

Christian Uses of Labyrinths

In 325 A.D. Christians placed a labyrinth on the floor of their church. Although Christians must have been using the labyrinth earlier, this is the first historical record we have of the Christian use of the labyrinth. Since that time labyrinths have been prayed, studied, danced, traced and drawn as Christians sought to use this spiritual tool to draw closer to God.

Using a labyrinth involves moving one's body and opening one's heart to Jesus. All you have to do is follow the path and you will find the center. Unlike a maze the labyrinth has no tricks. A "typical" labyrinth experience involves preparing oneself at the threshold, following the single path to the center, spending time in the center, following the same pathway out the threshold, and then responding to the experience.

If this is your first encounter with the labyrinth you may wonder, "What is the correct way for me to do this?" Relax! Pray on the labyrinth the way you like to pray in other places. Have a conversation with God about the things that matter most to you, offer words and gestures of praise, or present your prayer requests to Christ; there is no "right" way to pray the labyrinth. If you still aren't sure how to get started simply repeat, "Thy will be done" as you move on the labyrinth. Another simple way to pray the labyrinth is to pray for others on the way, enjoy God's presence in the center, and pray for yourself as you move back towards the threshold.

The word "labyrinth" is not found in the Bible, but themes of following God's way, spiritual journeys, and enjoying God's presence—all central to labyrinth experiences - are found throughout Scripture. Two verses that can be used while praying the labyrinth are, "You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy." (Psalm 16:11) and Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life..." (John 14:16).

We are currently in a period of historic labyrinth revival. Churches, retreat centers and Christian camps are placing these prayer tools inside and outside. Christians all over the world are installing labyrinths in their yards and gardens. Many are using the labyrinth as a ministry tool, bringing portable versions to prisons, national Denominational conferences and church group meetings. It is conservatively estimated that there are over 5,000 labyrinths in the United States alone. God is blessing the use of the labyrinth; many are being drawn closer to Jesus, experiencing healing and gaining spiritual clarity as they pray on its path.

For more information on the Christian use of the labyrinth see Jill Geoffrion's three books: *Praying the Labyrinth: A Journal for Spiritual Creativity*; *Living the Labyrinth: 101 Paths To A Deeper Connection with the Sacred*; and *The Labyrinth and the Enneagram: Circling into Prayer*. Pilgrim Press publishes them.

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