

# How to Walk a Labyrinth

By Steve Martin





**The labyrinth is an archetypal shape found thousands of years before the birth of Christ on pottery and clay tablets.** This shape transcends cultures, geography, and time.

**The shape of a circle itself is a sacred shape.** Researchers have found that babies stare at circles much longer than they stare at other shapes. You are genetically programmed to be attracted to circles. It is the shape of a face. It is found in flowers, trees, and galaxies. The spiral shape is found in nature at all levels.

**There are many ways to walk a labyrinth.** Listen to your own heart. Walk in a way that is comfortable to you. Whatever happens happens for a reason. In “The Way of the Labyrinth,” Hellen Curry says no one is every lost in a labyrinth, there is no wrong way to walk a labyrinth, and wherever you end up will be right for you. What I’ve written here are guidelines. Walk the labyrinth in a way that is meaningful to you.

**Thy will be done.** Start with having no expectations. Say “I don’t know” and put all that you know about prayer, religion, meditation, labyrinths, spirituality, and God in a box to pick up later after your prayer walk. Saying “I don’t know” in itself reminds us to be like a child, to be open to God’s will.

Having no expectations is the most im-

### 7 Steps

1. Have no expectation. Say to yourself, "I don't know."
2. Take half a minute of silence and think about nothing in particular.
3. Find your intention and mantra to carry your intention.
4. Let your mantra decide your pace. Think the mantra as easily as you would think any other thought.
5. Shed busy thoughts and concerns as you go in.
6. Receive new insights and peace in the center.
7. Integrate your new awareness back into your life and your world as you walk out.

portant principle of walking a labyrinth. All other instructions are built around this one principle, and this principle is the foundation of my almost fifty-year meditation practice. It has been my experience many times over the years that what is possible is always greater than what I thought was possible.

**Never underestimate the importance of simple spiritual techniques.** Good things, wonderful things, paradigm-changing things will happen if you are intentional in your practice and follow the simple technique. God wants to be in relationship with you.

**Before entering The Entrance to the labyrinth, take half a minute to think about nothing in particular.** Do this



half minute of silence first before doing anything else. Just let thoughts come and go. Notice how you feel. Notice how effortlessly and naturally thoughts come.

Don't try to think of anything. Don't try to censor your thoughts or feelings.

Don't judge your thoughts or feelings. Just be aware of what concerns you have, and how you are feeling.

Don't try to control the flow of your thoughts in any way whatsoever. Just be in the stillness. If you have lots of thoughts and strong emotions just notice what they are without judgement. This half minute of not trying to think about your intentions or how I will walk the labyrinth is a powerful tool. This releases you from expectation. This releases you from forcing your will over God's. This half minute should be how you start all prayer.

**The labyrinth itself is designed to help you have no intentions and allow the will of God to move you.** There are no wrong turns. There are no dead ends. It is one path to The Center and one path out. It turns regularly 180 degrees back and forth. The movement of the body by walking slow steps facilitates the letting go of your intentions. The inability to not really see the whole path and how it leads you to The Center facilitates trust that the path will take you there.

**After your half minute of silence, find what intention you want to have for walking the labyrinth.** Find the mantra, word, or prayer, you will use to carry your intention. An intention is a statement asking for guidance. The guidance may be about a particular issue or problem, a feeling, or spiritual need. Take 2-3 minutes. Answer the question, “I am a pilgrim seeking ...?” What are you seeking? Finish the sentence with what feels comfortable to you. What is God saying to you? Listen with your heart at the level below thought and words. What are you feeling? Your intention is anything that is authentically yours.

**Here are some examples:**

- The intention could be: “I am a pilgrim seeking healing.” The mantra could be: “Heal me Lord.”
- The intention could be: “I am a pilgrim seeking happiness.” The mantra could be “Happiness.”
- The intention could be: “I am a pilgrim seeking peace.” The mantra could be “Peace.”
- The intention could be: “I am a pilgrim seeking how to pray.” The mantra could be “Prayer is God’s love within me.”
- The intention could be: “I am a pilgrim seeking clarity.” The mantra could be “Clear my mind and heart.”
- The intention could be: “I am a pilgrim seeking acceptance.” The mantra could be “Acceptance.”



**Let me tell you about my personal experience on one labyrinth walk.** It was my first walk. The intention I used was “I am a pilgrim seeking understanding.” I wished to understand the labyrinth better. My mantra was: “The Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Ghost.”

On the way in to The Center, I used the mantra “Will of God,” which I substituted for Father.

At The Center I used “Holy Ghost,” and processed my thoughts and feelings. It is a time of reflection. What have I learned?

On the way out I used “Son,” as my mantra, representing the love Jesus brought out to the world. I thought, “How could I bring what I learned out into the world? How would I use it?”

The funny thing is while walking to The Center, my mantra “Will of God” changed. It felt more comfortable, peaceful, and powerful to use “Walk with God.” That instantly became my mantra. I had amazing experiences with my first walk. I suddenly relaxed. My shoulders dropped. This deep peace settled over me. I felt this gentleness along my walk that stayed with me weeks after the walk. This peace is deepening and growing within me day by day. It is with me now. My mantra “Walk with God” pops up while working around the house or otherwise going about my day. I let it.

**Be open to how you feel as you walk the labyrinth.** Be open to not knowing. Be open to listening to God and your own heart. Go with the sacred voice inside you. Think the mantra and your intention as effortlessly, and naturally as you would any other thought. Be easy with your mantra. It may want to change. Let it. It may get faint. Let it. The highest level of the intellect is feeling. Your heart knows what the mind cannot know. It is through feeling that you understand and know God.

**Walk the labyrinth using your mantra, and pace with no expectations simply one step after the next till you finish.** This is all you do. When you forget, and let go, and are not on the mantra simply go back to the mantra and continue walking. Don't worry if you forget, or have lots of thoughts and feelings. The goal is not to walk it perfectly. Be with your imperfection. The times you forget or drift or wander or daydream unintentionally is when the magic is happening. Just go back to the mantra. Don't try to make magic happen. It will happen if you follow the simple technique. Just easily not mind-  
ing go back to the mantra when you realize you are not on the mantra step by step through the labyrinth. The power of the labyrinth comes from these simple instructions. Your intention is always there carried by your mantra whether it is at the surface of your consciousness or not, working for you.

**Let your mantra decide the pace of your steps into the labyrinth.** You may decide for instance, a mantra of



“Walk with God” may feel comfortable to say with every other step, or third step or every step. You decide your pace and how you will use your mantra and the pace of your steps. Remember to have no expectation of the outcome. Walk as a child might on their first day of school.

**While walking focus your gaze on something that is comfortable to you.**

You may find looking at your feet, or looking a few feet ahead is comfortable. Some people use the practice of mindfulness meditation to be aware of the soles of their feet while walking. I imagine the soles of my feet connecting me to the path. I notice how the soles of my feet feel when they touch the ground.

**Be courteous while on the path with others.** If someone is too slow for your comfort, just step off the path and pass them. If someone wants to pass you, let them. Don’t mind what happens.

**When you reach The Center, pause for a moment.** The Center is a place for processing your experience. It is a time for understanding. Feel the stillness. How is the stillness different at The Center than it is at The Entrance? How are you different? What are you feeling? What have you learned about yourself? Process the experience at The Center with the same attitude of having no expectation, no judgement. Just let it



unfold. It may unfold in a moment or take days and weeks later to fully understand your walking prayer experience.

**On the way out retrace your path.** Use your mantra the same way step by step as on the way into the labyrinth. Draw your attention to how you may use what you've learned. How will it direct what you do? How can you use this experience at the end of your prayer walk?

**After you leave the labyrinth pause again at the exit and feel the stillness.** Do you feel different compared to how you felt when you began? Do you feel different compared to how you felt at The Center? Your prayer walk experience will unfold over time well beyond the site of the labyrinth walk. Know that if you can walk with God in a labyrinth, you can walk with God outside a labyrinth. God is not confined to a labyrinth.

**I use the walking prayer based on the labyrinth sometimes when taking a regular walk.** I imagine I'm at The Entrance as I take my first step. I have an intention, and a mantra walking at a regular pace. In my walk I am walking into myself going deeper and deeper as in the labyrinth. Wherever I turn around is The Center, and my way back is reflection on what I have learned.

I always feel this centeredness, this peacefulness on such a walk. I might use a walking prayer while doing house work. Sometimes the walking prayer intention or mantra I have used in the past comes to me unexpectedly just going through my day. Sometimes the experience of being in relationship with God



comes to me without thought, or effort or intention or particular practice whatsoever because God is not confined to a labyrinth.

### **References**

Here are some places to learn more about labyrinths, including history:

- Helen Curry, “The Way of the Labyrinth”
- The Labyrinth Society <https://labyrinthsociety.org/resources>
- The World-Wide Labyrinth Finder <https://labyrinthlocator.com/>
- Walk the World’s Most Meditative Labyrinths by Jennifer Billock <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/walk-worlds-meditative-labyrinths180957823/>
- Walking the labyrinth: An Exercise in self-healing by Mary B. Shindle <https://www.americannursetoday.com/walking-the-labyrinth-an-exercise-in-self-healing-2/>

### **Labyrinths in the Wilmington Area**

- New Hanover County Arboretum  
6206 Oleander Drive  
Wilmington, NC 28403  
<https://arboretum.nhcgov.com/>

- Church of the Servant  
4925 Oriole Drive  
Wilmington, NC 28405  
<https://cosepiscopal.ecdio.org/>
- Lower Cape Fear Hospice  
1414 Physicians Dr,  
Wilmington, NC 28401  
<https://www.lcfh.org/>
- St. Philips Episcopal Church  
205 East Moore St.  
Southport, NC 28461  
<http://www.stphilipschurch.org/>

### **How to Draw a Labyrinth**

It is easy to draw a labyrinth! Find some simple methods for drawing a labyrinth here: <https://imgur.com/gallery/miISB>

Here are some ways to get started:

- Draw one on a piece of paper and trace it with your finger.
- Take a stick and draw a labyrinth on sand and walk it at the beach.
- Use some sidewalk chalk and draw a labyrinth on a basketball court or parking lot pavement.

Labyrinth walking is not confined to the limited formal labyrinths you may find in your town. Be creative.

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Know that if you can walk  
with God in a labyrinth, you  
can walk with God outside a  
labyrinth. God is not  
confined to a labyrinth.



*A recording of the following as read by Steve Martin is available at <https://speechurch.com/WORSHIP/prayer.html>*

### **Labyrinth Visualization**

Start by saying “I don’t know”  
and take half a minute  
not trying to think about anything in  
particular at all  
not thinking about what your intention  
will be  
or your mantra that will carry your in-  
tention  
or even that you are a pilgrim seeking  
just let your thoughts and feelings  
move through you as waves on a beach  
don’t censor your thoughts  
don’t censor your feelings  
have no judgement whatsoever  
that you may be lost  
or that you don’t know  
remember that there is no moment other  
than this moment  
notice whatever is going on inside you  
and what it feels like to have no expec-  
tations  
and after about half a minute  
begin the search for your intention  
say to yourself  
I am a pilgrim seeking ... “  
finish the sentence and ask for guidance  
look below thought and listen with your  
heart for anything that is authentically  
yours  
and after you answer “I am a pilgrim  
seeking”

select a mantra, or phrase or word or  
prayer  
that will carry your intention through  
the labyrinth  
your mantra may be the same as your  
intention or different  
whatever is comfortable  
then let your mantra decide  
how you walk  
let your mantra decide  
the pace of your steps  
let your mantra decide your journey  
put all the weight of what may happen  
into just walking comfortably and ef-  
fortlessly with your mantra  
trust not knowing  
trust whatever is authentic in this mo-  
ment  
and as you walk to the center  
know that with each step you take  
you are moving deeper into yourself  
deeper into your relationship with God  
by simply letting it happen  
taking one step  
and then the next  
step after step  
mantra after mantra  
turn after turn  
maybe notice the soles of your feet  
touching the surface of the labyrinth  
floor  
notice how comfortably and effortlessly  
you walk  
maybe notice your fellow travelers  
around you  
and how you walk as a community

mantra after mantra  
step after step  
and as you move into the center  
you move into yourself  
feel the stillness  
at The Center  
and be fully and simply present  
exhale a breath and breathe in a breath  
is there anything you notice  
that is different at The Center  
than at The Entrance?  
how do you feel at each?  
is there anything you have learned  
allow thoughts of reflection as is comfortable  
embrace the mantra as it comes up  
let what happens happen  
honoring what you feel  
accepting what is real about yourself  
and whatever happens will be right for you  
and if you find there are some things  
that no longer serve you  
let them go  
embrace any gifts you receive  
and when it's time to leave The Center  
you will know  
it will feel right  
begin the walk back  
let your mantra guide your steps  
reflect on what you have learned  
step after step  
make your way back  
embrace what you are feeling  
embrace how you will use what you

have learned  
remember how Christ brought his love  
back to this world  
is your walk back different  
from your walk to The Center  
honor whatever is being said to you  
and remember what this walking prayer  
has to say  
may come as lightening or speak with a  
whisper  
or may reveal itself long after you have  
asked the question  
“I am a pilgrim seeking” asking for  
guidance  
now start your prayer  
with a half minute of not thinking any-  
thing at all  
then take several minutes to find your  
intention  
and the vehicle to carry your intention  
move into the labyrinth as is comforta-  
ble  
mantra by mantra  
step by step  
move into the labyrinth  
move into yourself  
for if you can walk with God in a laby-  
rinth  
you can walk with God outside a laby-  
rinth  
for God is not confined to a labyrinth  
now start your half minute of silence  
not thinking about anything in particular  
at all  
then find your intention  
and your mantra to carry your intention  
begin your walk with God

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