

# The Problem with Labyrinths

## Walking the Labyrinth

The labyrinth, a circular walking path for meditation, has its origin in ancient pagan rituals, most famously at Knossos in ancient Crete, where one is located in the basement of a famous palace where the man-eating Minotaur was defeated by the mythical hero Theseus.

The most famous Christian labyrinth is embedded in the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France. Some proponents believe that medieval Christians walked labyrinths as a substitute for pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Today some proponents describe three stages of the labyrinth's journey inward: 1) Purgation or letting go; 2) Illumination; and 3) Union with God. Many labyrinths even have Bible verses to aid in meditation.

One Lutheran youth group spent 200 hours making a labyrinth. Their pastor prayed for God's blessing on all who walked the labyrinth. One teenage girl prayed, "Thank you, God, for the labyrinth. It helped me sort out my problems. Now I know I can go on."

### It's become a Lenten thing-to-do.

What's wrong with this? Why not walk a labyrinth to sort out problems? To get closer to God? Let us count the ways the labyrinth craze goes wrong:

1. The Christian does not make spiritual progress in life because the Christian is always **totally** sinful and **totally** righteous. As Luther said, the Christian life is a "happy exchange" in which Christ takes our sin and gives us his perfect righteousness (Compare 2 Cor 5:21).
2. The Christian life is not a journey but a daily return to the foot of the cross. As Luther said, "The Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever continued" (*Large Catechism*, Baptism, Tappert 445:65).
3. Walking a labyrinth makes the Christian life something "we do" rather than what God in Christ has done on the cross for us (see #1). For example:
  - a. Labyrinth Stage 1: Purging or letting go of sin is not possible because we are caught in sin and cannot free ourselves. The only way out is to be rescued by Christ in baptism.
  - b. Labyrinth Stage 2: There is no illumination or light within us. Christ is not in us. As Luther said, "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament" (*Smalcald Articles*, Tappert, III/8, p.313:10).

- c. Labyrinth Stage 3: Union with Christ is not something we “experience” as we experience phenomena in life. Our confidence is not based on any experiences, even spiritual experiences or visions. As Paul states, “Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). Rather, Christ promises to be wherever his Word is purely preached and his sacrament administered according to this Word. Our confidence is based on the promises of Christ.
4. “But I find it helps!” While it’s possible to sort out problems while walking a labyrinth, it’s also possible to sort them out while jogging or doing the dishes. There are no holy walks, holy paths, or holy spaces where God’s presence is concentrated so one can get a boost of divine insight. We bring all things to the Lord in prayer, and we sort out our problems using the best common sense we can muster. In all things we live by forgiveness.

### **An Alternative**

Memorize the 4 verses of the hymn, “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less” (LBW #294).

For freedom Christ has set us free;  
stand fast therefore, and do not submit to a labyrinth.