

Prayer Labyrinth

Many Christians and churches are rediscovering an ancient prayer practice: a labyrinth. A labyrinth is a geometrically designed walking path leading to and from a central point. It is not a maze; you cannot get lost. There are no dead ends. The point is not disorientation, but orientation.

Some Christians, preachers and churches think labyrinths are weird, even pagan. It is true that labyrinths have been used in pagan rituals (for example, the Hopi people of North America used labyrinths as symbols of Mother Earth, and the numerous stone labyrinths along the Scandinavian shoreline were used as magic “traps” for trolls, etc.), but the form itself is no more pagan or Christian than a book or a musical note. It is the content in it and purpose of it that makes a labyrinth either pagan or Christian—or neither.

Labyrinths have been used for centuries to facilitate prayer and meditation. The most famous prayer labyrinth today is probably the one in the Chartres Cathedral. There are several typical designs: the “classical” design of seven rings, and the “medieval” design of 11 circuits in four quadrants.

There may be a labyrinth in a church garden or retreat center near you (a quick internet search may show your options). Some churches (particularly during the Lenten Season) create indoor labyrinths for a set period of time, and sometimes include “stations” or stopping points along the way to guide a worshiper. But anyone can pray in a labyrinth. Here are four ways to get you started:

- 1) Ask God a question as you enter the path. Then, as you walk slowly through the twists and turns, listen for an answer. Let your steps and your silence invite the presence and guidance of God.
- 2) Start your journey to the center with confession (you may want to visualize your sins being left behind with every step you take). When you reach the center, journey out with affirmation (perhaps visualizing yourself picking things up or putting things on—like the righteousness of Christ, the smile of the Father, the purity of the Holy Spirit, etc.). Pause at the exit and give thanks for your cleansing journey.
- 3) Recite a breath prayer as you navigate the labyrinth, perhaps praying a different prayer on each leg or quadrant of your journey.
- 4) Lay down your burdens as you walk to the center of the labyrinth (perhaps laying down pebbles along the way as symbols of your worries or cares). In the center, pause to thank God for taking your burdens on himself (1 Peter 5:7). Then count your blessings and give thanks on the journey to the exit.

There are, of course, many more ways to pray in a labyrinth, but these are offered to get you started.