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A Pilgrim's Digress: My Perilous, Fumbling Quest for the Celestial City

John Spalding

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It’s a long, strange journey to paradise, and often hilarious one, if you bravely follow the road less traveled—wherever it leads. John D. Spalding certainly has. In this smart and insightful collection, Spalding, Beliefnet.com’s popular offbeat humorist, wanders America as a modern-day “pilgrim” seeking the Celestial City.

Loosely organizing his comic misadventures according to John Bunyan’s classic **The Pilgrim’s Progress**, Spalding describes how he spent three days as a street preacher in Times Square (“Excuse me, sir, did you know you’re going to hell?”); went to the mat (conversationally) with Omega and Apocalypse, two mainstays of the Christian Wrestling Federation; and visited a man who, practicing the art of trepanation, drilled a hole in his head to make himself permanently happy. He also experienced his own funeral, courtesy of the Dying-to-Get-In Company.

Like Christian, Bunyan’s beleaguered pilgrim, Spalding never knows who is waiting around the next bend. On his journey, he finds himself at the mercy of rebirthing therapists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormon missionaries, and in the company of a psychic “ghost counselor,” America’s luckiest (and perhaps divinely blessed) lottery winner, and a mysterious, barefoot holy man named Whatsyourname. Finally, he makes an ancient, five-hundred-mile pilgrimage across Spain, during which he learns what it truly means to be a pilgrim.

Funny, wry, and revealing, the stories in **A Pilgrim’s Digress** describe Spalding’s satirical quest for the righteous path and what he discovers about the spiritual zeitgeist along the way.

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