

STUDY GUIDE: LIVING THE APPLIED LIFE (MODULE 202)

Lesson #6 – Applied to Our Earth: Dominion: Man’s First Stewardship Assignment

Mankind has been assigned the role of general manager of the Father’s world.

What an incredible honor! What an incredible responsibility!

We don’t get far into the Bible before we come across God’s very first stewardship assignment. It is found in the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible. As God is forming the crowning masterpiece of His creation – mankind – we read:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:26-28).

There are two important points to notice in these three verses. First, unlike anything and everything else God created, mankind is the only creation that is stamped with His image and likeness. And two, mankind has been given a creation mandate to fill, subdue and have dominion (rule) over all of the rest of God’s good creation. In other words, mankind has been assigned the role of general manager of the Father’s world. What an incredible honor! What an incredible responsibility!

Because of this, we must understand that our foundational motivation for being careful and creative in our management of the earth is not because the earth is our *mother*, but because God is our *Father*. And our Father has entrusted us with the challenge of carefully *using*, without *abusing*, and creatively *fashioning*, without *defacing* all He has created on this incredible planet – first and foremost for *His* glory and second for *mankind’s* benefit and enjoyment.

This stewardship assignment would be pretty clear and pretty straightforward, if it weren’t for one cataclysmic issue – the fall of man. When Adam ate that forbidden fruit in the Garden he took down the entire human race and the entire creation all in this one act of rebellion. God kept His promise to Adam when He told him, “*for in the day that you eat of [the fruit] you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). And not only would he now die, but all of us who have come after him will die as well. God’s entire, perfect creation had been fractured.

But the curse didn’t stop with Adam and Eve now dying, God also informed them, “*cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you*” (Genesis 3:17-18). Paul confirms this same earth curse in Romans 8:22, “*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*”

So what does this fall and curse mean to us today? From the human standpoint, fallen man is not only quite prone to, but often even obsessed with materialism, covetousness and the selfish accumulation of

excessive possessions, for his own use and his own glory, often at the expense of others and what may be best for the earth we have been charged to manage. To quote the thinking of an old idiom; “one man’s gain is at another man’s loss.”

Ezekiel 34:18 illustrates this very self-serving attitude of “As long as I get all I want – I really don’t care about anybody else” when he asks, “*Is it not enough for you to feed on the green pastures? Must you also trample the rest with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink pure water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?*”

Think about it. Should we not, as good stewards of our Father’s world, voluntarily do all we can to wisely manage all resources and all the earth’s beauty in the little part of His world that we do have the ability to manage?

Hosea 4:6 says, “*My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge.*” Unfortunately, we can also wreak destruction on our neighbors and on nature if we fail to properly carry out our creation mandate. So, let’s consider how we can do a better job of carrying out this important earth stewardship assignment.

There are so many simple ways in which we can make adjustments to our lives and lifestyles to better fulfill our creation mandate. We can avoid whenever possible abusing valuable resources, needlessly destroying its natural beauty, and producing unnecessary waste that naturally occurs as we live our lives. In fact, many of these possible action steps would have minimal impact on our lives and in many cases would actually be financially advantageous. And if we all were to collectively make minor adjustments, we could greatly reduce our demand on the resources and allow them to go further and require less clean up from what we do consume.

For example,

- Consider starting to recycle trash items that can be re-used. (Some churches have added recycling bins in their parking lots to make this even more convenient for their members.)
- Consider lowering or raising your thermostat a degree or two, depending on the season, reducing the amount of energy you consume. (This will save you money too.)
- Buy a car that still meets your needs, but choose one that would be more fuel efficient (and take less cash out of your budget to pay for gas), while still being crash-worthy to protect you and your family.
- Since it takes about four acres of farmland to feed a meat eater for a year and only one-half acre to feed a non-meat eater, maybe you could voluntarily reduce your meat consumption (and very possibly improve your overall health and save money on your grocery bill too.)
- Pick up trash that has been carelessly tossed whenever you see it.
- Plant some trees where and when you can. (It is great exercise. It adds beauty to the area. And trees have a number of significant benefits for the planet’s ecosystem.)

You see the objective. There are literally dozens of ways you can use less of the earth’s resources, waste less, require less waste disposal, increase the beauty of the planet and actually end up having more for yourselves in the process.

You are probably thinking, “Come on, I am only one person. How much of a difference can I make? There are billions of people on this earth!”

Even though this is a common line of reasoning, it fails us in two important ways. First, keep in mind that we are called to be a steward of what we have been entrusted with regardless of whether anybody else on the entire planet is doing anything or not. And second, just because we are only one person does not excuse any of us from doing what we can to fulfill our earth stewardship responsibilities.

Keep in mind, just *one* person can make an *enormous* difference. One such example is Norman Borlaug, the Father of the Green Revolution – the “Man Who Fed the World” – whose work in plant breeding increased many different crop yields to two, four and six times greater harvests, especially in poor countries. This one man made a massive difference!

Jeanie Greenough expresses a proper earth stewardship mindset perfectly. She says, “I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything; but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

May this way of thinking become our continual attitude as we each seek to be good and faithful stewards of our Father’s world.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Do you have an “entitled attitude” about natural resources or regard them as God’s creation?
 - a. When your region suffers a severe drought and water restrictions have been put into place, do you react by cutting back water consumption in any way you can or complain because you can’t water your grass?
 - b. What efforts have you made toward reducing gasoline and energy consumption?
2. What are you teaching your children by example in the area of conservation of natural resources?
3. What are you teaching them in regard to a frugal versus an indulgent lifestyle?
4. Explain your ideas on a believer’s responsibility in establishing healthy eating choices and limiting portion sizes?
5. Share some things you are doing or could start doing to make an effort to better “serve and preserve the earth?”
6. Describe how you could improve your efforts toward consuming less (a smaller consumption footprint) and preserving more for those who will come after you?
7. As believers, do you think this idea of earth stewardship ought to be a matter of serious concern for believers? Why or why not?
8. Share about how stewardship of our bodies and stewardship of the earth are connected? How could you change your diet to be a better steward of the earth?

9. Share how you think Hosea 4:6 illustrates where Christians are in this matter of earth stewardship. He says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

10. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?