactions he might have had.

“Was not your heart burning before the tomb of Saint Martin in Tours?”

“What holy desires were elicited in you before the fragment of the True Cross in the Church of San Pedro de la Rúa in Estella?”

“Did the face of Santa María de los Arcos in the Church of Santa María de la Asunción move you to tears as well?”

This is the man I wanted to keep company with on our pilgrimage. I wanted the companionship of a saint of heaven, one who had led a very human life on earth. And one who shared my fondness for praying on my feet. I like to think that Saint Ignatius, who often referred to himself in the third person as “the Pilgrim,” was pleased to be invited to accompany us on our pilgrimage.

It might seem strange to make a pilgrimage with the traditional intention of visiting the remains of Saint James as a way of companionship with another saint, Ignatius of Loyola. As patron of the Camino, Saint James offers his help and protection to anyone who undertakes the pilgrimage with sincerity of heart. James, in Latin *Jacobus*, is called “the Greater” to distinguish him from another apostle named James, “the Lessor.” James and his brother John were together nicknamed “the Sons of Thunder” by Jesus.

Evie and I were certainly grateful for the apostle’s inspiration, guidance, and presence with us. We enjoyed reading and hearing stories about James before and during our trip. Many of the stories recount “minor miracles” attributed to the intercession of the saint. For instance, a lost wallet is returned by another pilgrim who, days later, happens to stop at the same hostel. Or the pain and inflammation of tendonitis suddenly goes away, enabling a pilgrim to continue on to Santiago.

