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Walking in a New Way

An Exercise in Contemplative Walking

Part of the Teach Us to Pray series at Precious Blood Renewal Center.

Presented by Dennis Coday

Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/Dlvr0zmZMWE>

Find a time and place where you can take a 15-minute walk. It could be a walk you take every day: a walk to work or to school or to the store. The difference is in your intention. Normally you walk for a purpose. You have a destination and that is why you walk. Today, for these 15 minutes, we will try to walk without a destination. The intention today is pay attention. Pay attention to your body. Pay attention to your surroundings, the sights and sounds and smells around you. Pay attention to the sensations that envelop you.

If you walk every day for fitness, you could take the first or last 15 minutes of that routine for this contemplative exercise, but remember that today's walk is not for physical fitness. We won't be power walking. The pace won't be slow, but it will be deliberate. It will be intentional.

Similarly, turn off your music or your audio book or the podcast you normally listen to as you walk. You can walk with a partner or small group, but for these 15 minutes, refrain from talking.

If you are listening to this exercise, the recording will act as a timer for you, stopping you after 15 minutes. Otherwise, you may want to set a timer for 15 minutes.

Before you start, stand still with your arms at your sides. Check your posture; stand straight and tall. Relax your shoulders.

Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing that. Pay attention to your breathing. Be aware of your breath, but don't try to control it. Breathe naturally. Maybe count to 10 slowly.

With your eyes still closed, tell yourself, "I am going to be aware of my surroundings on this walk."

Open your eyes and look around you. Observe your surroundings. Choose 10 things you can see and say their names to yourself.

Now, it's time to go. Lift up one foot and begin. Walk at a normal pace and look around you. What are you seeing? If this is a familiar route, are you seeing things that you haven't noticed before. Keep watching.

As you walk, smell the odors around you — the good and the bad — and try to find their source. Keep walking.

Listen to the sounds around you. What is creating those sounds? What sounds do your steps make as you put one foot in front of the other? Take a moment to listen to the quieter sounds underneath the loud sounds.

You've been walking for some time now. Check in on your body. Feel each step you take. Are you on a hard surface? Spongy grass? Or crunching gravel? Feel the muscles in your legs as you stride along. Feel your ankles and knees as they bend and straighten.

How is your energy level? If it's morning maybe you're full of energy. If it's evening maybe you're a bit tired. How does the walking affect that?

What is the temperature like? Is there a breeze or is still where you are? Is it gusty? Is it humid or frigid? How does the air feel on our skin?

We're coming close to the end of the walk. Remind yourself of your intention: "I am going to be aware of my surroundings on this walk." Keep looking.

Stop now. Pause your walk. If you can do so comfortably, close your eyes. Breathe normally, but pay attention to your breath. Maybe count to 10 slowly.

There. You've completed the exercise. If you keep a journal, now might be good time to jot some notes in your journal.

Some questions to ponder.

- How did you feel as you walked?
- What came into your awareness as you walked? What new things did you see or experience?
- Have you ever intentionally paid attention to odors and sounds while walking? How did that feel?
- Some people become aware of the mechanics of walking, feeling how the muscles and joints work together to move you along. Did you experience any of that?
- Did you feel different after the walk from before the walk?
- Other thoughts?



This exercise is adapted from an exercise in the book *Just Breathe: Meditation, Mindfulness, Movement and More* by Mallika Chopra. It is a small book with lovely illustrations that aims at introducing mindfulness practices to young people.

Another good resource is *Earth: Our Original Monastery* by Christine Valters Painter. Each chapter of the book ends with a number of mindfulness exercises, including instructions for contemplative walking.