

**Stewards by God's Design: The Three R's of the Christian Steward**  
*Relationships – Responsibilities – Resources*  
**Facilitation Guide for My Relationship with Creation**

**Goal:** That participants would understand and live out the fact that God created us to have dominion over His created world. We are stewards of creation by His design!

**Introduction:** A number of years ago there was a television show titled, "Hoarders." It was about people who hoard things to such a degree that it negatively impacts their lives and their relationships. Ask participants to give reasons why people might hoard things.

**Background:** R. Scott Rodin writes in *The Steward Leader*, "On the fourth level—our relationships to the created world—meaning is derived from our status as caretakers of the created world. From Genesis we see that we were created primarily for this activity. The first task given to God's image-bearing creatures was to tend the garden (see Genesis 1:28-30). When we reflect God's caring nurture of us by caring for and nurturing his creation, we find meaning in a world that screams at us that meaning is found only in the hoarding and consumption of resources. Scripture demonstrates for us that we were created to find meaning in the sharing and careful stewardship of God's abundance...If we were created for a relationship with creation, our purpose is to live in harmony with creation; to love it, to tend it, to take care of it. God's command is that we have dominion, rule over and subdue the earth just as God has dominion, rules over and subdues us." Page 36

As we think about our relationship to creation there are two things that must be kept in mind. The first is that God is the one and only owner of all that exists. The second is that, as stewards by God's design, we have the responsibility to care for His creation as He would.

Ask participants what it means for the everyday life of the Christian steward that God is the one and only owner. Answer: It means that we recognize that we take care of things that are not ours. We are responsible and accountable to the Owner for how we manage His things. It means that we carefully and intentionally manage things according to His will. We study His Word to determine how He wants us to steward what He so generously gives into our care. It means that we thank and praise Him daily for the many blessings He gives us to manage.

This relationship with creation started when God created humankind in His image. Robert Kolb writes in *The Christian Faith*, "The biblical doctrine of creation describes the relationships God established as He fashioned his creation...He established the relationship of human creatures to the rest of creation, a relationship of 'dominion,' that is, God-style support and service, love, care, and concern (Genesis 1:26-30). Page 49

What do the following passages say about creation?

- Genesis 1:1

Answer: We believe, teach, and confess that God created all that is. He is the creator; we are His stewards. Robert Kolb writes in *The Christian Faith*, “At the beginning there was only God. Then he spoke, and creation came into existence (Gen. 1:1, John 1:1). ‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth...For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm’ (Ps. 33:6, 9). The creation is his. He made it and us. He is the Lord.” Page 50

- Genesis 1:31

Answer: When God finished creation, He looked at everything He created and proclaimed that it was very good—it was perfect! Kolb adds, “The Lord labeled his creation ‘very good.’ On five of the six days of creation God observed that the product of his creative Word was good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). At the end ‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31)...Although Eden’s gates are closed. God’s ‘very good’ still echoes, though sometimes faintly. Human experience with material things often discourages us from acknowledging that the material order is very good. We encounter the material in our own bodies, and we notice these bodies chiefly when they do not function well, when they are dying. We see the corruption of our own flesh...(However) believers thank God for the entire material order, from their bodies to the farthest star. Believers praise God for the gift of his creation, for limitless possibilities of using it for good purposes, for expressing human life in manifold ways. Believers delight in God’s limitless imagination.” Page 50-51

- Psalm 24:1

Answer: While God gave man the responsibility to oversee His creation, He did not transfer ownership to humans. God still retains ownership of everything—the world and all who dwell therein. We are stewards by God’s design!

What do the following passages say about our relationship to creation?

- Genesis 1:28

Answer: God tells Adam and Eve that they are to “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.” Kolb writes, “Dominion has a strikingly different meaning in the language of God. Gentile rulers lorded it over their people, but Christ taught the disciples that ‘it shall not be so among you’ (Mark 10:43 RSV). Whoever is great among God’s people will be a servant to others; whoever wants to be first among them will be their slave. The model is clear: Christ himself came not to be served but to serve and even to sacrifice his life as a ransom for his people (Mark 10:41-45)...God lords it under, not over, his creation. He is in charge, and he

exercises proper authority. He exercises this control for the sake of his creatures, not for his own sake. So it is with the dominion that his people are to exercise. This dominion is designed to serve, to lord it in the sense of embodying the Lord's care and concern and love. This dominion exploits neither nature nor other human creatures for its own sake. It lords from below, supporting, uplifting, embracing—and guiding and directing as appropriate." Page 57-58

- Genesis 2:8

Answer: It is God who planted the garden in Eden. He is the creator and owner. It is God who created Adam and Eve and placed them into the garden. We do not own creation—we are stewards.

- Genesis 2:15

Answer: God put human beings into the garden to take care of it. The first thing God gave human beings to do was to steward His creation. We are stewards by His design!

- Genesis 2:16-17

Answer: As creatures, we are limited by the Owner. He retains ownership rights over creation—all of it. He makes the rules. He sets the boundaries. We flourish when we live within the limits and boundaries God has set for us. When we go beyond those limits, we do not flourish.

How did sin impact the relationship human beings have to creation?

- Genesis 3:17-19

Answer: When sin entered the world everything changed. No longer were perfect human beings living in a perfect world. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve the ground is cursed. Work will now be hard and burdensome. Kolb writes, "When we experience disappointment with God's material creation, we need to remember that it did not fall. It was fallen upon. The ground is cursed because God's human creation ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it.' Because of human defiance and deafness to God's voice, the ground is cursed (Gen. 3:17)." Page 51

- Romans 8:20-22

Answer: This passage underscores the truth of Genesis 3:17-19. All creation groans under the weight of sin. It will continue to be so until Christ returns and establishes a new heaven and a new earth. Armin J. Panning writes in *Romans: The People's Bible*, "Creation is described as being frustrated because its original goodness and bounty became diminished by man's fall into sin. Ever since that time, there has been a constant deterioration. Creation is in 'bondage to decay.' A further frustration is that creation really didn't have this coming, as we might say. The downturn didn't happen to creation 'by its own choice,' or as it might also be translated,

‘because of its own willfulness.’ No, it was God’s will to curse the earth and have it produce thorns and thistles. In this way it became hard to work and as such served as a constant reminder to Adam and his descendants of the seriousness of their sin...But now Paul gives us a little glimpse into what the future holds for creation. He says it was subjected to its present state of frustration ‘in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.’” Page 134-135

- Job 12:7-10

Answer: In these verses Job is talking to his friends who have a distorted view of the reason for the suffering he is going through. Job contends that even the animals know that sin is the root cause of suffering and pain.

How are we as stewards supposed to respond to His creation?

- Psalm 104:24, 33

Answer: The Psalmist recognizes God as the creator of all that exists. God’s wisdom is demonstrated in His creation. Our response is to thank and praise God because of His magnificent creation.

- Romans 1:20

Answer: Our response is to pay attention and see God’s wisdom, eternal power, and divine nature in His creation. Armin J. Panning writes in his commentary *Romans: The People’s Bible*, “People have a natural knowledge of God written in their hearts, and this knowledge is supplemented and reinforced by what Paul now adds, namely, proof gained by looking around at the created world. Anyone can see that the world was brought into being by something far greater than mere chance, by someone with ‘eternal power and divine nature.’ Only the fool says, ‘There is no God’ (Psalm 14:1). All people have information about God, ‘so that men are without excuse.’” Page 26

*Luther’s Small Catechism* (2017) notes, “To some extent, we can learn about God as our Creator. Creation witnesses to God, His goodness, and His power. The human conscience also witnesses to God and His righteousness.” Page 129

Kolb continues, “We are creatures of the breath of God. We stand in a symbiotic relationship with the rest of creation...Nevertheless God did not issue a license for human exploitation of nature. The whole created order belongs to God. Nature is designed to protect itself against human abuse. God stands in judgement over human misuse of His world and its resources...The breath of God points to the vertical relationship that human creatures are designed to have with their Maker. The dust of the earth points to the horizontal relationships that human creatures have with the rest of creation. What makes us right and human in relationship to God

is our response of love and trust to the gift of life he gives without merit or worthiness in us, apart from any deeds we perform. What makes us right and human in relationship to the rest of creation is our proper performance of God's commands, our proper tilling of its ground, our proper care for its creatures." Page 53

- What is a symbiotic relationship with the rest of creation?

Answer: A symbiotic relationship is one in which organisms, people, or things exist together in a way that benefits them all. That is the relationship God designed for His stewards in creation. We are to take care of creation while we enjoy its benefits.

- How do we as humans exploit nature?

Answers will vary. One way in which we exploit nature is by selfishly using it for our own ends and not conserving resources for others and for future generations.

- How does God's ownership of all creation impact our stewardship?

Answer: It makes all the difference. We steward what God has entrusted to our care by using His resources according to His will. We do not manage selfishly, but selflessly.

- What makes us right and human in our relationship to God? To creation?

Answer: Kolb says that what makes us right and human in our relationship to God is the love and trust we have toward Him because of the gift of life He so generously gives. It is all about God—He gets the glory for everything.

What makes us right and human in our relationship to creation is to treat it with care and respect in obedience to God's commands.

- How can we be better stewards of God's creation?

Answers will vary. We can certainly be better stewards by reading and studying God's Word and living in obedience to it as it pertains to His creation.

Read the Rodin quote on the left side of the participant's guide. Ask participants what it means to "live lightly in this world." Answers will vary.

Also read the Martin Luther quote and ask participants to respond to the question. Answers will vary. One way we see that God cherishes His world is that He not only created it as "very good" but also continues to preserve it by sustaining it and nourishing it.

The following passages provide additional material regarding our relationship to creation:

Numbers 35:33a *You shall not pollute the land in which you live.*

Deuteronomy 20:19 *When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you?*

Deuteronomy 25:4 *You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.*

Job 12:7-10 *But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.*

Psalms 8:6-8 *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

Matthew 6:19-21 *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Psalms 118:24 *This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Proverbs 12:10 *Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.*

Matthew 25:21 *His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."*

Matthew 10:29 *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*

Close by saying or singing together hymn 817, "Earth and All Stars," in the *Lutheran Service Book*. Note the many elements of God's creation cited in the hymn. "He has done marvelous things."