



Walking the Labyrinth: A Place to Pray and Seek God

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"In the shortest terms, I think the central thesis of Walking the Labyrinth is that life itself is a labyrinth, a singular journey that winds its way to God in an encounter with Jesus Christ."

— Travis Scholl

"I came upon the labyrinth by accident."

In 2008, my wife and I moved into our home in St. Louis, Missouri, returning to our hometown after living in Connecticut for a while. Getting to know the neighborhood, I was walking past a church near our house, First Presbyterian Church, which sits at the dead-end of Midland into Delmar Avenue. Glancing at the churchyard, I discerned thin circles of cobblestone brick enmeshed in the grass.

I walked closer and recognized its circular pattern. I had heard and read about labyrinths before. And ever since college, I had read and reread the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), the writer whose paradoxical fictions are labyrinths, like M. C. Escher sketching with words. Now I stood at the literal foot of its infinite path. Its open entrance invited me.

I began to walk.

After that first discovery, I would walk its path occasionally, as the mood struck. For all I know, I am this labyrinth's only pilgrim. I have never noticed anyone else walking it.

The labyrinth first intrigued me as a leisurely curiosity. But then came the questions: Why walk a labyrinth anyway? What am I supposed to do as I walk it?

Walking the labyrinth—any labyrinth—is a curious thing. The labyrinth is a distinctive kind of maze. Its purpose is singular, as is its path. Thus it isn't the kind of game we typically think of when envisioning a maze, hoping we make the right choices to reach the end.

As a matter of fact, a labyrinth does not have an end per se. It has a center. And as long as you follow the path, you will reach the center. Every time. So there is a kind of mindlessness to the labyrinth.

But I soon discovered a purpose in the mindlessness. The labyrinth, paradoxically, stirs up a new kind of mindfulness, an awareness of the path that opens its pilgrims into a deeper sense of their surroundings, the lifeworlds—home, neighborhood, work, family, friendships, ad infinitum—in which they find themselves.

In short, the path of the labyrinth is the process of discovery. Its path is process itself. I walk the labyrinth to discover anew the worlds I inhabit. I walk it to discover what I thought was previously undiscoverable, what I didn't even know was there. Which is why I can walk the same labyrinth—time and again—and still find the path new.

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What started as leisure was now turning to discipline. And the path is always new, because, as a spiritual discipline, the labyrinth is a path of contemplation, reflection, prayer.

On the surface of it, it is a place for silence and for speaking into silence, for speaking to One unseen. But beneath the surface, walking the labyrinth is a profound discipline in listening, in active silence, in finding movement and rhythm in the stillnesses underneath and in between every day's noise. Walking the labyrinth is an exercise in finding the voice speaking in whispers underneath the whirlwind of sound.

-Taken from part one, "Before the Beginning"