

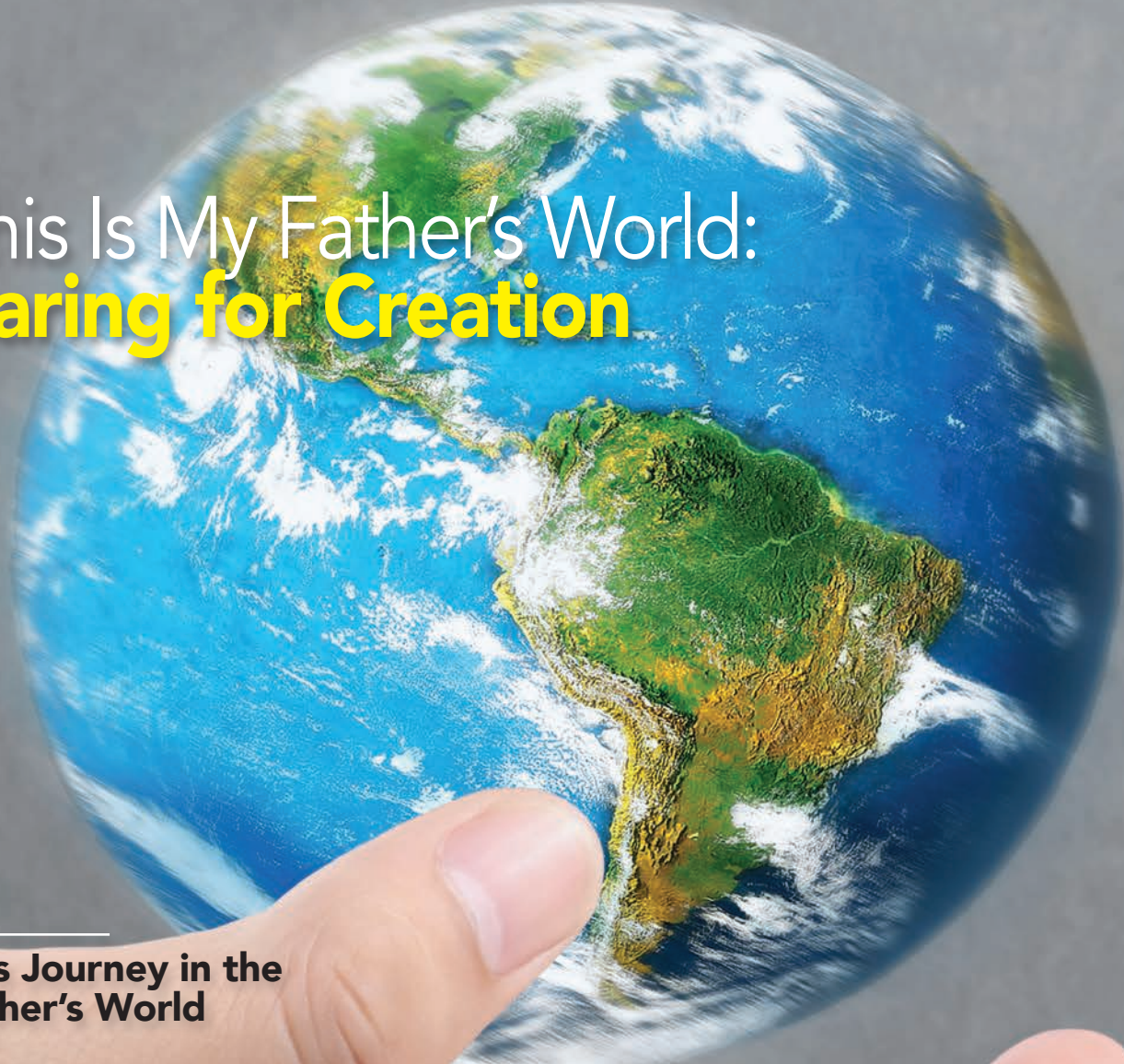
WHITE WING

100 YEARS

AUGUST 2023

MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY



This Is My Father's World: **Caring for Creation**

**This Journey in the
Father's World**

**Stewarding Eden:
The High Calling of
Caring for Creation**

**Stewardship: Making
a Difference**



transform

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WHITE WING MESSENGER

WE BELIEVE in the Holy Trinity—one God, eternally existing in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We believe in one God, the Father, creator of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. All things were made through Him and for Him. He is true God and true man. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin, Mary. He suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He will return to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who eternally proceeds from the Father. He is Teacher, Comforter, Helper, and Giver of spiritual gifts. Through Him the saving and sanctifying works of Jesus Christ are applied to the life of believers. He is the empowering presence of God in the life of the Christian and the church. The Father has sent His Son to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and bearing the fruit of the Spirit are New Testament signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that He died in our place. The believer's sins are forgiven by the shedding of His blood. We believe that healing of mind, body, soul, and spirit is available to the believer through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in one baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the grace of God brings forgiveness and reconciliation to those who repent, as well as transformation in holiness, enabling them to live a Christ-like life. Sanctification is both a definite work of grace and a lifelong process of change in the believer brought by the blood of Jesus, the Word of God, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one holy, universal church, composed of all true believers in Jesus Christ, offering fellowship and calling for service to men and women of all races, nations, cultures, and languages. We believe in the spiritual and ultimate visible unity of the church.

We believe that the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His will to humankind, sufficient for instruction in salvation and daily Christian living. The Bible is the Christian's rule of faith and practice.

We believe that God will ultimately reconcile all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Therefore, we look forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Executive Editor/Publisher: Tim Coalter
Managing Editor: Marsha Robinson
Copy Editor: Katherine Osborn
Editorial Assistant: Roxanne Corbett
Graphic Designer: Sixto Ramírez

About the Church of God of Prophecy
The Church of God of Prophecy is a vibrant, worldwide body of believers, united in worship, working hand-in-hand to share God's love and a message of hope to the brokenhearted. The organization has more than a million members and more than 10,000 ministers, worshiping in more than 10,000 churches or missions in 135 nations of the world.

Church of God of Prophecy Core Values

- Prayer
- The Harvest
- Leadership Development
- Biblical Stewardship
- Service

Vision Statement

Reconciling the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

Mission Statement

The Church of God of Prophecy is a Christ-exalting, holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple-making, church-planting movement with passion for Christian union.

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White Wing Messenger (ISSN 0043-5007) (USPS 683-020) is published monthly as the official publication of the Church of God of Prophecy, 3720 Keith St. NW, Cleveland, TN. Send all materials for publication to Editorial Department; PO Box 2910, Cleveland, TN 37320-2910; e-mail: editorial@cgop.org; fax: (423) 559-5151. For subscription rates, visit www.cgop.org; call (423) 559-5540; e-mail: subscriptions@cgop.org. Subscription rate: \$20.00 per year, payable to White Wing Messenger by check, draft, or money order. Periodical postage paid at Cleveland, TN 37311 and at additional mail office. Donations for the White Wing Messenger may be sent to the above address. All Scripture references are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated. POSTMASTER: Send address change to White Wing Messenger, PO Box 2910, Cleveland, TN 37320-2910. Please submit all material to the White Wing Messenger; Managing Editor; P. O. Box 2910; Cleveland, TN 37320-2910; phone (423) 559-5320; e-mail us at Editorial@cgop.org.

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FACING FORWARD

Our God Is Awesome

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth. (Psalm 19:1-6 NIV)

Our God is awesome! Without speaking a single word, creation proclaims mightily proof of our Creator. The awesomeness, beauty, and majesty of God's creation can be seen and heard by humanity. It all points to our awesome, loving, merciful God.

Renee and I were recently ministering at a pastor's conference in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and we were blessed to view some of the most majestic proof of God's glory on the face of the earth. As we enjoyed the breathtaking beauty of Bow Valley, marveled at the majesty of Lake Louise, and stood in amazement at the roaring waterfall at Banff, our hearts rejoiced in our Creator. Songs of worship and praise flow out of your heart when you see the beauty of creation and dwell on the goodness of the Creator.

The Psalms are full of the acknowledgement of the goodness of our Creator and his enormity in creation. Certain places in our world are so beautiful, and at times so large, they overwhelm us. When we are quiet (and still) before the Lord, we may hear the smallest sounds of God's creation giving praise to the Creator. From roaring waterfalls to the delicate sounds of birds chirping, the earth proclaims his goodness. We also acknowledge the mindfulness of our God to us, and we are humbled by his goodness. We proclaim with the Psalmist,

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon, and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;



Bishop Brian T. Sutton, D.Min
North America General
Presbyter

You have put all things under his feet, All sheep, and oxen—Even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:1, 3–9 NKJV)

At this moment in the world, we are faced with distress and turmoil regarding creation. Varying sides offer differing and often angry opinions about everything from nuclear power, gas and oil exploration, greenhouse gasses, and global warming. The sides of each argument often display science to prop their opinion. The church stands in a wonderful position to proclaim the wonder of our Creator and the beauty of creation. God's Word has instructed us to steward creation so that it would feed,

clothe, and house us through his provision. The church can be the voice of love and hope for those in distress. We know that though we presently live in a world marred by sin, our King of kings is soon appearing to renew all things and bring the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21). As we steward God's creation, our prayer remains for his grace to flow through his church that we may fulfil his will to reconcile the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Our Prayer...

Heavenly Father, our divine Creator, we praise your name and acknowledge your goodness and power in all creation. We thank you for the proof of your love for us we find throughout your world. We join our voices with the voice of all creation in proclaiming your majesty, holiness, mercy, and love for your creatures and creation. We cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3 NIV), and we ask for your presence to dwell with us and flow through us as we serve you.

As your people, we ask for your anointing that we may steward your creation well. Give us insight and compassion, wisdom and understanding. Show us how we may follow you in the care of your creation. Thank you for the opportunity you have given us to experience the beauty of all you have made. We ask you for your grace to know your will in many complex issues in our world. Where there is confusion, anger, and distress, give us clarity, love, and peace that we may speak your voice. May your people ever proclaim your goodness as we eagerly await your glorious appearing.

CONNECTIONS

Myanmar One Child Fund



Your prayers and financial support have encouraged the growth of our orphanages spiritually, physically, and mentally. Your sacrificial donations and love have planted seeds of hope and the fear of the Lord in the lives of our orphans. Our heartfelt thanks and love go to our donors. We value your financial support, prayer, love, and generosity that you have given to our three orphanage homes: Carmel Children Home, New Hope Orphanage Home, and Lighthouse Orphanage Home.

The total number of orphans between all the homes is forty, with an estimated monthly support cost for food and clothing of \$3,401.60 (\$85.04 per child). The political situations are more challenging every day. However, we have been managing our time to witness night after night as opportunities arise. Thank you very much for your continued prayer support during this most critical situation in Myanmar.

The combined impacts of conflict, political instability, economic crisis, and longstanding poverty leave millions unable to access basic services and struggling to meet their family's food needs. With three in four people dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, humanitarian support to restore rural households' production is critical. Without a respite from conflict, political turbulence, and economic instability in sight, 2023 will be another year of dire struggle for the people of Myanmar.

I humbly would like to inform you regarding a specific need at our Carmel Children Home. When the children were still young, we combined boys and girls in one building. Now, as they have grown, the situation compels them to be housed separately. We urgently need to build a separate boys' dormitory.

By the grace of God and through your previous sacrificial love and hard work, we were able to purchase land and now have laid the foundation for the boys' dormitory. We have been working hard with some of our mission students to lay the foundation for the last three months. As our students need to return to their classwork, the foundation is finished. To complete the construction, at least \$15,000 (USD) is needed. We constantly pray that God will open the door to supply the needed funds to complete the building.

Last month we did not meet the need for food costs for the three children's homes we have in Myanmar. We worked in diligence just to feed them rice and vegetables.

Thank you so much for your love and vision for the orphans in Myanmar.

In his ministry,

Chin Kang Mon, National Bishop





This Journey in the **Father's World**

In 2021, I was traveling and preaching in eastern Idaho. I had stopped to speak at one of our local churches in Pocatello when I met a somewhat quirky man named Jay. We visited together after the service, and he briefly shared a story of his adult conversion and life in Christ. He was passionate, knowledgeable, and a prolific writer (seven published books) on environmental Christianity and other subjects. Honestly, I am not easily impressed or enamored by people with their homespun theology of the Scripture. But something touched my heart about Jay's sincerity, gentleness, and understanding of geology. Before my wife and I departed that evening, he handed me a personally signed book to read that examined how we as humans can first help save our souls and then save our planet. Since that time, I have come to appreciate the stories and facts shared by this Christian geologist. Most of all, I have developed a conviction that many Christians are ignoring their stewardship obligation for this earth and have allowed it to become a politically-charged issue that side-skirts our scriptural responsibility for this journey in the Father's world.

Although many Christians are familiar with the Scriptures, two passages are profoundly disturbing as we observe the rapidly changing environment on the earth's land and seas. The first passage comes from the first book of the Old Testament where creation is examined. It reads:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, 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. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion [governance, stewardship] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for



Dr. Wallace Pratt is the regional bishop for the Church of God of Prophecy in the COGOP IOU Navajo Nation region. He was born into a Church of God of Prophecy family and has been a Christian and a member of the Church from an early age. He serves the Lord and the Church as an administrator, teacher, evangelist, and a pastor to the pastors in his region. He is married to Judy Pratt and has two daughters and five grandchildren.

BISHOP WALLACE PRATT, PHD/DMIN | IDAHO, OREGON, UTAH, NAVAJO NATION REGIONAL BISHOP

food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Genesis 1:26–31 NKJV)

In addition to this fracturing earth, we witness the increased moral, social, and psychological deterioration of humanity as well. We can with certainty confess that humankind has not stewarded this world very well, whether it be environmentally, socially, morally, or spiritually. This neglect or ignorance has propagated the fractures that are tearing apart the future of the earth.

In a second powerful witness of Scripture, there is a reminder that all of creation is looking toward God's children for stewardship and accountability ordained by the Creator. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul references this influence that believers in Christ Jesus have concerning the earth:

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:19–23)

The Urgency to Save Other Souls

From the earliest restart after the global deluge that covered the earth in the days of Noah, the Scripture makes this commentary about humankind:

These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood. Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come,

let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 10:32–11:4)

We often do not realize that this was a blatant act of disobedience to the created purpose of humankind (Genesis 1:28). In this abandonment of our stewardship of the earth, there is another critical departure. What follows in the souls of men and women is worse. By the time the apostle Paul wrote to believers, the disobedience and sinfulness of humankind was polluting the souls of this world:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 1:20–25)

Before we end this section on the deteriorating morality and thinking of humankind, we also must address the lack of urgency among God's people to save souls. With the rapid rise in materialism, entertainment, leisure, and immorality, many Christians are looking toward some utopian leader to save their nation or the world from the fracturing of creative wholeness. This zealotry has gripped the church and seduces people to believe that we can somehow be saved by nationalism, partisanship, prosperity, and morals through elections, revolutions, reeducation, and balanced financial disbursements. But this is far from reality of what the New Testament

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Is caring for the environment important?

Revelation 11:18 (KJV) states, "And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

Reflection

"We are stewards of God's creation" is currently a statement or a subject that has received little attention from most believers. When God created the heavens and the earth, he designed every aspect of the environment, and the biblical

testimony describes how God looked at what he had made: "... **and God saw that it was good**" (Genesis 1:25). Even with this statement, the Bible tells us that the "crown" of creation was not the environment, nor the other created beings, but



Bishop Edgar Rossini Ortiz Salguero currently serves as national bishop of Spain and Portugal. He was born in El Salvador into a Christian home; both his parents were COGOP pastors. Bishop Rossini served as a pastor in the COGOP for 18 years, in different national ministries, and collaborated in the development and implementation of the new Foundations program. He earned a bachelor's degree in theology and is currently studying for a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry at Pentecostal Theological Seminary. Bishop Rossini is married to Idalia Ramos de Ortiz. They have two daughters, Melissa and Marcela.

BISHOP EDGAR ROSSINI ORTIZ | PORTUGAL AND SPAIN NATIONAL BISHOP

the human being created in God's image, after His likeness. Looking at the creation account, God gave man the dual responsibility of being a steward of creation when he said, "**Be fruitful, and multiply**, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and **have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (1:28). God's perspective also included a second responsibility—the preservation of the environment. This was given to man as a commandment, an order from God, which implied not only to use and transform it, but also to care for it.

Without this proper relationship between man and his environment, we would not be able to notice God's joy over creation as recorded in Genesis 1:31: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

From the thoughts expressed in this reflection, we must ask ourselves these questions:

Is Christianity to blame for the environmental crisis? As Christians, how should we treat the physical world? What is the value of non-human life? How careful should we be with nature? How does God view non-human creation?

It is because of human hands and humanity's fallen condition that inadequate/inappropriate use of nature occurs. This includes the indiscriminate exploitation of resources, which were created for man's use, and cruelty towards animals for which man's responsibility/stewardship included their care. I believe Adam carefully assigned the name to each of the animals expressing dominion, but also care. Furthermore, God instructed his people in the law to make proper use of the environment. For the children of Israel, appropriate use included not polluting the earth and allowing it to rest [from time to time]. God, in his omniscience, established these balances knowing that the resources exploited were few in relation to the existing population; however, the increase in population and the overuse of natural resources have made the challenge of preserving and

restoring a very difficult task. As a result, the earth itself groans, awaiting the renewal of all things (Romans 8:19-23). During the pandemic, the earth rested, which had been a historical struggle since the 17th century. However, today we do not allow the earth to rest. The use of chemicals, mining, and the like have caused the earth to be again in the same state it was before the pandemic.

Conclusion

Since we are stewards over God's creation, what should our motivation be? Are we good stewards for pragmatic reasons or for moral reasons? The pragmatic approach posits that we must be good stewards of the world because it is necessary in order to survive. For example, if we irresponsibly cultivate the land, we lose the layer of good soil on the surface, jeopardizing the possibility of producing food. If we carelessly kill snakes, we will have a plague of rodents. If we recklessly extract copper from the mines, we cause horrendous erosion that damages the water. If we burn forests, we pollute the air, destroy oxygen-producing trees, and damage our oxygen supply. But the Bible rejects this as the primary motive for being good stewards.

Rather, the Scriptures beseech man to exercise good stewardship over the physical world because this demonstrates honor and respect for something God has created. The physical creation should not be exploited because it is morally wrong to misuse God's creation. When we have God's perspective, we farm responsibly, avoid unnecessary destruction of animal life, mine copper sensibly, and stop burning forests because we respect and honor what God has honored and respected. We show honor to the physical world with which God has a covenant. Christians, then, must be theologically responsible leaders. As God's stewards, we represent him when we honor his physical world. The opening verse, Revelation 11:18, tells us that God will also take into account, in his judgment, those who harm his creation; this includes harming the place where we live. Let us respect the rules that preserve our world.



If one were to pick one word to encapsulate human's relationship to and care for the environment and all creation, this word would be stewardship. The concept of stewardship in the Christian tradition is rooted in the story of Creation. God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them and declared them good. He then created humans after his image and likeness and entrusted them with the high calling of caring for his marvelous work. Genesis 1:28 states, "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (NASB). In the text, we see the way in which humans were appointed as representatives of God's sovereignty in the created order. In essence, God blessed them to protect, watch, and care for his staggeringly complex and magnificent universe. According to the narrative, after this installation act, God rested on the seventh day.

The Creation story not only shows us the amazing acts of God and the goodness of all he created, but it also gives us a glimpse into God's caring relationship with his creation. By entrusting those made in his image and likeness with the task of stewarding the earth, God demonstrates how much he cares for the world he created. God neither abandoned creation nor gave humans the right to destroy it; rather, he carefully positioned humans as administrators of justice, care, and love.

The ideas of image and likeness are crucial to understanding righteous stewardship. Humans were not meant to abuse their positions as ambassadors and become tyrants over creation. Neither were they meant to take a passive role as resources are wasted. The higher calling of stewardship is connected to displaying God's image and likeness in every action. To be righteous stewards is to be holy as God is holy. As stated by Sandra Richter in her book *Stewards of Eden*, "Humanity plays a critical role in God's plan for the flourishing of his ecosphere. YHWH is the ultimate sovereign, but humanity has been positioned as his custodian for the purpose of enacting his will."¹ The high calling of stewardship entails loving as God loves, acting as God acts, and ruling as God rules. We are meant to act in this calling as servants, not as kings.

Genesis 2:15 further explains this dynamic: "The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it." The work of humanity as stewards began in the garden, a training environment to begin exercising their calling. I often imagine what it would have been like for Adam to cultivate the land and care for all the animals. I wonder how being in contact with God's creation would have deepened his communion and friendship with God. The task of stewardship of the earth was meant to serve more than one purpose. Not only would humans learn to co-labor with and worship God by caring for his creation, but they would also grow in their



Alejandra Guajardo-Hodge serves as executive administrative assistant to Bishop Jeffery Davis, executive director of Leadership Development and Discipleship for the Church of God of Prophecy International Offices. Alejandra earned both a BA in Biblical and Theological Studies and an MA in Theological Ethics from Lee University. In 2019, she received the Zeno C. Tharp Award, which is given to the Lee University senior who shows the greatest promise of making a significant contribution to the church. Alejandra has been married to Stephen Hodge since January 2022.

ALEJANDRA GUAJARDO-HODGE | CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

understanding of who God is. Can you imagine Adam holding the dust from the ground as he cared for the plants of the Garden and being in awe of how God created him? What a wonderful experience that would have been for him—to breath in and look around and experience wonder and gratitude!

To be a steward is to fulfill a high calling by approaching creation with reverence and gratitude. It is to recognize that God has dignified his creation, and so should we. Stewardship, unfortunately, has not been the framework humanity has chosen to relate with the earth. When sin entered the world, humans stopped seeing the earth as a means to God and, instead, began to see the earth as an end in itself. Resource scarcity, the extinction of numerous species, and pollution are evidence of this. In addition, history shows that Christians have misunderstood the command to subdue the earth and interpreted it as an allowance to abuse creation. Theologian Jürgen Moltmann once pointed out, “For centuries, [humans] have tried to understand God’s Creation as nature so that they can exploit it in accordance with the laws scientist has discovered. Today the essential point is to understand that which we call ‘nature’ must be lifted into the totality of being and be acknowledged as ‘God’s Creation.’”²

For several years, I have spent time thinking about what truly acknowledging our world and the universe as God’s creation would look like. I have spent time wondering what stewardship should look like in today’s world as well. If we as Christians are meant to live as redeemed people and reconcile the world to Christ, we ought to care for what God cares for and exercise our calling to steward God’s earth rightly. Thankfully, I have found guidance in the Scriptures, particularly in those texts that address the institutions of Sabbath and Jubilee.

According to the Hebrew tradition, our relationship with the world is reflected in the way we act on the Sabbath Day. How we act and do not act determines how we understand our place in the world and our Creator. An example can be found in our relationship with life on earth. The Torah teaches that the Sabbath ordinance includes a provision for animals to experience rest and satisfaction on the seventh day: “You have to complete your task in six days, and you must stop on the seventh day so that your cow and the donkey can be satisfied” (Exodus 23:12). Sabbath and Jubilee are compelling pedagogical provisions that teach humans how to act in dignifying ways towards the creatures

of the earth, the environment, and our fellow humans. They help us to recognize that “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1), and that we must approach the world with humbleness and gratefulness.

Both the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year indicated that the land should rest and not be cultivated for a year. The Jubilee year also extended to the land: humans do not cultivate it for a year (Leviticus 25:11). Margaret Barker observed, “In contemporary terms, this means caring for the land rather than tilling it to the point of exhaustion.”³ So the problem is not the part of the forest that is cut down to cultivate a piece of land, but the relationship between it and humans, and the inefficient ways they use it.

Sabbath observing has the potential to transform a person’s self-understanding of his/her relationship with nature. It helps individuals to not see themselves as beings that hold creative and technological control over nature. It reshapes human desire and disposition towards nature and promotes the cultivation of environmental virtues. Sabbath practice can disrupt the suicidal econometric fantasy that grows unabated in our world. In a way, Sabbath has the potential of saving our world by teaching us how to steward its resources.

In conclusion, the concept of stewardship has its roots in the Creation story. It highlights the responsibility that believers have to take care of the earth and everything in it. As stewards of the planet, Christians are called upon to live out their faith by protecting the environment and using its resources wisely. By doing so, they are not only fulfilling obligations but also demonstrating their love for God. To be a steward is to embrace God’s high calling to care for that which he cares for. The world we live in is complex, but thankfully we are not left without answers. The Scriptures provide us with helpful frameworks to tackle modern issues, namely the institutions of Jubilee and Sabbath (Leviticus 25:3-5, 11–12; Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–14). May we grow in our understanding of God’s truth as we walk rightly and justly in our calling to steward the beautiful world he has entrusted us with. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19).

¹ Sandra Richter, *Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

² Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007), 28.

³ Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).



Does Genesis 1:26–28 command us to be gardeners, farmers, and conservationists? Was the mandate given to Adam and Eve one that we are meant to observe and obey even now? What purpose does any of it serve if our world is going to be utterly destroyed on the great Day of the Lord? How ought we to act with the illumination that this present world is reserved for fire? These and other questions tumble through the mind when we consider the concept of stewardship over the Lord's creation.

The topic of caring for the environment tends to arouse strong emotions and opinions on both ends of the spectrum. Nevertheless, it is the Christian who has (or should have) more cause to be motivated to action in the care of our precious planet than any other. Name any other religion under which humanity finds a divine mandate to care for creation. (Here we ought to include Judaism alongside Christianity, as they share the same story of Creation and divine appointment of mankind over said creation.)

However, we are still facing the same questions posed at the beginning. These I believe must be addressed within two specific frameworks. The first is how we are to understand the ordination of mankind as the Lord's image bearers. The second is how the New Testament expands this prerogative through the understanding of our position as caretakers, not owners.

In the first category, we ought to consider the concept of being created in God's image. To begin, we look back at the verses that initiate this line of thought. Genesis 1:26–28 (LEB) states,

And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image and according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every moving thing that moves upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the likeness 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 rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven, and over every animal that moves upon the earth."

There is a depth to this passage that my time and lack of expertise forbid me to properly explain. Suffice it to say, the *imago Dei* is a deep, rich term that contains hints of the temple-like organization of Eden.¹ But aside from its symbolic significance, there is a functional purpose that demands our attention. When we read the phrase that humanity is made in the image of God, we find it in conjunction with a blessing and a responsibility. The responsibility is to subdue the earth, rule over the animals, and have kids ("fill the earth"). The blessing seems to be the providential hand of the Lord upon humanity to fulfill this very thing.

Adam and Eve were not unique in their nature. The image of God, it seems from Scripture, is passed down to each new child born into this world—without exception, without prejudice, without regard to color, creed, or culture. Furthermore, the *imago Dei* is passed down not by genetics, which would imply that some could possess more or less of God's image, or that it may be mutated and deformed in others. Instead, the *imago Dei* is bestowed upon each child as they are, by birthright, part of the human race and ordained to rule over the earthly creation. This belief is not only central to Christianity, but it is the foundational truth of Christian social morality. And since we are each image bearers along with all our ancestors back to Adam and Eve, it seems very reasonable that this initial blessing/responsibility is transferred to us as well.

Shall we all now abandon city life for gardens and farms and big families? My wife would like nothing better! But the greater context within Scripture does not seem to underscore agrarian life as the lifestyle that must supersede all others. When we observe the command



Jeremy Osborn graduated from Lee University with a Bachelor of Arts in Art and currently works in fabrications/welding. He is a lay minister working on licensure and serves as the regional youth director of Northeast Texas. Jeremy is passionate about God's Word, artistic expression as a form of worship, and engaging young people on the Christian journey. He resides in Maud, Texas, with his wife Brittane and their daughter Xoi.

JEREMY OSBORN | MAUD, TEXAS

Gardening in a World on Fire

(Image Bearers in God's Garden)

to "fill the earth and subdue it," oftentimes it is taken to one of two extremes. The first extreme, which was just mentioned, has gardening or farming as the preferred fulfillment of this command, especially when connected with Genesis 2:15 where Adam is specifically placed within the Garden to tend and keep it. The other extreme is quite the opposite view where one might be tempted to say that we were given free rein to use and abuse all the resources of the world for the sake of "progress." Neither of these ideas are particularly appealing. The first disqualifies many good, honest careers. The second would quickly produce a dumpster fire of a planet. Turning aside from these extremes, the writings of the prophets use symbolism that remind us of the Garden of Eden, sometimes blatantly, as a way of communicating the Lord's desire to reunite his creation in harmony with himself. Never is the imagery of Eden used to move their audience to abandon other pursuits to become herbalists and shepherds. There is an ideal in Eden that we are invited to pursue. It consists of mankind living in close and peaceful proximity to our Creator and acting in cooperation with him to produce and spread life abundantly throughout the whole of his creation.

All this talk of being God's image bearers would be frivolous without fixing our eyes on the one who bore that image perfectly. Turning to the New Testament, we see Jesus as the complete and perfect image of God in whom the fullness of God dwells (Colossians 1:15–19). Through his life, death, and resurrection (which is sometimes portrayed in terms of a seed that becomes a tree, which is a huge wink to the Tree of Life in the Garden) we are regenerated into new men and women, for the old has passed away. However, we still live in this same human body as before our regeneration, even though we have been promised a new body, unstained by sin and death. Our Messiah and the apostles spoke of a new heaven and earth that shall likewise be unstained.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, points out this tension of our regenerated state, and I believe this directly correlates to the mandate that we have for the earth. What

our bodies currently are and what we have become in spirit seem to be at an impasse. Our sinful nature cannot and will not survive forever, and our current body will either perish or be transformed at Christ's imminent return. But Paul labors in Romans to show that even though this body will one day die, we should not live according to its desires, but should act in accordance with the new nature, even though we have not yet received the new body. In the same way, creation is longing for its renewal:

For the eagerly expecting creation awaits eagerly the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation has been subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its servility to decay, into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans together and suffers agony together until now. Not only this, but we ourselves also, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves while we await eagerly our adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:19–23 LEB)

Elsewhere we are reminded that we are not the owners of our own bodies, but rather their caretakers (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The apostles encouraged believers many times throughout the New Testament to live in a manner reflecting our new nature in Christ and to honor him with our bodies. In this same manner, we ought to honor our Creator in the way we govern, maintain, and utilize this world which he has placed in our care, and so fulfill the first blessing and command given to humanity. Even though we are preparing and eagerly waiting for the day when Christ will make all things new, and just as we strive to live righteously in this body that is still destined for the grave, even so we ought to treat this present world with all the same holy conduct and reverent gratitude as we anticipate our future reign with Christ Jesus in the new one.

¹ Zachariah Zienka, "What Does It Mean to Be Human?," BibleProject, accessed June 2023, <https://bibleproject.com/articles/what-does-it-mean-to-be-human/>.

This Is My Father's World: **How We Are to Steward the Earth**



Regarding stewardship of God's creation, I see the same principle as in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 23:26 provides additional insight: "First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean" (NIV). In short, it is first things first. If we realize that care for our environment and the earth itself should not be our first priority, but concentrate on the real priority—the kingdom of God—the natural outcome will be that our environment and the earth as a whole will prosper. People's hearts must be our primary focus.

Just like anything else in the life of those who belong to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, God's own priorities should be reflected in our care for all creation. If, through Christ, we get people to the point of being and seeing themselves as his special and dearly beloved children and this world as their Father's world, then they will take better care of themselves, others, all life, and the

environment. God's biggest delight is in the best of his creation—humankind. All else is secondary, but he still delights in everything he has created on this earth.

If we follow the right priorities—that is, keep our priorities straight—we should first be good stewards of human life as seen in the Word of God. Jesus teaches that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. My



Bishop Darin Ivanov has served as a pastor for more than 20 years. He is currently the national bishop of Bulgaria. He is a graduate of Ruse Technical University, earning a Bachelor of Economics with an emphasis in International Economics. He has been married to Vesya Georgieva Ivanov for 28 years. They are parents to three boys: David (27), Andrew (24), and Darin, Jr. (10). Bishop Ivanov's primary goal is to know Christ more and more so that he may present the fullness of him to others.

BISHOP DARIN IVANOV | BULGARIA NATIONAL BISHOP

point is that if we are good stewards of people (including ourselves) and lead them to God through Christ, then they as God's children will see taking care of their environment as something very important. This care includes our mental and physical health, our families, one another, and all life.

Very important to this topic is the issue of motivation. We have two underlying reasons that compel us to action. First, we should care for creation because we are beloved heirs and sons and daughters of God. Secondly, we are also his loyal subjects and servants. I personally believe that the stronger motivation is that we are sons and daughters of God. He is our Father indeed, and we are his in a very true and intimate way by the new birth. John 3:6 states, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (NIV). Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; he/she should be far more motivated to care for God's world than those who are just descendants of Adam. Everything that matters to God should matter to us. God obviously delights in nature/creation as seen in the creation account in Genesis; six times before he made mankind, he declared that his creation was "good." We also read that the sparrows (Matthew 10:29) and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:30) have value in his eyes, and he delights in his creatures (Psalm 104:31). It is clear that creation brings God pleasure.

It helps also to remember that because people and their domain are connected, there are two primary ways in which we can adversely affect our environment. When people are disobedient to God, their environment is negatively impacted just like it happened with Adam and Eve and their habitat. This came as just punishment from God, and we see it repeated again and again in early human history and in the history of Israel. In short, nature suffers when we go against God's will in disobedience. This brings direct judgment like the Flood, the case with Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. When Adam sinned, the ground was cursed (Genesis 3:17), and the whole of creation now groans (Romans 8:20–22). Secondly, in recent times, we have advanced technologically to the point that we ourselves are in a position to harm this earth in even greater

ways if we are not careful and considerate with our choices. In other words, we directly harm nature by our own actions or lack of action.

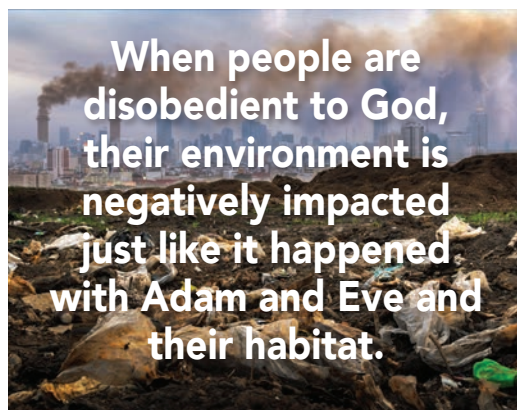
Going back to first things first, we can say that once clean on the inside, free from sin, and secure in the love of God in Christ, believers will want to promote and engage in practices that preserve God's creation. Embracing such practices becomes a natural expression of being stewards of our Father's world. For example, we must strive to reduce our carbon footprint by embracing renewable energy sources, practicing energy efficiency, and wisely supporting clean technologies. Responsible consumption and waste management can significantly contribute to minimizing environmental degradation. Furthermore, advocating for balanced, environmentally conscious policies, such as regulations on pollution and emissions, encourages systemic change for a more sustainable future.

Those who belong to Christ should be very strong supporters of stewarding the environment. Here are just a few practical steps we can take to help care for this creation that belongs to our Father:

- Be a host for a neighborhood day for cleaning. Supply gloves and trash bags and pick up garbage and recycling. Consider the idea of sowing flowers or planting some trees.
- Recycle. If it is available in your community, recycle plastics and cardboard. You may donate used items to a thrift store or give them a second life by organizing regular yard sales. Before throwing something out, think twice if it can be reused.
- Reduce plastic use. Plastics are a big problem because they do not break down easily or quickly, and plastic waste is finding its way into the ocean and elsewhere.

You can reduce the amount of plastic that you use very simply by avoiding single-use items, such as plastic water bottles, disposable diapers, or straws. Bring your own water bottle, use a stainless steel or bamboo straw, or choose cloth diapers instead.

Remember, this world belongs to our Father in heaven. As his stewards, we want and will take good care of it!



Soul Care: Preparing and Passing the Test

The pressure of taking a test can be overwhelming. Each student sits down with pencil and paper in hand, heart racing with nerves and anticipation. However, with thorough preparation and a clear mindset, one can conquer even the most daunting of exams. It is natural to feel nervous, but it is important to remember that this is just one moment in the academic journey. Embrace the challenge and give it your best effort, knowing that you have done everything you can to prepare for this moment.

The day finally came for me to take my AP English exam, and I must admit, I was feeling nervous. I had studied hard and prepared as best as I could, but somehow, I still felt unprepared. I could not shake off the feeling of anxiety that had been building up inside me for days. My mind was racing, and I could not think straight. I knew that I needed to somehow find a way to calm myself before the exam began. The pressure to perform eclipsed all my months of studying and I struggled through the entire test. After it was over, one of my classmates described how she handled the information. It was simple and straightforward. I felt like I had missed some important details during the exam. Despite my hard work and preparation, key elements of the test had escaped my notice. I could not help but wonder if my preparation had been poor. This experience remains as a marker in my mind. It serves as a great reminder that preparation for a test is a key element between success and failure.

As Christ-followers, we take many tests. God prepares us for the challenges that we will face by grounding us in his holy Word and guiding us through each test by the Holy Spirit. He is not the type of teacher who remains at his desk to simply observe, but he is a very present help. It is important to remember that we are often tested in ways that are not immediately clear or understandable. Samuel anointed David to be king, but he did not wear the crown that day. Great tests, trials, and victories followed David until it was time to come to the throne and even after this, the tests did not cease. Tests can come in many forms and challenge us in unexpected ways. These tests are not meant to harm us, but rather to help us grow, strengthen



our faith, and direct us to Jesus as our ultimate guide. They also come because we bear the name of Christ. The world examines our resolve and resists our understanding of loyalty as believers. This is why it is imperative to walk close to our Savior and learn of him. In his ministry, Jesus did not become distracted. Even when religious leaders accused him, he addressed them from his Father's heart and discerned what was really in theirs. Those religious leaders constantly sought to entrap him and put him to the test, but Jesus stepped over them in victory when he won the ultimate test at the cross. Hallelujah!

Most of the time, we have no foresight about the test. In the book of Genesis, we read the story of Abraham and Isaac and God's command to Abraham to, "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you" (Genesis 22:2 NLT). Abraham had no prior knowledge that Isaac would survive God's sacrificial request but "Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19).

Daniel chapter three shares another preparation and test. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have an English exam to pass. Their test was born out of King Nebuchadnezzar's anger. "But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put



Roxanne Corbett is a native of the US Virgin Islands. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Health Administration and is a licensed ordained minister in the Church of God of Prophecy. She presently serves as worship pastor at Spring Place Ministries (Cleveland, Tennessee) and as the editorial assistant for the White Wing Messenger. Roxanne and her husband Nathan have five daughters and four granddaughters.

ROXANNE CORBETT | WHITE WING MESSENGER EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up" (Daniel 3:12). Their blatant defiance of his statue caused the king to fly into a rage. He required them to bow down and worship, but they refused. They did not defend themselves. They simply responded with their golden intention, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up" (Daniel 3:17–18). They were thrown into the fire, but they passed the test.

These tests could have ended in defeat, but each one trusted God and he helped them overcome. How did they prepare for this kind of test? Abraham's answer to his test was a ram caught in the thicket and an assurance that he truly feared God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had the privilege of walking around in the fire unharmed. What was the key? Notice Abraham's journey prior to this experience. He trusted God and believed him. The Hebrew brothers declared their intent before they were ever thrown into the fire. Their faith was not in question or steeped in fear. They were prepared.

Preparation is one of the keys to passing the test. We can practice for the test and hope that we are ready, but it is God who orders our steps. Consider Esther. She had been adopted by her cousin Mordechai. When the search took place to find a new queen, she was taken into the king's harem with other young women. All the women (some scholars estimate between 400 and 1,400) went through extensive beauty treatments for an entire year before meeting the king. Esther found favor with Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the king's harem. "Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace and removed her and her maids into the best place in the harem" (Esther 2:9). Esther also hid her identity. "Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had directed her not to do so" (Esther 2:10).

Every element of Esther's life was framed and molded for something more significant. The test for Esther came through revealing her identity as a Jew and pleading for her people's lives. Mordechai brought her the reality of impending destruction for all of them and her response was to prepare. "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days,

night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16 NIV).

The Scriptures do not tell us more about Esther's character and behavior other than she was obedient and had favor. She was selected along with other virgins to join the king's harem. How did she deal with the competitiveness of the other women? How did she manage to stand out among the others? Prior to meeting the king, she was being prepared with oil (speaks to anointing), special food (nourishment), kindness from Hegai the king's eunuch (favor), and living arrangements (location). These preparations were necessary and important to the request that Esther would make on behalf of the nation.

We glean certain conclusions from this text. Esther's preparation and favor placed her in the right place at the right time to save the lives of many. Her test had a much larger implication for the people of Israel, and it was necessary for her to face that reality. As people of God, we also need to recognize that God's purposes are his own, and we participate with him as his work continues to move across the earth. He knows how to develop and prepare us, but we need willing hearts to "let patience have her perfect work" so that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James 1:4). He is, after all, the master teacher.

Every aspect of our lives is used by God to equip us for service in the kingdom. We are learning through tests to serve God's holy purposes. As the Holy Spirit (the paraclete) walks with us, He uses every part of our lives, and that includes the good and the bad. Innocently and sometimes immaturely we focus on the good things as a measure of what God uses in us, but God does not filter out challenging things to discard. He uses each piece by forming and shaping us between the pages of Scripture, our trials and tests, and the God-dependent hearts we need.

Tests do not terrify me as they once did. I prepare quite differently now. I study the material and take mini tests for practice. I've learned in life that my testing is not finished, and I am not exempt. Preparation and testing are placed into the hands of God. David describes my feelings perfectly in 1 Chronicles 21:13 (NLT): "'I'm in a desperate situation!' David replied to God. 'But let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is very great. Do not let me fall into human hands.'" In the hands of our Lord, we can pass the test. Our friends in Scripture—Abraham, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Esther—knew their own resources were not sufficient, and neither are mine. With confidence we can all say that with the help of Almighty God, we will pass the test!

STEWARDSHIP

—Making a Difference



The topic of stewardship causes some Christians (and non-Christians as well) to feel uncomfortable. Do you ever wonder why that is? Maybe you are among those who prefer to avoid the topic. It is possible that this uneasiness is linked to one of two probable causes. The first is the association of stewardship with money. Many of us have heard numerous messages preached about being good stewards, and these messages tend to emphasize money management and/or the need to be more generous in our giving. Face it, we do not like being told how to spend or manage our money. Additionally, the current culture is very self-focused, so denying ourselves—especially denying ourselves for the purpose of giving to others—goes against the grain; it makes us uncomfortable.

The second reason many Christians prefer to avoid talking about stewardship is due to the current political stigma attached to the topic. In this case, we are referring to environmental stewardship. We do not want to talk about global warming or conservation because these are politically charged issues. Unfortunately, this causes us to overlook an important aspect of who we are as God's image bearers and the commission given to mankind in the Garden. We must not neglect our responsibilities nor let fear of political agendas silence our voice in the public square.

So what is stewardship? The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a steward as "a manager of a large home, estate, or organization." He/she can also be "a person employed to manage the supply and distribution of food and attend the needs of passengers."¹ Thus, stewardship refers to one who performs the duty of a steward, managing what has been entrusted to his or her care. In today's jargon, a steward is equated to a (household) manager, administrator, or even a supervisor. While emphasis is often put on the management of finances, stewardship covers much more as it also includes taking care of people, property, resources, and creation itself. The items and/or people in our care do not belong to us.

This might be a good place to insert a statement

about ownership. Psalm 24:1 declares, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (ESV). This psalm is very plain and reminds us that the entire earth and all its inhabitants (mankind and animals) belong to God. This is the essential starting point for understanding stewardship—God owns it all.

Having a biblical perspective of stewardship is important, especially since the word "stewardship" only occurs three or four times in the English Bible (depending on the Bible translation), and only in the New Testament. "Steward," on the other hand, occurs some 13 times, with five to ten of these (depending on the version) being in the Old Testament. Part of the difficulty, though, is that several words are translated as "steward":

- In Genesis 15:1–2, Abram identifies Eliezer as the steward (*mešeq*) of his house. Although not much is known about Eliezer, many commentators believe that he is the trusted servant who is sent some 55 years later to obtain a wife for Isaac. Whether that is the case or not, here, Eliezer is identified as the steward who is to be "the heir of his house."² This is the only use of this Hebrew word, and it indicates that this steward is to inherit all Abram's wealth since, at this point in time, Abram is childless.
- After purchasing Joseph as a slave, Potiphar notices "that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did" (Genesis 39:3 NIV). Thus, Potiphar appoints Joseph as overseer (*pāqad*) (v. 4)—his personal attendant—over his entire house.³ Potiphar was entrusting everything he owned to Joseph's stewardship.
- Just a few chapters later, in Genesis 43:19, we find Joseph, having been appointed ruler over Egypt by Pharaoh (41:39–44), now has a steward (*iš*) of his own. The Hebrew word used here is quite common (used some 1,639 times in the Old Testament) and is most commonly translated as "man," but it can also refer to men, a husband, a servant, a steward, etc.⁴ Yet in the next chapter, the term *ʾāšer* is used (in conjunction with other Hebrew words) in the same context to refer to the same steward over Joseph's house.



Katherine transitioned from COGOP's Accredited Ministry Development department to take the role of proofreader and copy editor for Communications. A graduate from Tomlinson College, Katherine obtained a bachelor's degree in secondary education from Western Oregon State College. She later earned a Master of Arts in Religion from Gordon-Conwell and, in 2022, she completed the doctoral program with Western Theological Seminary. Katherine and her husband (Glen) have two sons, a beautiful daughter-in-law, and a precious granddaughter named Xoi.

KATHERINE OSBORN, DMIN | COMMUNICATIONS COPY EDITOR

- As David prepares to turn over the plans for the building of the Lord's temple to Solomon (1 Chronicles 28), he assembles all his leaders—the princes of the tribes, his captains, and his officers. He also calls for the stewards (*šar*) of all his "substance and possessions" (v. 1). These stewards, under the king's authority, were in charge of the possessions of the king and of his sons. Not only did the stewards care for and protect these possessions, but they were to see that they were used for their intended purposes.

Though "steward" is not used often, the above are just a few examples of stewardship that are prevalent in the Old Testament. This idea of having or being given the responsibility and authority to manage what has been entrusted to one's care was part of Old Testament culture. But it does make me wonder—since we do not see the word "steward" or "stewardship" in Genesis 1, do we tend to brush it aside? Do we miss the first divine appointment of stewards, an idea that is quite evident in the Garden?

Genesis 1:28 states, "Then God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground'" (NLT). I chose this translation on purpose. Other versions use the term "subdue" and "have dominion" (rule), words come across as negatively forceful as they imply bringing someone or something into subjection or bondage through conquest and/or control. However, we must remember when this mandate was given (before Adam and Eve rebelled against God) and the character of its giver (the character of God). As God's image bearers, Adam and Eve (and future humanity) were to rule and reign in the same manner as God—in righteousness, justice, and love—according to his character. A better glimpse of this appears in Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (ESV). Humans were assigned the task of tending to, cultivating, watching over, and protecting Eden. They were to help Eden continue to be a beautiful and fruitful place—a place that was intended to grow beyond its original physical boundaries, part of "filling" the earth. God entrusted the care of the world he created and loved to us. The mandate has not changed. As his stewards, we need to care about the plants, animals, minerals, water supply, human life, and so forth because God cares.

Stewardship covers much more as it also includes taking care of people, property, resources, and creation itself. The items and/or people in our care do not belong to us.

The focus thus far has been on the Old Testament where we see two major forms of stewardship—creation care and care of possessions (belonging to others). The New Testament offers additional insight. Two Greek words are translated as "steward"—*oikonomos* and *epitropos*. Their meanings are relatively the same as what is seen in the Old Testament. The steward functions as a manager or superintendent who has been entrusted by a proprietor or head of household with the care of his or her affairs, including "receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not yet of age."⁵ This word can also refer to a tutor, guardian, governor, or even a fiscal agent. These were common roles in New Testament culture.

However, the New Testament also introduces us to a new form or a new twist on stewardship. First and foremost, we have the life of Jesus who was "a servant-steward of God's commission to redeem and reconcile humanity."⁶ Though we do not find the word "steward" used in relation to his mission, Jesus was appointed to (and willingly accepted) the task set before him. As Paul points out in Philippians 2:5-8, Jesus "made himself of no reputation" (KJV)—that is, he emptied himself—to take on the form of a servant and to die a criminal's death on the cross for the redemption of humanity. He made it clear that his focus was to do the Father's will: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38 ESV). He demonstrated the Father's love in his concern for the world, especially for lost humanity. Before he went back into heaven, after his resurrection, he passed on the mission of reconciliation to his followers:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

If stewardship is properly understood, it will cause us as Christians—ministers, leaders, and laity—to take more seriously the work we have been called to do. Paul recognized the depth of responsibility that goes with following God. In addressing the believers at Corinth who were squabbling over particular leaders, he states, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of

Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1–2). Wow! We have been entrusted with the mysteries of God, and God expects us to "steward" these mysteries appropriately and faithfully.

In his encouragement to persecuted believers, Peter reminds them they are called to holiness and obedience, but he also reminds them to "steward" the gifts they have been given:

Just as each one of you has received a special gift [a spiritual talent, an ability graciously given by God], employ it in serving one another as [is appropriate for] good stewards of God's multi-faceted grace [faithfully using the diverse, varied gifts and abilities granted to Christians by God's unmerited favor]. (1 Peter 4:10 Amplified)

Like the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27), we are admonished to use what we have been given, whatever that may be, for the glory of God and his kingdom (1 Corinthians 10:31). Paul gives us good guidelines in Colossians 3:23–24: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (NIV).

So much more could be said on this topic. Suffice it to say, stewardship encompasses all of life and can be expressed in many ways:

- **How we treat the earth.** Recognizing this is the Father's world, maybe it is time to show more care. Find a way to reduce, reuse, and/or recycle. Make a difference where you live. Our goal should be to make the world a better place for the next generation.
- **How we breathe (live).** Our very life is a gift from God. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20 NASB). This should affect how we care for our body—food, exercise (physical and mental), work, worship, and rest.
- **How we manage our relationships.** Whatever role we have—spouse, parent, grandparent, child, sibling, friend, coworker, etc.—we are to care for and encourage those whom God has placed in our lives, even those who do not like us. Jesus poured himself into others and gave us the example of how to love unconditionally. We should follow his example.
- **How we manage/spend our finances, time, and other resources.** Someone once said, "Show

If stewardship is properly understood, it will cause us as Christians—ministers, leaders, and laity—to take more seriously the work we have been called to do.

me your checkbook and I will show you what is most important to you." Whether it is financial blessings or material blessings, these are gifts from God. We are admonished to be generous (2 Corinthians 9:6–7; 1 Timothy 6:17–19; Hebrews 13:16). We are blessed so that we can bless others.

- **How we care for the church (the body of Christ) and its mission.** Have we abandoned all to take up our cross to follow Christ (Matthew 16:24)? Can we say like Paul, we are being poured out as a drink offering for others (Philippians 2:17), or that Christ is the "one thing" that we desire and pursue with our whole heart (Philippians 3:11–14)? Do we love God and others in the manner Jesus modeled and commanded?

Being stewards has to do with more than money. David Jeremiah summarizes this topic well:

We are to be stewards of our moral and ethical life, our health, and our time and talent, as well as our treasure. We're also to be stewards of our relationships—all of them: family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and strangers. We are to do for others whatever God would do for them if He were in our place. We are in those relationships for His glory. Paul wrote that only one thing is required of stewards—faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:2). God is pleased with faithful stewards (Matthew 25:14–30).

God owns us and has entrusted to us all we are and have (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). As stewards, our mission is to manage our life in a way that is well-pleasing to Him. As we are faithful in that mission, God continues to entrust more and more of life to us.⁷

You and I may not have the power to change the world, but we have the power to impact the world around us as stewards of God. As Mother Teresa once said, "If you cannot feed a hundred people, feed one." Make a difference where you are.

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "steward," accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/steward>.

² "H4943 - mešeq - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4943/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

³ "H6485 - pāqad - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6485/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

⁴ "H376 - 'iš - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (kjv)," Blue Letter Bible, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h376/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

⁵ "G3623 - oikonomos - Strong's Greek Lexicon (kjv)," Blue Letter Bible, Accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3623/kjv/tr/0-1/>.

⁶ David Jeremiah, "'Stewardship' Is Not What You Think," Making Sense of It All, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.davidjeremiah.org/makingsense/finances/stewardship-is-not-what-you-think?devdate=2021-02-20>.

⁷ Jeremiah, "'Stewardship' Is Not What You Think."

MINISTERING TO PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Abi Avila, Children's Ministries Spanish Language Training Specialist



What we do every week matters, and the church has the opportunity to help and support the families of children with special needs. Those families need a place where they feel understood, they can share their joy and concerns, and they find comfort in the midst of distress. The church has the potential to be that safe haven, providing an environment of compassion, acceptance, and unconditional love.

The number of children with special needs is rising. These needs may include physical, emotional, or cognitive differences. Some needs are obvious, while others are not. My many years of experience in children's ministry has shown me, and I have learned, that parents of children with special needs need to be ministered to as much as their children. Parents have shared their stories of distress. Unfortunately, some of those distressing encounters were at the church.

I wish to share four ways to minister to parents and families of children with special needs:

1. **Listen and pray.** Ask parents to share their story. Allow them to share their struggles. As you listen, you connect to them and learn ways to minister. Pray for them and with them.

In the process of ministering to parents of children with special needs, it is critical to practice active listening and prayer. By providing them with a safe space to share their stories and challenges, we connect with them on a deeper level and learn how we may help them in practical ways. Listening attentively to them allows us to understand their specific needs and find concrete ways to support them. In addition, by inviting them to join in prayer, we demonstrate our trust in God and offer spiritual support. The combination of listening and prayer allows us to be agents of love and healing in the lives of these families.

2. **Always welcome them.** Show genuine happiness when you see parents and children with special needs. Chances are you and I are unaware of the struggles they face every day. Oftentimes it is an accomplishment to get to church. Some families may feel they are a burden to your ministry. Restrain yourself from that perception. Families need to feel welcome.

Fostering a culture of inclusion and educating everyone in the church about the importance of showing love and compassion to these families is critical. We must

create a safe and welcoming environment where these families feel accepted and appreciated.

3. **Share words of encouragement and support to parents.** Every parent needs to hear positive words about their child, especially parents of children with special needs. We must remember that children with special needs are a blessing to our churches and ministries.

Recognizing their children's worth and highlighting their strengths provides support and validation. In addition to words, providing resources and practical support strengthens families and helps them overcome challenges. Together, these actions demonstrate our support and unite us as a community of faith in ministering to these families.

4. **Educate teachers and parents of typically developing children.** We cannot assume that children, parents, and teachers have been exposed to children with special needs. They may feel fearful, uncomfortable, not knowing what to say or how to act. Others may just gaze at or jump to conclusions about a child's behavior. This hurts deeply.

We should not assume that everyone has experience or knowledge about these situations. It is common that they may feel fear, discomfort, or insecurity when interacting with these children. This can lead to misunderstandings and snap judgments, which can be painful for parents and children. Therefore, it is critical to educate and raise awareness of the needs and challenges faced by these children and their families. This includes providing information and practical strategies and promoting a culture of respect and acceptance. In addition, creating spaces for dialogue and collaboration strengthens bonds and provides strong support for families of children with special needs.

Use the opportunities to educate parents and children to show compassion and kindness to children with special needs. Teach them how to talk to them and get to know the child and family. Help teachers connect with parents to get information about their specific child to help the child have a positive church experience. Bold leaders learn about best practices for developing a special ministry in their local church. I encourage you to learn more about special needs ministry. We must look for ways to minister to these children and their families. Churches should be a place where families feel loved and encouraged.

Lesson Four

Restoration and Rest for the Pastor

Developing Strategies for Abandoning
False Compulsions

Bishop Tim McCaleb, DMin



(A Sample from “The Minister’s Personal Life,”
*Minister’s Development
Program*, Lesson 4)

A Theology of Work

No amount of rest will be sufficient to restore exhausted pastors if their work is misguided, ill informed, or unbiblical. In other words, good rest follows good work as outlined in the first pages of Genesis. The first great Sabbath in the Genesis account followed six days of good work. After each day of creation, God paused, looked over the things He had accomplished that day, and said, “It is good.” This phrase indicates that God was pleased with the beauty, the complexity, and the diversity of His creative work on the earth and in the heavens. Then God blessed the seventh day and rested. If work is not done well (i.e., if it is not done with the right motive, if it is not done properly, or if the work is done as drudgery), then no amount of rest will bring restoration. In other words, there is a symbiotic relationship between good work and restorative rest.

Work existed before Adam and Eve sinned and is not part of the curse. God initially made the world, planted a garden, watered it, and then fashioned a wife for Adam. After God had created the garden, He placed Adam and Eve

there with the admonition to care for it. Tim Keller has observed,

The fact that God put work in paradise is startling to us because we so often think of work as a necessary evil or even punishment. Yet we do not see work brought into our human story after the fall of Adam, as part of the resulting brokenness and curse; it is part of the blessedness of the garden of God. Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine, but food for our soul. Without meaningful work, we sense significant inner loss and emptiness. People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need to work to thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually.¹

The problem of exhaustion is not meaningful work; the problem is when work becomes an idol, as it so often does. God gives many wonderful things that are delightful to human beings such as delicious food, beauty,

Jesus is inviting us to step out of our yokes with the world and to be yoked with Him.

knowledge, and children, but everything should be kept in its proper place, including work. However, in a disordered and broken world, people look for meaning, purpose, and value outside of and away from God.

There is nothing wrong with people building a city and erecting a tower, but when they did it in Genesis 11, it was to make a name for themselves rather than for the glory of God. Pastoral work is a noble work when done as a calling to participate with God in the building of His kingdom. It is odious when it is undertaken to build names, reputations, and monuments to the pastors for themselves. When this happens, it is a betrayal of God's calling; but when it is done for God, and with the glory of God in mind, work rejuvenates because one has time to rest, pause, and reflect on the good work that one has done with God. On the other hand, when it is done to build a monument to oneself, that individual cannot rest lest their work crumbles to the ground. When work is done for the latter, the money, prestige, and numbers will never be enough, for the ego will never be satisfied.

Pastors should grasp the fact that they are called to join God in His work. In Mathew 11:28–30, Jesus stated,

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (NKJV).

At first glance, it may seem that Jesus is telling people that if they are tired of

laboring, working, and toiling that they should come to Him, and He will give them rest. However, a closer look reveals that He is encouraging them to exchange, or step out of, their present yoke and take His yoke upon themselves.

A yoke is a wooden beam carved out to fit the neck of oxen and is used to connect two animals together. The yoke attaches the beasts to a plow, cart, or to another implement that they pull. Jesus' point was that everyone is yoked to some type of work, either a world view or an ideology. Pastors and people who are yoked to a worldview that demands riches, popularity, notoriety, power, large church buildings, stately property, prestige, big houses, new cars, etc. eventually find themselves burdened and heavy laden with unrealistic expectations. Jesus is inviting us to step out of our yokes with the world and to be yoked with Him. Pastors who harness the yoke with Jesus and work with Him at His pace, and with His motivation, will find a true restorative rest for their souls and their bodies.

When we harness with Christ, Jesus is the one pulling the burden, and we are simply joining Him in the task. It takes the responsibility for fruitfulness off the pastor and lays it upon Christ. Thus, the pastor is not working to prove his worth, but is working out of the sheer joy of being with Christ and participating with Him in sharing the gospel, visiting the sick, teaching the Word, encouraging others, and building the kingdom of God.

It allows pastors to stop the constant running to and fro and calls them to listen to the heart of God. God is not a task master. He not only wants pastors to rest, but He expects pastors to be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10). This scripture suggests that pastors should make listening for the voice of the Spirit, and watching for the activities of the Spirit, their primary activity. Discerning what God is doing flows from long periods of

Pastors who embrace a proper theological and scriptural view of their work set the stage for abandoning false compulsions.

inactivity. A slow read of the Gospels reveals that Jesus often retreated to the mountains away from everyone and prayed. He also said that He only worked when and where He saw His Father working. Therefore, Jesus was yoked with His Father, and His Father often called Him away for a season of rest and leisure.

Pastors who embrace a proper theological and scriptural view of their work set the stage for abandoning false compulsions. This liberation is accomplished when pastors adopt a lifestyle that allows for a rhythm of work followed by rest and play. In doing so, pastors model to their congregations that it is okay to step out of the yoke of the world and into the yoke with Christ to work at His pace. In order to do this, it is vital that pastors develop a biblical foundation for rest and restoration, along with their theology of work. A proper theology of rest is another step in abandoning false compulsions because it is an acknowledgement that God is the one upholding the world and not the pastor.

Biblical Foundations for Rest and Restoration

The idea of rest and restoration finds its beginnings in the first chapter of Genesis with God as the initiator of these concepts. After creating the world in six days, the Bible states that God rested on the seventh: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all of His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day

and sanctified it, because in it He rested from His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:2, 3 NKJV).

Of course, this passage does not mean that God needed to rest in the sense that He was tired and worn out. He was not emotionally drained from all the activity, nor was He stressed by the details of creation. God rested in a way that a king rests upon on his throne when ruling his kingdom. In other words, after creation, God rested in the sense that He had completed the universe and now He would reign over all that He had made.

Even though God did not need to be rejuvenated, it is undeniable that the concept of rest and restoration for human beings is rooted in the seventh day of creation. God knew that man would need rest, and the Sabbath of rest was created with human beings in mind when He blessed and sanctified the day as a period of rest, worship, and reflection. In the Law, God reminded the people, through Moses,

Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:15–17 NKJV)

Notice that the word "refreshed" was added as a part of the explanation for the necessity of a Sabbath rest. The Hebrew word here translated as "refreshed" means to "breathe freely, recover, to be relieved." In other words, God wants His children to be able to breathe freely and have time to rest, reflect, and to enjoy their work, too. He wants them to be refreshed.



Furthermore, God commanded that slaves, strangers, and those hired be allowed to rest on the Sabbath day as well. Such a thing was unheard of in the ancient world, and it is regarded as one of the greatest pieces of humanitarian legislations ever adopted. The seven-day week, with at least one day for rest, is now common throughout the world, even among those not practicing Judaism or Christianity.

People and pastors need to rest and to be refreshed more than once a week; thus, God, from the beginning, planned a daily rest for humankind.

Jesus made it clear that the Sabbath was created for humans and not the other way around. When He was criticized for allowing His disciples to pluck grain and eat it on the Sabbath, He gave a short discourse on David eating the showbread that had been designated only for the priests and then He concluded, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27 NKJV). By this statement, Jesus reinforced the idea that a day of rest was created for the benefit of all God's children with mortal bodies. He also demonstrated the need for rest when He called His disciples away from the crowds for a period of separation.

People and pastors need to rest and to be refreshed more than once a week; thus, God, from the beginning, planned a daily rest for humankind. In Genesis, God sums up each day with the expression "evening and morning."

In Judaism, the day starts with the evening and not the morning. Therefore, the Sabbath day begins on Friday evening, not Saturday morning, and so it is with each day. The situation being that just as humans are going to bed the day is beginning, and God is going to work. In other words, it is God who sustains the universe, and the world does not depend on the activity of humans. God makes the sun to rise and to set; He makes the seasons come and go. He causes the daily rhythm of the ocean tides, and all this is accomplished without any human aid and while humans sleep. As the psalmist said long ago, "It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2 NKJV). Many pastors, however, are working as if the world, the community, and the church depend upon them, and it is leaving them near collapse.

The imagery in Psalm 23 is that of God as a shepherd. As David pours out his soul in prayer and adoration to God, he pictures himself as one of God's sheep. David depicts God as a shepherd who gently leads His sheep, and not as one who relentlessly drives them with force. He gives the imagery of God providing a life for the sheep that brings deep satisfaction by the still waters, lying in green pastures, and following paths that lead to life. According to the Psalmist David, all of these things are for the purpose expressed in verse three, "He restores my soul." The word "restore" carries the idea of retreating, recovering, reviving, or bringing again. David had learned that the great Shepherd, full of mercy and grace, desires that His people be rested and restored.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2012), 36–37.



Graduation: A Registrar's View



Maureen Beckford and Glasford Thomas, all three completing a 600+ mile journey from Illinois. Next, I recognize Stacy Tuttle from Somerset, Kentucky; Marcey Brannon from Crab Orchard, Tennessee; and Anita Cowan from Ohio.

SLS instructor Dr. Yanez from Iowa, who will carry the mace to lead the graduation entourage, enters with mis amigos Andy Diaz (St. Paul, Minnesota) and Marta and Otoniel Alvarez (Lexington, Nebraska). Soon Dorylin Edwards, Nerissa Dolphin, and Naaman and Nolma Chalwell arrive, having flown in from the British Virgin Islands. An incredible energy explodes inside the MTC.

t starts with a list....

- * Finalizing and locking grades
- * Collecting RSVPs for graduation dinner
- * Typing and printing place cards
- * Dusting furniture
- * Checking on the caterer
- * Emailing reminders to graduates, faculty, board members
- * Steaming gowns
- * Scanning diplomas
- * Windexing glass doors
- * Sorting tams, tassels, and mortar boards
- * Filling diploma covers
- * Registering not-yet-graduated students for summer courses
- * Feeling excited but knowing I'm EXHAUSTED!

In an instant, everything changes. Around 12:45 p.m. on Friday, May 19, 2023, an SUV appears in the parking lot of the Ministry Training Center (MTC) at the International Offices of the Church of God of Prophecy in Cleveland, Tennessee. I recognize the driver, though I have never met her. I have been viewing Yvonne Robinson's tiny profile picture in Populi, Spirit and Life Seminary's learning management system (LMS), for 11 months. Walking in with her are

Months of thoughts and prayers spring into audible affirmations and physical embraces. Students who have never met become a tight-knit family in an instant. No shy outsiders. All exuberant devoted insiders. Among the chatter I hear, "I wish I had known you were from the Virgin Islands. I would have heard a British accent in my head when I read your comments on my discussion posts."

Academic Dean Albert Murza initiates graduation rehearsal, and Admissions Manager Steven Hodge follows with next steps, volleying English and Spanish. The "almost" Seminary graduates contemplate graduate studies at Pentecostal Theological Seminary with scholarships available to Church of God of Prophecy students.



A graduate of Tomlinson College, Debbie received her Bachelor of Music Education from Lee University and her Master of Science in Music Education from Radford University. Having worked as both an educator and an academic advisor, Debbie took on the role of registrar and student services coordinator for Accredited Ministries Development and Spirit and Life Seminary in July of 2022. She resides in Cleveland, Tennessee, with her husband, Dennis, and their son, David.



DEBBIE FREEMAN | AMD/SLS REGISTRAR AND STUDENT SERVICES COORDINATOR

Then it was time for a tour. Sarah Rising led the group into the offices of some general presbyters. Wow's, oohs, and ahs were followed by treats and thank yous. As students approached the foyer of the International Offices, one espied a familiar face. Could it be? Overwhelmed to behold the star of their video lectures in person, students raced to greet and embrace SLS instructor Larry Lowry alongside his wife, Susan, from Georgia. Greetings flooded the hallways as cameras flashed to snap souvenir photos.

students were received at the MTC at 6:00 for a graduation celebration sponsored by Bishop Jeffery Davis and his LDD/AMD staff. Students shared dinner fellowship with faculty members, board members, SLS staff, and family members. Former LDD director Kathy Creasy reviewed the history and celebrated the accomplishments of Spirit and Life Seminary. She emphasized the importance of THEC authorization and AETH certification and expressed excitement that SLS is actively pursuing institutional accreditation.



The tour continued with the enthusiasm of guests visiting the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. or Le Louvre in Paris. Students stopped to read the articles on the walls and collect more photos. Praises to our good Lord broke out in the Upper Room where International Offices employees worship, as students recalled presiding bishops who have delivered messages from God's Word there. Reverent admiration filled the conference room as students viewed the pictures of A.J. Tomlinson; M.A. Tomlinson; Billy Murray; Fred Fisher, Sr.; Randy Howard; Sam Clements; and Tim Coalter. The final stop was the Adrian Varlack, Sr., Library where students relished the memorabilia displayed and shared stories of their own experiences in the history of the Church of God of Prophecy.

After an opportunity to visit the White Wing Bookstore and/or freshen up from their travels,



President Dr. Hernandez announced that SLS now has a \$250,000 endowment fund to help secure its place among accredited institutions. Guests learned that interest from an endowment fund can provide student aid opportunities, develop stronger teaching programs, and maintain physical assets. Donors at the dinner added \$2,500 to the endowment fund in an effort to leave a

legacy of educational opportunities for church members and leaders. (If you are able to add to the SLS endowment fund, please go to Donation | Spirit & Life Seminary [spiritandlifeseminary.org] and type "SLS Endowment Fund" in the comment box. Any amount will be greatly appreciated.) SLS graduate Hanny Vidal was named Alumni Coordinator to assist with the initiation of an Alumni Association for Spirit and Life Seminary.

On Saturday, May 20, around 8:30 a.m., graduates returned to the MTC to don their regalia—black gowns, mortar boards, and tassels. At 8:45 the photographer captured images of the 2nd annual graduating class from Spirit and Life Seminary.

Board of Directors members in attendance were Tim Coalter, Jeff Davis, Ben Feliz, Paul Holt, Joshua Lynn from Virginia, and Gabe Vidal. Faculty members in attendance were David Bryan, Randy Howard, Larry Lowry, Joshua Lynn, Kristen Murza, Abigail Velazquez, Isabel Yanez, and Jesse Yanez. SLS staff members included Dr. Michael Hernandez (president), Albert Murza (academic dean), Steven Hodge (admissions manager), Gayla Brewer (librarian), Jacob Coleman (business office manager), and Debbie Freeman (registrar).



Brittany Gordon and Alejandra Hodge led worship in English and Spanish before graduate Stacy Tuttle spoke to represent the six graduates in the Fall 2022 class. Graduate Hanny Vidal spoke in Spanish to represent the 11 students in the Spring 2023 class. Bishop Jeffery Davis gave the commencement address challenging graduates to soar like the eagles God created them to be rather than to stay in the comfort zone of chickens.

Dr. Hernandez awarded Dr. Michael Plumley a plaque in honor of his service as Associate Dean of Accreditation and Institutional Effectiveness from October 2017 to October 2022. Presiding Bishop Tim Coalter gave a prayer of blessing for the graduates before the turning of the tassels.

Three students graduated in absentia: Kenneth Benjamin, Jr., Paul Dudding, and Antonio Perez. We so missed getting to meet them but hope they were able to enjoy the commencement exercises online at Church of God of Prophecy (Official) | Cleveland TN | Facebook.

As guests dispersed, the celebration drew to a close; but... our memories will continue for a lifetime!





This Journey ...

Continued from page 7

writers warned us was coming upon the earth. Instead, we must openly preach Christ and the Cross to save the souls of all humankind. He is the sole means of deliverance. Our help comes from the Lord and not through a dynamic personality or political philosophy that will only usher in the great deception of the Antichrist. "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

The Urgency to Save Our Planet

There is a second responsibility given to humankind by the Creator. Earlier I wrote of the need to develop a conviction that many Christians are ignoring regarding our stewardship of this earth. It goes beyond taking the gospel of Jesus to lost souls; we also have a responsibility for our earthly journey in the Father's world. To assume that we have no plausible guilt in this area is a willful neglect of our primary stewardship of God's creation. In the prophecy of Jeremiah, there is a divine principle about what God created and to whom he gives power or authority to rule over it. The prophet wrote,

And command them to say to their masters,
"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel—thus you shall say to your masters: 'I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me.'" (Jeremiah 27:4–5)

While the prophecy directly alludes to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire rule over Judah, the overarching principle of truth holds humankind accountable for this earth,

including her rulers, her people, her animals, her oceans, and all living things. In the parable of the vineyard and husbandman (Matthew 21:33–41), this same axiom is taught by Jesus Christ about the stewardship of what God has given us to handle for his glory and purpose.

Several years ago, I was fishing with some Christian friends in a river several miles away from my residence. We fished all day, and we were all tired and ready to go home after a successful catch of many fish. As we gathered our gear and prepared for the two-hour trip back up the river, the owner of the boat picked up a large sack of garbage and emptied it off the port side. I was stunned and struck silent for a few moments. Eventually I worked up the courage to ask my brother, "Why did you dump the trash in the river?" His reply shocked me even more. "Oh, everyone does it. Besides, the fish, crabs, and alligators will eat most of it." I rode home contemplating what had just happened and what had been said. It was not just biodegradable contents in those garbage sacks, but also papers, plastics, and glass bottles. Knowing other fishermen saw what he had done, I was ashamed that we would be identified with those who did not care about the environment. I also wondered if Jesus would have approved of Peter and Andrew doing the same thing on the Sea of Galilee. This experience is not mine alone; all of us must possess a worldview that includes responsibility for all God has given us to manage or to hold in trust for Him.

In the masterpiece entitled *Kingdom Ethics*, the authors sum up well our stewardship of the world¹:

Jesus makes absolutely clear that God cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and that we are placed in the midst of this community of God's caring. Many of Jesus' parables point to God's caring for the growth of seeds, for the fields, for the gift of rain and sunshine to all persons. Just as Jesus' teaching on divorce said God's covenant in Genesis established the norm, so his parables treat God's creating and caring for us and the rest of creation as the norm for our awareness of God's present reign. God has created us in limited community, the earth, and God continues to care for that community. It is not us over against nature or the environment; we are part of God's created community of the earth, and we are dependent on this earth community for our lives, just as it is now dependent on us for its life."

¹ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 429.



HERITAGE MINISTRIES



— IN HIS PRESENCE —

— MINISTERS —

Byron Minter

Georgia (USA)
June 3, 2023
Licensed minister for 48 years

Lewis Rice

Indiana
June 15, 2023
Licensed minister for 23 years

Howard Scott Maynard

West Virginia
May 19, 2021
Licensed minister for 35 years

Stephen Allen Lynch

Western Canada
October 18, 2022
Licensed minister for 62 years

Francis Xavier A/L Anthony

Malaysia
June 23, 2023
Licensed minister for 10 years

Marvin C. Brisson

North Carolina
June 20, 2023
Licensed minister for 73 years

Leonard Rushing

Louisiana
April 22, 2023
Licensed minister for 46 years

Patricia Ann Henson

Ohio
March 23, 2023
Licensed minister for 65 years

Helen Christine Posey

Georgia (USA)
December 18, 2022
Licensed minister for 33 years

Leonard L. Rivas

California
September 19, 2002
Licensed minister for 9 years

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Ohio
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Abdiel Medina lives in Cleveland, Tennessee. He is a student at Lee University studying English Literature and hopes to continue writing. He is an active member of Keith Street Ministries and loves being a part of the awesome Medina family!

ABDIEL MEDINA | CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

Working Together

Many of the actions performed by human beings require different parts of the human body to work together. A runner's heart pumps oxygen to muscles as legs move the body forward, and arm swinging keeps the body balanced. Singing on Sunday with the Church choir is possible because of vibration in a singer's vocal cords. Eating a salad involves the use of teeth and tongue to break apart and move food. All these actions are possible because of the intricate design God has created into the human body; the different parts work in cohesion for the human body to function and to complete different tasks. Similar to how different parts of the body depend on one another for the human body to function, Christian believers are called to depend on one another as the body of Christ. "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12: 25–26 NKJV).

Christians should be united as the body of Christ. This involves using the unique roles and gifts God has given to support one another and to fulfill God's calling for all believers "to make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This was practiced by the

early church in the book of Acts: "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6: 2–4).

The disciples recognized they needed to depend on one another to do the ministry of the Lord; they were striving to spread the gospel everywhere! Furthermore, because some of the disciples focused on meeting a specific need to feed the widows, the other disciples were able to focus on continuing to spread the word of the Lord. Additionally, none of the disciples expressed feelings of superiority or inferiority to one another. They recognized each other's ministry roles as important, and they supported one another.

Interdependence as the body of Christ continues to take place in the church today. For example, there are people involved in the worship team, children's ministry, greeting, pastoring, praying, and more. When believers depend on God and each other, they are able to do the work of the Lord.



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