

## The Labyrinth is an Ancient Practice

The labyrinth is an ancient pattern found in many cultures around the world. Labyrinth designs were found on pottery, tablets and tiles that date as far back as five thousand year. Many patterns are based on spirals and circles mirrored in nature. In Native American tradition, the labyrinth is very similar to the Medicine Wheel and Man in the Maze. The Celts described the labyrinth as the Never Ending Circle. It is also known as the Ka bala in mystical Judaism. One feature labyrinths have in common is that they have one path that winds in a circuitous way to the center.

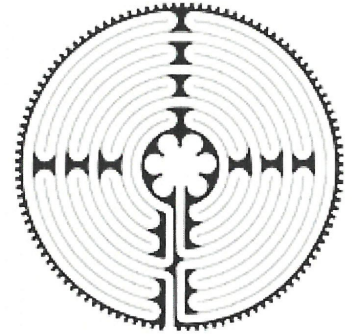
The earliest labyrinth found in a Christian church is the 4th-century pavement in St. Reparatus' Basilica, in Algeria. What is the meaning of labyrinths then, in Christian art and, more specifically, in cathedral floors? The most widely spread explanation claims these labyrinths were originally used as symbolic allusions to the Holy City (Jerusalem), thus giving the labyrinth a spiritual meaning. The labyrinths served as substitutes for pilgrimage paths, thus considered symbolic "paths to the Holy Land." Those who could not go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would walk these labyrinths, some even on their knees, while praying some specific devotions (like the stations of the Cross, for instance).



Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, France

## Labyrinth Prayer Guide

The labyrinth is a walking meditation, a path of prayer. It has only one path that leads from the outer edge in a circuitous way to the center. There are no tricks to it and no dead ends. Unlike a maze where you lose your way, the labyrinth is a spiritual tool that can help you find your way.



### Walking a labyrinth is like making a pilgrimage...

The concept of the labyrinth is patterned after the Christian journey. Generally there are three basic movements that connect the Scripture stories of the Exodus, Jesus' passage into Jerusalem and the Disciples' walk to Emmaus with the Catholic mystical tradition of the Three-Fold Mystical Path.

- ◇ **Purgation: Releasing on the way in...**  
The first movement is from the outside toward the center. Here we seek to quiet our mind, soul, heart and body through the balancing motion of the turning path, very similar to that of a rocking chair. We seek to release, let go, cleanse ourselves of things we might be struggling with or anxious about.
- ◇ **Illumination: Resting in the center to receive inspiration...**  
We reach the respite of the center and have a chance to be illumined by the light of Easter. We are in a place where we can simply 'be' with God. It's good to stay in the center for a bit, perhaps turn to face the four directions and hear or see what God might be trying to show you. This is a center for prayer, reflection and clear vision
- ◇ **Union: Returning to our lives with a new awareness...**  
The third and culminating movement is the journey back out through the path-the unitive path. The Union is the joining of what you carried in, with the insights you have received from God. This path helps us discover a renewed spirit of giving and receiving.

**...did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road...Luke 24:32**

There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. However, the following suggestions may help as you explore this unique spiritual practice.

- ◇ Begin by taking a few slow, deep breaths to relax your body and empty the mind of clutter, except for a simple meditative word such as “love,” “peace,” or “Christ.”
- ◇ As you enter into the labyrinth, pause to ground yourself.
- ◇ Walk the path at a comfortable pace and as the Spirit leads you. You may want to pause along the path to repeat your prayer or word.
- ◇ Don't try to look ahead or focus on the center of the labyrinth, while walking. Live in the moment and focus on the path just in front of your feet.
- ◇ If you meet another along the walk, let them pass
- ◇ When you get to the center, pause to meditate or pray and listen to God. Open your mind and heart to whatever gift you may wish to receive.
- ◇ When you are ready, follow the path out of the center and back through the labyrinth. Give thanks for whatever you have received or found there.
- ◇ As you journey out, you may find yourself energized and want to move at a faster pace...you may find yourself empowered to act on some new plan or idea that God has planted in your heart.
- ◇ There is no right or wrong way to walk your spiritual journey on the labyrinth...

## Scriptural Phrases to Use While Praying the Labyrinth

Sometimes it is helpful to use a scriptural phrase to focus prayer on the labyrinth. Pick one the verses listed below (or choose one of your own) and let it orient your prayer as you move.

- ◇ In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. (*Psalm 86:7*)
- ◇ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (*Jeremiah 29:11*)
- ◇ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (*Matthew 11:28*)
- ◇ But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. (*Micah 7:7*)
- ◇ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. (*Psalm 130:5*)
- ◇ Lead me in the way everlasting. (*Psalm 139:24b*)
- ◇ I [Jesus] am with you always, to the end of the age. (*Matthew 28:20b*)
- ◇ My [Christ's] grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. (*2 Corinthians 12:9b*)
- ◇ Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you. (*1 Peter 5:7*)

