

Stewardship¹ and the Environment



SABBATH—MARCH 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 8; Genesis 2:15; Revelation 4:11; Exodus 20:8–11; 1 Corinthians 3:16.

MEMORY VERSE: “God blessed them. He said to them, ‘Have children and increase your numbers. Fill the earth and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish in the waters and the birds of the air. Rule over every living creature [thing] that moves on the ground’ ” (Genesis 1:28, NlrV).

THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE IS A GIFT OF LOVE FROM THE CREATOR GOD. It is God “ ‘who made the heavens and the earth. Worship Him who made the sea and the springs of water’ ” (Revelation 14:7, NlrV). Within this creation God put humans. It was God’s plan from the start for humans to be in relationship with Himself, other persons, and the world. So, as Seventh-day Adventists, we are to take good care of nature in our service to God. . . .

“Since human poverty [poorness] and pollution are connected, we pledge [promise] ourselves to make life better for all people. Our goal is to manage our environment well while meeting human needs. . . .

“We promise to manage our stewardship of God’s creation. We also believe that total restoration² will be complete only when God makes all things new.”—Excerpted and adapted from “Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.”

1. stewardship—careful management of one’s money, property, time, talents, and health.

2. restoration—the act of making something new.

SUNDAY—MARCH 3**CONTROL GIVEN AT CREATION
(Psalm 8)**

According to Genesis 1:26, Adam's control is over everything in the world—the sea, the land, and the air. Control means the idea of ruling or having power over all living things. Nothing is said about control over the forces of nature themselves but only over the living things. And, according to the verse, Adam is to be the ruler of the earth.

Read again Psalm 8. What is David's answer to the honor God gave to humans? What does it mean that we have been given "glory [power] and honor," which means humans have been given control over the earth?

According to Genesis 2:19, one of Adam's earliest duties is to name the animals. Names had great meaning in Bible times. One's name showed who a person was and also his position. The authority to give names to the birds and beasts was proof of Adam's authority over the animals.

Read Genesis 2:15. In what ways do you see the principle (important rule) of stewardship shown here?

Adam was given the responsibility of caring for the Garden, which meant he had to manage it and supply its needs. The Hebrew root word, *smr*, translated here as "keep" it, often means "to watch over" or "to protect." The Garden was



Adam named the animals, showing he was ruler over them.

a gift to Adam. This was an example of God's love. And Adam was now given responsibility over this Garden. It is another example of the control that Adam received at the time of Creation.

How should our understanding of God as the Creator or the Creation story influence or impact how we care for the environment? Why should our understanding of these things protect us from going too far in caring for the environment?



It was Adam's job to care for the Garden.

MONDAY—MARCH 4**CARING FOR OTHER LIVING THINGS (Psalm 50:10)**

What does Psalm 50:10 show about our stewardship of the earth?

Read Revelation 4:11. How is this verse very different from a nonbeliever's belief of a creation without a creator?

Creation of the animals was not an accident. God created them from a carefully laid plan. It was His will that they should have life. This principle (important rule) should guide us in how we care for them. (Read also Exodus 23:5, 12; Proverbs 12:10; Luke 14:5.)

When we are cruel toward animals, it shows that there is something wrong with our character (who we are). Many organizations have been created to support good treatment of animals. That is good.

But, at the same time, some people have claimed that humans are not as important as animals. They argue that humans should not be given special treatment. In many ways, this thought comes from the teachings of evolution.³ These people think that if we and the animals are separated only by time and chance, why should we be any more special than they are? One thinker has even argued that a chicken, or even a fish, has more “personhood” than a fetus does

in the womb or even a newborn baby.

Anyway, such ideas are not taught in the Bible. Humans have a special place in God's plan over the animals. (Read Genesis 3:21; Exodus 29:38; and Leviticus 11:3.)

Put yourself in the mind of a person who believes in evolution. Work through the reasons for why you think that animals should be treated no differently than humans. What should this tell you about how much influence our ideas and beliefs have on our thinking?



There is something wrong with people who hurt animals.

TUESDAY—MARCH 5**THE SABBATH AND THE ENVIRONMENT⁴ (Exodus 20:8–11)**

As we have learned, stewardship means taking good care of the planet.

3. evolution—a theory (unproven idea) that the differences between modern plants and animals exist because of changes that happened by a natural process over a very long time.

4. environment—the conditions that surround someone or something.

This is tied directly to the Creation. And our views about Creation influence how we feel about the creation.

For some people, the creation is meant to be abused to satisfy their own desires and wants. Still others worship the creation itself. (Read Romans 1:25.) But the Bible teaches us that we should have a balanced view of how we relate to the world that the Lord created for us.

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What do we find in this commandment about stewardship?

“God set aside the seventh-day Sabbath as a continuing memorial to and reminder of His act in creating the world. In resting on that day, Seventh-day Adventists renew the special sense of relationship with the Creator and His creation. Sabbath keeping shows the importance of our relationship with the total environment.”—Excerpted and adapted from “Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment.”

The Sabbath points us to the fact that God created us and the world that we live in. It also reminds us that we do not have the authority to do whatever we wish to others and to the world itself. Sabbath should teach us that we are stewards, and stewardship gives us certain responsibilities. And the commandment itself shows how we are to treat those who are “under” us.

Think about how you treat other people, especially those who are under your control. Are you treating them with respect, fairness,

and grace (mercy and kindness)? Or are you taking advantage of the power that you have over them? If you do the second, you will one day have to answer for your actions.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 6

STEWARDS OF OUR HEALTH (1 Corinthians 3:16)

As we have learned throughout this quarter, God’s plan for Creation was “good,” even “very good.” Everything and everyone came forth from the hand of the Creator perfectly. There was no sickness, no disease, no death. But evolution teaches something different. Evolution shows that disease, sickness, and death are part of creation. But these things came only after the Fall, after sin came into the world. This background of the Creation story helps us to better understand the Bible teaching about health and healing.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19, 20. What is our responsibility to God about the care of our bodies?

Our bodies are the carriers of our brains. Through our brain, the Holy Spirit communicates with us. If we wish to have a relationship with God, we must take care of our bodies and brains. If we abuse our bodies, we destroy ourselves, both physically and spiritually. According to these verses, how we take care of our bodies is our spiritual responsibility. It is a spiritual responsibility filled with

eternal results.

Care of our health is an important part of our relationship to God. Clearly, there are some things we cannot control. We all have some bad genes.⁵ We all are exposed to unknown chemicals. And we are all at risk of physical injury that may damage our health. God knows all this. But we are to do our best to care for our bodies, which are made in the image of God.

“Let believers have a serious attitude about caring for the health of the body. They should not think that abusing their health is no sin and will not influence their spirituality. There is a very close connection between the physical and the moral nature.⁶ The standard of purity is raised or lowered by the physical habits. . . . Any habit that does not encourage healthful action in the human system is harmful to the spiritual nature.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*,[®] January 25, 1881.



We must take good care of our bodies.

5. genes—parts of cells that control or influence the appearance and growth of a living thing.

6. moral nature—the ability to choose between right and wrong.

THURSDAY—MARCH 7

STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES (James 1:17)

How does James 1:17 help us to better understand the Bible principle of stewardship?

We often think that stewardship deals with money. But stewardship involves much more than just that. With money, with our environment, or with our own health, there are certain principles of good stewardship. They are the principles that have their ties with Creation, as shown in Genesis. In the end, because God is our Creator who gives us gifts, we are responsible to Him for being good stewards.

Read Matthew 25:14–30 to understand how this parable (story) shows the rewards of good stewardship. What is the message of this parable about the principles of stewardship?

“To His servants Christ gives ‘His goods’ to be cared for Him. He gives ‘to every man his work.’ Each person has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in cooperation with Christ for the salvation of souls. The place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions [homes] is no more special than the place chosen for us on earth where we are to work for God.”—Adapted from Ellen

G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pages 326, 327.

What are you doing with the talents that you have been given? (Remember—everything good comes from “the Father of the heavenly lights,” James 1:17, NKJV.) What choices can you make that will help you to use these gifts in better service for the Lord’s work?

FRIDAY—MARCH 8

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Christ’s followers have been saved for service. Our Lord teaches that the true goal of life is ministry [work done for God]. Christ Himself was a worker. And to all His followers He gives the law of service. This is service to God and service to others. Here Christ has given to the world a higher purpose for life than they have ever known. By living to minister [work] for others, man is brought into connection with Christ. The law of service becomes the connecting link that ties us to God and to our fellow men.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 326.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Some worldly people think that the value of life should not be measured by whether the life is human but by how much life a living thing can enjoy. They might put more value on a young, healthy chimpanzee than they do on an old, diseased human.

For example, read the following quote from Australian Peter Singer. He argues that humans should not have any more rights than some animals do: “People should have more concern about all kinds of life. For example, there are those who are against abortion⁷ but regularly eat the bodies of chickens, pigs, and calves. They are the ones who show more interest in the welfare of humans than in that of animals. If you compare animals with humans, sometimes animals seem to be more aware of what life is than humans are.”—Adapted from Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical [Choosing Between Right and Wrong] Life* (New York: The Ecco Press, 2000), page 156.

Singer, of course, is an evolutionist.⁸ So, he believes that there is really no difference between us and the animals. We just have evolved (changed) into something different from what they did.

What is wrong with this picture? How should we as Christians answer this kind of thinking?

② If you can find it, bring to class the entire text of “Caring for Creation—A Statement on the Environment” (this statement can be found at adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat5.html). If not, use the parts quoted in this week’s Sabbath study. Study how the statement ties the Genesis Creation to the environment. Think more about how a proper view of Creation can protect us from having wrong ideas.

7. abortion—the removal of an unborn child from its mother’s womb.

8. evolutionist—a person who believes in evolution.