

Walking the Labyrinth

A labyrinth is a continuous path that loops around in a circular manner until it reaches a center point.

The design is thousands of years old, of unknown original purpose. In medieval Europe the Catholic Church began incorporating the design, often inlaid in the floors of cathedrals, as a symbolic way for the faithful to “walk” to the Holy Land. Over time the religious significance of the labyrinth changed to reflect one’s relationship with God, the center point representing union with God.

The concept of walking the labyrinth was revived in modern times as a form of prayer or reflection for people who experience their life as a spiritual pilgrimage, a personal journey or a process of growth.

The Hospice labyrinth is located at the end of the winding walkway next to the pond by the inpatient facility. As you stand there looking down, you will see five dark-colored stones side by side in a straight line. Step across those stones onto the light-colored stones and you will be on the path to the center. Once there, simply retrace your steps back out.

Your walk in to the center, being in the center, and leaving the center to return to the opening portal can mean whatever you want it to. For example, walking in represents the life you have lived to this point, the center represents the present moment, the walk out represents what you want your life to be in the future. Or you can walk in with your palms pointing down, signifying something you want to let go of; you can stand in the center with palms open and pointing up signifying what you want to receive; you can walk out with your hands held together in a sign of gratitude for all that you have.

Walking the labyrinth can be done in times of crisis and times of celebration. It is not magic; it is simply a way of focusing our attention on what we are thinking and feeling, be it grief, depression, anxiety, joy, hope or love, and it can provide a healthy means for us to understand and express our inner state at the moment.

Walking the labyrinth can be done with a specific intention in mind, such as remembering or honoring someone we love, perhaps leaving a symbolic token of this in the center. Or it can be done simply as an act of open awareness of how the process itself typifies our life in general. For example, did I walk quickly through it in order to complete it (because I am feeling rushed in my life or because achievement is important to me)...or did I walk it slowly (because I am a careful person who needs time to do things)?

There are many variations of walking the labyrinth. For additional suggestions and guidance on this, whether to walk it individually or as part of a group, contact the Center for Grief Support at Hospice of the Panhandle.

