

A Labyrinth Walk

The labyrinth, an ancient sacred design with a simple pathway that leads to and from the center, presents a deeply spiritual practice. Signs of labyrinth designs on tablets, pottery and tiles date as far back as five thousand years. The basic pattern of the labyrinth reflects spirals found in nature, such as a snail shells, whirlpools, or even the inner ear. While early church fathers such as Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome of Stridon wrote of labyrinths, it was during the 12th and 13th centuries that churches employed labyrinths to symbolize the spiritual journey of life and proclaim a space for prayer and worship.

The most prominent feature of the labyrinth exhibits only one way into the center, with the return following the same path out. Unlike a maze where one must figure out which way to turn so you don't get trapped or lost, the labyrinth has only one path. By following the twists and turns of the path one arrives at the center, the goal of the journey. Then, by following the same path outward, the labyrinth walker returns safely to the beginning point of the labyrinth.

“Since the destination is assured, there are no obstacles to overcome, no muddles to figure out, no dead ends to retrace. What remains for the labyrinth walker is simply the deeply meditative and symbolic discipline of setting one foot in front of the other, of honoring the journey itself and what it has to teach. The mind can be stilled and attention paid to the body, the wisdom of the heart, and the graces of being rather than doing.” (Exploring the Labyrinth, pg. 5)

Historically, labyrinths vary in purpose, including decoration, play, Easter worship, and prayer. No two labyrinth experiences are the same. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to walk a labyrinth. It exists as a spiritual tool which provides opportunities to reflect, rest, pray, wait, and walk. This spiritual practice encourages sojourners to walk in God's ways by reflecting on Scripture and welcoming communion with Him.

Walking a labyrinth also provides a metaphor to the path of life and allows one's busy mind to slow and allow God, by His Spirit, to be present in a deeply meaningful way. The literal path of the labyrinth can even symbolize God leading one through life. Additionally, after experiencing the labyrinth with God, sharing the experience through journaling or in conversation heightens one's awareness of the movements of God within one's soul. Moving through the labyrinth with God reminds followers of Christ of the Holy Spirit's companionship through life, bringing healing and wholeness through Jesus Christ.



Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth, France – 13th century
(One of the most well know labyrinths in the world)

Some ideas for meeting with God by walking a labyrinth:

- **Enter expectantly** and walk a slow pace allowing the opportunity for your body to connect with God while you are moving. Permit yourself to wholly meet with God through the experience.
 - How is God speaking to you through the movement of your body?
 - What is the state of your soul? Settled? Restless? Anxious?
 - In what ways are you receiving God's grace and peace in this spiritual practice?
 - Where is God working in your life, relationships, work, and ministry?
- **Pay attention** to the path:
 - What are the "rocks" or "pebbles" in your life?
 - What about the weeds popping upon on the path? What sin is the Lord revealing to you? Surrender your sin as your feet step upon the weeds.
 - How do the turns impact you? Are they confusing? Is confession necessary and a "turning" from sin? Do you find yourself impatient to reach the center? Why does it seem you move further from the center in order to get closer? What wisdom might the Lord be offering to your life circumstance?
 - How does the certainty of reaching the center inspire and encourage you?
 - Describe your experience of being in God's love upon reaching the center.
 - On the journey out, to what does God lift your eyes? For whom will you pray? How and where is God leading you to serve Him in the world?
- **Notice** the small details of the journey: your breathing, your movements, the sounds around you, the smells, and the textures surrounding your path.
 - What parallels from your observations do you see to your life?
 - Let the Spirit lead the examination of your soul.
 - What happens when you encounter others along the labyrinth? Notice the parallel to your own spiritual journey.
- **Direct** your thoughts during the practice
 - In – Rest – Out
 - As you enter into the labyrinth and journey to the center, pray for yourself. Let go of the noise in life. What is God teaching you in life? Where are you being stretched? How are you experiencing Him? How are you stirred through the journey? Etc.
 - Upon reaching the center; stop and rest. Simply experience God's amazing love.
 - As you begin the journey out, let God lift your eyes to praying for others and the world. Who has God placed upon your heart? Is God calling you to action of some sort? How can you be more available to serve the needs brought your way?
 - Ask God a question upon entering the labyrinth. As you meander and navigate the twists and turns in the journey, listen for God's gentle nudgings and directions. How does walking the labyrinth illumine your own faith journey with Jesus?
 - Do you have a conflict or problem you are wrestling with? Invite God to meet with you and bring resolution along the path. Let Him comfort and lead your spirit.
 - Choose a Scripture to focus on as you walk the labyrinth. Some ideas:

Psalm 23 - God's presence

Matthew 6:9-13 - Pray the Lord's Prayer

Jeremiah 29:11 - God's plans

Ephesians 6:10-18 - Put on God's armor and pray

Matthew 11:28 - Rest

Psalm 24 - God's sovereignty/our response

Psalm 107:1 - Give thanks

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Direction

Matthew 13:14-17 - Receptive eyes and ears

1 Timothy 6:17-19 - Live generously

Ephesians 1:3 - Spiritual blessings

Galatians 5:22-23 - The fruit of the Spirit

Psalm 119:15 - Meditate on God's ways

Isaiah 45:3 - Treasures of darkness

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - Scripture's inspiration

A Labyrinth Walk with your Children

There is no right or wrong way to experience the labyrinth – let your kids be kids and trust God to meet them in the midst of the journey 😊 Nevertheless, give some direction and see how the Lord moves! Be sure to talk about your experience, listen to your kids share (even if it is a bit wild) and try to give them space to express their labyrinth journey in their own words.



- Explain that a labyrinth is different from a maze. Did you like knowing that you can't get lost? Did you know that God will never lose you? He knows right where you are and just what you need.
- In – Rest – Out
 - As you enter the labyrinth and journey to the center, encourage your children to pray for themselves and listen for God.
 - Upon reaching the center; ask your kids to wait for you, if they get their first. Stop and simply experience God's amazing love. Share ways you see and experience God's love. Maybe enjoy a family hug.
 - Then as you begin the journey out, tell your children to pray for others and the world.
 - When you all return to the beginning, talk about whom you were praying for and as a family determine if God is asking you to do something "tangible" for those He put on your hearts. (Maybe a "we prayed for you today" card/note, giving financial help, a meal, etc.)
- Choose a verse to read before entering the labyrinth and invite your children to listen for God's voice as they walk the path toward the center. In the center, share what was heard 😊. Then encourage your kids to ask God how they can share with others what they heard from Him. When you all get out, talk about it!
- Ask your children to think about God as they take this special walk. Tell them to imagine God holding their hand and leading the way. How did walking this path help you focus on God? Did He whisper anything to you along the journey?
- Is there something you need God's help with? Ask Him about it as you journey toward the center of the labyrinth. In what ways did you experience His help?
- Do you have a favorite song? Maybe "Jesus loves me"?! Encourage your kids to either sing it aloud or to themselves as you all walk through the labyrinth. On the way into the center think about God's love for you! In the center imagine His great love wrapping you up like a comforter. On the way out, think about all the people God loves and who He might want you to show love to.

- Take a bottle of bubbles. On the journey in, encourage your children to think all about God's blessings. When you get to the center, blow bubbles as a family and talk about God's many blessings. Notice how the bubbles float into the air and maybe touch other people. God's blessings are not just for us, but to be shared with others. On the journey out, think about how can you share God's blessings? When you get out, share what you will do as a family to bless others.
- Bring some sea-shells and have your kids notice how the shells might look like a labyrinth. God in his creativity made patterns like labyrinths in creation. As you walk to the center of the labyrinth think of things God made that have swirls in them. In the center share the thoughts that came to mind. When you are done, thank God for his attention to every detail. How might God want you to be creative? Is there something He wants you to do? After walking the labyrinth, make something that shows "your" creativity as a family.



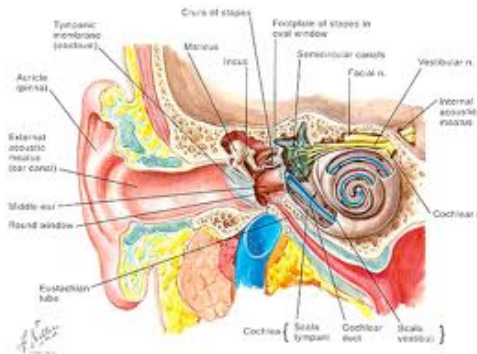
Snail



Snail Shell



Whirlpool in the ocean



The inner-ear

Resources and Recommended Reading:

Artress, Lauren. *Walking a Sacred Path; Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*

Geoffrion, Jill Kimberly Harwell. *Praying the Labyrinth*

Geoffrion, Jill Kimberly Harwell. *Christian Prayer and Labyrinths*

Scholl, Travis. *Walking the Labyrinth*

West, Melissa Gayle. *Exploring the Labyrinth*

Some of my favorite Labyrinths to visit in the Denver area:

Dominick Park
14th and Washington
Denver, CO 80203

St. Gregory's Episcopal Church
6653 W. Chatfield Ave.
Littleton, Colorado 80128

Benet Hill Monastery
3190 Benet Lane
Colorado Springs, CO 80921