

chapter twelve

the labyrinth

Just as a ship without a helm is driven to and fro by the waves, so a careless man, who abandons his proper course, is tempted in countless ways.

Thomas à Kempis

Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geffrion introduced me to the labyrinth. She has written several books on the subject, including, *Praying the Labyrinth* and *Christian Prayer and Labyrinths*. She has also built several around her family home in Minnesota which she graciously opens to the public. But more importantly, her beautiful spirit and love of the labyrinth, and of God, exudes from her very being. She graciously offers this reflection on one of her experiences:

Pausing at the threshold of the labyrinth, I prayed, "Your will be done." I entered expectantly and began walking on the 14-inch path at a relatively slow pace, savoring the opportunity for my body to connect with God

while moving. At about the third turn, I noticed that I'd slowed almost to a stop as I made the 180-degree change in direction.

I have learned that it is always worthwhile to pay attention to what I am noticing as I use a labyrinth. The semicircular stones between my feet reminded me of millstones. This led me to a sense of connectedness with generations of family members who made their living as the power of water turned such stones. Filled with a feeling of my place in history, I continued on. At the next turn, without initially realizing it, I slowed and stopped.

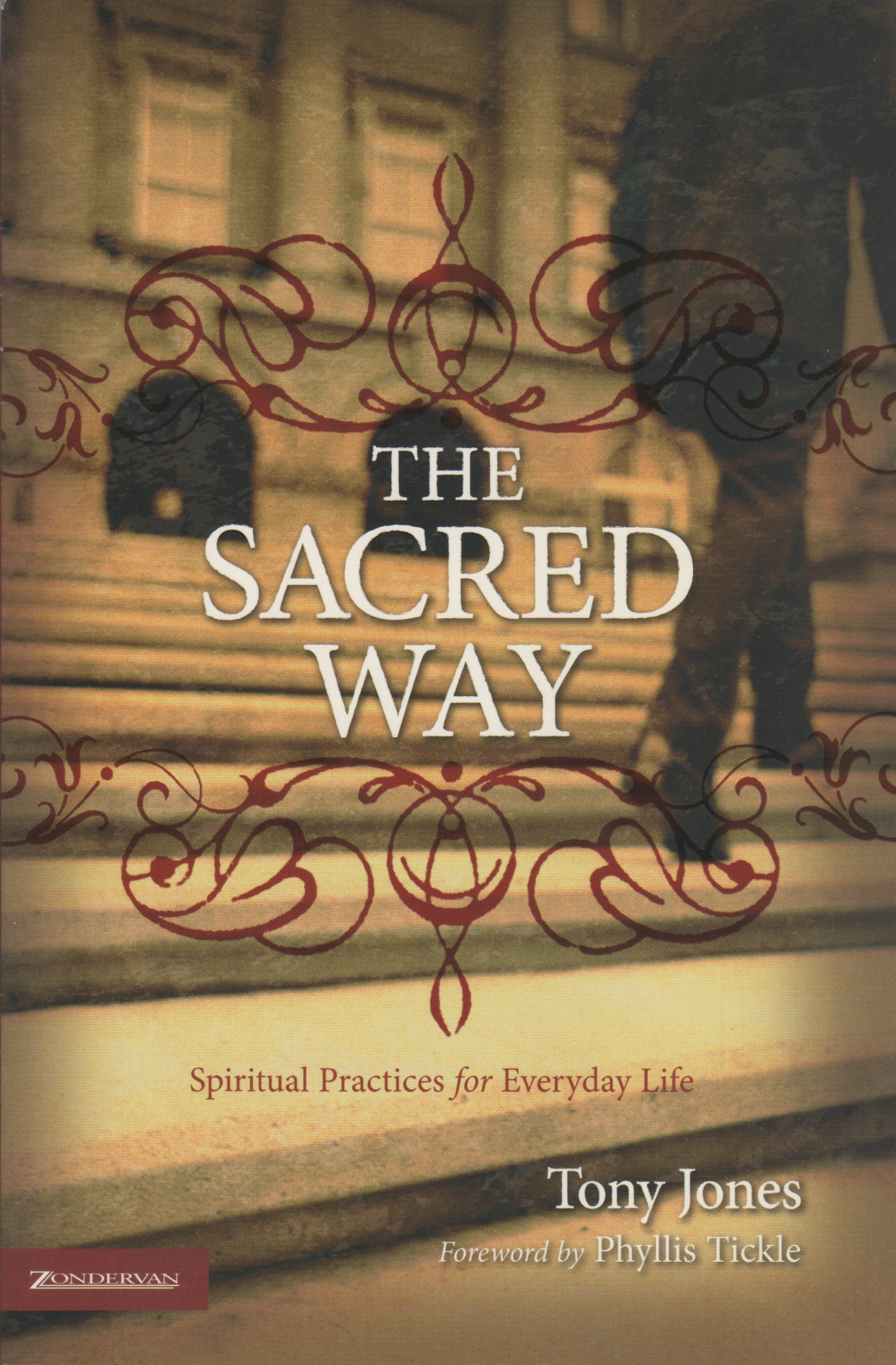
On the labyrinth I often see my life as if I were looking at it in a mirror. My internal and external realities come together in a way that brings new understanding. Since I usually move around turns at the same pace I use on the rest of the path, my sudden desire to stop surprised me. I asked myself and God, *What's going on?* I knew the answer would come in the walking, so I moved on.

I could feel and hear someone coming up behind me on the path. The person was walking more quickly than I. When I got to the next turn I walked straight through it and waited on the far side for him to make the turn and walk on. Once he was past, I moved back on to the half moon shaped slab of stone and stood there in the unexpected awareness, *Here I am again. Stopped at a turn.*

"Oh!" I laughed out loud as the realization hit me. "I'm in a time of transition in my life. Many changes (turns) are ahead, including my oldest child's departure for a college 2,000 miles away from our home, and my father's impending death. No wonder God is using the turns of this labyrinth to offer me the opportunity to gain needed wisdom about moving through transitions." After that I made at least a brief stop at each of the 28 turns that lead to the center.

As I did so, a fuller understanding came. Being a person who thrives in a crisis, I usually speed up and take care of everything I can in order to make the difficult situation "better." The strategy had worked well, at least I had thought so. Standing on that turn without moving, I realized I was practicing a skill I would need to use often in the coming months. Through this amazing labyrinth pattern that my body was praying, God was communicating this message: "As you enter transitions, you will find it helpful to slow down, perhaps even stop, before entering the experience of change that lies before you."

My labyrinth prayer had once again opened me to the possibility of walking with God, others, and myself in new ways. I had come to the labyrinth with an open mind and heart. God had met me with a gift I had not realized I needed. I moved on, filled with gratitude.



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