

A NUN WITH A BACKPACK

PILGRIMAGE, PREPPING, and
THE FRANCISCAN WAY

*A blend of survival wisdom, contemplative
spirituality, and nomadic simplicity for those
seeking God in uncertain times*

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OFC



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by Sister Abigail Hester, OFC

Title Page

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Dedication

For the wanderers, the weary, the ones exiled by empire and economics.

For the campers, the car-dwellers, the backpackers, the houseless prophets.

For every soul seeking God with nothing but a patched-up rucksack and a stubborn, sacred hope.

You are not alone.

This book is your companion.

Epigraph

“The world is our cloister, the road our chapel, the wind our choir.”
— from the Rule of the Road, Order of Franciscan Clareans

“Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.”
— Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 9:3)

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Introduction: When the World Falls Apart, Walk

I never planned to become a prepper.

I was a nun, not a survivalist. I wore sandals and prayed the hours. I studied the lilies of the field, not tactical gear catalogs. But something in my spirit started stirring when the fires burned hotter, the storms hit harder, the rents rose higher, and the politicians grew crueler. I looked at the world around me—the collapsing ecosystems, the creeping fascism, the cages at the border, the homeless encampments, the shuttered churches—and I asked myself: **what would Saint Francis do in a world like this?**

He'd walk.

He'd shoulder a sack and walk. He'd knock on doors with nothing but peace and a prayer. He'd beg. He'd sleep under the stars. He'd listen to the birds and love the lepers. He'd hold the hands of those cast aside. He wouldn't hide in luxury or hoard supplies or preach from behind a gated church. He'd hit the road with nothing but the Gospel and grit.

And maybe, just maybe, he'd carry a backpack.

This book is for the new pilgrims of our age: the wanderers, the displaced, the houseless prophets, the off-grid believers, the ones who choose sacred simplicity and the ones who have it thrust upon them. It's for those who are tired of waiting for the system to change and have decided to live prophetically now. It's for those who are not waiting for the collapse, because it's already here. We feel it in our bones. We see it in the eyes of the elderly woman choosing between medicine and rent, the refugee walking across borders, the disabled person left behind by the machine of productivity.

We are already living in the storm.

But we are not without hope. And we are not without each other. This book is a Franciscan field guide for such a time as this. It's about prepping not from fear, but from faith. It's about pilgrimage not as escape, but as embodied resistance. It's about carrying light—not just in our packs, but in our hearts.

You will not find luxury in these pages. You will not find political neutrality or polished piety. What you will find is raw truth, rugged love, radical simplicity, and relentless grace.

Jesus said, "Take nothing for your journey."
Francis echoed, "Let us go out two by two."
And I say to you now, dear companion:

Strap on your boots.
Fill your flask.
Bless your backpack.

The road is calling.
The world is weeping.
The Spirit is walking ahead of us.

Let's go.

Chapter One

What Would Francis Carry?

Let us begin with a simple question.

If Saint Francis of Assisi were alive today—walking barefoot through the cracked concrete of Los Angeles or the muddy roadside of a rural backwater—what would he carry in his bag?

Not much.

And yet... perhaps more than we think.

Francis was a minimalist not because it was trendy or aesthetic, but because he believed that owning little made room for loving much. He stripped himself naked in the town square to declare his freedom from property, privilege, and patriarchy. He kissed lepers. He begged bread. He prayed with dirt under his fingernails.

But he was not naïve. He traveled long distances. He weathered cold nights and brutal sun. He encountered robbers, illness, and rejection. His simplicity was not romantic. It was gritty, raw, and deeply practical.

And so we ask again—in a world on fire, what would Francis carry?

He might carry:

- A worn cloak for warmth—now, maybe a wool blanket or space-age survival wrap.
- A pouch of herbs—today, a zip bag of comfrey, garlic, and tea.
- A walking stick—today, a collapsible trekking pole.
- A psalter—perhaps now a dog-eared prayer book or a solar-powered audio Bible.
- A pouch of seeds—to feed birds and hearts alike.

He would carry what a pilgrim carries: enough to survive, never enough to own him. And he would give half of it away by sundown.

The Franciscan Bug-Out Bag

Modern preppers speak of the “bug-out bag”—a backpack pre-packed with the essentials to survive 72 hours of crisis. The Franciscan bug-out bag isn’t so different, except the motivation is not fear but faith, not escape but encounter. We carry not to isolate, but to be ready to serve.

Let’s look at the layers:

- **Water:** A collapsible bottle and a LifeStraw. Francis knew the sacredness of water; we carry it like a holy relic.
- **Food:** Simple, nourishing, portable. Oats, nuts, dried fruit, jerky. Enough to share.
- **Clothing:** One spare tunic—today, a dry pair of socks, a bandana, maybe a lightweight rain jacket.
- **Shelter:** A tarp and cord. Francis slept under the stars, but he’d recognize the mercy of nylon.

- **Light:** A candle, or today, a hand-crank flashlight. “Let your light shine” was not metaphor alone.
- **Love:** The most essential item. Everything else is dust without it.

Packing as Spiritual Discipline

Packing light is more than a skill—it is a spiritual path. Every item asks us a question: Do I need this, or do I fear without it? Is this about survival, or about control?

Francis teaches us to carry the Cross, not the closet. Every extra item is a weight on our back and on our soul. So we ask:

- Can I share this?
- Can I bless someone with it?
- Can I do without?

Packing becomes prayer. Weight becomes witness. The backpack becomes a mobile monastery.

Reimagining Pilgrimage in a Collapsing World

Pilgrimage was once a luxury for the devout. Now, it may become a necessity. As systems fail and safety nets fray, more of us will live from pack to pack, shelter to shelter. But in this nomadism, there is grace. We return to the God of tents, the God of deserts, the God who travels with exiles.

Francis would recognize this moment. He would walk into the collapse with joy, not fear. He would bless the ruins. He would build an altar out of trash. He would sing with the birds above the burned forests.

He would not ask, “What should I carry to survive?”
He would ask, “What must I leave behind to live?”

Reflection Prompt:

Take out your own bag. Lay it all out. What’s truly essential? What could you give away tomorrow? What weighs your body—or your soul—down?

Prayer:

God of the open road, teach me to carry only what love requires. Strip me of excess. Fill my pack with mercy, and my heart with courage. May my backpack be a tabernacle, my steps a hymn, my journey a Gospel. Amen.

Chapter Two

Prepping as Prophecy

“Be alert,” Jesus said. “Keep your lamps lit.”

He wasn’t just talking about spiritual awareness. He was talking to people who lived under occupation, who feared sudden raids, who knew hunger and exile. In short, he was talking to people like us.

Too often, prepping is dismissed as paranoia. It’s the realm of conspiracy theorists, doomsday hoarders, or right-wing militia men. But I want to offer you a different vision: **prepping as prophetic practice**—rooted in love, not fear; solidarity, not selfishness.

Saint Francis was a prophet. He lived lightly to speak loudly. His stripped-down life was a challenge to the Church’s wealth and the Empire’s excess. In our day, prepping—when done through a Franciscan lens—can be just as prophetic.

Not Just for the End of the World

The world doesn’t end all at once.

For the single mother evicted with her kids, the world ends on the first of the month.

For the elder who dies alone in a heatwave, the world ends silently.

For the trans kid abandoned by their family, the world ends when the door slams shut.

For the earth scorched by pipelines, it ends with each drop of oil spilled on sacred soil.

We don’t prep because we’re afraid of apocalypse.

We prep because **the apocalypse is already unevenly distributed**. We prep because we choose to stand with those already in the rubble.

This isn’t survivalism. It’s survival **with**.

Prophets with Water Filters

Imagine Ezekiel in a tent city. Imagine Jeremiah with a solar lantern. Imagine Deborah handing out water purification tablets to climate refugees. That’s the kind of prophet we need now—not abstract preachers, but gritty companions. A nun with a backpack. A queer street medic with a satchel full of antibiotics. A radical grandma passing out peanut butter and rosaries.

The tools of prophecy now include:

- Water filters and first aid kits
- Mutual aid phone trees
- Homemade fireproof blankets

- Pre-packed go-bags for the homeless
- Handwritten prayers tucked into trail mix packets

These are the sacraments of survival. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “I was hungry and you gave me food. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Prepping for the Sake of the Poor

True Christian prepping is never about hoarding. It is about **healing**. It’s about remembering that our spiritual ancestors were desert people—Abraham, Moses, Hagar, Jesus—all of them wandered, all of them relied on daily bread.

Francis lived among the lepers, not the lords. He embraced voluntary poverty so he could be in solidarity with those who had no choice. When we prep, we prepare not just for ourselves, but for the people left behind by every system that fails.

Every extra flashlight is a chance to light someone’s way.
Every meal in your pack might become a Eucharist in the street.
Every water jug is a holy well.

Prepping as Defiance

In a world that wants you dependent, prepping is an act of resistance.

- Against a healthcare system that profits from pain—pack herbs, tinctures, and healing knowledge.
- Against capitalism’s grip—learn to sew, patch, cook, fix.
- Against fossil-fueled destruction—travel lightly, walk often, share always.
- Against despair—carry joy, humor, courage, and song.

Prepping doesn’t mean we expect to be alone. It means we’re building communities of resilience. It means our faith has muscle, not just music. It means the Gospel is not theoretical—it’s in our packs, our pockets, our prayers.

You are a prophet with a backpack. Don’t wait for the collapse to begin your ministry. It’s already here.

Reflection Prompt:

What would it mean for your prepping to become a prophetic act? How can you align your emergency planning with radical love and mutual care?

Prayer:

God of the storm and the shelter, make me ready—not for my own safety alone, but for the

healing of the world. Teach me to prep like a prophet, to store mercy, to pack hope, to share from my sacred stash. In your name, I carry light. Amen.

Chapter Three

Holy Poverty in a Collapsing Economy

The economy is breaking.

The cost of housing is obscene. The cost of food is cruel. The cost of medical care is damnation by capitalism. For the poor, the sick, the disabled, the aged, and the displaced, the market offers nothing but punishment. And in the richest empire the world has ever seen, the cry of the poor still echoes: **“There is no room at the inn.”**

Francis heard that cry.

He was born into wealth. His father sold fine cloth. But Francis tore off those garments in public protest. He chose a life of what he called *Lady Poverty*, not to glorify suffering, but to reject greed. He believed that God lived closer to the beggar than to the banker. He believed that if Jesus was born in a stable, we should not fear the barn over the palace.

And so we ask:

What does holy poverty look like in a collapsing economy?

Voluntary Poverty vs. Forced Poverty

Let us be clear: there is nothing romantic about hunger. There is no spiritual badge for sleeping in a bus station. Holy poverty is **not** about glorifying suffering. It is about *choosing* a path of solidarity, simplicity, and spiritual clarity—**especially** when others have no choice at all.

Voluntary poverty is not about having nothing. It’s about owning nothing that owns *you*. It’s about reorienting your life away from accumulation and toward compassion.

In a collapsing economy, voluntary poverty means:

- Downsizing to make space for others.
- Living with less so others can live with dignity.
- Learning from the poor instead of trying to “save” them.
- Sharing your food, your tools, your knowledge, your shelter.

Refusing the Empire’s Bargain

Empire will always offer us a trade:

“Give up your soul, and we’ll give you security. Buy in, sell out, and you’ll be safe.”

But that safety is an illusion. The more we buy in, the more we become enslaved. Student debt, medical debt, housing debt—these are the shackles of modern empire.

Francis refused that bargain. So must we.

- We refuse to believe we are only what we can produce.
- We refuse to believe value is measured in money.
- We refuse to believe dignity must be earned.

Instead, we find abundance in simplicity. Not because it’s easy—but because it’s **freeing**.

Backpack Economics

Here’s the truth: you cannot carry capitalism in a backpack.

The system is too heavy.

The system is built for those with storage units, portfolios, power tools, and property lines.

But in a backpack? There is no room for profit margins. There is no space for endless consumption.

When you live light, you live free.

You begin to ask different questions:

- Do I need this, or do I just want to feel safe?
- Is this a necessity, or a numbing agent?
- Who profits from my fear?

The backpack becomes a filter. What fits in here must serve love. What doesn’t—let it go.

The Economics of Enough

Holy poverty is built on one sacred principle: **enough**.

Not excess. Not indulgence. Not starvation either. But **enough**.

It’s the manna in the desert. The loaves and fishes. The widow’s oil that didn’t run out.

Francis believed in a God of enough. When we embrace holy poverty, we learn to trust that enough exists *outside* the market.

- Enough kindness to go around
- Enough bread to share
- Enough skill in our communities

- Enough resilience to rise again
- Enough grace to survive this system and build something new

Living Poor, Loving Rich

In the end, holy poverty isn't about what we give up.
It's about what we gain:

- **Time** to pray, to love, to serve.
- **Space** to welcome others.
- **Freedom** from debt, shame, and consumerism.
- **Connection** to those who are suffering.

Francis said, "It is in giving that we receive."

In a collapsing economy, that's not idealism—it's a strategy for survival with soul.

Reflection Prompt:

What does "enough" look like for you? Where are you still trying to fill your soul with stuff? What might you release to walk freer, love deeper?

Prayer:

God of the widow's oil and the loaves of love, teach me the art of enough. Strip away the lies of lack. Let me find richness in your people, your presence, and your peace. May I be poor in things but rich in grace. Amen.

Chapter Four

The Backpack as Tabernacle

Every church has a tabernacle—a sacred space where the divine presence dwells. For many, it's a golden box behind the altar, filled with consecrated bread. But what if holiness could be found not just in cathedrals, but on trails, at bus stops, in back alleys, or under a tarp?

What if your backpack... could become a tabernacle?

It carries more than tools and food. It carries your prayers, your almsgiving, your witness. It is the mobile monastery on your back. It is where practicality meets prophecy.

The road is your chapel.

The stars are your stained glass.

And the backpack—your traveling tabernacle.

What Makes a Space Sacred?

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Israelites carried a *mishkan*, a tabernacle in the wilderness. It was portable, provisional, but filled with holy presence. God chose to dwell not in permanence, but in **movement**.

Francis understood this.

He preached in fields. He slept in caves. He prayed under trees. His sanctuary had no walls but the sky. His altar was the earth.

So we, too, make our sanctuary small enough to carry—and wide enough to serve.

Contents of a Sacred Pack

Let us reimagine the items in your backpack—not as gear, but as sacraments:

- **Water Bottle** – A baptismal font. Every sip a reminder of life and renewal.
- **First Aid Kit** – A healing ministry. The oil and bandages of the Good Samaritan.
- **Notebook** – A Book of Hours. Record your prayers, visions, encounters.
- **Flashlight** – A candle in the darkness. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”
- **Food** – Eucharistic potential. A shared granola bar is a communion feast in exile.
- **Tarp** – Your shelter is holy ground. You camp as Jesus did—with nowhere to lay his head.

Everything becomes liturgy. Every tool becomes theology. Every act of care becomes communion.

Living from the Tabernacle

In a collapsing world, the church must become portable.

No longer can we rely on stained glass institutions. We need saints who carry the holy with them—into the streets, the shelters, the wild. We need tabernacles on wheels, in wagons, on backs.

You are that tabernacle.

Your backpack is an ark of justice.

Your daily acts of survival are sacred liturgies of resistance.

When you pull out a bandage for a blistered stranger, it is a laying on of hands.

When you share dried fruit with a hungry child, it is sacred hospitality.

When you whisper a prayer under your tarp as rain pelts the nylon, it is cathedral music.

A Theology of Mobility

Francis didn't stay still. Jesus didn't stay still. The Spirit is never static.

Our theology must walk. Our Gospel must move. Our love must be packed up and ready to go.

The world is shifting under our feet. But when you carry the sacred in your bag, **you never walk alone.**

Reflection Prompt:

Unpack your bag and look again. What do these items say about your values, your fears, your hopes? How might you treat your backpack as a holy object?

Prayer:

God of the wandering ark and the roadside altar, bless my backpack. Make it a tabernacle of compassion, a mobile monastery of mercy. May each zipper echo your name. May each item serve love. Let my path be prayer and my pack be holy. Amen.

Chapter Five

Shelter in the Storm: Tents, Tarps, and Trust

Storms are coming.

Some are already here—economic storms, climate storms, political storms, personal storms. Tornadoes that sweep away your job. Hurricanes that drown your town. Floods of medical bills. Wildfires of grief. Ice storms of abandonment.

You can feel it in your bones: the world is not safe. And so, like the Israelites in the desert, we build shelter with what we have. Tents. Tarps. Trust.

This chapter is about finding sacred shelter when the world no longer offers you a roof.

Jesus Slept Under the Stars

“He had no place to lay his head.”

Let those words sink in. Jesus was not a homeowner. He was itinerant. His sanctuary was often a hillside. His bedroom was sometimes a boat. His shelter was not built of stone but of presence.

We forget this when we idolize buildings and institutions. But the Christ we follow was a homeless healer, a divine drifter. He knew what it meant to pitch a tent with faith and a prayer.

Tents: Temporary, Tender, and True

A tent is humble. It is easily torn. But it is also portable, flexible, and open to the elements. The early church met in homes and open fields. Monastics camped out in deserts and forests.

Tents are sacred now. They house climate refugees, protestors, and unhoused prophets. They are temples of resistance in parking lots and under overpasses.

To sleep in a tent is to say:

- I will not cling to false permanence.
- I will not pretend the system is safe.
- I will trust in the God of the wandering.

Tarps: The Gospel of Improvisation

A tarp is grace.

It's not glamorous, but it's resilient. It can become a roof, a wall, a floor, a cloak, a banner. It teaches adaptability—the most holy of prepper virtues.

Jesus once said, “The wind blows where it chooses.” The tarp listens to that wind. It bends, it flaps, it shelters. In the age of collapse, the tarp may be the new vestment of the priesthood of all survivors.

In the Franciscan way, tarps and tents are not signs of failure. **They are sacraments of faith.**

Trust: The Shelter Within

Gear matters. Shelter matters. But trust is the strongest structure we carry.

The psalmist sang, “You are my refuge and my fortress.”

Francis prayed, “We are pilgrims and strangers in this world.”

And we, too, must learn to say: Even if I have no house, **I have a home in God.**

This is not denial. It is defiance.

- Defiance of the lie that worth is found in square footage.
- Defiance of the myth that safety is only for the rich.
- Defiance of the empire's scarcity mindset.

Trust says: I may not have walls, but I am surrounded by grace.

Franciscan Shelter Strategies

Here are a few spiritual and practical shelter tips for the wandering nun or pilgrim soul:

- **Bless your tent.** Name it. Pray over it. Let it become your monastery.
 - **Anchor your tarp with compassion.** Each tie-down is a tether to community.
 - **Keep a candle lantern.** Light it each night. Let it be your sanctuary lamp.
 - **Sleep in peace.** Even if you're afraid, say, "Into your hands, O God, I place my soul."
 - **Trust the morning.** Even the longest storm ends. Even the coldest night gives way to sunrise.
-

Reflection Prompt:

What kinds of "shelters" have you relied on that were not safe? How is God calling you to trust in more portable, humble, holy forms of protection?

Prayer:

God of the tent and the torn tarp, shelter me beneath your mercy. Wrap me in grace. Be my refuge when the winds rise, my wall when the world collapses. Let every tent I pitch be a sanctuary. Let every storm draw me nearer to your presence. Amen.

Chapter Six

Sacred Simplicity: Living Light to Carry Christ

We are drowning in too much.

Too much stuff.

Too much noise.

Too much debt.

Too many notifications, prescriptions, schedules, expectations.

In a world addicted to excess, **simplicity is revolutionary**. And for the pilgrim, the prepper, the nun with a backpack—**simplicity is survival**.

Saint Francis didn't just preach simplicity. He embodied it. He didn't declutter his life for aesthetics. He let go because love needed room to move. His simplicity was radical, rough-edged, and prophetic.

Today, sacred simplicity may be the most urgent resistance of all.

Carrying Too Much Will Kill You

Ask anyone who has walked long distances: *the lighter you pack, the farther you go*. A five-pound sleeping bag feels like a boulder by mile twenty. A spare pair of jeans becomes unnecessary weight when your body aches and your spirit strains.

The same is true for our lives.

The emotional clutter.

The spiritual baggage.

The consumer debt.

The fear of not having enough.

What we carry becomes what carries us—or crushes us.

Jesus told his disciples to go without a bag, without bread, without a second tunic. Why? Not to torture them. But because *freedom is light*. You cannot carry the Kingdom and capitalism in the same pack.

Simplicity as a Spiritual Practice

Sacred simplicity is not just about possessions—it is about posture.

- Saying no so you can say yes to what matters.
- Living within limits—not because you must, but because it's holy.
- Embracing stillness, silence, and slowness.
- Making space for people instead of performance.

Francis lived in a hut made of sticks. Clare wore patched habits and slept on straw. These weren't aesthetic choices. They were deep declarations: **I will not sell my soul to own the world.**

Can you say that?

The Weight of Wealth

Let's be honest. Wealth complicates.

- It isolates.
- It insulates.
- It deceives.
- It distracts.

The wealthier we become, the harder it is to feel the Gospel's sting. The more we own, the more we must protect. But the way of Jesus is not gated communities—it's open roads and shared tables.

Sacred simplicity is a letting go that sets us free.

- From ego.
- From consumer identity.
- From the empire's lies.
- From spiritual constipation.

It's not about being poor. It's about being **empty enough for grace** to enter.

Living Light in the Age of Collapse

The world is unraveling. And the lighter you travel, the better you'll move through the rubble.

When you practice sacred simplicity:

- You are more adaptable.
- You can respond quickly to need.
- You require less, so you fear less.
- You become a vessel for joy, not just survival.

Lightness is liberation.

The lighter you pack, the more you can carry love.

The simpler you live, the clearer you see Christ.

The less you hoard, the more you can heal.

This is not about minimalism as a trend.

This is about discipleship as defiance.

This is about surviving the empire with nothing but a sleeping bag and the Spirit of God.

Reflection Prompt:

Where in your life have you confused clutter for comfort? What can you release—physically, emotionally, spiritually—to walk lighter and live freer?

Prayer:

God of the empty hands and full heart, teach me the sacred art of simplicity. Help me to shed the unnecessary. Free me from addiction to more. May I carry only what Christ would carry. Let my backpack be light, and my love be deep. Amen.

Chapter Seven

Finding God on the Road

God is not where we expect.

Not always in the church.
Not always in the rituals.
Not always in the comforts we construct to feel close to the divine.

Sometimes—**often**—God is out on the road.

On the long walk with blistered feet.
On the detour after the dream crumbles.
On the margins, in the shadows, on the move.

The first Christians were called *followers of the Way*. Not followers of an institution. Not members of a club. But pilgrims. People of the road. Saints with dust on their feet.

And when we take up our backpacks and walk into the unknown, we enter that sacred lineage.

God of the Detour

We want straight paths. Predictable turns. GPS certainty.

But God often leads us the long way around.

- Through the wilderness instead of the freeway.
- Through grief instead of clarity.
- Through the underside of society instead of the center.

The Israelites wandered forty years. Jesus took the backroads. Francis meandered with no plan but love.

The road is rarely efficient, but it is always revelatory.

Every wrong turn is a holy possibility. Every dead-end can become a doorway to grace.

Roadside Altars

On the road, you start to notice what you'd normally miss:

- A flower growing through asphalt.
- A stranger's unexpected kindness.
- A moment of silence between highway hums.
- The Spirit whispering in your own breath.

These are roadside altars. Invitations to reverence in the ordinary.

Francis called the birds his brothers and the sun his sibling. He prayed with trees and wept in caves. The road taught him to see **everything** as sacred.

It can teach you the same.

When you walk slowly, carry lightly, and listen deeply, **God shows up everywhere.**

Faith That Walks

Too many Christians today have a faith that sits—static, sedentary, domesticated.

But the Gospel moves. It walks. It wanders. It goes to Samaria, not just Jerusalem. It travels light. It says, “Come, follow me,” not “Come, sit here forever.”

To follow Christ is to walk.

Even if your feet are swollen. Even if you walk with a cane. Even if your walking is spiritual, metaphorical, emotional.

Movement is holy.

So if you are stuck—start walking.

If you are lost—keep walking.

If the church has harmed you—walk out and walk on.

You may find God not in the pew but in the parking lot.

Spiritual GPS: Getting Lost to Be Found

There’s something terrifying about not knowing where you’re going.

But there’s something sacred about it too.

Jesus never gave a map.

Francis never had an itinerary.

Clare walked off into the dark with nothing but trust.

Sometimes the only GPS is Grace Positioning System.

- You go where love calls.
- You turn when the Spirit nudges.
- You rest when your soul says enough.

God is not a destination. God is the road itself.

Reflection Prompt:

What road are you walking right now—physically, emotionally, spiritually? Where have you met God in an unexpected place or person? Where might the Spirit be asking you to walk next?

Prayer:

God of dusty roads and divine detours, walk with me. Be my compass, my map, my shade and

sun. Let me find You not just at the end of the journey, but in each step along the way. When I am lost, be my Way. When I am weary, be my Rest. When I am searching, be my Home. Amen.

Chapter Eight

Mutual Aid as Monastic Vow

In a time of collapse, community is survival.
And in a time of empire, **mutual aid is resistance**.

The monastery of the future will not be a cloister of stone, but a network of shared meals, passed water bottles, hand-stitched clothes, and healing herbs traded beneath tarps.

This is the new monasticism: where the vow of poverty becomes shared abundance. Where the vow of obedience becomes listening to the cry of the poor. Where the vow of chastity becomes radical, boundless love.

Where mutual aid is not an emergency tactic—it's a **holy commitment**.

What Is Mutual Aid?

Mutual aid is not charity.

Charity trickles down.
Mutual aid rises from below.

Charity creates dependency.
Mutual aid builds solidarity.

Charity asks, "What can I spare?"
Mutual aid asks, "What do we all need, and how do we meet it—together?"

In the earliest church, they had all things in common. They sold their possessions and gave to anyone in need. This wasn't communism or capitalism—it was **Christ**. It was the Gospel made flesh in bread and blankets, coins and companionship.

Mutual Aid Is Franciscan

Francis gave away everything. But he didn't retreat into solitude—he created community. The early Franciscan brothers begged not just for survival, but to share. To gather food for the hungry. To build networks of care among the outcast, the leper, the widow, and the wanderer.

Clare created a sisterhood built not on status, but on shared purpose and holy dependence.

Today, we must reclaim this legacy. Not as nostalgia—but as **necessity**.

Mutual aid is the monastic vow **adapted for a broken world**.

What Mutual Aid Looks Like in Practice

Mutual aid isn't complicated—but it is countercultural.

It might look like:

- A community fridge on the sidewalk
- A stash of clean socks for unhoused neighbors
- A first-aid kit shared at a protest
- A GoFundMe shared, not scorned
- A diaper bank at a radical church
- A phone tree for storm preparedness
- A pot of soup, ladled to anyone who knocks

It's about building **networks, not hierarchies**. Relationships, not transactions.

Francis didn't ask who was "worthy." He asked, "Who is in need?"

Vowing to Each Other

The monastic vow in the age of collapse is not made to an abbess or a rulebook.

It's made to the people on your block.

The people in your encampment.

The elder who can't afford groceries.

The queer youth cast out by their family.

The disabled friend who needs help reaching the doctor.

What if we vowed to:

- Show up when it's inconvenient
- Share when we're not sure we have enough
- Care without conditions
- Organize for liberation, not just relief

This is mutual aid as spiritual practice.

This is the vow that rebuilds the world.

Holy Dependency

We've been taught that needing each other is weakness.

But Francis knew: *dependence is sacred*.

The birds depend on the sky.

The flowers depend on the soil.

The monk depends on the mercy of strangers.

The body of Christ is not self-sufficient—it is interwoven.

Mutual aid reminds us: *we belong to one another*.

We are the answer to each other's prayers.

Reflection Prompt:

Who do you depend on? Who depends on you? How might you build or deepen a network of sacred mutual aid in your life?

Prayer:

God of manna and shared loaves, teach me to need without shame, and to give without pride. Knit me into a community of compassion. May I be a vessel of mutual aid, a carrier of care, a weaver of holy interdependence. Let our shared struggle become our shared salvation. Amen.

Chapter Nine

Survival Skills as Spiritual Disciplines

When the church teaches “spiritual disciplines,” we often think of fasting, prayer, solitude, Scripture reading. And these are beautiful.

But what if, in the age of climate collapse, economic injustice, and mass displacement, **building a fire is a form of prayer?**

What if **purifying water is a sacrament?**

What if **first aid is a laying on of hands?**

Survival skills are not just for the rugged or the reclusive. For the Franciscan, for the pilgrim, for the faithful soul with a backpack, **survival is spiritual**. It is how we love God with all our strength—and our neighbors with our knowledge.

Survival as Resistance

In a world that was not built to keep everyone alive, survival becomes resistance.

- When you grow food instead of depending on poisoned supply chains, you resist.

- When you make herbal salves instead of relying on unaffordable pharmaceuticals, you resist.
- When you share a tent and not just a tract, you resist.

And every act of survival grounded in love becomes sacred.

Jesus did not just teach theology—he fed people.

Francis did not just pray—he built shelters with his hands.

Clare did not just sing psalms—she defended her monastery with her body.

Survival skills are discipleship in motion.

The Spirituality of Practical Things

Here are just a few survival practices—and the spiritual disciplines they echo:

- **Fire-making** → *Kindling inner light, learning patience, honoring transformation.*
- **Water purification** → *Discernment, cleansing, faith in the unseen.*
- **Shelter-building** → *Hospitality, sacred space, protecting the vulnerable.*
- **Foraging and herbal medicine** → *Creation care, gratitude, earth reverence.*
- **First aid** → *Healing ministry, anointing, presence with the wounded.*
- **Navigation by stars or signs** → *Guidance, trust, walking by faith.*
- **Cooking with little** → *Eucharist, community, blessing what we have.*

When we treat these not as "just in case" skills, but as **ongoing liturgy**, they become holy habits.

Learn, Then Teach

Franciscans do not hoard wisdom. If you learn how to make fire with wet wood, teach a neighbor. If you learn what herbs help with fever or grief, write it down, pass it on.

Make survival a shared skill.

Make preparation a community art.

And don't let imposter syndrome stop you. You don't need to be Bear Grylls. You just need to be willing to **try, fail, learn, and love**.

Healing as Holiness

So many of us have trauma related to survival. Abuse. Houselessness. Disability. Neglect. Being told we're not "enough" to make it.

But in the Franciscan Way, survival is not a test—it's a testimony.

You survived.
You endured.
You are learning how to tend your wounds and teach others to do the same.

That's holy.

That's Christ-like.

That's how we build the Kingdom: not in stained glass chapels, but in the fire circle, the tarp shelter, the herbal poultice, the shared meal in the ruins.

Reflection Prompt:

What practical skills do you already have that could be reimagined as spiritual disciplines?
What do you feel called to learn for the sake of yourself and your community?

Prayer:

God of fire and field, of bandage and bread, make my hands holy. Teach me to survive in ways that serve, to prepare in ways that protect the least. Let every knot I tie, every flame I strike, every wound I dress be done in love. May my survival be sacred. May my skill become blessing. Amen.

Chapter Ten

Pilgrimage, Protest, and the Prophetic Life

There comes a moment in every journey when walking becomes more than movement.

It becomes **defiance**.

To walk when you are told to sit down.

To speak when you are told to stay silent.

To gather when you are told to scatter.

To carry your sacredness on your back through a world that treats you as disposable—this is pilgrimage as protest.

And it is holy.

Pilgrimage Is Not a Vacation

Modern culture sells pilgrimage like a wellness retreat—walk the Camino, pose for Instagram, find yourself.

But real pilgrimage is raw.
It is blisters and uncertainty.
It is choosing the long road.
It is walking into danger—not away from it.

Jesus' entire ministry was a protest walk—from Galilee to Golgotha.

Francis' walk to the Sultan during the Crusades was not a tourist excursion—it was an act of nonviolent resistance.

Clare didn't walk far, but her steadfastness behind the walls of San Damiano was a form of immovable protest against patriarchy, war, and wealth.

To walk for justice is to walk with God.

Protest Is a Pilgrimage of the Soul

When we march through city streets chanting against war, poverty, or state violence, that is a sacred procession.

- We walk not to conquer, but to confront.
- We move not to escape, but to expose.
- We carry signs like sacred texts, shouting truth into a world of silence.

The prophets of old did this too—walking naked, cooking over dung, smashing clay jars, lying on their sides for months—*embodied disruption*.

Today, a nun with a backpack sleeping on a park bench is a prophet.

A queer elder in a protest wheelchair is a prophet.

A teen handing out water to protestors is a prophet.

And every step they take is holy ground.

Living the Prophetic Life

Being a prophet doesn't mean predicting the future.

It means **telling the truth about the present**—especially when it's dangerous to do so.

- To say, "The poor deserve better," is prophetic.
- To say, "Black lives matter," is prophetic.
- To say, "Trans lives are sacred," is prophetic.
- To say, "The earth is groaning, and the time is now," is prophetic.

Prophets do not always have pulpits. Sometimes, they have tents.

Sometimes, they preach by presence—by showing up with a meal, a flashlight, a shoulder to cry on.

Francis never sought power. He sought presence.
He walked the land and reminded it of God.
So must we.

Marching Orders for the Road

If you're ready to live as a pilgrim prophet, here are your marching orders:

1. **Walk Light** — Let go of what binds you. Keep your pack and your conscience uncluttered.
2. **Walk Loud** — Speak the truth. Sing justice. Refuse to be invisible.
3. **Walk Together** — Build communities that carry each other. Mutual aid is how we march.
4. **Walk in Love** — Protest with compassion. Anger is holy, but it must be rooted in love.
5. **Walk Until the Walls Fall** — Like Jericho, keep circling. Even when it seems futile, walk on.

Reflection Prompt:

Where are you being called to walk—not just physically, but spiritually, relationally, politically?
What truth are you afraid to say out loud that your body is ready to live?

Prayer:

God of the march and the meadow, the protest and the pilgrimage, give me feet that will not falter. Let my walking be witness. Let my silence be shattered. Let my presence speak peace and provocation. May I walk like Jesus walked—straight into the empire's heart, with nothing but love and truth in my backpack. Amen.

Conclusion

We Are All Wayfarers Now

Whether we chose it or not, the world we knew is gone.

The certainties have crumbled. The systems are teetering. The maps no longer match the terrain. And here we are, standing on the edge of something terrifying and holy.

We are all pilgrims now.

Some of us live in tents.

Some of us live in spiritual homelessness.

Some of us are nomads in grief, in poverty, in transition, in trauma.

But all of us are moving.

And that movement is not a curse—it's a call.

The old ways of security and success are collapsing. The backpack is the new tabernacle. The tarp is the new temple. The street medic is the new priest. The protest march is the new procession.

This isn't about survivalism.

It's about the Gospel.

- The Gospel that walks.
- The Gospel that shares.
- The Gospel that sleeps on the floor with the outcast.
- The Gospel that doesn't just ask what Jesus would do—but **does it** with blisters and faith and a pocketful of granola.

You, dear reader, are being invited into a holy life:

- A life of sacred simplicity.
- A life of radical trust.
- A life of compassionate preparedness.
- A life that defies empire by loving what empire throws away.

You don't need a monastery to live this way. You just need a backpack and a willingness to walk.

Carry light.

Love fiercely.

Give everything.

Bless everyone.

And when the world says, "You don't belong,"
say back:

"I am a nun with a backpack. I belong everywhere love leads me."

Final Prayer:

*Holy God of the road and the ruin, of the rising sun and the falling empire—
bless my journey.*

Let my steps preach peace.

*Let my pack carry healing.
Let my eyes see the sacred in the scraps.
And when I am tired,
let me remember:
I walk not alone.
The Christ who camped among us
still walks beside us.
Still sleeps under bridges.
Still passes the bread in parking lots.
Still laughs under starlight.
Still whispers:
Keep walking.
I'm with you.
Always.*

Appendix A

OFC Minimalist Packing List

A Franciscan Clarean Guide to Walking Light and Living Holy

This is not a survivalist stockpile. This is a sacred inventory—a spiritual and practical packing list for those walking the Way with compassion, courage, and trust. Designed for pilgrims, preppers, protestors, and prophets, this minimalist list reflects the values of the Order of Franciscan Clareans: simplicity, solidarity, and sacred care.

Clothing (Functional + Layered)

- 1 lightweight, weather-resistant cloak or jacket (bonus if it looks monastic!)
 - 2 tunics or shirts (breathable, durable, simple)
 - 1 pair of sturdy, comfortable pants (or skirt with leggings, if preferred)
 - 2 pairs of wool socks (essential in cold or wet climates)
 - 1 bandana or head covering (multi-use: sun, hygiene, prayer, dignity)
 - 1 pair of durable shoes or sandals (walkable miles)
 - Optional: compact rain poncho or tarp cloak
-

Shelter & Sleep

- 1 tarp or ultralight tent (multi-use: shelter, privacy, protection)

- 1 emergency blanket or sleeping bag (lightweight + compact)
 - 1 ground pad or foldable mat (to protect your body and your spirit)
 - 1 small cloth (altar cloth, towel, prayer space)
-

Water & Hygiene

- 1 reusable water bottle or collapsible container
 - 1 portable water filter or purification tablets
 - 1 bar soap (wrapped in cloth, biodegradable)
 - 1 small hand towel
 - Toothbrush + natural paste or baking soda
 - Optional: menstrual supplies, cloth pads, or cup
 - Compact first aid kit (bandages, salve, pain relief, herbal tincture)
-

Food & Fuel

- 1 small mess kit (cup, bowl, spoon)
 - 1 folding knife or multi-tool
 - 1 fire source (waterproof matches, lighter, ferro rod)
 - 2-3 days of dry, shareable food (oats, nuts, dried fruit, jerky, rice cakes)
 - Herbal tea blend or portable nourishment powder
 - Optional: lightweight camp stove and fuel tabs
-

Spiritual & Communal Tools

- Pocket-sized prayer book or journal
 - Pencil or pen (for writing, sketching, or passing notes of hope)
 - Pocket-sized New Testament, Psalms, or interfaith sacred text
 - Tiny cloth cross, icon, or Franciscan token
 - Small notebook with addresses or names for prayer
 - Rosary, mala, prayer beads, or meditative object
-

Healing, Aid, and Mutual Care

- Herbal salve (comfrey, calendula, plantain, etc.)
- Bandages, gauze, safety pins
- Pain relief herbs or OTC tablets

- Anti-nausea, antihistamines, and antiseptic
 - Anointing oil or holy water in a small vial
 - Extra socks, protein bar, and clean bandana to share
-

Extras (for Spirit, Sanity, and Safety)

- Hand-crank flashlight or solar light
 - Small patch kit (needle, thread, duct tape, safety pins)
 - Trash bag or dry sack for gear protection
 - A favorite psalm, poem, or quote taped inside your bag
 - One thing that makes you smile (stone, shell, letter, tiny stuffed animal)
-

Things to Leave Behind

- Excessive electronics
 - Brand obsession
 - Overpacked fear
 - Empire's urgency
 - Judgment
 - Shame
 - Any weight that keeps you from love
-

Final Blessing:

Pack light, walk boldly, love fiercely.

This list is not about perfection—it's about presence.

Carry what you need to love, to serve, to survive.

Leave room in your bag—and in your heart—for grace.

Appendix B

Prayers for Preppers and Pilgrims

For those who walk, wander, wait, and prepare with holy hope

These prayers are meant to be prayed under the stars, at rest stops, in alleyways, before protests, in tents and on trails, wherever you find yourself. They are field-tested liturgies for the journeying soul.



Prayer for Packing

God of holy travels and sacred simplicity,
bless my packing with discernment.
Let me carry only what love requires.
Remove fear, excess, and ego from my load.
May every item serve compassion.
May my pack be light, and my spirit lighter still.
Prepare me, not just for the journey,
but for those I'll meet along the way.
Amen.



Prayer for Setting Up Shelter

Sheltering Spirit, who tabernacled with the wandering,
bless this ground beneath my feet.
May my tarp be strong,
my tent be sanctuary,
my resting place be sacred.
Keep me safe,
but never so comfortable I forget my calling.
Let each rope I tie be an act of faith.
Let this temporary shelter remind me:
Your love is my true home.
Amen.



Prayer for Water

God of rivers, rain, and renewal,
bless this water.
Make it clean.
Make it life.
Make it a baptism in every sip.
Thank you for this holy, flowing grace.
Let me never take for granted what others thirst for.
As I drink, help me remember:
Justice flows like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.
Amen.

Prayer Before a Simple Meal

Bread of life,
thank you for this food—however humble, however small.
Bless the hands that grew it, gathered it, gave it.
Let each bite strengthen me for the work of love.
If there is enough to share, make me generous.
If there is little, let gratitude be my feast.
Feed my body, fuel my spirit,
and nourish my soul with hope.
Amen.

Prayer for First Aid and Healing

Healer of bodies and hearts,
be present in this tending.
Guide my hands.
Steady my breath.
Make bandages become blessings.
Turn balm into sacrament.
Let this care be more than medical—
let it be holy,
a whisper of your restoring touch.
Amen.

Prayer Before Sleeping Outdoors

God of night skies and wandering stars,
watch over me as I sleep beneath your canvas.
Guard me from harm.
Calm my fears.
Wrap me in peace.
Let each sound in the dark be part of your lullaby.
Remind me that I am not alone.
That your love stretches wider than the sky.
And your angels pitch tents, too.
Amen.

Prayer for the Road Ahead

God of journey and justice,
as I rise, so does your mercy.
As I walk, so does your witness.
As I stumble, so does your strength catch me.
Make this road holy beneath my feet.
Let every encounter be a revelation.
Let my footsteps echo peace.
And may I walk—not to escape the world,
but to meet it with love.
Amen.

Acknowledgments

To walk this path is never a solo journey.

I want to thank the saints and prophets—both ancient and living—who walk beside me and whose wisdom has guided each step of this book.

To **Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi**, who showed us how to love without owning, walk without fear, and live without walls—your radical trust and gentle fierceness continue to set my soul ablaze.

To **the members of the Order of Franciscan Clareans**, who are building a new way of community in the ruins of empire. Your courage, kindness, and prophetic presence inspire every word of this work.

To **those living on the streets, in tents, and under tarps**—you are my teachers. You reveal the face of Christ in every resilient breath. You are not forgotten. You are not disposable. You are sacred.

To **my fellow pilgrims, protestors, and preppers**—the queer ones, the disabled ones, the weary caregivers, the holy fools—you are proof that the Gospel still walks.

To **my beloved Lacie**, whose love made even the wilderness feel like home. I carry your memory in every step I take.

To **readers and seekers everywhere**—especially those who feel like they don't belong in the church, who've been exiled from comfort or cast out by cruelty—this book is for you. Your longing for God is not misplaced. Your journey matters. You are not alone.

And to the **God of the open road**—who pitched a tent among us, who wandered with outcasts, who made the dust sacred—thank you for walking with me, even when I didn't know how to walk with myself.

May this book be a breadcrumb trail for others. May it help the lost find a little light. May it bless the backpacks of a thousand wayfarers.

Amen and amen.

About the Author

Sister Abigail Hester, OFC is a prophetic voice, a wandering nun, and the founding companion of the *Order of Franciscan Clareans*—a new monastic community devoted to justice, simplicity, and radical love. A transgender Christian, a contemplative caregiver, and a theologian of the margins, Sister Abigail writes with fierce compassion for the poor, the displaced, the disabled, and the exiled.

Her ministry combines queer theology, Franciscan spirituality, survival wisdom, and liberation ethics for a world in collapse. Whether she's tending herbs, marching for justice, sleeping under the stars, or writing by candlelight, Sister Abigail carries her calling in a backpack and her Gospel in bare feet.

She is the author of numerous books, devotionals, and commentaries including *Casting Out Empire*, *Little Girl, Arise*, *The Franciscan Clarean Way*, and *The Table of Success*. Her blog, **franciscanclareans.blogspot.com**, offers spiritual reflections and practical resources for fellow pilgrims and prophets walking the way of Christ in uncertain times.

You can support her work, connect with the Order of Franciscan Clareans, or join the movement toward sacred simplicity and survival by visiting the blog or finding her on social media.

No fixed address. No fixed creed. Just a backpack full of grace.
