

Labyrinth Prayers

*You show me the path of life, in your presence there is fullness of joy,
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – Psalm 16:11*

History

For over 4,000 years, labyrinths have been used for prayer, meditation, and personal spiritual growth. Labyrinths were constructed in the European cathedrals during the Middle Ages when making physical pilgrimages to the holy lands were not possible. The labyrinth in Chartres cathedral, dated around 1200 A.D., is particularly well-known and a tracing of that labyrinth is pictured on the reverse of this page. Labyrinth designs have been found on coins and pottery from the island of Crete, on a rock carving in Sardinia dating from 2500 B.C., and in earthen mounds in the British Isles.

Today labyrinths can be found outside many churches as part of a garden area. Others are found in public gardens or gardens of private homes. There are several outdoor, publicly accessible labyrinths in the Atlanta area (see our website at www.spdl.org/prayerresources). Many use handheld finger labyrinths on wood or printed on paper (like the one on the back of this page) to trace a path in and out. More modern designs can be found by googling “labyrinth images.”

Background

A labyrinth is a spiritual tool – a path for prayer or walking meditation. Most labyrinths are designed for walking, others are designed to be used by tracing a finger along its pathway. Labyrinths are not mazes with walls designed to confuse. Instead, they are winding paths designed to guide your way without wrong turns or dead ends. A labyrinth has only one path that leads the seeker to the center and back out the way they entered.

“The labyrinth is gracious and generous with its gifts for all who enter it. It reintroduces the much-needed walking meditation back into Christian Tradition. It gives everyone a tool for spiritual experience. It heals and consoles, supports and confronts, and helps us remember the ancient path where others have trod before us. The labyrinth allows us to experience the rhythm of our souls. It weaves us together in the joy and mercy of God’s grace.” -- Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path*

Experiencing the Labyrinth

There is no right or wrong way to “Walk” the Labyrinth, but below are a few suggestions that may be helpful either in a walk or by using a finger labyrinth (such as on the back of this page):

- **A Path of Prayer**—Walk. Quiet your mind. Let your body find your pace.
- **A Simple Journey**—Think of the journey in three parts:
 - **Going In:** Take a moment to reflect on your life or a specific question or challenge. Ask God to direct your prayer. Let your mind quiet. Let go of all that burdens you. Release your question or challenge to God.
 - **The Center:** Stop, rest, pray, and listen. Spend time with God.
 - **Going Out:** Symbolic of returning to the world, consider your response to God. How can you integrate this experience into your life?
- **Using Scripture**—Choose a Psalm or other passage to guide your prayer (Ps 139 is particularly meaningful since it asks God to search us (search comes from the Latin *circare* which mean “to go around,” much like a labyrinth.)
- **For Discernment**—Take a question into the labyrinth and be open for guidance. This may come in the form of a feeling, an image, a word, or a phrase.

- **Use a repeated phrase as you walk.** Examples are: “Come, Holy Spirit” or “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Or you may have your own prayer.
- **Journal**—Before the walk, write down questions you have for God. After the walk, spend some time recording your experience.



Additional Resources

- For additional labyrinth designs to print, visit www.spdl.org/prayerresources to find examples.
- Local outdoor labyrinths include one at the Cathedral of St. Philip, Mercer University’s Atlanta campus, and St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal. For additional locations around the country, visit: <https://labyrinthlocator.com/home>
- *Walking a Sacred Path* by Lauren Artress
- Visit Veriditas: The Voice of the Labyrinth Movement at <https://www.veriditas.org/>