

## Four Ways to Pray in a Labyrinth

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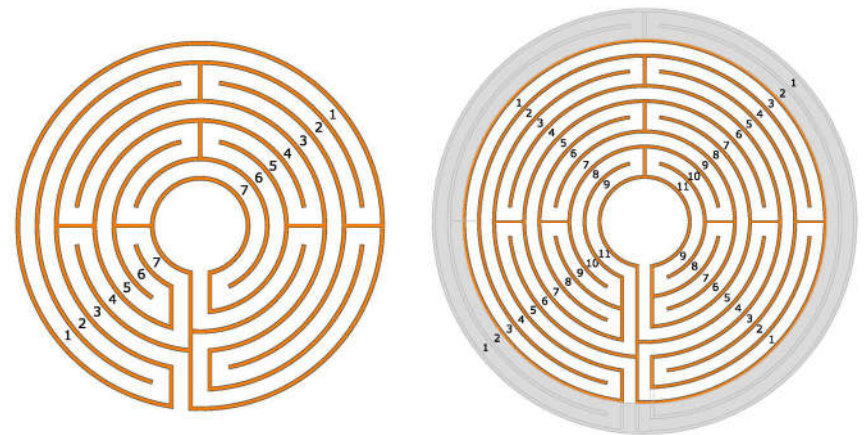
Many Christians and churches are rediscovering an ancient prayer practice: a labyrinth. A labyrinth is a geometrically designed walking path leading to and from a central point. It is not a maze; you cannot get lost. There are no dead ends. The point is not disorientation, but orientation.

Some Christians, preachers and churches think labyrinths are weird, even pagan. It is true that labyrinths have been used in pagan rituals (for example, the Hopi people of North America used labyrinths as symbols of Mother Earth, and the numerous stone labyrinths along the Scandinavian shoreline were used as magic “traps” for trolls, etc.), but the form itself is no more pagan or Christian than a book or a musical note. It is the content in it and purpose of it that makes a labyrinth either pagan or Christian—or neither.



Labyrinths have been used for centuries to pray and meditate. The most well known labyrinth today is probably the one in the Chartres Cathedral.

There are several typical designs: the “classical” design of seven rings, and the “medieval” design of 11 circuits in four quadrants.



There may be a labyrinth in a church garden or retreat center near you (a quick internet search may show your options). Some churches (particularly during the Lenten season) create indoor labyrinths for a set period of time, and sometimes include “stations” or stopping points along the way to guide a worshiper. But anyone can pray in a labyrinth. Here are four ways to get you started:

- 1) **Ask God a question as you enter the path.** Then, as you walk slowly through the twists and turns, listen for an answer. Let your steps and your silence invite the presence and guidance of God.
- 2) **Start your journey to the center with confession** (you may want to visualize your sins being left behind with every step you take). When you reach the center, journey out with affirmation (perhaps visualizing yourself picking things up or putting

things on—like the righteousness of Christ, the smile of our Creator, the purity of the Holy Spirit, etc.). Pause at the exit and give thanks for your cleansing journey.

- 3) **Recite a breath prayer\* as you navigate the labyrinth**, perhaps praying a different prayer on each leg or quadrant of your journey.
- 4) **Lay down your burdens as you walk to the center of the labyrinth** (perhaps laying down pebbles along the way as symbols of your worries or cares). In the center, pause to thank God for taking your burdens on himself ([1 Peter 5:7](#)). Then count your blessings and give thanks on the journey to the exit.

There are, of course, many more ways to pray in a labyrinth, but these are offered to get you started.

Are there any prayer labyrinths near you? Have you prayed in a labyrinth before? What was the experience like? Please leave a comment and let me know.

### **\*Breath Prayers**

Here are ten short, simple “breath” prayers, based on Scripture, that you can pray anytime, anywhere:

#### **1) "Lord, have mercy."**

The Desert Fathers, monastic Christians in Egypt in the third and fourth centuries, often prayed the prayer many know as the “Kyrie Eleison” (Greek for “Lord, have mercy”). Also called the “Jesus Prayer” when pronounced as “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,” it is rooted in Psalm 123:3, Luke 18:13, and Luke 18:38.

#### **2) “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”**

Based on the words of the boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3:9). Occasionally I pray these words to quiet my soul and express my desire to hear from God.

#### **3) "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."**

I often pray this prayer of affirmation and dependence, from Psalm 121:2, in times of need and desperation. It reminds me that my help doesn’t come from my own strength, but from God.

#### **4) "Here I am."**

This is a prayer of presence, and availability, based on the cry of the prophet in Isaiah 6:8.

#### **5) "Show your power."**

This is a prayer (based on Psalm 68:28 and others) to intercede for others, particularly when the need is great and the situation dire.

#### **6) "When I am afraid, I will trust you."**

Based on Psalm 56:3, this prayer has helped me to remain calm and trustful when tempted by worry and fear.

#### **7) "Not my will, but yours."**

This prayer echoes Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Like the previous prayer, it helps to pray this when you are anxious or impatient. It places the praying heart in a position of surrender, where great answers are likely to come.

#### **8) "Bring your kingdom."**

Based on the prayer Jesus taught his earliest followers (Luke 11:2), I often breathe this prayer when I am overwhelmed by the sadness and horrors of the latest news or a devastating diagnosis. In just a few words, it expresses a heartfelt desire for the day when “the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God” (Revelation 12:10) will be fully realized and the Evil One will be defeated.

#### **9) "Say the word."**

When a Roman centurion sent word to Jesus asking him to heal a sick servant, he told Jesus that he didn’t even feel worthy for the Lord to come into his house. He simply requested, “Say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Luke 7:7). Jesus commended the centurion’s faith, So I will often pray for someone’s healing—from sickness, addiction, emotional pain, depression, etc.—with this breath prayer.

#### **10) "Come, Lord Jesus."**

The last prayer recorded in the Bible (Revelation 22:20) is not only a prayer for Christ’s return, but also as a prayer for him to come repeatedly, constantly, into my situation and struggles.