

STEWARDSHIP ARTICLES/DEVOTIONS
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TIME OUT

When we hear the phrase “Time Out” we often think of a game in which there is a strategy to calm the team down so they can play effectively. Or we think of a child sitting in a corner contemplating his/her bad behavior. There are positive ways to look at “Time Out”.

One aspect of stewardship that we tend to forget is our time. We think of stewardship in terms of our financial responsibility. Giving our time means giving part of ourselves. Giving time in service to others honors the God we profess to love. There are many opportunities to give our time. The church needs teachers in Sunday School and for the Extended Church, as well as babysitters for the small children. The choir would welcome new members; volunteer before you are asked to be on a committee, to be a greeter on Sunday, lead a Bible study, work in the kitchen or accept an invitation to be an Elder or Deacon. The community uses those who are willing to give time to Food Pantries, after school tutoring, soup kitchens, nursing homes and many other organizations.

These are only a small percentage of ways we can use our time to serve God and others. All that is required is a willingness to take “Time Out” of our busy lives, out from our routines to be of service in God’s work.

ABOUT STEWARDSHIP

The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalm24:1)

Because Scripture proclaims everything belongs to God, then as Christians we manage the property of our Lord. Since everything belongs to Christ, we need to have the attitude and view that our things are His things, our stuff is His stuff, that all we could have now, all we have lost, all we will have, is His. So as Christians it is our duty to learn how to become responsible stewards of our Lord’s resources entrusted into our care. That includes our money. According to Charles Swindoll, as important as money may be, we are all aware that there are some things it can’t buy.

Money can buy medicine, but it can’t buy health.

Money can buy a house, but not a home.

Money can buy companionship, but not friends.

Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness.

Money can buy food, but not an appetite.

Money can buy a bed, but not sleep.

Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Savior.

Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life.

Ask God’s guidance to help you become a good steward, to make stewardship a priority, remembering that stewardship is managing God’s treasures in God’s way, for God’s purposes, and always for God’s glory. Pray that God will lead you to take what you have and put it to the right use.

SPRING PLANTING

Don't you love to see the emergence of Spring after this lo-o-ong winter? The trees come to life with their blossoms, the bulbs which were planted in faith last fall push through the earth in glorious color, the perennials bud and flower in their appointed time, and the seeds that we plant sprout and grow without our help. What a miracle! In Genesis, God created each part of the universe and saw that it was good. That's an understatement when we consider the intricacies of all of creation.

We, too, look at our world and say it is good. God went on to say that the people he created would be in charge of keeping God's creation good. Caring for the earth is part of our stewardship. Not only does God, who has gifted us with so much, expect us to share our time, talents and money, but also we are to make good decisions when it comes to seeing that the earth and its resources are protected. We can do this by our judicious use of water, power and forests as well as participating in a regular recycling program.

As you observe the beauty of spring, thank God and say "It is Good"!

ARE YOU GIFTED?

The answer to the title question is "Yes"! Everyone has a gift or an ability or a talent to share. We have to determine just what our gift is and then start using it. This is another aspect of Stewardship. God has blessed all of us with a gift to use to benefit others. Let's not waste it!

Every time we enter the church we see the evidence someone's use of their gift. The seasonal decorations in the entrances and in the rooms, the flowers in the sanctuary, the beauty of the displays at Christmas and Easter, good food coming from the kitchen, the sound of a vacuum cleaner during the week, leading a Bible study, beautiful inspiring music from organ and choir, teaching Sunday School and caring for the children during worship, being a comforting presence while visiting in the hospital are all part of the stewardship of gifts that many of our members are sharing. Not all of us are gifted with artistic or musical talent but we have an opportunity during worship to greet those around us with a handshake, a kind word, a smile and to share the peace of Christ.

And how about prayer? Each month we are given a list of people in need of prayer for various reasons. Prayer is an important part of stewardship. It doesn't require a special talent or training, just faith that as you speak with God on behalf of someone, God will hear and honor that prayer. That is God's gift to those who intercede for others.

We all have been given gifts to use for the good of all. Let's use them!

STEWARDSHIP

No, the space in the title is not an error! Our fall stewardship theme will center around the image of our church as a boat in choppy waters. It is being rowed by all of us against the current of difficult economic times. We are doing the best we can but not making the progress we would like.

What could make a difference? Catching the vision of what our church can do above and beyond what we are now doing! How can we, by our actions, demonstrate Jesus' example of love to those in our own community and those around the world who have had their lives devastated by natural disasters or wars or famine. We need a vision that excites us to action.

The prayer, "O Lord, The sea is so big and our boat is so small. Help us remember who our pilot is and how great you are" seems to apply to us in these difficult times. Let's not think in terms of deficits or scarcity, but rather put our faith in God's abundance and step out in generosity.

If we could truly believe this is God's will for our church, our little rowboat could be provided with a sail. The "wind" of the Holy Spirit will fill our sails and we become a Windjammer—a large sailing ship which takes full advantage of the power of the wind and sails along at top speed.

Jesus knew how to use the wind when needed and how to calm the waves when they threatened the disciples. His challenge to us is to make his mission a priority in our lives by our giving with the "wind" of the Holy Spirit behind us, and raising our pledge this year even if our income remains unchanged or is cut. If we do that, we discover that we will be guided into the safe harbor with full sails and we will have enough for all our needs. Try it and see!!

THE LAUNCH

Our journey over the waters in our Steward Ship will be taking us into all kinds of situations. There will be waves that threaten to overwhelm us. There will be moments when we have to make difficult decisions in order to avoid the storms that would capsize our ship. To complete our trip in our allotted time and in safety, we must catch the wind of the Holy Spirit to fill our sails and sail into our port-of-call. We depend on the guidance of our Captain, Jesus.

Then there will be times of calm when the surf brings a series of rolling swells. We can feel very comfortable with that, lying back and allowing our craft to be subjected to the whims of the wind. When the wind dies out completely, we find ourselves in the doldrums and we go nowhere.

Think about our church as the Steward Ship as we consider our responsibility to the church. We may encounter monster waves as our nation faces a slow economy, and decide we just can't do any more. Or we may face a time when life is calm and we are comfortable with the status quo. That apathy will render our sails completely useless unless we call upon God who fills our sails and moves us on to our port.

When you receive your pledge card later this month, remember your Steward Ship. Let's stop plugging along, rowing our boat. Instead, let's raise our sails and allow God to send the wind to move us to the port that God has intended for us. We need everyone on board in order to reach that port, which is a continuation and expanding of our ministry. We are all in the same boat so we need to have a commitment from each one of us in order to reach the port to which God is guiding us.

IN THE BEGINNING.....GOD

These opening words in the Bible fit quite logically in the opening of a new year. As it was at the time of creation, God is active in our world, working to bring about God's plan for creation. We are the beneficiaries of his blessings and as such, we are asked for a response.

That response is our stewardship. Someone once said, "Stewardship is what you do after you say, 'I believe'". It is not only involving our resources, but how we relate to others in our family, our church, our community and our world. We care when others are struggling and reach out to help. We take care of this beautiful world God has given us, not allowing greed to destroy the environment. We use the time and talents God has given us to let others know that God is in charge of our lives and we give back to God.

This New Year, may we all be conscious of the presence of God in our lives, our church and our world and become good stewards in all aspects of our lives.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There is a committee in our church with a double name. You have probably seen or heard of it—perhaps many times. It is the Mission/Stewardship Committee. There are times when we call it the Mission Committee, others when we refer to it as the Stewardship Committee. There is a good reason why it is generally linked.

Stewardship is the reflection of our Christian beliefs. When we confess our belief in Christ, our whole life is affected. We want to give, not only of our resources, but of time in worship and service. That service is Mission. It is reaching out to others wherever there is a need, wherever we can let others know that we have found a sense of purpose and personal peace in our faith and we want to share it. There is no age limit to doing this. Sometimes the only avenue through which we can do this is by giving money. But be aware of opportunities to become personally involved in service to others, or, in conversation, to let someone know what your faith means to you. That is Mission and that is Stewardship!

That is why we call the committee Mission/Stewardship. In a way, it is "reaching out/ reaching in". It is the way every Christian tries to live.

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL.....

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you see a few more gray hairs or a wrinkle or two you didn't notice yesterday? Do you ever take time to look at yourself and see beyond the physical blemishes or evidence of the aging process? Look again, and this time really see yourself as God sees you.

On at least two occasions, God called Jesus his beloved son. As you look at your reflection, imagine God calling you a "beloved child", because that is what we are. God sees beyond our appearance and looks at the essence of our being and loves us as we are. God not only has told us in God's word that we are loved with abounding steadfast love, but also provides us with all we need in our lives. That is why we are called to give back to God our love, our worship, our service to those around us, as well as a part of the resources that God has given us. The motivation for this is profound gratitude for God's love and blessings. The Lenten season is a perfect time to review our responses to God's love in all aspects of our stewardship and to make any needed changes.

The next time you look in the mirror, see what God sees---a beautiful human being, whom God considers worth the price paid for our salvation.

AN OBITUARY

Very soon, we will be hearing of a death, the death of the greatest man who ever lived. We are horrified when we think of the undeserved pain, the torture and the rejection which he experienced, all leading to a terrible death. If you were writing an obituary following Jesus' death, what would you say? Would you speak about the miracles he did, his compassion, the love he had for all of us when he laid down his life for us? As we review his life and ministry, we would join with the Roman soldier at the Cross who exclaimed, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!"

What would you want people to say about you in your obituary? Do you want to be remembered primarily for all your accomplishments, for your standing in the community or your success in the business world? Or would you want people to celebrate your love, your kindness, compassion, faithfulness, service and your generosity. These are the marks of a faithful steward who lives abundantly the life God has given us. God bless our stewardship in the years allotted to us!

LEFTOVERS

Do you have any leftovers in your refrigerator? They are what is left of last night's dinner that you put away to eat later. There are times when you create a delicious concoction from those leftovers. Other times they may be consigned to the back of the refrigerator and there to sit until they become unpalatable.

The Old Testament tells us of the offerings the people made to God out of gratitude for God's care. They gave God the very best of their animals or produce. This is where the term "First Fruits" originated. They did not give their leftovers. In the New Testament we read that Jesus watched how people gave and commended the widow who gave out of her poverty, all she had. The wealthy gave what they had leftover.

As we consider our gifts of time, talents and money, let's be sure that our gift is not just what we have leftover but a gift that is planned, prayerfully considered and the first on our list of disbursements. This is our response to what God has made possible to us—God's amazing grace!

SUMMER MUSINGS

Ah-ah-ah! These hazy, lazy days of summer! It's time to sit back, relax in the hammock, read a book, listen to the bird songs, smell the flowers and enjoy God's beautiful creation. When the activities of the rest of the year subside a bit in summer, it is the ideal time to take stock of our blessings.

In considering the theme for our Stewardship emphasis for this Fall, we were influenced by the beauty of Spring as it unfolded before our eyes. From the moment the Snow Drops and Crocuses peeked from the frosty ground until the full burgeoning of grass and leaves, God's miracle of new life thrilled us once again. We chose the theme. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights." (James 1: 17). The translation of that verse in Peterson's "Message", is even more descriptive. "Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light."

Picture a cascading waterfall. Think of the enormous amount of water falling from rocks above. Then make the analogy of the waterfall to the abundance of gifts from God. Think how deeply God loves each one of us. Then read the second part of our theme: "What is your gift back to God?" When you are asked to make a commitment, respond generously, remembering all that God has done for you.

ARE YOU READY?

Time has a way of arriving at the end of summer before we are prepared to welcome the Fall season. But whether we are ready or not, September brings it on. In the church we return to our normal hours of worship, Sunday School, men's and women's meetings and a host of activities of service and fellowship.

Though Stewardship is not confined to a Fall campaign, as the monthly VISION articles have emphasized, the church does use this time to bring awareness of all our need to evaluate our monetary responsibilities.

There is an old hymn called "Take my Life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee". Each verse begins with a part of us which we want the Lord to take. It goes "Take my hands", "Take my feet", "Take my mouth", and so on. In an article in PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK, Marge Carpenter tells of a Presbyterian church in Africa that sang that hymn with gusto until they reached the verse which says "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold", then they just hummed!

Our theme this year is taken from the book of James. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming from God. What will we give back to God?" As you consider your gift, don't hum that last verse! Sing the entire hymn because God asks us to give our "silver and our gold" as well as dedicating ourselves to God's work out of our profound gratitude for all God has done for us. May all of us be ready to sing that hymn with "gusto" all the way through!

CROSS YOUR HEART?

Remember the times when a friend asked you to keep a secret or make a promise? Usually your promise was followed by, "Cross your heart"? This month the church is asking you to make a promise. This promise is not a contract that cannot be changed but it is a promise to do your best to abide by the pledge you sign. "Cross your heart"?

You will receive a pledge card on which you will be asked to list an amount you, with God's guidance, agree is a proportionate amount of your income for God's work through the church. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". Notice that your heart, your compassion, your generosity and your Christian maturity all grow following your gift. Generosity emanates from the heart which is why during worship; we take an Offering not a collection.

Your pledge card is a recorded promise. The spiritual practice of generosity begins with a pledge card. We trust that God not only will provide, but that God has already provided and we want to share. As we share from our heart, giving back to God prayerfully and thankfully for all we have been given, "cross your heart" as a token of your pledge.

DECISIONS! DECISIONS!

Every day we are faced with decisions. First thing in the morning, we decide what to wear and what to have for breakfast. As our day progresses the decisions become more complicated and often we aren't sure which way to go. It is at such times that we need a thought or inspiration to direct us.

One decision we all will be asked to make comes on our Dedication Sunday. At this time we are asked to indicate on a pledge card, a percentage of our income to support the Mission of the church. Biblically, that percentage is a tithe, or 10%. That is a worthy goal and one to consider. In the Bible directive, that tithe was in the form of produce given to the storehouse to feed the poor. While we cannot provide the actual food, 10% of our pledge goes to help with the needs of people around the world and at home. Our prayer is that someday we could increase that percentage of congregational giving to 35% Or even 50%! It could make a difference in our community and our world.

So we all have a decision to make. Can we raise our pledge this year so that more of God's children can have their needs met? Can we give a little more so that the love of Jesus Christ can bring peace and joy to those who have lost all hope?

The decision is ours. May God be a party to that decision.

WERE YOU THERE?

Sunday, November 11th was a very special day. It was Dedication Sunday. If you were there, you could not help but be moved by the sight of so many members willing to make a commitment of time and money. They came down the aisles bringing their gift back to God and placing it in the Gift Box.

For many this was a step out in faith, a stretch in discipleship, trusting in God's promises. It was a response out of sheer gratitude to God who has given us everything we need in life: health and strength, food and shelter, love of family and friends, beauty and happiness and a faith to live by.

Our Pledge card represents our gratitude to God for God's grace, mercy and abounding love.

If you were not there that Sunday, be sure to bring your commitment to the church and become part of those faithful believers in the recognition that all we have comes from God and our pledge is our way to give back to God a portion of what we have been given. God bless our efforts.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

There is a story about the two headed god, Janus. One head is looking behind and the other looking ahead. The month of January is named after Janus. We do much the same thing at the start of a new year. We think back over the year that is past, praising God for the blessings we have enjoyed and thanking God for God's presence and help in the more difficult times.

We as a church reflect on the year past. There were many bright moments with inspiring worship, informative Bible studies, successful mission projects and enjoyable times together. We have laughed and cried together as dear friends faced illness or death. Through it all, the church in the name of Jesus, was there, standing firm and giving us the spiritual strength needed to meet the challenges.

Now we look to the future. Catch the vision of possibilities to expand the outreach of the church. There is more need than ever. We can be certain that this church continues to be there for each of us as well as for our neighbors in the community as we practice good stewardship. If anyone feels he or she can do even more than the amount of their pledge, please do it. If you have not pledged as yet, please bring it as soon as possible. Then we can all look ahead with the certainty that the ministry will continue and expand. God be with us in the year 2013.

LOVE LETTERS

Have you ever received a love letter? If you received more than one you may have tied them up with a blue ribbon and stored them in a safe place that only you could find. Since March marks the beginning of Spring and Spring is the month for lovers, it is only natural that love letters come to mind. The most beautiful love letters any of us will ever receive are those between the pages of God's Word. The Bible abounds with messages of God's love for us. Just open the Bible and there they are: Love Letters from God! "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him will have eternal life"; "God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"; "I have loved you with an everlasting love". As human beings, we thrive when we are loved. The love of others is vital to our well being. To know how much God loves us gives us the assurance that no matter what life brings, we are safe in God's love.

We respond to that love by following as nearly as is humanly possible Jesus' directions for living and by loving God and our neighbors. This is the heart of good stewardship.

WHO IS YOUR BOSS?

In this day and age, that is not a question to ask a married couple. The preferred answer is equal responsibility in marriage. In the workplace, a wise CEO will welcome ideas from the employees to make the business grow. But what about our spiritual lives?

In the Lenten Bible study, we have been considering what it means to be a disciple. In his book, Dallas Willard suggests that being a church member does not necessarily make us a disciple. To take the second step, we must make a commitment to follow Jesus. We will think, speak and act as Jesus directs us. In order to understand that direction, we worship, pray, read in Scripture the life and words of Jesus, reach out to others in his name, and give our time, talents and treasure to God's work. Giving God our highest priority in our lives is a step to becoming a disciple.

Does this mean that God is our Boss? It does if we are willing to take that second step and follow Jesus as closely as we possibly can. We will fail often but our "Boss" is loving and forgiving and will always be near to encourage and cheer us on. The joy that we feel as we live our lives with God at the center goes far beyond the time and effort required to be a disciple. As church members, we are asked to take that second step and become one of Christ's disciples, thus ensuring we live out our stewardship.

FRUITCAKE

Some people look down on the fruitcake, but this is one to be savored and desired! The ingredients are the mark of a healthy spiritual life. When taken together, baked into our very being as we mature in our Christian faith, they provide an appealing, nutritious and beautiful witness to God's love in Christ. The ingredients are found in Galatians 22, the Fruit of the Spirit. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Since our Stewardship theme this year is "Generations of Generosity- One hundred years of Giving", we are emphasizing Generosity. All the Fruit listed is important for a delicious fruitcake and for our Christian maturity, but generosity sets the tone for the way we live our lives. Generosity is determined by our priorities. If we are generous with our time, our talent, our love, then we will also be generous with our money. So let us be sure that we include generosity in our fruitcake, that it becomes one of the most important and visible fruits.

RAINY DAY

This summer in Maine we had plenty of rain. Most of the rain came at night but we had several rainy days which kept us inside. What do you do when you have seven or eight people in the cottage, it is raining outside and the normal activities such as beach sitting, boating, fishing, swimming etc. are not possible? You go to “Rainy Day Schedule”! That is the time we turn to those things we have set aside to do when the sun is not shining. That may include shopping, baking cookies, reading, or just rocking on the porch. These are enjoyable pastimes which can overcome the disappointment which a rainy day can bring.

All of us plan for rainy days in our financial calculations. We have insurance, savings accounts, retirement funds and other safeguards against a “Rainy Day”. Sometimes our concern for our financial future determines the stewardship of our resources. As we approach our stewardship emphasis this year, it is important to think of God’s abundant love and care for us and understand TRUST in God’s care must influence our decisions. Generosity is an indication of the level of our trust in God who has given us all we have and all we need. Our “Rainy Days” are secure when we trust the God who loves us.

GREAT IDEA!

In a Presbyterian church recently, the ushers brought the offering forward and the congregation burst into spontaneous applause. The Pastor announces, “If you are new here we want you to know we clap at offering time to celebrate that we all have something to give. We don’t just give money, we have time, attention, friendship to share, skills and hobbies to offer, a listening ear, hard work.... We all have something to give.”

On November 10th people in our church came down the aisle and placed their pledge card on the Communion Table. It was indeed a celebration as we gave something of ourselves in gratitude to God who has given us everything we have. There is a joy in giving as every dollar written on that pledge card could have been spent another way. Pledging indicates our trust that God will provide for that pledge to be met. Generosity blesses the giver and the work that the gift makes possible. Applause would have been very appropriate that day. Why not every Sunday?

A NEW LEAF

Reading a book is a very rewarding experience. As the story progresses, there can be exciting and interesting developments in the plot as we turn each page or leaf. What lies ahead is unknown, a mystery. We may speculate on what will be the outcome but the twists and turns of the plot are hidden from us until the story is revealed at the end.

A new year is as much of a mystery as the conclusion of a book. As we enter 2014 some may look at the ensuing months with dread, wondering what disaster or trouble will affect them. Others will look with excitement and anticipation of good things that will happen in the next 365 days. All of us can view the future in the light of God’s love for each of us, knowing that each day we can put that day and all that happens in God’s loving and powerful hands. No matter what befalls us in health, economics or personal relationships God will bring good even from difficulty.

As we turn a new leaf in our book of life, may we remember the saying, “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future”!

LOOK AGAIN!

While we are still at the early stages of a new church year, it is helpful to look again at the service and fellowship activities in which the congregation participates. It is not the activity itself but how we respond to it. For instance, when we are approached and asked to be an officer and we accept, do we respond positively with a sincere desire to serve or do we accept out of guilt or obligation? If we are asked to be a part of a Committee or to make sandwiches for the coffee hour or to serve a dinner, how do we feel when we accept the opportunity to serve? Do we agree to do it but consider it a burden or feel a sense of guilt if we refuse? When we fill out our pledge card, do we give because we feel an obligation instead of responding to God's call to give a portion of our income out of gratitude to God.

Let's look again. In all of our responses to requests for our involvement, God calls us to take on tasks with the attitude of Thanksgiving, not out of obligation or guilt. God loves and cares for us and our gratitude is shown by way we accept a service opportunity. Then the Spirit of joy, passion and a positive attitude will prevail, making our church an exciting place to worship and serve. This is Stewardship at its best.

HOLINESS---WHO, ME?

Being holy is probably not the answer we would have given when someone asked what we wanted to be when we grew up! But holiness is more than being pious. It reflects our faith in every decision we make, in our words and attitudes with our families, friends and those with whom we work and meet in everyday life. God alone is Holy. It is God's nature and character that reflects God's holiness. When we pray the Lord's prayer each Sunday, "hallowed be thy name", we are asking God's character to be honored by the way we live. Holiness comes as we seek and find God's will in our lives.

We are not born with holiness. It has to be taught. It is taught when we read and study Scripture enough that it resonates inside of us and directs our actions. We teach children holiness when we read Bible stories to them. Holiness is seen when we give generously to help people in need with food, or give to organizations that supply that need. Holiness shines through when we reach out to visit a sick friend or one in trouble. It also becomes very personal when we receive love or forgiveness even when we don't deserve it.

Holiness is not being judgmental or feeling better than others. It comes when we receive a taste of God's goodness and want more—more of God's goodness, presence and strength and more of Christ's love living in us. Holiness doesn't sound so difficult when you consider it is a product of living your faith.

SURPRISE!

Have you ever had the amazing experience of paying your bill at a restaurant and being told that the person ahead of you had paid it for you? That has come to be known as a "Random Act of Kindness." The benefactor has disappeared, leaving you with no one to thank and with a warm feeling inside.

There are some parables which Jesus taught as acts of generosity. The good Samaritan who spent time and money to help a stranger left robbed and badly beaten; the Prodigal Son welcomed home with a huge party to the dismay of his responsible brother; the Great Banquet to which many people were invited but did not come and the invitation was then given to the poor on the streets and lanes who gladly accepted.

Good stewardship tells us to give generously to those in need whether we judge them deserving or not. Let God make that decision. God in the parables is not a tight fisted miser. God has showered undeserved grace on each one of us as our sins are forgiven.

To grow closer to God, means in part, to unlock all the gifts we have been given: our hearts, minds, bodies, and our material resources, so others may experience the loving God we know.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

Have you ever suddenly seen a person whose face is very familiar but you just can't remember his or her name? You have an enjoyable conversation hoping all the time that there would be a clue as to the person's name.

Names are important. Being called by our name enhances our self esteem, gives us confidence in our relationships. There is one very important verse in the Bible that brings to each of us a sense of just how important we are. It is the first verse of Isaiah 43. "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." What an amazing declaration! God knows all of our names and claims us as his own!

As God's own people, we should look in the mirror and remind ourselves that we are a beloved child of God and we have a responsibility to respond by loving and serving God and each other. Our lives and the way we choose to live should reflect our gratitude for what God has done for us. God has a perfect memory. God never forgets our name or our face! Thanks be to God!

MARK MY WORDS!

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS---They are everywhere! We are bombarded with words from many sources each day. There is no shortage of people who want to talk, selling us the latest gadget, the juiciest gossip, sage advice or just passing the time of day. Walk down any city street and many people you meet will have a cell phone pasted to their ear deeply engaged in conversation. We all use thousands of words in the course of a day.

Words can be a powerful instrument. They can be a blessing to someone or they can inflict great harm. The saying we learned in childhood about words never hurting us is absolutely false. Self esteem and self confidence can be destroyed by careless or sometimes vindictive use of words. The book of James, Chapter 3, tells us we worship God with our tongue but speak unkindly about someone in the next breath. We need to choose our words wisely.

As Christians, we try to exercise good stewardship of all our blessings, giving of our time, talents and money as a gift of gratitude to God. Perhaps we could make an offering of our words to God, asking God if what we are about to say is true, kind, and acceptable. Then our words can be a source of comfort and strength to someone who needs to hear them.