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A Work-Around for Praying

Home renovation contractors sometimes encounter a detail on an architect's blueprints that cannot be built as described, so they create a work-around that takes the ideal and makes it real. A work-around supplies the practical element that is necessary to fulfill a desire or a plan. In putting spirituality into practice, each of us might sometimes need to make use of a work-around.

For example, we might decide that we want to take more time for prayer, but day follows day with no change in our habits. Something is missing between a fine resolution and practical action. A work-around for making time available to pray might be through use of an appointment book: we could make appointments with God. The link between wanting and doing would be as normal as when we make a paper entry for when we are going to call a repair person, meet a friend, or take someone to dinner. We often schedule events or actions that we want to make sure not to forget. We can do that with time for prayer.

As an alternate work-around to using an appointment book, we might metaphorically consult a map to understand how to get from where we are now - not praying as much or as often as we wish - to a different place. We could consider how to arrange time for prayer by imagining and planning a destination - a place where we can pray - plus a time frame - when and for how long we will pray. Our plan lets us know where we are going, and how long we will be there.

Setting a time for concluding prayer might be a significant work-around in itself. If we have an unconscious rule that praying must be open-ended, we are unlikely to begin. Not many of us are willing to go to a party without some sense for when we will leave. If we have a reasonable plan for beginning and ending, whether for a business meeting or for praying, we are able to put it into practice. Afterwards, we can reflect, and decide whether the length of time we chose for the meeting or for praying was appropriate, and to be repeated.

We believe that God is with us no matter where we are. If we drive a car or walk down the street by ourselves, we are not really alone. An appropriate work-around for encountering God even while driving in the midst of traffic or walking on a busy sidewalk is to turn off a radio, iPod, or cell-phone and experiment with praying while on the move. Even though we have to pay some attention to our surroundings, we can still attend to our unseen companion. Recognizing God's presence

with us as a prayer in the midst of action is not greatly different from driving or walking with someone we know well, without doing much talking. We are pleased and contented to be traveling together

When driving or walking by ourselves, we might need a work-around to assist us in staying aware of our gracious God, who is happy to be with us on our journey. Some people use a repetitive memorized prayer, such as a rosary, or make use of a favorite saying that they have found meaningful. Others mull over a passage they have recently read, whether from Scripture, a book they are reading, or some news item. Still others are content in considering that they have a passenger or a walking companion who is silent, but present. Finally, some pay attention to the surroundings of scenery and people they pass, and seek to recognize God's presence and action in all that they observe.

Another very useful and practical work-around enables us to deal effectively with negative thoughts that arise in our minds. Many of us find that we are easily drawn into thoughts that are of no benefit to anyone: put-downs of self or others, invidious comparisons, negative judgments about others' behavior, and impulses of anger. The same kinds of thoughts might recur, no matter how often we decide that they are inappropriate and perhaps destructive. We need a work-around that includes a particular manner of praying. Rather than telling God the obvious – that we are unable to control some negative remarks and judgments – we bring to God our awareness of the feelings that accompany the judgments and negative words. When we acknowledge the movements in our hearts as well as the thoughts that occur in our minds, we open to God the sources of the negative thoughts, where healing is needed. Instead of expecting God to take away the thoughts, we look within ourselves for an attitude, past experience, or other perhaps surprising insight that God inspires in us. When we can see the sore spots in us which make us vulnerable to negative thoughts, we are ready for the healing that God desires for us. Real change is likely to follow.

To seek a work-around for praying is to begin praying.