

“The Way” starring Martin Sheen, Emilio Estevez, Deborah Kara Unger, 2010, PG-13, 123 minutes

Major themes:

- Road trip
- Pilgrimage
- Father-son relationships
- Isolation
- Simplicity
- Hospitality
- Friendship
- Healing

Major characters:

- Tom Avery
- Daniel Avery
- Sarah
- Joost
- Jack

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Background info:

- Tagline: *"Life is too big to walk it alone"*
- *"The Way of St. James"* is the pilgrimage route to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where is traditionally believed to be where the remains of the apostle James are buried. Legend holds that his remains were carried by boat from Jerusalem to northern Spain where he was buried at what is now the city of Santiago de Compostela. The pilgrimage can vary in length from 100 to 800 km (60 to 500 miles).
- According to *"Martyrs Mirror,"* the apostle James preached the Gospel in Judea, Samaria, and Spain, before being imprisoned and executed in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa, in the fourth year of the reign of Emperor Claudius.
- Whenever St. James's day, July 25th, falls on a Sunday, the cathedral declares a Holy or Jubilee Year (the next ones will be 2021, 2027, 2032)!
- This is the seventh time that father-son Martin Sheen and Emilio Estevez have worked together.
- Catholic teaching allows for cremation, but Christian reverence of the body and the hope of resurrection requires that cremated remains be buried together.
- This movie was filmed in 40 days with a small crew of 50 people. There were no movie set trailers used. Pilgrimages to Santiago have occurred continuously since the time of the discovery of St. James' remains, though there have been years of fewer pilgrims, particularly during European wars. In recent years, the number of pilgrims has risen sharply, largely due to this film (in 1985 there were fewer than 700 pilgrims; in 2012 there were almost 200,000).
- The main pilgrimage route to Santiago follows an earlier Roman trade route, which continues to the Atlantic coast of Galicia, ending at Cape Finisterre (Latin for "Land's End"). At night, the stars seem to point the way, so the route acquired the nickname *"La Voje Ladee"* – *"the Milky Way."*

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- The scallop shell, often found on the shores in Galicia, has long been the symbol of the Camino de Santiago, and is seen frequently along the trails in order to guide pilgrims along the way. Most pilgrims receive a shell at the beginning of the Camino, and many display it in some way while on the journey.
- The scallop shell also serves as a metaphor. The grooves in the shell, which meet at a single point, represent the various routes pilgrims traveled, eventually arriving at a single destination. The shell is also a metaphor for the pilgrim: As the waves of the ocean wash scallop shells up onto the shores of Galicia, God's hand also guides the pilgrims to Santiago.
- The scallop shell has in times past also served a practical purpose for pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, used as a vessel for scooping up drinking water or as a makeshift bowl.
- Most modern-day pilgrims travel by foot or on bicycle, but a few travel as some of their medieval counterparts did, on horseback or by donkey.



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- Here's a quote from a real pilgrim who recently traveled on the Camino (copied from an online forum) – *“At least once, expect to cry. Everybody cries... sometime. The camino has a strange way of stripping us down not only to bare material essentials, but also to our raw emotions. Everyone I met along the Camino, whether they started in St. Jean (like I did) or Sarria, cried at least one time. We cried out of frustration, out of pain, we cried because the emotions we keep so neatly tucked away in our non-Camino lives suddenly had nowhere left to hide. We cried out of sheer joy and gratitude, we cried out of overwhelming emotions that we didn't even know we had, or were capable of feeling. Sometimes, we cried for no apparent reason. I called the Camino 'Mucinex for the soul' (Mucinex is a powerful decongestant here in the USA) because, for me, anyway, it was just the tonic I needed to clean out all kinds of toxic feelings and emotional baggage I had been carrying. The Camino taught me to lighten my physical AND emotional loads.”*

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Scriptures:

John 14:6 (NIV) – *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) – *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”*

Ecclesiastes 4:9 – 12 (NLT) – *“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”*

Matthew 9:35 (The Message) – *“Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives.”*

Romans 12:11 – 13 (The Message) – *“Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.”*

1 Samuel 16:7 (The Message) – *“God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.”*

Psalms 84:5 – 6 (NIV) – *“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs”*

Galatians 6:2 (NIV) – *“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

Romans 15:7 (NLT) – *“Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.”*

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Discussion points:

1. One character says, *"You don't choose your life, you live it."* Discuss.
2. Tom set out in search of something. What do you think he was hoping to find?
3. How would you describe Tom's actual journey?
4. How did Tom's journey result in him learning about his son, Daniel? What did he learn about himself?
5. We often find ourselves among unlikely companions in life. What are some of the things that keep us from receiving each other person as a priceless gift from God who is created in His image?
6. How do the companions on the journey intentionally or unintentionally *"sharpen"* each other?
7. What is it about a pilgrimage that can serve as a crucible for transformation?