

# **Labyrinth Meditations**

**by**

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Spiritual Directors' Training Programme of Spiritual Growth Ministries**

In the garden of Eden Community Church is an octagonal patterned labyrinth based on the one at St Quentin's Basilica in North France.<sup>1</sup> I want to provide opportunities for 'pilgrims' to contemplate and reflect in this quiet mid-city space.

The Labyrinth is a place to receive Spiritual Direction guided by the Pathway and/or a Director, to encounter God and respond. The pathway, like a director, leads the directee by just being there. The directee moves with bends and turns along one pathway to and from a destination and in an environment that beckons the traveller to respond personally to God.

The Labyrinth provides a unique way of Spiritual Direction. The directee is in a physical position of prayer 'journey' where they open themselves towards an encounter with God one step or pause or turn at a time. The directee is exposed in a sensory way to encountering God, particularly if the labyrinth is outdoors, involving sight, sound, touch, smell and even taste. The centre of the Labyrinth is the inward 'destination' of the physical journey where the Spiritual Director may have placed symbols suggested in these Meditations. From the pausing, stopping, reflecting and praying on the way to the centre and engaging with the symbols at the centre a directee is open to an encounter with God. The Labyrinth gifts the directee the opportunity to take a reflective walk by slowing down and paying attention. Personal communication and intimacy with God may be discovered. A similar process allows a walking out with opportunity to respond and to live the consequences of the encounter.

Before the Labyrinth journey begins the Spiritual Director may offer to be available at the end of the walk if the directee chooses, or to provide a space available for the directee to journal, draw, meditate or pray further before leaving. At this stage the directee may want to engage with the director but may have found the 'direction' of the Labyrinth and God's Spirit sufficient. The Spiritual Director needs to be sensitive to this. In my own experience, holy and mysterious things do happen that must not be interfered with. A Director, however, needs to remain prayerfully available.

The following Labyrinth Meditations have been written for seasons in the church calendar and biblical events. It is the fulfilment of a dream for a prayer garden when my husband Richard and I were pastors of the church and leading the renovation and building of a new community centre on the site of the original 'beyond use' building. I shared the dream with a creative energetic person and we were away! We subdivided a back section and developed the new centre's outdoor area. My colleague found a sponsor to fund the labyrinth and prayer garden.<sup>2</sup> To this space I invite any in the community to come and take their own individual or group pilgrimages.

I dedicate this to those special people who caught my vague vision and made it happen. May generations of pilgrims meet God in new ways on this sacred pathway.

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<sup>1</sup> Eden Community Church, 74-76 View Road, Mt Eden, Auckland, NZ. Labyrinth garden accessible from church car park on Alderley Road

<sup>2</sup> A prayer kneeling bench, commissioned by Dr John Sturt in memory of his wife Agnes Sturt, was added to the garden.

These reflections don't necessarily need to happen in this particular space but all are welcome to come and use it.

*Jeremiah 6.16 "This is what the Lord says; Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."*

*Psalms 84.5 "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their heart on pilgrimage."*

The labyrinth is a sacred pathway of pilgrimage, prayer or meditation. It is not a maze. Rather it has a single winding path that leads to and from the centre with no obstacles or dead-ends. It is found in various forms in religious traditions around the world.

Historical examples of labyrinth for walking are numerous.<sup>3</sup> The oldest identifiable are in Southern Sweden and date back to the Iron Age. Most others date from the Middle Ages. During the late Medieval and Renaissance periods the labyrinth became a popular feature of garden design. The most famous and oldest surviving path is the medieval designed stone Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France dated from around 1220 AD.

Back then pilgrims would walk the labyrinth symbolically to represent the journey to the Holy Land. "One of the most intriguing and engaging aspects of the labyrinth is to help us connect somehow with our place in a great, unfolding story – a story of humanity, spirituality, theology, quest, belief, wonder, doubt, penitence and journey."<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary labyrinths have become attractive to people and they can be found worldwide in temporary form<sup>5</sup> and permanent form. Their purpose allows people in their fast moving world to stop, meditate and be deliberate in their quest for God and to silence the body, mind and spirit. "In walking the Labyrinth we deliberately slow down to give God our prayerful attention. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us to be fully present to the one who is always with us. We quiet ourselves so we can notice the stirrings of God and respond in love, faith and obedience."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> made from turf, stone, plants, tiles ceramics and dirt.

<sup>4</sup> Draper, Brian , **Labyrinth Illuminating the Inner Path**.(Lion Hudson, England, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> made with candles, stones, sand, moveable canvas and fabric

<sup>6</sup> Brown, Sharon Garbough, **Sensible Shoes** (InterVarsity Press, Illinois.2013)



### Stages of the Labyrinth Journey

1. Before Walking In.
2. Journeying In.
3. The Turns.
4. The Centre.
5. Journeying Out.

1. Before Walking In: – a place of letting go, leaving behind, shutting down the inner noise that could disturb. You may want to remove your shoes.
2. Journeying In: – this is a journey into the unknown but on a path you cannot get lost on as there is only 1 path to the centre. Walk at your own pace – meditating on what God gives you, release burdens, identify fears, and confess sins.
3. The Turns: – the path will take you close to the centre then draw you away towards the outside time and time again. Turns remind us to be open to changes to reach a goal – to be welcomed not feared. It is a picture of life.
4. The Centre: - Rest, breathe, be still - experience being held in God's loving embrace. Linger with God in your own deepest centre.

5. Journeying Out: - Begin your walk out when you are ready. Allow the Spirit to strengthen and empower you as you take God's presence and gifts out into the world. There may be symbols there for you to choose to carry out.

When you reach the exit, pause, give thanks, rest, put your shoes back on, sit on a seat, kneel at the prayer bench or sit in the garden. You may want to express your journey with words, pictures, or with another who has walked the pathway with you.

The seven seasons are:

1. Advent.
2. Incarnation (Christmas).
3. Lent.
4. Maundy Thursday/Good Friday.
5. Resurrection Sunday.
6. Ascension.
7. Pentecost.



**Advent Labyrinth Guide.**

Advent – the 4 Sundays before Christmas represent hope, peace, love and joy. It is a time of looking forward, preparation for the Promised One. What preparation do you need to make to welcome the Promised One this Christmas time?

**Before Walking in:**

As you consider this busy time in our southern hemisphere - the end of the year, Christmas coming, summer holidays beginning:- what word do you most need to meditate on for Advent? Hope, Peace, Love or Joy?

Read: Isaiah 9.6 "For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

**Journeying In:**

Walk at your own pace meditating on part of this passage or what you sense God is saying to you to.

### **The Turns:**

What am I turning from as I make a turn in the path? Name those things. What am I turning towards as I move closer to the centre or to God? Be aware that God is with you as you make the turns.

### **The Centre:**

At the centre will be candles representing the promise of light that is to come into the world with the birth of Jesus. Advent candles; Hope, Peace, Love and Joy are lit to show that way. Take a candle from the container – name it and carry it with you out into the world to light your pathway towards Christmas?

### **Journeying Out:**

You are walking out on a journey from this centre to Christmas. Meditate on that light you are holding; a light of love, joy, hope or peace. Thank God for the great gift to hold a light that will keep burning because of His Spirit within us. Go with confidence as you prepare with expectation for Christmas.

### **Christmas Labyrinth Guide.**

*Joy to the World the Lord has come, let earth receive her King.*

*Te Harinui, – glad tidings of great joy.*

*O Holy night the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.*

*Away in a Manger no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.*

*O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant...O come let us adore Him.*

*Silent night, holy night.*

*Hark! The Herald Angels sing, glory to the new born King.*

These are words you may sing during the Christmas season.

Luke 1.28-37 "The angel went to Mary and said, Greetings you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High...Nothing is impossible with God."

### **Before Walking In:**

As you prepare to enter, think of yourself as Mary or Joseph or yourself. You are about to give birth or welcome a new part of you into the world. Remove your shoes if you like to indicate you are beginning an unknown and new journey.

### **Journeying In:**

Walk to Bethlehem searching for a place to rest mindful that your time has come...to let go of this heavy weight, given to you by God, you have carried for many months.

### **The Turns:**

What do I need to turn from and turn to on the path to a new beginning?

### **The Centre:**

His name shall be called 'Emmanuel' God with us. Welcome God with you...God in you...God around you...the miracle of rebirth. 'O Come let us adore Him'

### **Journeying Out:**

God became flesh and dwelt among us. As I walk out – what gifts do I offer to my world this Christmas time?

*Joy to the world the Lord is come.*

*Let earth receive her King;*

*Let every heart prepare Him room*

*And heaven and nature sing.*

Isaac Watts /George Handel

## **Lent Labyrinth Guide.**

‘During Lent we examine our lives and through the practices of prayer, fasting and works of charity, seek to conform our lives to Christ’s. For some this conversion will be a turning from sin to grace, for other it will be a gracious turning towards the mystery of God in Christ.’<sup>7</sup>

### **Before walking in:**

Pause, sit on a seat or kneel at the prayer rail. Quieten your thoughts, the distractions of the day, still your body. Read these selected verses from Psalm 51.

*“Have mercy on me O God according to your unfailing love;*

*According to your great compassion*

*Blot out my transgressions.*

*Wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.*

*Against you and only you have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...*

*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts, you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*

*Cleanse me and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow.*

*Create in me a clean pure heart O God and renew a right spirit within me.”*

### **Journeying In:**

Walk at your own pace meditating on what God calls you to for confession and cleansing. Speak aloud or silently your requests to God as you walk towards Easter.

### **The Turns:**

What are the attitudes, thoughts and actions that I want to turn from in this season of denial, fasting or temptation.

### **The Centre:**

Make a cross with the sticks, reeds and flax as a symbol of solidarity with Jesus on the Lenten journey to the cross.

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<sup>7</sup> Nouwen, Henri J.M. and Bauer, J. **Lent and Easter Wisdom** (Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri, 2005)Pg x

### **Journeying Out:**

As you walk out carrying your cross, you are going back into the 'world' with your Lord on a journey towards Easter, of death then resurrection.

### **Prayer**

*'Loving God, take my poor offering of friendship and remind me every day of your invitation to journey with you to the Easter miracle of Resurrection. Allow me to accept the weaknesses and defects that you and others see in me, but which are hidden from me. Lift me up when I fall and always let me reach out to, not reject, your outstretched hand of welcome and forgiveness. And, keep my sins and doubts from leaching the joy out of life.'*<sup>8</sup>

### **Maundy Thursday or Good Friday Labyrinth Guide**

"The Lenten Journey is one of Spiritual growth and as such presumes movement from one state of being to another state. Scripture, psalms, prayers, rituals, practices and penance are the components of the Lenten journey. Each component, tried and tested by years of tradition is one of the 'engines' that drives the season and which brings the weary spiritual traveller to the joys of Easter."<sup>9</sup>

### **Before walking in:**

PAUSE where you are standing: sit on a seat or kneel at the prayer rail. Quieten your thoughts, the distractions of the day, still your body.

If you would like to, read this passage from Matthew 26.36-45

*Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little further he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" He asked Peter. "Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."...*

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<sup>8</sup> Nouwen, Henri J.M. and Bauer J. Pg 11

<sup>9</sup> Nouwen, Henri J.M. and Bauer J. Pg 8

*“Look the hour is near and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer.”*

### **Journeying In:**

On the eve or on the day of Good Friday, walk at your own pace meditating on Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, this scripture, or your own meditation.

### **The Turns:**

Jesus was turning to submit to His Father’s will. As you make the turns to the centre what are you turning to Jesus for in this time of sorrow?

### **The centre:**

Here are symbols of the crucifixion – nails, thorns, hammer, a sponge, a jar of wine vinegar. Linger, reflect, touch, hold, taste as you identify with the journey of Jesus and the cross.

Hear the words of Jesus:<sup>10</sup> ‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing’.

### **Journeying Out:**

As you walk out you are going back into the ‘world’ with your Lord on a journey towards Easter, of death and then resurrection. “The man of suffering is the God who still suffers the pain, injustices, greed, and betrayal of his people today. God is not impervious to our suffering.”<sup>11</sup>

Upon that cross of Jesus  
Mine eye at times can see  
The very dying form of One  
Who suffered there for me;  
And from my smitten heart, with tears,  
Two wonders I confess-  
The wonders of His glorious love,  
And my own worthlessness.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 23.34

<sup>11</sup> Irish Jesuits, **The Sacred Space** (Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, Ave Maria Press, Inc, Notre Dame, IN 2015) Pg 98

<sup>12</sup> Hymn 309, verse 4, ‘Beneath the Cross of Jesus’ from **Hymns of Faith**.

## **Resurrection Sunday Labyrinth Guide.**

### **This guide is for sunrise.**

#### **Before Walking In:**

At dawn on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.<sup>13</sup>

Imagine yourself as one of the women who are going to anoint the body of Jesus. This is a walk of grief, love and courage. The one you loved has died and is in a sealed tomb. This is also a walk of great mystery.

#### **Journeying In:**

Be aware of the changing sky from darkness to light.

What is the darkness you are feeling as you approach the tomb of your Jesus?

#### **The Turns:**

What are the fears you are turning from over the last 3 days? Where are you turning to with the spices? What are these gifts you are bringing? Is there a perfume?

#### **The Centre:**

Hear the words; 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen just as he said.'<sup>14</sup> HE IS ALIVE! Touch a stone that has been rolled away...pick it up and hold it. What is the stone you want rolled away today so Jesus can live fully in you?

#### **Journeying Out:**

Either: Are there words or a song of Resurrection that God reveals to you, celebrating this wondrous miracle of redemption power.

Or: Meditate on the new day dawning with the stone that you have named that is being rolled away.

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<sup>13</sup> Luke 24.1,2, Matthew 28.1

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 28.5,6

### **Song of Praise:**

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today.

He walks with me and talks with me, along life's narrow way.

He lives He lives, Salvation to impart.

You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart.<sup>15</sup>

### **Ascension Labyrinth Guide**

40 days after the Resurrection

### **Before walking in:**

Jesus speaks to his friends; *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14.1-3)

Recall a time when someone very dear to you told you that they were leaving your home, community, town, country. How did you feel? What was that like for you?

### **Journeying In:**

Notice as you walk, the feelings of 'goodbye', physical separation, loss of the friend who was always there or near.

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<sup>15</sup> A.H.Ackley, **He Lives**. Youth Sings: Praise Book Publications, Glendale, California.

### **The Turns:**

As you make the turns, reflect on the disciples' different responses to this news. Thomas; 'Lord we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Phillip; 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

### **The Centre:**

Hear the words of Jesus to you today.

*'The counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. I am going away and I am coming back to you.'*<sup>16</sup> *'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.'*... *'After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky..."'*<sup>17</sup>

Look up into the sky beyond a cloud and hear the voice of the angel – 'He will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'<sup>18</sup>

### **Journeying Out:**

*'I am coming back...wait for the gift my Father promised...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...you will be my witnesses'.*<sup>19</sup>

Walk out anticipating meeting Jesus or a loved one again.

'Eternal and gracious God,  
We believe your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
To have ascended with triumph into your kingdom in heaven;  
May we also in heart and mind  
ascend to where he is,  
and with him continually dwell;  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit  
one God now and forever.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> John 14.25 - 28

<sup>17</sup> Acts 1.8,9

<sup>18</sup> Acts 1.11

<sup>19</sup> Acts 1.4,8

## **Pentecost Labyrinth Guide.**

50 days after the Resurrection.

Romans 5.5 *'Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.'*

This is the day to celebrate the sending of the Holy Spirit on the disciples who were, *'waiting for the gift my Father promised which you heard me speak about.'*<sup>21</sup>

### **Before Walking In:**

They were all together in the same place – waiting faithfully following the last instruction Jesus had given them, probably with a range of feelings and thoughts. What will this look like? How will it happen? How will we know? Will any-one else notice? Is there anything to be afraid of? What do we do while we are waiting? How will this change our lives? Will I miss out if I am not with the others at the exact time?

### **Journeying in:**

"This is the day to allow the Holy Spirit to set you on fire, to fire you up, to ignite a spark in you".<sup>22</sup>

Pick up a red candle as you begin your walk signifying your anticipation of the Holy Spirit to surprise you and to open your heart to infinite possibilities.

### **The Turns:**

Choose a mantra to pray as you take the turns:

With God all is possible / Come Holy Spirit / Light up my life / Surprise me Holy Spirit / I seek your power in my life...

Look at the candle you are holding as you repeat one these prayers reminding you that you walk to the centre where the fire is burning in hope that your candle will be set alight.

### **The Centre:**

Here is a fire burning. Become aware of the extravagant and dramatic sounds and senses on the day of Pentecost that the disciples of Jesus experienced...sound of a

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<sup>20</sup> A NZ Prayer Book. Pg 602

<sup>21</sup> Acts1.4

<sup>22</sup> Shaper, Donna, and Camp, Carole Ann **Labyrinths from the Outside In** (Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, V.T. USA 2013) Pg 122

violent wind from heaven, visual of tongues of fire resting on them, sounds of speaking in unknown words, crowds of people from every nation hearing their own languages...people amazed and confused.

What is the spark you want God to ignite today?

When you are ready hold out your candle to be lit. This symbolizes being set on fire by the Spirit of God.

(If the wind is blowing then I invite you to take a piece of cardboard and shape it to give protection to the flame as you walk out, reflecting on the winds that blow in your life that may cause the flame to be snuffed out.)

### **Journeying Out:**

Living God, eternal Holy Spirit,  
Let your bright intoxicating energy  
which fired those first disciples  
fall on me  
with joy and boldness  
to send me out in the power of the same Spirit  
to witness to your redeeming love,  
and draw all people to you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God now and for ever.

Amen.<sup>23</sup>

Blow out the candle when you choose after your Labyrinth journey is complete. You may like to take this candle home and have a ritual of lighting it at certain times to remind you of Pentecost and/or praying the mantra you prayed on 'the turns'.

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<sup>23</sup> A NZ Prayer Book Pg 604,605

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## **Terms**

- Contemplation - a long loving look
- Meditation - reflection, quiet pondering.
- Penance - the process of declaring wrong and receiving forgiveness.
- Pilgrim - one who is on a journey
- Promised One -referring to Jesus 'God with us' whose birth was foretold.
- Sacred - Holy

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I am happy for Spiritual Directors to print the Meditations for the Labyrinth as guides for any Labyrinth walkers they may be directing.