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A Game?

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A Game?

Many of us have watched young persons who have excellent hand-eye coordination and quick response time, play with a game that involves accurate and swift movements. Some of us have at times wondered if prayer, our communication with God, is just about as difficult and challenging as getting a tethered ball to land atop a small hand-held stick: only the skilled or talented could hope to succeed on a regular basis.

We are so accustomed to obtaining results primarily by our own practiced actions that we can think of prayer as another task that we might perform in which we lack proficiency, rather than a communication between friends who understand and care about each other. Friendships, including those with God, grow over time and interaction, and they require careful attention if they are to deepen.

The model for making friends is not found in developing a competitive skill like putting a basketball through a hoop. Rather, we set aside time to be with friends, and we communicate, using whatever means seem helpful. With fellow humans, we employ face-to-face conversations, telephone calls and all kinds of messaging options that are available to us. Even more, shared experiences, especially those involving meals, and everything from taking a walk to watching a movie or TV program together, are a normal part of friendships as we know them. Not all of these means are directly available to us in communicating with God. But God is with us always and everywhere. So we can pray at any time, especially when we do so from the perspective of friendship.

Prayer is not a game, in which we can improve our technique, or compare ourselves to others. Praying is the name we use for when we are with an unseen Person who is wholly present with us and personally, lovingly attentive to us whenever and wherever we engage in the activity. We can consciously seek to grow in our relationship with God, and, as we do in all friendships, try to interact in ways that seem mutually pleasing. In praying, it helps to consider that we are the ones who are trying to become more conscious of the other, since God has already committed to the relationship with us without reservation.

In all our friendships, we have never been in control of the others' responses to us, nor have we foreseen or known ahead of time what our thoughts and feelings would be in response to the initiatives of any of our friends. The development of every friendship is in many ways quite mysterious. In some friendships we know that we are growing closer only when we reflect, and become aware that our bonds have become important to us. With God

especially, since we do not usually have direct experiences involving our physical senses, the mystery of how our friendship grows and matures is even more hidden, even more recognized primarily from reflection. We have moments of emotional contact, and times of almost imperceptible but real peace of mind and heart in times of prayer. But only when we stop and consider how important it is to continue relating, in our own ways, do we recognize the reality of our friendship with God.

Though it is not a game, praying can sometimes be a form of playing, with a Friend.