

Above all,
clothe yourself
with love
which binds
everything together
in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:14-15

And let the
Peace of Christ
rule in your
hearts.



St. Augustine's Anglican Church
Biblical Stewardship 365
Stewardship of Ourselves
Bulletin 5, February 2021

**How and why we must look after the Physical,
Mental, Emotional and Spiritual Selves
that God has given us.**



February

Saint Valentine's Day is likely over by the time you get this Bulletin. February is an odd month, not only because the number of days change every leap year, but because as 'churchy' people we do not only celebrate love on the 14th, but soon after we observe (note I do not say celebrate!) Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Season of Lent. Interestingly, if we have any Valentine's Day chocolate left, many of us feel we need to 'give it up' for the next forty days. This sounds a little like masochism to me, especially because we know we can eat our fill of goodies at Easter!

To be serious, and because the focus of this programme is Biblical Stewardship and the following definition has been used many times, '**Stewardship is about how we use the gifts God has given us to work with God to make the world a better place, to help build the Kingdom of God on Earth**', I would like to briefly reflect on the juxtaposition of these two events, in the light of Stewardship as defined above.

Firstly, anything which focusses on love is good. When we give and receive those lovely cards, and maybe gifts, we not only feel good ourselves, but we make others feel good too. I remember as a teacher of young children, the effort that went into making sure everyone was included. If we take care to see that no one is left out, Valentine's Day can boost our good feelings and increase empathy thus supporting our mental health and the mental health of those around us. Last Spring, during those dark days, we focussed on the importance of mental health and how to enhance it. We looked on this as a part of the stewardship of God's gift of ourselves, body, mind, and spirit. And how we are to do this in order to be Good Stewards doing God's work on earth.



So, what about Lent when the focus is on self-discipline? The rigors of Ash Wednesday sharply change the mood and the focus. We look inward and examine our lives. From a stewardship perspective, are we disciplining ourselves to do the work necessary to be God's hands and feet, voice, and heart, here on Earth? Are we being Good Stewards of all God has given us, using those gifts to help build God's Kingdom? The words 'discipline' and 'disciple' are closely linked!

The English word 'Lent' is a shortened form of the Old English word 'lencten', meaning spring season. This is associated with 'lengthen' as in lengthening days. As Christians we associate this with the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry. In scripture, the number 40 is often used to separate two distinct eras.

Early spring was a time when food supplies were running low, so it was a 'convenient' time for a fast, hence Lencten-faesten/Spring fast.

As part of the stewardship of our physical selves, giving up chocolate might be helpful if it makes up a large part of your diet, but being sure to eat healthy food every day will make you a better steward and more able to do the work to which God calls you. Remembering to contact other people regularly, especially during this Covid-era, will not only enhance your mental health, but will enhance the mental health of your contacts too. Healthy minds are God's gift to us, and if cared for, can be used in God's service. This list could go on and on.

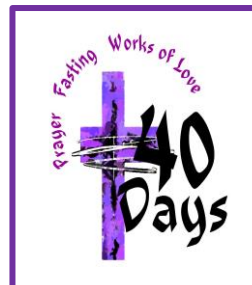
God also gives us the gift of spirituality. Again, this needs to be looked after, and one way of looking after it is regular prayer. This might include prayer that begins,

'Loving God, I want to be a good steward, please show me what you want me to do....', and then waiting for the answer. I guarantee it will come – possibly in a way you do not expect! Maybe even as a recognition that this means that being a good steward includes looking after yourself, or even resting for a while!

So, how DO we look after our spiritual lives?

Here at St. A's and at other churches, **our form of spirituality involves following Jesus Christ**, and seeing in Jesus the reality and nature of God, and then living in a manner that helps God make the world a better place.

Religious spirituality of this kind calls for action on behalf of God, and this is Stewardship.



Many of us use prayer to deepen our relationship with God and there are numerous different ways to pray.

Communal Prayer – The Prayers of the People, Table Grace etc. (See the previous Bulletins)

Personal Prayer - A time to listen for what God might be saying to us. A time to deepen our relationship with God.

Suggestion Number Three – I heard this called ‘Augustinian Prayer.’

Prayer of this kind often suits people who are creative, optimistic, verbal, persuasive, good at writing and speaking, and communicate easily. They generally need to find meaning in everything and constantly look for hidden meanings, or they ‘read between the lines’ finding connections with the inner life of the spirit. They often hunger and thirst for God and need to know that God loves each person individually and unconditionally. They need to experience God as personal and intimate. They understand symbols and often use them to express the reality of God.

Augustinian Prayer involves a search for a richer, fuller, deeper, meaning in scripture and then personalizing the message for incorporation into life. Prayer of this kind is a dialogue between God and the Self. Spiritual Journals are often helpful and continue this dialogue in written form. Also, long periods of prayerful silence can lead to a loving dialogue with God. Icons or candles can help too.

Some Suggestions

Read Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to Saint John. (Other passages to use: Isaiah 43:1-5; Ephesians 3:14-21; Matthew 5:38-48; 1 John: 4:7-21, etc.) (Just focus on a few verses at a time.)

- As you read, change the personal nouns and pronouns so that they refer to you. (i.e., ‘they’ becomes your name. etc.) In this way this passage becomes a prayer that Jesus is praying for you personally.

Questions to ask yourself.

- What do these words mean to me in my present situation?
- What is the Lord trying to convey in these ancient words?

Method

Listen to what God is saying through the scripture passage – read between the lines.

1. Reflect prayerfully – try to apply ancient wisdom to today.
2. Respond to God’s Word by appropriate personal feelings and internal dialogue.
3. Remain quiet and still so you are open to new insights. These are likely to come ‘bubbling up’ when your mind is quiet.



What makes me feel close to God by Heidi Schock

What makes you feel close to God? I was asked to answer this question. There are many ways that I feel close to God but if I had to focus in on one, it is prayer. For me prayer has been the most consistent and tangible way for me to connect with and feel close to God.

I can distinctly remember a time in my life when my prayer life completely transformed. It started when I attended a prayer event at church and saw God moving and working in ways I had not seen or experienced before. After that I joined a prayer group that introduced me to a new way of looking at prayer. We studied a book called “Can You Hear Me?” by Brad Jersak, and I began to practice what he called “listening prayer”. He talked about how his prayer life had “amounted to leaving phone messages on God’s answering machine.” Give your list of prayer requests to God and hope he gets the message. He explained that with this kind of prayer he missed out on a personal relationship with God. I could completely relate to this and it described my prayer life exactly up to that point. I remember in my growing up years I would often refer to Jesus as my best friend thinking this was the right thing to say and what my answer should be as a Christian. But when I looked at my prayer life, I knew that this was not true so when I was introduced to a prayer where I could pray, and God could actually listen and respond back to me I knew I had to learn more. Listening Prayer uses John 10 to reinforce that God is the Good Shepherd and that we are his sheep and that we recognize and know the voice of the Good Shepherd. “I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep.” As a I studied and practiced this new kind of prayer my faith grew and for the first time in my life, I truly believed I served a God, the creator of heaven and earth, who was alive and cared for me on a personal level. My prayer life is not perfect, and I often forget the value in tuning in to his voice and trusting in the Good Shepherd. I will always be grateful for the access I have being granted to a God who cares about what I have to say and longs to answer.

Thankyou so much Heidi.

Next time we will look at another style of prayer and hear from other people about their spirituality.

If you would like to take part in this by sharing with others what you do to feel close to God, please let me know. (val_mc@telus.net or 780 410 1571.)