

The sermon “Stewardship 1: Cultivating the Earth”
From Genesis 1:1–28
By Rev. Peter Blank
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1. The Earth Is the Lord’s

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

A seminary professor of mine said this about the early chapters of Genesis – the book of beginnings, “The opening chapters of Genesis are more about who created than about when or how.” As well, it clearly sets out the distinction of Creator and Creation.

It’s how everything starts — with God. Before there was light or life or even time itself, there was God — creating, shaping, calling the world into being. And when the last word of creation was spoken, God looked at it all and said, “It is very good.”

That phrase — “very good” — is not small talk. It’s God’s way of saying that creation reflects divine intention. The rivers and mountains, the trees and stars, the creatures that creep and crawl, the people made in God’s image — all of it was blessed, purposeful, and good.

The first thing Genesis teaches us about stewardship is this: **the world/creation doesn’t belong to us.** We didn’t make it. We didn’t purchase it. We inherited it. And God, the Creator made it, and is still its rightful owner.

Psalm 24 declares, “*The earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it.*”

Everything — the soil beneath our feet, the air we breathe, the paycheck in our hand, even the time we live within — belongs to God. We are not owners of creation; we are caretakers, stewards, trustees of grace.

That’s the foundation of stewardship: not fundraising, but faithfulness.
Not control, but calling.

2. The Human Vocation — To Cultivate

Then comes the charge. God says, “*Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing.*”

That word “subdue” has carried a lot of baggage. Too often, people have taken it to mean “use it up,” “take charge,” “dominate.” In the Hebrew context, *kabash* and *radah* (subdue and have dominion) are not about exploitation — they’re about **ordering creation so that it flourishes.** It’s the work of cultivating — of bringing forth life, fruitfulness, and goodness out of the raw potential God has built into the world. So we build raised garden beds to encourage increased production and save our backs.

God is not giving us permission to plunder creation. God is inviting us to **participate** in creation — to till, tend, and care for it as gardeners in God’s garden. Yes, we name the animals.

Later, Genesis 2:15 says it plainly:

“*The Lord God took humans and put them in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.*”

To “till and keep” — those two Hebrew verbs mean to **serve** the ground and to **preserve** it. In other words: work it with care, and protect its ability to thrive.

That’s our calling — not to dominate the world, but to cultivate it.

3. Dominion Is Not Domination

So let’s rethink that word “dominion.” Dominion doesn’t mean domination. Dominion means **responsible authority modeled after God’s own care.**

When God reigns, God brings life, order, and justice. When God exercises dominion, the hungry are fed, the lost are found, the broken are healed, and creation rejoices. That’s the pattern we imitate.

To have dominion in the image of God is to nurture, not to exploit;
to bless, not to hoard;
to serve, not to seize.

This is as true in our finances as it is in our fields, as true in our communities as in our climate.

We are called to rule as God rules — with compassion, imagination, and care.

4. Cultivating the Earth in Practice

So what does all this look like in practical terms? How do we live out this ancient command to “cultivate the earth” here and now — in our homes, our church, our daily routines? Let me suggest four simple but powerful ways.

(1) Cultivate Creation — Care for the Land and Life Around You.

Start small.

Plant something. Grow a flower or a vegetable garden.

Reduce waste. Recycle. Buy less plastic.

Support local farmers, re-use what you can, and remember that everything you touch comes from the earth God made.

You don’t have to be an environmental activist to care for creation — you just have to pay attention. Every act of care, no matter how small, is a way of saying, “This world still matters to God — and to me.”

When you conserve water, when you feed the birds, when you tend a small garden bed — you are joining God’s ongoing act of creation.

(2) Cultivate Gratitude — Live with Enough.

Stewardship always begins with contentment.

Paul wrote, “*We brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it.*” (1 Timothy 6:7)

The constant hunger for more — more money, more possessions, more security — is what keeps our souls restless. Gratitude turns what we have into enough.

When we pause before a meal, or when we give thanks before paying our bills, or when we share what we have with others — we remember that every good thing comes from God.

Living gratefully is the simplest, deepest form of stewardship. It changes how we see the world: not as something to conquer, but as something to celebrate.

(3) Cultivate Generosity — Sow Seeds That Bear Fruit Beyond Yourself.

When we give — whether of money, time, or talent — we are planting seeds in God’s field. And we never know how those seeds will grow.

A small act of giving can change a life.

A word of kindness can spark faith.

A single gift of love can ripple outward into blessing.

We don’t give because the church needs our money.

We give because generosity is part of God’s nature — and we were made in that image.

When we give joyfully, we are reflecting the character of the Creator, who delights in giving life to the world.

(4) Cultivate Community — Tend the Garden Together.

No one tends God’s garden alone.

Stewardship is communal work.

In Genesis, even God says, *“It is not good that the human should be alone.”*

We are meant to live in networks of care — families, churches, communities that share the work of cultivating the good.

When we serve together, build together, pray and plan together — something more than efficiency happens.

We experience what Genesis calls “image-bearing” — reflecting God’s relational nature.

When this church serves a meal, repairs a home, or supports a mission project, we are participating in the creative energy of God.

That’s what stewardship really is: **joining God in making life flourish.**

5. The Image of the Gardener

The first portrait of God in Scripture is not of a king or a warrior, but a **gardener**.

God separates light from darkness, water from land, fills the earth with color, form, and fragrance — a gardener’s work of beauty and balance.

And when God creates humanity, God breathes divine life into dust — so that we, too, can be creators: people who shape, nurture, and heal.

Every time we fix something broken, plant something green, encourage someone weary, or give in ways that bless others — we’re continuing God’s creative work.

That’s the heart of stewardship — not obligation, but participation.

God invites us into the joy of cultivating life.

6. Conclusion – The Call to Cultivate

So, what does it mean today to “subdue the earth” and “have dominion”?

It means to cultivate — to bring forth life where God has planted us.

To take what we’ve been given and make it flourish — whether that’s a patch of soil, a paycheck, or a relationship.

The earth is not a warehouse to empty...It’s a garden to tend.

And stewardship is not a fundraising season...It’s a lifelong vocation.

When we give, serve, recycle, teach, volunteer, repair, or forgive — we are cultivating the earth...We are reclaiming our place in God’s good creation.

So may we live as gardeners of grace —
people who take joy in the soil,
hope in the harvest,
and trust in the God who still walks among the trees.

“The Lord God took the human and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15)

That’s the work — and the joy — we are called to do.

Amen