

# The Emmaus Labyrinth

A PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT FOR THE GOOD LIFE



*Contemplative Conversation*

*Imaginative Discernment*

*Caragony's Embodiment*

# The Emmaus Labyrinth

is designed to help you connect experience and faith, and live the implications. This process might be called theological reflection, meaning-making or Christian reflective practice. The Emmaus Labyrinth offers a creative approach to reflective practice to form us for God's good life of *shalom*. It combines two rich resources.



## **ONE IS THE ROAD VIA EMMAUS STORY (LUKE 24:13–49). IT HAS THREE MOVEMENTS.**

1. On the road to Emmaus two grief-stricken disciples contemplatively walk and talk with a cloaked companion who gently listens them into speech. 2. In the imaginative act of breaking bread at Emmaus, Jesus makes himself known. 3. Returning to Jerusalem, the disciples' excitement turns to fear when they see Jesus in plain view, but he gives courage to empower the living of their new reality.



## **THE OTHER IS THE LABYRINTH, A RITUAL FOR EMBODIED REFLECTION AND AN ANCIENT ARCHETYPE FOR LIFE'S WINDING JOURNEY. IT ALSO HAS THREE MOVEMENTS.**

1. The inward trek helps us release what we carry. 2. The centre gifts rest and positions us for the discernment of new truths. 3. The outward trek returns us to embody these gifts in daily life. The labyrinth's non-linear and circuitous route orients us for sacred meaning-making attuned to mystery, patience and surprise.

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**WHEN SET TOGETHER,  
THE EMMAUS LABYRINTH EMERGES  
WITH ITS THREE MOVEMENTS:**

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**Contemplative Conversation**



**Imaginative Discernment**



**Courageous Embodiment**

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Together these facilitate reflection and formation that is both communal and individual, named and beyond words, lived out and hidden within.

The Emmaus Labyrinth neither mandates sequential steps nor guarantees ‘results’. Rather, it invites awareness and curiosity along the path of encounter and knowing. The hope is that you more deeply share in God’s ‘good life’, or what the Bible calls *shalom*. *Shalom* is much richer than just ‘peace’. It is God’s flourishing in Christ of self, others and world, in graces such as

- + reconciling relationships
- + justice and righteousness
- + beauty and creativity
- + paschal wholeness\*

\* ‘paschal’ is shorthand for Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection; true wholeness comes through the cycle of cross and empty tomb

# Using this resource

## **PONDER**

To begin you might ponder the mystery and dynamics of the Emmaus Labyrinth by slowly reading Luke 24:13–49 in its wending, circuitous and coloured format. If the story is familiar, what do you notice that is new? What do the earthy tones and curving of words evoke? What invitations arise? Simply let these be—resist analysis and hold your thoughts lightly.

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## **CHOOSE**

Reflective practice begins with experience, so take time now to identify an issue, event or circumstance that grabs, arrests, niggles or stays with you. Is it something personal, communal or global? Huge, or seemingly fleeting and insignificant? Definable or vague? For the two disciples it was the tumultuous events, confusion and grief, but for you it might be something wonderful! Just start with something within the marvel and mess of life that beckons further exploration in relation to faith. Don't overthink it.

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## **NARRATE**

Once chosen, write it down clearly and concisely. Dot points will do. Stick to facts and the feelings evoked but avoid interpretation; just tell it how it is. Then stay with it quietly and become as present to it as you can.

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## **ENGAGE**

You are now ready to gently engage with some or all of the Emmaus Labyrinth's three interlocking movements. You can do this by yourself or with others. You might like to sit quietly and be still, or like the disciples, walk and talk together with Jesus. If you have access to a labyrinth, try walking and talking it by yourself or with another trusted friend.

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# Contemplative Conversation

Contemplative conversation invites you to explore sacred clues from your experience through listening conversation within you and with others. As they walked and talked the two disciples released their inner feelings, told of what others said and recounted Israel's backstory, while a cloaked companion listened and shared wisdom from the Scriptures. These varied clues emerging from the winding conversation were critical for meaning-making.

Be patient, hospitable and attuned to the possibility of God in all things. Where does *shalom* seem present and/or absent? What does the silence between the words suggest? Use this movement to contemplatively listen for clues in your experience in one or more of the following ways:

## **LISTEN IN TO SPIRITUALITY AND PERSONHOOD**

In your chosen experience, what might God be saying through your life? Contemplate any felt responses in your body; the lived experience of your spiritual journey as God's beloved; what moves you and the emotions you feel; your unique personality revealed in your story, character, thinking and biases. How was *shalom* evident and/or inhibited *within you* in this experience?



### **LISTEN OUT TO MINISTRY IN CONTEXT**

In your chosen experience, what might God be saying through others and the surrounding context? Contemplate the physical environment, both constructed and natural; the possible influence of cultural or societal dynamics; any persons involved, their journey and their possible perspectives; an evaluation of your participation in God's work. How was *shalom* evident and/or inhibited *around you* in this experience?

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### **LISTEN UP TO THEOLOGY AND WISDOM**

In your chosen experience, what might God be saying through words of guidance and wisdom? Contemplate any relevant verses, passages, books, stories, characters or themes from the Scriptures; communal wisdom from the Christian tradition past and present, other traditions, or broader society; robust thinking that is open to both critical examination and the mystery and adventure of ideas; common sense from accumulated, gathered experience. How was *shalom* evident and/or inhibited in these wisdom sources from *beyond you* in this experience?

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Be still and listen. Do any clues catch your attention from listening in, out and up? Do any prompt a 'burning heart' or aliveness? Stay with them and let them speak as they twist and turn together. What do they say? Does a bigger picture begin to emerge?

# Imaginative Discernment

Imaginative discernment invites you to discern and name any realities emerging from contemplative conversation, engaging the imagination where helpful.

At the Emmaus meal table, the simple imaginative act of Jesus breaking bread connects the clues for the disciples. It triggers the recognition of a larger reality, makes sense of their burning hearts on the road ("I knew it!"), and prompts a bold naming of discerned truths.

Imaginative discernment is gifted rather than forced and may feel like unexpectedly popping out at the centre of a labyrinth. Use this movement with a posture of receptivity to place yourself on discernment's path.





## IMAGINE

In your contemplative conversation, did an image arise which reflects and probes the deeper truths of your experience? Can you say, "It is like ..."? Examples might include a picture, figure, icon, metaphor, analogy, saying, sign, symbol, gesture, artefact, illustration, parallel or story. Where is *shalom* present or absent in your imagery? What does your exploration of imagery suggest? Or can you imagine what God's good life might look like in relation to your experience? Can you say, "It could be like ..."? How might *shalom* be cultivated, and its absence resisted, in the experience you are exploring? What part might you and others have to play?

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## DISCERN

Now name your discerned truths, as best you can. Do this knowing you could be wrong, but believing you are right. Consider the conversations so far as a whole, particularly in relation to any imagery and visions of the good life. What 'grabbed' you or had your heart burning? What are the kernels of reality and truth? Where is *shalom* present and absent? Where might God be present, desiring, speaking, acting? What are the new questions and places of mystery and ambiguity, disquiet or discomfort? What might it all mean for future action, understanding and becoming?

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Be as concise and straightforward as you can. At the same time, if things feel locked inside or on the tip of your tongue, that is OK. Discernment is always 'on the way'. Let any frustration give way to wonder that something is brewing within as deep calls to deep. It is all part of coming to know. This mystery is to be marvelled at rather than mastered.

# Courageous Embodiment

Courageous embodiment invites you to ponder how you will wholeheartedly live any discerned truths, and what courage is needed to overcome inevitable obstacles so transformation might take root.

The two disciples rush back to Jerusalem to share their revelation with the other disciples, who excitedly share a similar experience. But with Jesus' sudden appearance and offer of *shalom*, they all get the wobbles! Excitement and burning hearts turn to terror, doubt, joy and disbelief. Living discerned truths is decidedly non-linear, and they need the encouragement of his presence, plans and power to truly embody their new reality.

A better title for the story might be the Road *via* (or *through*) Emmaus, rather than *to*; the return journey is just as critical as the mealtime revelation. What, where or who is your 'Jerusalem'? Use this movement to explore how your return will let discerned truths live in the muscle.



## **EMBODIMENT**

What are God's invitations to concrete action, to *doing*? How will your discernment work its way into your beliefs, desires and actions? What practical steps will you take to cultivate any visions of *shalom* in yourself, others and the world? What planning, people and resources might this involve?

And where do you sense God *deepening* you in your true self in Christ? What rhythms or practices for holistic formation might cultivate this depth and strengthen your 'muscle memory' for *shalom*? Think small, incremental and achievable steps.

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## **COURAGE**

What obstacles to embodying any discerned truths can you already notice or anticipate? These might include fear and failure, doubt and scarcity, grief and isolation, inertia and stubbornness. What courage from God do you need to step forward? How and from whom might you receive that encouragement?

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In the embodiment of discerned truths new experiences will arise that beckon further reflection. These might return you to contemplative conversation. This is not an endless cycle of introspection, but a way of being in the world that lives the call to live more attentively, fully and fruitfully into our own lives. This is the way of sharing in God's *shalom* in the world. How has that been deepened in you through the Emmaus Labyrinth?

**Go with the deep blessing of God's *shalom* in your journey.**

# TALKING THE WALK



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR THE GOOD LIFE



## DR BRUCE HULME

Bruce is a freelance wisdom educator, consultant, retreat curator, spiritual director and professional supervisor of ministry practitioners and spiritual directors. He loves to help people discern and respond to God's invitations in life and ministry to the good life of *shalom*. Contact Bruce to find out how he can help you or your team notice God, discern well, and join in.

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