

Whatever brings you to a labyrinth, begin your walk with a time of centering and focusing on the present moment. Many people start their labyrinth walk by kneeling or standing in prayer a few feet in front of the entrance to the labyrinth. During this time it might be helpful to close your eyes and listen to your own breathing. Allow the stillness of your body to quiet your mind as you contemplate beginning your walk.

When you are ready, open your eyes and begin your labyrinth walk. As you walk slowly along the path toward the center, allow your thoughts, anxieties, stresses, and worries to slide away with each turn. This process of continuing to center is called purgation, because you are purging your mind and spirit of unhealthy thought, concern, and attitudes.

As you walk toward the center, allow your mind to mull and pray over whatever brings you to your walk. If you have a decision to make, ponder your options, and lift them up silently to God. If you are trying to achieve balance in your life, contemplate what is unbalanced and offer that to God. The walk toward the center is about unloading your heart of whatever you're carrying and turning it over to God.

When arriving at the center of the labyrinth, most people sit, kneel, or stand in prayer for a period of time. Time spent in the center of the labyrinth can be the most fruitful time. Praying and listening should be your two primary activities in the center. Most people indeed discover that when they've reached this point in

their labyrinth walk, they have reached a place of balance and peace that allows them to engage more fully the presence of the Holy.

Because the prayer time in the center of the labyrinth is often so powerful, many call this time a period of illumination. Those who seek God intentionally in the center of the labyrinth regularly experience moments of incredible lucidity where they feel the presence of God.

When you are ready, turn and begin the journey from the center to the fringes once again. Sometimes this part of the labyrinth is like waking up in the morning; with each step you slowly become more aware of your surroundings and your thoughts become more task-oriented. When you have felt God speaking to you, you contemplate what you've learned and what you'll be doing about it.

When you reach the entrance to the labyrinth, many people take one step out of the labyrinth, turn and say a prayer or amen or take a few moments to reflect.

Taken from:

*Finding Stone:
Cave and Labyrinth*
by Jean Gebser

Prayer for People Who Can't Sit Still
by William Tenny-Brittian

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Prayer Labyrinth

WHAT IS A PRAYER LABYRINTH?

Walking a Prayer Labyrinth is like taking a thoughtful walk, going on a symbolic journey or pilgrimage, or taking part in a religious walk. It is a maze-like path outside on the ground or inside a building placed on the floor. You start walking at the beginning and pray and walk to the center and then back out again.

To walk the labyrinth is to make a pilgrimage, to discover something about ourselves and God. The destination is not important; the journey is! Labyrinths are not magic, though they are full of mystery, and often they offer an avenue for participation in and experience of many different levels of the mystery of life.

Walking the labyrinth models the classical three-fold spiritual path:

- Walking in: Purgation, emptying or letting go.
- Time in the center: Illumination, clarity, insight.
- Walking out: Union, initiative, integration, and action in the world.

HISTORY

The labyrinth dates back to prehistoric time, and is perceived as sacred space. It seems to have been an integral part of many cultures, such as Celtic, Mayan, Greek, Cretan, and Native American. Labyrinths have been known to the human race for over 3500 years.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

We are attracted to healing tools such as the labyrinth because they deepen our self-knowledge and empower our creativity. Walking the labyrinth can clear the mind and give insight into the journey. The journey is different for everyone, as is life, for we each bring different raw material to the labyrinth. We bring our uniqueness, and often depart with a greater sense of oneness and unity.

People walk and pray labyrinths for various reasons. Some walk to seek wisdom when faced with a decision. Others walk to experience the presence of the holy or to find a spiritual balance in their lives. Still others walk in order to seek healing, be it mental, spiritual, or sometimes even physical.

Some who have studied the labyrinth have suggested that a physiological response to the labyrinth helps the mind to clear itself of negativity. Because the labyrinth changes your direction one-hundred and eighty degrees every so many steps, it is thought that your mind shifts its focus from the left side of your brain to the right and back again with each new turn. Further, since you do not

have to consciously make a decision about which way to turn, the brain waves flow freely from side to side without serious interruptions. It is believed that by the time you reach the center of the labyrinth, your mind has found a natural balance in blood flow and synaptic activity. This balance, some suggest, puts you in a place of heightened awareness to your surroundings and particularly to your spirituality; thus, by the time you come to the center of the labyrinth, you are ready to hear from God.

EXPERIENCING THE PRAYER LABYRINTH

Suggestions for walking:

The labyrinth is a path for prayer and meditation. Collect yourself before you start. Sit and rest for a while or walk around the outside once. Think of different people, events, situations, places or things in your life to develop a specific intention if you wish to use one in your meditation. Get centered.

There are two common ways of walking. The way of silence and the way of image. In choosing the way of silence, it might be helpful to focus on your breathing. The way of image might be done by reciting a prayer of a name for God over and over to yourself. Ask yourself: How am I loved? How do I love? In either case or in some other manner best suited to you, be open to your heart and mind. Pay attention to your thoughts as they rise and then let them go.

The labyrinth is a place of presence; allow yourself to be present to yourself

and to God. The labyrinth is a teacher; let it teach you through the mysterious power of God. As you walk the path, thoughts and ideas may rise up for you and in you—often in refreshing and startling ways.

One way to feel more connected to the experience is to walk barefoot and slowly. There is no need to rush. Some people feel a sense of confusion as they first start; remember there is only one path in and one path out. You will not get lost.

People have different experiences walking the labyrinth. As with all practices of prayer or meditation, your experience will grow and deepen the more you do it. There is no “right” experience. Some people feel a sense of peace. Others find old memories rising up as they walk. Others find themselves thinking about an immediate situation or person. Others walk at varying speeds as different thoughts and emotions come and go. Some have profound insights. Others have very small experiences or none at all. The experience of walking the labyrinth is different for each person, each time. Whatever you experience, it is your experience.

There is more to walking and praying a labyrinth than just strolling along a pathway. For a meaningful walk, it is important to be intentional about centering, praying, and listening. These three components are often referred to as purification, illumination and union and they provide the framework for your time in the labyrinth.