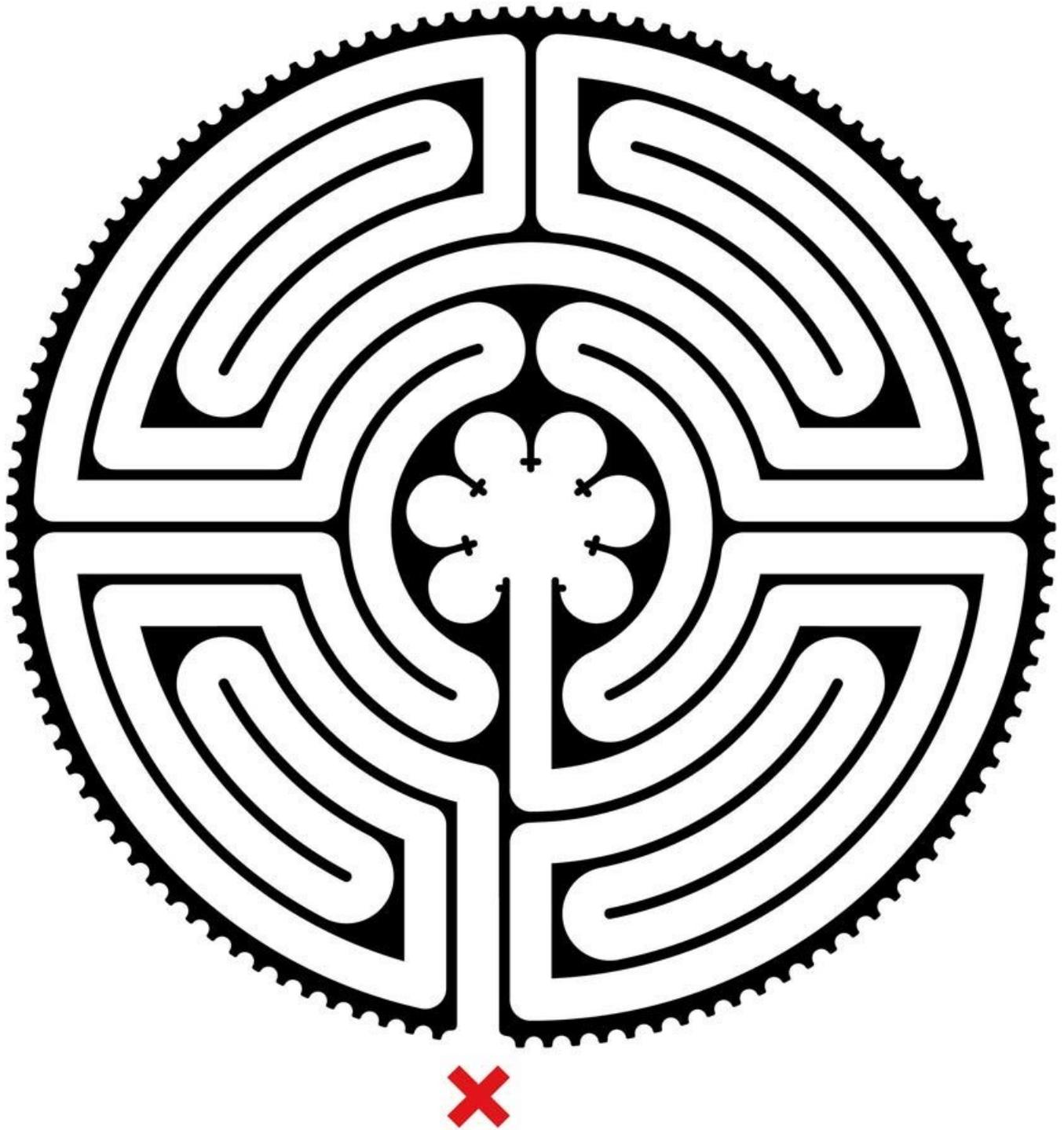


A Labyrinth for Lent

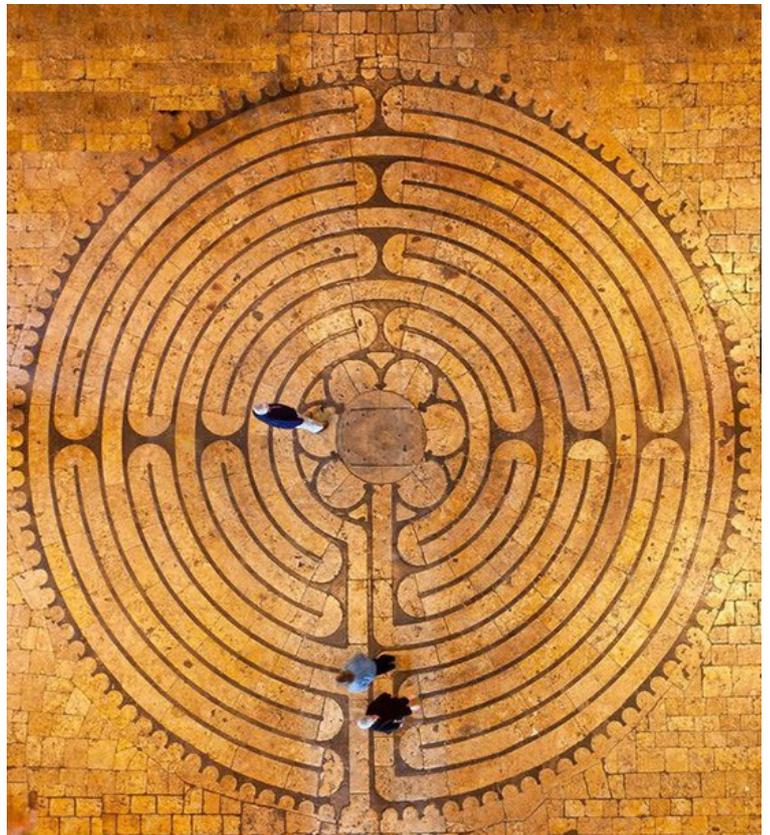


Resources and activities for 'stay at home' pilgrims this Lent

A Labyrinth for Lent

This year our focus for Lent is a ‘labyrinth’ that we’re creating in the garden at the Good Shepherd. Labyrinths are one of the oldest spiritual tools known to humankind, dating back at least 4000 years. They became identified with the Christian church in Europe around 350 A.D. In the Middle Ages it is believed that walking the labyrinth was often used as a form of pilgrimage for those who couldn’t afford the time, or the money, to make the journey to the Holy Land. That makes the labyrinth the perfect tool for ‘stay at home’ pilgrims like us!

The Labyrinth is not a maze and is not intended to trick or confuse you. There is no “right” way to walk the Labyrinth, though typically you start at the entrance, follow the path to the centre, and then follow the same path out. In its simplest form a labyrinth walk is used as a meditation. Many churches create a labyrinth during Lent and Holy Week as a meditative walk toward the Cross – perhaps as an alternative to Stations of the Cross.



One of the best known labyrinths is at Chartres Cathedral in France. Built in the 13th Century it is still visited by pilgrims today.

People walk the labyrinth for many reasons, including curiosity. Some people begin walking and then discover their reasons along the way. You might choose to walk the labyrinth for prayer and discernment, self-reflection, mindfulness meditation, healing and wholeness, processing grief, or even reducing stress.

For Christians, the labyrinth is used to depict pilgrimage and journey into God; but its symbolism and meaning transcend religious and non-religious boundaries. We



hope that people in our parish will also be drawn to walk the labyrinth. The beauty of this symbol is that it can mean different things to different people - although our prayer is that people will find God as they follow this path.

In this booklet you'll find a variety of resources. There's a 'finger labyrinth' for you to try at a home. There are prayer exercises for each week in Lent, that are intended to be *practical, physical and playful!* There's also some 'prayerfulness colouring' based on ancient labyrinth paths. Lastly, we've included a sheet to encourage people to turn some gentle daily exercise into a prayer walk.

These resources are suitable for people of *all ages*, and at all stages of faith. We hope that these different tools will help everyone to find and experience God in a new way.

How do I use the labyrinth at church?

The labyrinth is set up in the garden at the Good Shepherd. It's free for anyone to use at anytime. Below are some suggestions on how to use it. There are four stages to walking the labyrinth:



Reflecting

Before walking the labyrinth, pick up a stone.

Jesus said: *'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'*

Think about whether there's anything that's weighing you down? Or is there a question that's weighing on your mind?

Releasing

Carry your stone as you walk to the centre of the labyrinth. This is the time to quiet the mind and release your troubles. Be open to whatever thoughts or feelings bubble up. Take slow breaths. Relax and move at your own pace.

Receiving

The centre is a place of reflection. Pause and stay as long as you like. Be open to God; listen to that small inner voice. Be honest with yourself. Rest.

Returning

As you prepare to retrace your steps, *place your stone at the foot of the cross.* As you walk, think about what God is inviting you to do or be. Be aware of God's presence with you.

Guidelines for the walk

There is no single “right” way to pray a labyrinth. Praying in whatever way helps you connect with God during the labyrinth is the “right” way and serves as the best guide possible. Walk the labyrinth with an open mind and an open heart.

Quiet your mind and become aware of your breath. Allow yourself to find the pace your body wants to go. Since the path is two-way, those going in may meet those coming out. You may “pass” people or let others step around you. Do what feels natural.

Every labyrinth experience is different. You may feel nothing or have a powerful reaction. Don't over analyse it!

Other approaches to the walk may include...

Listening for God's voice or message to you

Intercessory walks - offering prayer for people or needs

Meditative walks - meditating on a specific word or passage from the Bible

A conversation with God

Confession and forgiveness - letting go of past mistakes and forgiving yourself

Discovering your vocation or calling

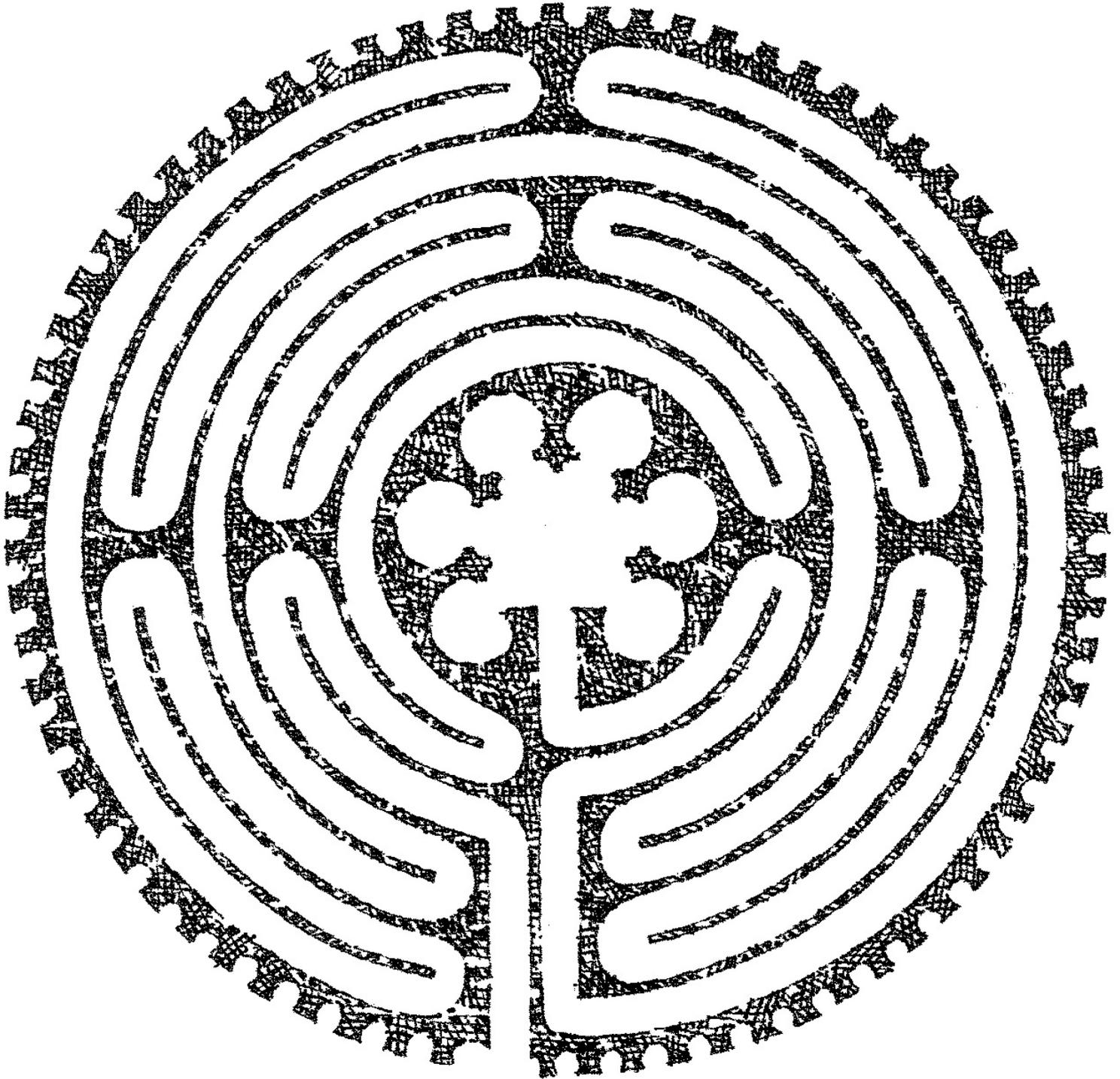
A walk of thanksgiving and gratitude

A way to release grief



Finger Labyrinth - for use at home

See the instructions on the right



Walking a Finger Labyrinth A Meditative Exercise

Walking a finger labyrinth not only de-stresses and relaxes you, but when you walk it with your non-dominant hand it can also help you solve problems. Is there a question you are struggling with? Is there a doubt about life or faith you can't answer? See if the finger labyrinth can help you unravel things, and bring some resolution...

Sit quietly with your finger labyrinth in your lap. Take a few breaths in and out until you feel at peace.

Recite this prayer or a similar prayer of welcome and receptivity:

*Walk with me Lord
through all the twists and turns of life,
walk with me when clouds obscure the way,
when what seemed close is now so far away.
Walk with me Lord until I trust in you,
lead me to the centre of your love.*



Frame your question. Place a finger from your non-dominant hand at the entrance to the labyrinth. Prayerfully ask a question you are struggling with about life, faith or vocation. Invite God's Holy Spirit to guide and instruct you on your journey.

Slowly trace the circuit with your finger. Stay open to whatever presents itself: feelings, sensations, memories, ideas. Pause at any time to breathe, be with a thought or memory or just to relax into the labyrinth and the question stirring in your mind. At the centre of the labyrinth, sense your connection to your own centre and to God's centring presence.

Acknowledge the Holy Spirit, the heavenly counsellor directing your thoughts and exploration. You can relax, pray, breathe, sing, close your eyes. Repeat your question.

Trace your way out, staying open to whatever comes to you. When your 'walk' is done, place both hands on the labyrinth and sit quietly in the presence of God once more. Thank God for your questioning heart and for the enrichment it brings to your faith.

Trust your 'gut' and the journey it takes you on. Believe in your creative impulses. Is there a solution to your question that surfaces? How is God nudging you to respond? Write it down. You might like to write both your question and response around the labyrinth. Think about what you might need to do next.

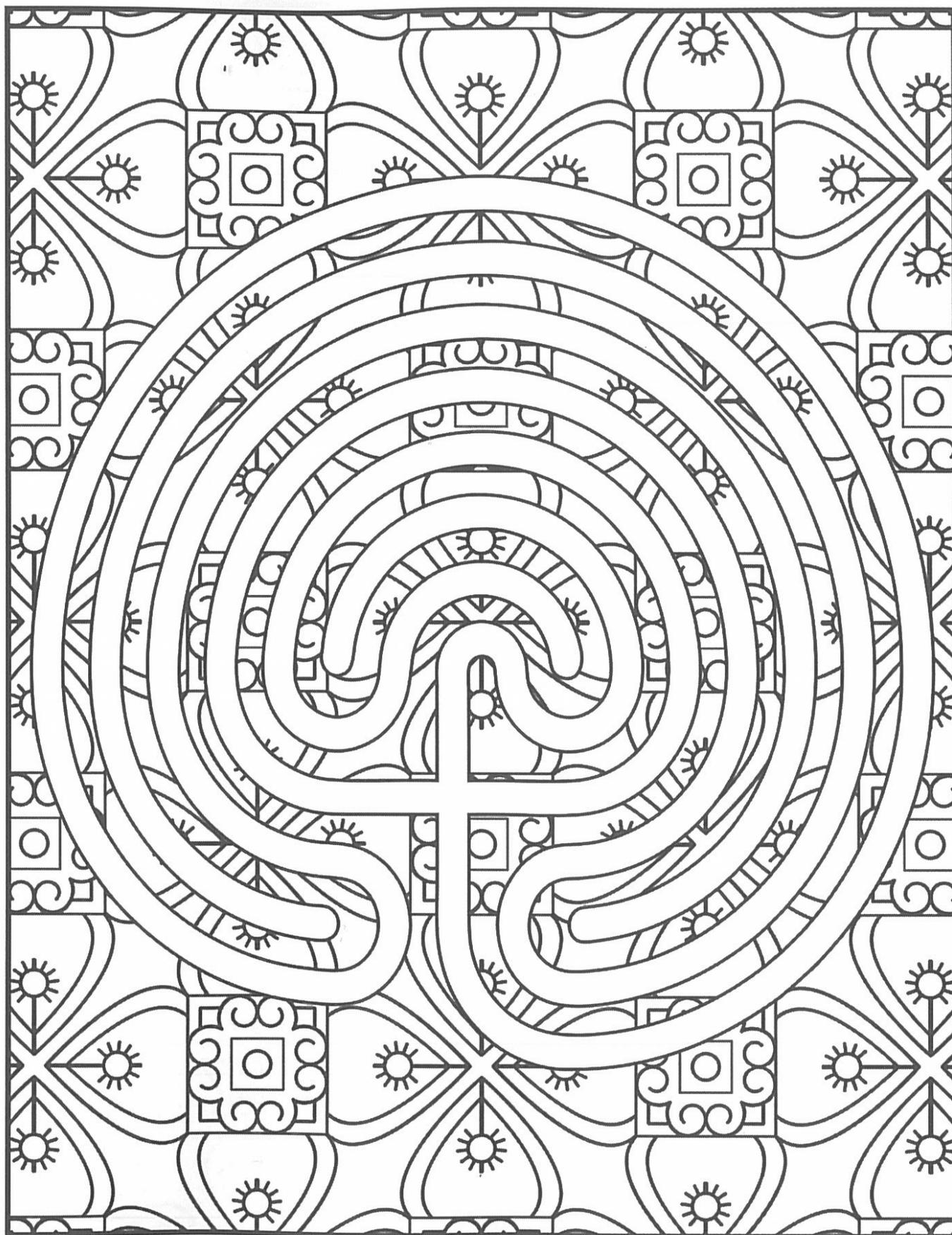
Finish with prayer. Offer a prayer of gratitude to God for the responses that have come to you and the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and change you.

*This exercise is adapted from The Gift of Wonder
IVP Downers Grove (2019) (90-91)*

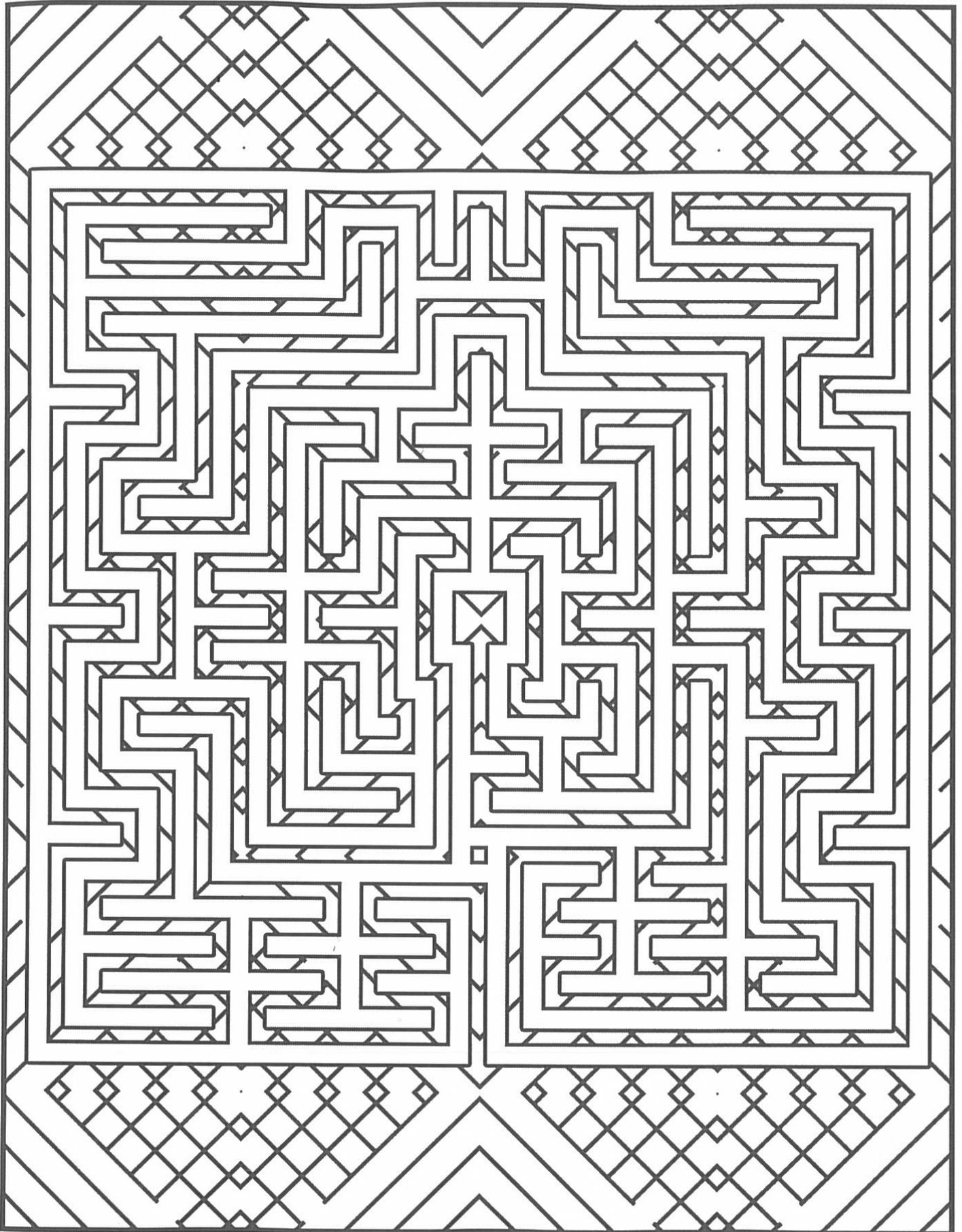


Have a go at creating your own finger labyrinths...

You might like to try some 'prayerfulness colouring'....



'Prayerfulness colouring' can be a helpful way to relax, unwind and become aware of God's presence...



Prayer Activities

Lent is a time for self-reflection and self-examination. Below are a series of guided prayer exercises that are written to be *physical, practical and playful*. The aim of these exercises is to remind ourselves that it's possible to meet with God at all times, and in all places. All the reflections are based on the theme of walking, and things you might need on a walk.

Week 1 – Shoes for the journey

*...but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*

If you're going on a pilgrimage, one of the essential items you'll need is a sturdy pair of shoes. Find a pair of your own shoes that you wear if you're out for a walk.

Take a good look at your shoes - the soles, the uppers, the insides. What condition are they in? Which parts are well worn? Do they need cleaning? How do they smell?

Think about how you're feeling at the moment. Are you feeling worn down? Are you showing signs of wear and tear? Do you feel in need of some care and attention?

Take a few minutes to clean up your shoes. If they're leather, you might like to polish them. If they're suede or fabric, give them a good brush, and clean off any mud.



As you do that, you might like to tell God how you're feeling, or to pray for your own needs, or to simply ask God to do for you what you're doing for the shoes.

When you've finished, put the shoes on. Think about the walks you've done in the shoes. What are you thankful for? Where do you want these shoes to take you next?

Be open to any other observations or reflections you have. God often chooses to speak through every day things.

Week 2 – Food for the journey

After Jesus had gone without eating for forty days and nights, he was very hungry. Then the devil came to him and said,

“If you are God’s Son, tell these stones to turn into bread.”

Jesus answered, “The Scriptures say: ‘No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken.’” (Matthew 4:2-4)

If you're out for a long walk, then most people pack a picnic, so you might like to do this prayer exercise at lunchtime...!

Make yourself a simple lunch – perhaps a sandwich. As you prepare it, think about what's 'feeding' you, and 'giving you life' at the moment. What are the things that have fed you in the

past? Notice how you feel as you think about those things.

Then think about what you're hungry for at the moment – what is it you need? Or want?

As you sit down to eat, offer those wants and needs to God.



Try to eat a few mouthfuls really slowly – noticing the different tastes and sensations as you eat.

What food might God be offering to you right now?

Think about the things you need energy for – for the rest of today, this week, and the coming weeks. Ask God to give you what you need to keep going.

Week 3 – A mobile phone for keeping in touch

Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:8)

Over the last 20 years, pilgrims, travellers and walkers have become increasingly reliant on mobile phones. It's now possible to be in a far flung part of the world, and to still be able to talk to the people we love!

Pick up your mobile phone.

Who was the last person you spoke to on your mobile?

Who was the last person you texted?

You might like to pray for them, or to give thanks for them.

Now think about the last time you couldn't get a signal, or couldn't get through. How did it feel?

At the moment, are you feeling cut off or connected? From



If you're feeling cut off from God, or struggling to hear God's voice, you might like to tell God how that feels. It's fine to be honest; and to raise your voice!

You might find it helpful to remember a time when you felt God was close to you, or you 'heard' God speaking to you.

Often God uses others to speak to us, or uses us to speak to others. Think of someone who might appreciate a text or call right now. Give them a ring or send them a message.

Week 4 – A first aid kit

*Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)*



If you're out for a long walk it's a good idea to carry a simple first aid kit – even if that's just a few blister plasters! Do you have a first aid kit at home? If so, get it out, and use this as an opportunity to sort through it.

Sort through your first aid kit, throwing out things that are out of date, and generally tidying it up. As you do that, think back on the times in your life when you've needed healing – whether that's physical healing or emotional healing. Who or what brought you comfort and help during those times? How did it feel at the time? How do you feel now, when you look back on those experiences?

Be aware of the different thoughts and feelings that surface as you do this.

Take a moment to think about how your body feels today. If you like, you can do a ‘body scan’ – noticing what you’re feeling from your head to your toes. Have you got any aches and pains? Any areas where you’re carrying tension? Have you got any concerns – major or minor – about your health and wellbeing?

As you look through the first aid kit, invite God’s healing power to be at work in your life. Take several deep breaths, and ask God to fill you with his peace and presence. If it helps, you could put a plaster in your pocket, or stick it on your arm, just to remind you that God is with you.

Put your first aid kit away, remembering that it’s always there if you need it.

Week 5

A stone in your shoe!

Next, the devil took Jesus to the holy city and had him stand on the highest part of the temple. The devil said,

“If you are God’s Son, jump off. The Scriptures say:

‘God will give his angels orders about you. They will catch you in their arms, and you won’t hurt your feet on the stones.’”

Jesus answered, “The Scriptures also say, ‘Don’t try to test the Lord your God!’” (Matthew 4:5-7)

For this exercise, find a stone from somewhere outside.



Start by examining it carefully. How does it look? How does it feel? Would it feel different if you stepped on it?

Stones are common features on walks. Small stones can get in your shoes, and big stones can trip you up! Sometimes it's necessary to stop and take off your shoe to remove the stone. Or to attend to some grazes if you've taken a tumble.

If you like, you could put the stone on the floor and run your foot over it, or alternatively, keep holding it in your hand.

As you hold your stone, think about the things that are 'niggling' at you. Are there things that are causing you discomfort, or even pain? Perhaps you're aware of something getting in your way, and causing you to trip up.

Notice who or what comes to mind as you do this exercise.

As you continue to hold or touch the stone, think about what you might need to do with 'the stone' in your life. Is it a big stone, or a small stone? You might like to invite God to help you move it, or remove it.

Look again at the verses above. When Jesus was tempted in this way, he was in the middle of a desert - surrounded by innumerable stones! Invite God to sustain you, in the same way that he sustained Jesus.



Week 6 - A water bottle

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' (John 19:28)

Jesus said: 'I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink' (Matthew 25:35)

Pour yourself a glass of cold water.

When was the last time you were really thirsty? Try and bring to mind that experience; imagine the parched lips, gritty mouth, and dry throat. Now drink some of the water.



Sometimes in life we can be so busy, that we don't even notice we're thirsty. It's only when we stop that we realise we need a drink.

Drink another mouthful of the water. Notice how it feels as you drink it, and how you feel afterwards.

People sometimes talk about 'spiritual thirst'. Are you feeling thirsty for God? Does your dry, dusty spirit yearn for refreshment from God? Have you been so busy with the demands of life, that you haven't noticed how thirsty you are for God?

Drink some more of the water.

As you drink, invite God to refresh you in the same way that water brings refreshment. If you like, close your eyes and take some time to sit still.

Take a moment and think about others who may be so busy that they haven't had time to get a drink. Who comes to mind?

Take another sip of water, and pray for God to refresh them today.

Week 7 - A hot bath

Then Jesus turned towards the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ... Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' (Luke 7:44, 47-8)

After that, Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him. (John 13:5)

After a long walk or journey, there's nothing better than a hot bath to help rest your legs, and to wash away the dirt from the road. For this prayer activity, consider running a bath, or soaking your feet in a bowl of warm water.

Get into the water, and take some time to relax. Enjoy the sensation of warm water around your feet. Feel yourself begin to unwind.



How often do you take time to care for yourself? If it's not something you do often, what stops you from caring for yourself?

In the Bible, the image of washing is often used in connection with sin. For some people that can be a helpful image, for others it's less helpful as it suggests we're 'dirty'.

In the verses above, the image of washing is connected with love, generosity and tenderness.

There is no hint of shame, only love.

Give yourself a wash. Take some time as you do this. Wash yourself with care and attention, the way you might wash someone else, who's unable to wash themselves. As you do this, remind yourself that God deals with us with that same love, generosity and tenderness.

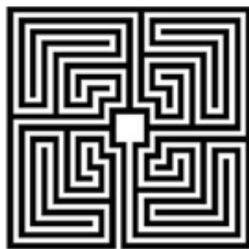
Continue to enjoy the sensation of the warm water.

If you feel guilty about taking time for yourself, invite God to take that guilt from you, and allow God to care for you, in body, mind and spirit.

Empty the bath, or pour away the water, and give thanks both for the journey, and the rest at the end of it.



They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road...?' (Luke 24:32)



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