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Assistive technology helps the homebound stay independent

Want to do something "practical" for your homebound members? Here are some ideas that will have them praising God!

By Timothy Merrill

Perhaps there is no greater desire among the elderly than the longing to be independent. The elderly do not want to be dependent. They've been independent from young adulthood to now. Why would they enjoy lapsing into dependence?

They don't. Their irritation is especially noticeable during transition moments — for example, after a fall or hospitalization. At times such as these, they truly must rely upon others to monitor their safety and well-being.

Fortunately, advances in technology are helping seniors and the homebound maintain some measure of independence.

Assistive Technology (AT) helps people at many different levels of late-life living. It enables those living by themselves to stay independent longer. It helps those in assisted-care facilities to do many things themselves that they otherwise would not be able to do. AT is also a boon for caregivers, because it enables the homebound to do for themselves what caregivers often need to do.

WHAT IS AT?

Assistive technology is a term used to refer to assistive devices, independent living aids or adaptive equipment that can help a person live more independently. Examples include devices as simple as a hearing aid, a cane, wheelchairs and scooters, magnifiers, pill organizers, as well as more sophisticated technologies like computer applications, sensors and smartphone systems.

Many AT devices, however, are extremely simple, but very useful. Think of kitchen items. These include reaching tools, jar openers, special cutting boards, self-opening scissors, easy-to-grip silverware and high-lipped dishes.

Bedroom items that the homebound need might include bedside organizers, reaching tools, orthopedic cushions, hip pads for fall protection, bedside commodes, night lights, large-numeral alarm clocks or talking clocks.

Bathroom AT items are things like full-length tub mats, shower seats, transfer benches, toilet risers, night lights, long-handled scrub brushes, shampoo basins, lotion applicators, colored faucets or a mark for hot water controls, handheld shower heads and no-rinse shampoos or body washes that do not require rinsing off with water.

Dressing and grooming aids might include dressing sticks, elastic or non-tie shoelaces, button-hooks, zipper pulls, long-handled combs and brushes and pumps for soap and toothpaste.

Medication aids include pill organizers, timers, special mini-alarms which remind you to take your next dose,

and pill crushers and splitters for those who have difficulty swallowing.

Mobility devices typically include canes — which might be foldable, adjustable, double-grip, and three- or four-pronged; walkers — foldable walkers that can double as a seat are very convenient, and many of the elderly like to have a basket or pouch on the front to store things; and wheelchairs, which might be manual ones which require some arm strength, or powered ones for those who lack the strength to wheel themselves.

Communication devices have come a long way to-ward making the lives of the homebound easier. Telephones, for example, now might have large buttons, headsets, speakerphone capabilities, or keyboard and visual displays, or even voice-activated dialing systems to make them useable by the homebound. Computers can allow people to stay in contact via email, while more sophisticated technology can employ modified keyboards or voice recognition software to enable disabled individuals to use computers effectively. AT can also be very helpful for people with communication difficulties due to stroke, ALS, aphasia, quadriplegia or other disorders. AT can help them to "speak," operate lights and other controls, and remain active members of their families and communities.

Communication boards are great tools for others, and can be simple low-tech plastic boards with graphics and a keyboard-style letter displays to convey messages. Automated boards with voice input or a computer screen are also available. Voice- or eye-activated communication systems allow people with complex physical difficulties to operate computers or telephones to communicate with others. Speech amplification and adaptation systems are automated speech processing systems that can correct garbled speech for improved communication.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Some of the AT examples cited above are beyond the reach of what a typical congregation might be able to provide, and some of those devices are for people who are not necessarily homebound or elderly, but disabled because of disease or an accident. Still, a congregation may be able to help simply by being aware that there are technologies available today that make difficult living just a little better.

Talk to the homebound. When visiting the homebound, be sure to ask if there is anything they need that would help them. Be observant without prying. Or, if the homebound person is comfortable talking about this, do a risk assessment survey, or needs survey, listing areas where your team might be able to help.

Talk to the primary caregiver. They have perhaps the best sense of what their loved one really needs. Ask the caregiver how the church family can be of assistance.

Mobilize your team. The trustees may be able to install bathroom aids for a homebound person and make adjustments in a person's home, such as installing railings, bars and lever door handles. Perhaps the youth group or women's group can make cloth storage pouches for walkers and present them to residents of a nursing home or individual homebound members of the church.

The most important thing to remember is to stay in communication with the homebound person. That means more to him or her than any AT device you might be able to provide. But when the congregation of a homebound person can be so knowledgeable about AT needs and be in communication with the homebound person as well, that says to the homebound and their caregivers that this is a congregation that takes its ministry seriously.

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THOUGHT: Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin. —Mother Teresa

Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 2, 2017

Scripture Reading: John 11:1-45

Last summer, I visited a cousin in Lorton, Virginia. In her lovely home she has a grandfather clock. One morning, I watched as she "wound it up." I began to think about grandfather clocks.

I learned that it all began in 1582 with an 18-year-old lad who was praying in the cathedral of Pisa, Italy. The pious young man was distracted by a swinging chandelier that had just been lit by the lamplighters. He noticed movement of the swinging chandelier. He began to time the swings. Later, in his workshop, he continued to study the movement of pendulums. The boy's name was Galileo!

He did not make a clock, but his work inspired Christiaan Huygens, a Dutch astronomer who was in pursuit of a more accurate clock for predicting the movement of the stars and planets. In 1656, Huygens successfully "hitched" a pendulum to the workings of a clock. It revolutionized clock-making by greatly increasing the accuracy of timepieces. Typical clocks could be off as much as 15 minutes every day. Huygens reduced this discrepancy to about 60 seconds per day.

His creation was the very first prototype of what would later be called the "long case clock." At the time, these clocks were named "wags-on-the-wall" since their pendulums were short, and "wagged" back and forth like the tail on a dog. Before too long, the clocks were encased in wood.

The clocks became known as "grandfather clocks" thanks to a song! It was written in 1875 by Henry Clay Work, an American songwriter and composer. He named the piece "The Grandfather Clock." The popularity of Work's ballad swept the nation, and by the early 1880s the long case clock was known as the "grandfather clock."

We are like those clocks. Sometimes we need "winding up" so that we can be faithful witnesses to the correct time. Reading the Bible, spending time alone with God and prayer are ways in which we can be reset so as to witness perfectly to the "correct time." The correct time is the timeless truth of God's work in the world: God's love, God's forgiveness and God's patience.

Every grandfather clock has a chime. It is pleasant-sounding, and it is always accurate.

When I saw my cousin winding up her grandfather clock, I was reminded that I, too, want to be like that clock: Steady, dependable, wound up by God's word and telling the right time.

—Timothy Merrill, with help from "A brief history of the grandfather clock." thewellmadeclock.com.

Prayer: Your truths are timeless, O God. Help me to "chime" in a way that is pleasant and not loud and annoying, in a way that reminds others of your steadfast love. Amen.

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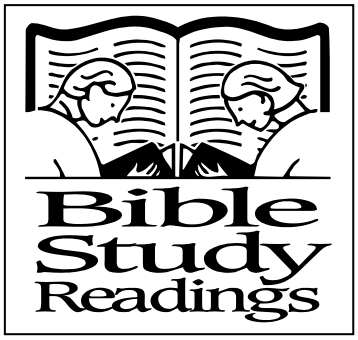
Activity Page for the week of April 2, 2017



Sunday: Luke 1-4
Monday: Deuteronomy 23-25
Tuesday: Deuteronomy 26-28
Wednesday: Deuteronomy 29-31
Thursday: Deuteronomy 32-34
Friday: Joshua 1-7
Saturday: Psalms 33-35

RIDDLE

A father is 62 when his daughter is 36. How many years has it been since she was exactly one-third his age?

(answer below)

The Promise: See Joshua 24:24 (NIV);
Riddle: 23. She was 13, he was 39.

The Promise

Find the letter of the alphabet that is missing in each row and write it in the space provided. Then read from top to bottom to hear Israel's promise to Joshua in Joshua 24:24 (NIV).

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLKJIHGFDCBA	_____
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLKJHGFEDCBA	_____
ABCDEFGHIJKMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMKJIHGFEDCBA	_____
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLKJIHGFDCBA	_____
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ABCDFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
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ABCDEFGIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLKJIHGFDCBA	_____
ABCDEFGHIJKMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPNMLKJIHGFEDCBA	_____
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLKJIHGFECBA	_____
BCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPOMLKJIHGFEDCBA	_____
ABCEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPNMLKJIHGFEDCBA	_____
ACDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ	_____
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLKJIHGFDCBA	_____
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