

Develop Your Faith Praying a Labyrinth

The labyrinth is another tool for prayer that very any Christians, especially in a Celtic context, find immensely helpful in shaping their prayers



ABOUT THE LABYRINTH

A labyrinth is a pattern with a purpose. They offer a chance to take “time out” from our busy lives, to leave schedules and stress behind. Walking a labyrinth is a gift we give to ourselves. The labyrinth walk is popular with a growing number of people because of its simplicity and the ability to approach its paths on your own terms. It also has a long heritage in Britain from at least medieval times. Anglican Churches such as Malmesbury Abbey use the labyrinth a great deal.

SYMBOL

The labyrinth represents our passage through time and experience. Its many turns reflect the journey of life, which involves changes of direction, transition, some uncertainty but also discovery and achievement. Different from a maze (which has dead ends and false passages), the labyrinth has a single path that leads unerringly to the center. It shows us that no time or effort is ever wasted; if we stay the course, every step however circuitous, however many

turns, however distant it seems, takes us closer to our goal. The two most common types are Chartres and Classic 7, however there are many variations. Labyrinths are described by the number of circuits or paths they contain.

HISTORY

Labyrinths are found in many cultures dating back as much as 3,500 years. Labyrinth walking is a form of meditation that has been practiced by nearly every religious tradition since ancient times. There is no one “Christian” labyrinth pattern. Faith communities throughout the ages have utilized labyrinths of various dimensions, materials, colors, and shapes. Theologians of different periods have utilized the pattern to emphasize beliefs that were most relevant to their time. Significant examples include Chartres and Grace Cathedral

USE

People walk the labyrinth as a tool to enhance prayer, contemplation, meditation and/or personal growth. There is no “required way” to walk the



labyrinth. Thinking is not required to walk a labyrinth. At the same time, one must remain alert to stay on the path. This combination of reduced mental activity and heightened awareness makes the labyrinth ideal for walking meditation or prayer. The turns of the labyrinth are thought to balance the

two hemispheres of the brain, resulting in physical and emotional healing. As reaching the center is assured, walking the labyrinth is more about the journey than the destination, about being rather than doing, integrating body and mind, psyche and spirit into one harmonious whole. The labyrinth meets each person where they are and helps them to take the next step on their spiritual path. Because it is so personal, it is a spiritual practice that can be enjoyed by everyone.



THE WALK

A “typical” labyrinth experience involves preparing yourself at the threshold, following the single path to the center (**releasing**), spending time in the center for as long as you like (**receiving**), following the same pathway from the center out, crossing the threshold (**returning**), and then responding to the experience. There is no single “right” way to pray a labyrinth. Praying in whatever way helps you connect with God during the labyrinth encounter is

the “right” way and serves as the best guide possible. Journaling before or after the walk may help provide focus and insights.

Feel free to walk around other people if their pace is different or if they stop. It’s okay for other people to move around you. Some find it helpful to stop at each turn. The path can be a two-way street. Do what comes naturally when you meet someone else, just as you would if you were walking on a narrow sidewalk. Walking around the outside of the labyrinth before or after the walk may be helpful.

Approaches to the walk may include:

- Intentional walks—where you address a specific intention, issue or concern as you walk
- Intercessory walks—offering prayer for people or needs
- Meditative walks—meditating on a specific word or passage or prayer
- Conversation—having a conversation with God
- Walking in a relaxed, peaceful state, temporarily releasing concerns, being open and peaceful

Many have found that reciting Scripture on the labyrinth focuses their attention on biblical teaching and their relationship with God. For instance, a person may find it helpful to pray, “You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11) or Jesus’ words, “I am the way and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) while moving on a labyrinth.

(Text from Godspace with thanks)