

The Labyrinth: A Prayer Walk



Historical Information

The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool found in many cultures and religious traditions. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth is *unicursal* or a one-way design, with no tricks, decisions, or dead ends. The way in is the way out.

Early Christian labyrinths date back to the 4th century. In the Middle Ages, Christians were expected to travel to the Holy Land at least once during their lives. As travel became more dangerous during the Crusades, certain cathedrals throughout Europe were designated as “pilgrim cathedrals.” Christians would travel to those cathedrals where they would walk a labyrinth laid in the cathedral’s stone floor.

The labyrinth we are using is a replica of the labyrinth found in the floor of the Chartres Cathedral, which was built between 1194 and 1200. It is one of the few that remains intact, relatively undamaged and that, if lucky, modern pilgrims can still walk.

The labyrinth itself does not hold special powers. It is a tool for a sacred experience. Walking the labyrinth provides an opportunity to be attentive to God’s presence in our life in new and fresh ways.

Three Stages of the Walk

1. *Releasing* – The path to the center is a releasing, letting go of your cares and concerns.
 - Discard your many roles (mother, father, wife, etc.) and simply say, “I am.”
 - Leave the demands, the voices around you and enter a soothing silence.
 - Unload your guilt, resentment, self-hatred, failures, depressions, shame, and forgive yourself.
 - Set aside all things you think you want and need and seek to find what God wants for you.

The first step of a labyrinth walk is an inward one, taken before you even step onto the path. A pause before entering allows you to prepare for the walk and leave the world behind. Take time to be still, to quiet your

mind. Moving into the labyrinth requires nothing more than putting one foot in front of the other to follow the path and remaining open to the journey.

2. *Receiving* – The center of the labyrinth is intended as a place of meditation, prayer, and illumination, a place to receive from God whatever it is God would offer you. Stay in the center as long as you would like to:
 - Recognize the emptiness in ourselves that only love can fill.
 - Enjoy the silence, stillness, waiting, and the simplicity
 - Listen to nothing, to nature, or to God.
 - Contemplate the blessing of the hidden nature of God who cannot be fully known, yet who knows each of us by name.
 - Consider the possibility of the new, the miraculous, the transforming entering our lives.
 - Remember the Holy Spirit – like the wind – blows as the Holy Spirit wills.
3. *Integration* - Return from the center and retrace the same path on which you entered. Feel energized as you integrate the insights you have received from God to take back out into the world. As you leave the center and journey back:
 - Refuse to take up the guilt, resentment, failures, shame of the past.
 - Seek a simpler, more focused life.
 - Rest in the knowledge of God's unconditional love.
 - Move away from anxiety towards peace and faith.
 - Seek direction from the Holy Spirit.
 - Decide to continue your journey deeper into the love of Christ.

A Child's Walk

The three stages of a child's walk can be much simpler:

1. *Releasing* - Walking towards the middle can be like walking towards God's presence. Use the time to confess when you have done wrong...haven't loved God or loved others like Jesus.
2. *Receiving* - When you get to the middle you can use that time to thank God for all the blessings you've received...like family, friends, gifts, and abilities.
3. *Integration* – When you're walking back to the beginning, think about ways you can share God's love with other people and ask God to help you do those things.