

DOMINION: MAN'S FIRST STEWARDSHIP ASSIGNMENT

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 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—to 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*. 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 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 all creation 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 a human standpoint, fallen man is not only prone to, but often obsessed with, materialism. Often at the expense of others and the earth, man is consumed with covetousness and selfish accumulation for his own use and glory. To quote the thinking of an old idiom; “One man’s gain is at another man’s loss.”

Ezekiel illustrates this very self-serving attitude of “As long as I get what 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?* (Ezekiel 34:18) Think about it: Should we not, as good stewards of our Father’s world, voluntarily do all we can to wisely manage all the earth’s beauty and resources?

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

There are so many simple ways to make changes to our lifestyles in order to avoid wasting valuable resources and needlessly destroying the earth’s natural beauty. In fact, many of these steps would have minimal impact on our lives, and in many cases be financially advantageous. If we collectively make minor adjustments, we can greatly reduce our demand on resources, allowing them to go further and requiring less clean up from what we do consume.

Consider the following examples:

- 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 members.)
- Lower/raise your thermostat a few degrees, reducing the amount of energy you consume (also a money saver).
- Buy a more fuel-efficient car and take less cash out of your budget to pay for gas, while still being crash-worthy to protect you and your family.
- Reduce your meat consumption, considering it takes about four acres of farmland to feed a meat eater for a year, but only one-half acre to feed a non-meat eater. (Very possibly this would improve your overall health and save money on your grocery bill.)
- Pick up trash that has been carelessly tossed whenever you see it.
- Plant some trees where and when you can. (Not only is it great exercise, but trees add beauty and have a number of significant benefits for the planet’s ecosystem.)

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

Your first thought might be, “How much of a difference can I make; I am just one person? 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, it is important to remember that we are called to be stewards of the earth, regardless of what other people do. Second, we are not excused from doing what we can to fulfill our responsibilities simply because we are “just one person.”

Keep in mind, just *one* person can make an *enormous* difference. Norman Borlang, the Father of the Green Revolution—the “Man Who Fed the World”—increased many different crop yields to two, four, and six times greater harvests, especially in poor countries, through his work in plant breeding. 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.

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E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University’s Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.