

**The Gift of Walking**  
**By Rev. Todd Farnsworth**  
**Proverbs 4: 10-19**



*10 Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. 11 I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. 12 When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. 13 Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. 14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way. 16 For they cannot rest until they do evil; they are robbed of sleep till they make someone stumble. 17 They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. 18 The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. 19 But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.*

It is summertime and the rhythms of the program year shift to a quieter, more gentle pace. It is a time for playing, and reflecting, and napping in a chair as the sun warms your body. It is in many ways, like a prolonged sabbath opportunity. A chance for us to be with God in different ways and enjoy the presence of the Holy in our lives.

To that end, I will be offering a series of ways for you and me to stay connected with Jesus/Spirit/God in this sacred season of summer.

We begin with the practice of walking, which seems like a pretty basic place to start. I noted that everyone here today is already a champion at it (except maybe little Lina, who is making moves in that direction as she celebrates her first birthday with us...go LINA!). Some of us move quickly. Some of us move slowly. Some of us are somewhere in between. Whatever your speed, walking as a spiritual practice can be a gift. Taking a cue from the familiar labyrinth, the practice of spiritual walking involves intention as well as connection. It can take place anywhere at anytime. Some of you will remember that a labyrinth is a twisty path that has only one entrance that also serves as an exit. The sojourner moves from the outside to the inside of the labyrinth by following a path on the floor while focusing attention of God. By moving along the path of the labyrinth, while considering a question or particular piece of sacred text, you open yourself up to new understandings and relationships with God, other people, the planet, the universe.

The path has three stages - the 'inward' journey, the center and the 'outward' journey.

Now, some of you may be thinking, “but Todd, we don’t have a labyrinth to walk on. Where could we find one? What if I get dizzy or lost?”

The good news is, you can’t get lost in a labyrinth, because it is like traveling to a cul de sac. You wind down the street, get to the end, and turn around. So, in effect, anywhere can serve as a “labyrinth” if your labyrinth was stretched out to be straighter than most common labyrinths. You could use a path in the woods, rooms in your house, the length of your driveway,

or even the sanctuary! If you use a path that is familiar to you, all the better because then you won't be distracted by the *worry* of getting lost.

So, now that we have access to a labyrinth, let's see how to use it to stay connected to God using today's text.

The author of today's lesson was trying to impart wisdom to his or her readers/listeners. They wanted their audience to reflect on the path of righteousness that God lays out for us vs the obstacles of wickedness that are laid out by others around us.

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When you see the word "wisdom" here it is important to know that the original audience would have experienced that word as a feminine manifestation of God. A female representation of the Holy, who imparts the ways of the Lord to those who will listen. Are you listening?

She says that the way of wisdom, the way to a long life, is to take the path of God. To seek justice. To be humble. To show love and caring to all people. These are God's ways in comparison to the ways of evil that bring about personal and communal destruction.

So, with that text in mind, let's start out on our sanctuary labyrinth and stay connected to the source of the path which will lead from here in the front of the sanctuary, to the back, and then return to the front. In your home you

can choose a path in and out of various rooms, or from one end of your house to the other and back again. In the woods you can set an end point and then return from it. Wherever you walk, remember that:

- The theme of the 'inward' journey is letting go of things which hinder our wholeness and inner approach to God. Past perceptions, preconceived ideas, prejudice are left behind as we make our way to the center or ending point of our stretched out labyrinth. It is a narrow way. Holding the idea of today's text as we go, for example, we may start the journey inward taking inventory of any practices that are antithetical to loving relationships, and ask God to help us let go of them along the way. Let go of *doing evil or causing someone else to stumble*. Let go of entitlement. Let go of the need to be right or win. Whatever is a stumbling block for you, let it go as you head to the "center" and trust that God has something for you to replace those obstacles to peace.
- When you reach the center of your Labyrinth allow it to be a space of meditative prayer and peace. it is a place to just "be" with God. We might dream, imagine, converse with God, keep quiet, listen to God's prompting whispers that fill us with new life and draw us deeper to God's side. In the center of the labyrinth rest a bit until you sense the "something new" that God has in store for you. It may be a new thought. It may be a new relationship. It may be a sense of being forgiven, of your load being lightened. Just be there with God, and experience whatever God has in store for you. Remember, God

builds us up. God desires our wholeness so that we can be in holy relationship with God.

When you are ready, head back.

- The theme of the 'outward' journey is 'relationship' - with ourselves, with others and with the planet - seen in the light of our relationship with the Holy. It is an opportunity to reflect on what we've experienced in the "journey" and wonder about how it will change the way we interact with God and/or the world around us. What new ideas has the labyrinth raised in us? How will we begin to respond to those revelations? Head toward the *path of the righteous (which) is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.*

When you complete your journey, take time to reflect on where you've been and how God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit has been with you. Take time to thank them. Move forward with your day, connected and transformed by your relationship with the One who loves us best.

Walking is a gift that can keep us in touch with the Holy. Let us practice it with intention and discover where the Spirit is leading us this summer, in Jesus' light. Amen.