

Labyrinth Prayer

“For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,
5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

■ 1 Timothy 4:4 (NIV)

To be a pilgrim means
to be on the move, slowly
to notice your luggage becoming lighter
to be seeking for treasures that do not rust
to be comfortable with your heart's questions
to be moving toward the *holy ground* of home
with empty hands and bare feet.
~ Macrina Wiederkehr

“Pilgrimages to holy sites have been part of the Christian tradition for millennia. Many of us still visit the Holy Land today. And Orthodox and Catholic believers are not unfamiliar with pilgrimages to various holy places. However, when a pilgrimage is not affordable or accessible, the discipline of pilgrimage can be honored through the symbolic prayer walk of the labyrinth. Labyrinths seem to have developed around the twelfth century as a substitute for making a pilgrimage to a holy site. Labyrinths are not mazes, nor are they something magical. Walking the labyrinth is not a newfangled technique to jumpstart your spiritual life. It is a slow, quiet, meditative practice that has historically attended to the desire to make a journey toward God. The floor of Chartres Cathedral in France has a labyrinth that has been used by pilgrims for centuries.

“In walking the labyrinth you leave behind the noise and hurry of life. Just as you would pack simply for a pilgrimage, you offer your load to Jesus as you begin your prayer journey. The prayer-path structure moves you slowly toward the center and toward God. At times you are close to the center, further along the path you may be farther from the center. This represents the reality of the spiritual journey. But as we keep moving, we are always getting closer to the center and to God, no matter how far away it looks in real space. At the center of the walk you can stop and rest in the presence of God, listening for his word to you. With his word in your heart you begin your journey back to the world.

“Labyrinth prayer is a contemplative spiritual discipline on a simple marked path that is based on the ancient practice of pilgrimage. On a pilgrimage, a pilgrim intentionally (1) leaves the world, journeying away from the noise and distractions of life, (2) eventually arrives and rests with Christ, and (3) returns home to live more deliberately and obediently as Christ's own.”

■ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*

SOLVITUR AMBULANDO

~ It is Solved by Walking~

■ St. Augustine

Compiled by Jim Ennis, Pastor of Community Care
for use at Soul Care Retreats

GRACE
C H A P E L

Much thanks to Hallie Cowan for providing the following instructions/tips regarding the use of the labyrinth. Hallie serves with Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship as the Assistant Regional Director for Spiritual Formation and Prayer in New England.

How do I use it for prayer?

There are as many ways to use a labyrinth as there are creative people who use it. There is nothing magical about the shape. It simply provides a set-aside path that has a beginning and an end, to aid you in reflective prayer. It is a holy place because Christians pray here in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

People who may have difficulty sitting still to pray, often find that walking and praying provides a better level of concentration. If you tend to get distracted in mid-prayer, the labyrinth literally keeps you “on track.”

There are many metaphors for the Christian life in the labyrinth. It symbolizes the journey of the Christian spiritual life. As you walk the labyrinth, you can see the center, but you can't see how exactly you will get there, Sometimes you find you are making surprising turns that seem to take you farther away, not closer. However, if you stay on the path, you will get to the center. Then, you follow the path from the center to go out “into the world” in mission.

Some tips for walking a labyrinth are: (there should be no more than four people walking the labyrinth at one time so as to not make it too crowded. Be very respectful of each other's quiet space, discreetly passing by or making way as each walks according to their own pace)

1. **At the start,** Begin with a prayer, such as, “Lord Jesus, show me the way to the Father, by your Spirit,” or “Here I am Lord, to walk with you.” Or there may be a specific intention for your walk that you want to offer to the Lord. Make a plan for your walk. What will be your focus as you go in? As you remain in the center? As you leave?

2. **Walk the path:** Walk “contemplatively”; that is, walk slowly, and notice what you are experiencing, thinking, sensing and feeling as you walk. Pray a prayer, or meditate on a question, or recite a Scripture verse, or just walk in silence. When you reach the center, take time to rest in the Lord's presence, with thanksgiving. When you are ready, leave by retracing your route. You may use a different prayer, Scripture or question as you go out.

3. **Exit:** As you leave, face the center once more and lift a closing prayer of thanksgiving or blessing, such as “Thank you Jesus for guiding me. Stay near me as I leave this place, and remind me, when I forget, of the time we have shared here. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

4. **Reflect:** After walking the labyrinth, reflect back on your experience. Sit on one of the benches. Use journaling or drawing to capture your experience.

Father, be the Goal of my pilgrimage,
and my Rest by the way.

■ St. Augustine