

**Series: God & Our Culture #1495**

**Title: Genesis 2.15**

***Stewards Who Cultivate and Keep***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. When we last left off, we had clearly established, from Genesis 1, that we have all been given a mandate from God to have dominion, to rule and subdue this earth and every living creature on this earth. We call this the dominion mandate. And the most biblical way to think about our role and our responsibility is that we are *stewards of God's creation*. God has appointed us as caretakers of all that He has made.

In the next chapter of the Book of Genesis, Genesis 2, we have a primary, biblical example of what stewardship looks like in practice. In Genesis 2, verse 8 we read that God planted a garden in Eden and **“there He placed the man whom [God] had formed.”** So God puts Adam in the garden. Then we read about the amazing topography of the garden. It is beautiful in its perfection. Then, this in verse 15. The Bible says, **“Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”** This one verse speaks to us, profoundly, about the first man's responsibility and, later, the first woman's also. They were to work. They were to cultivate and keep the garden.

I want to focus on what it means to cultivate and to keep the garden, but I hope you will not miss that men and women were made for work. Because most of us do not like working, we tend to think that work came as a result of sin and the fall, but that is not true. Before evil ever entered the garden, Adam and Eve were workers. They were gardeners. God created work. It is true that because of our sin, work is now hard and difficult. But work was always there. And *will* always be there. In heaven, we will work! Albeit in perfection where everything we do will be pure joy! OK, hold onto Genesis 2.15 in your mind when you are doing your own work.

The more important point to capture this day is that Adam and Eve were put into the garden to steward God's gorgeous creation. To see this in the text we come back to these words “cultivate” and “keep.” The words cultivate and keep speak to man's stewardship of God's creation. Please note that this garden in Eden is God's garden. God made it. Man did not make it. So that when man enters the garden man is given stewardship over that which belongs to God. Therefore, man should treat this lush, delightful environment the way God has treated it. Man is not to destroy the garden, man is to keep it the way he found it.

Let me draw us back to Genesis chapter 1 for a few moments here to solidify my point in your mind. In Genesis 1 we have a repeating phrase: **“God saw that it was good.”** God's perspective on His creation is repeated in Genesis 1, verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25. And then down in verse 31, after the creation of man and woman, **“God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”** Now that is clearly God's perspective on God's creation. Well, then, if God saw that everything (and everyone) in the garden was good, who is man or woman that they should not see it as good? And, not work to preserve that goodness?

Should that not convince us that to cultivate and to keep made man and woman stewards of the creation, we should certainly need nothing more than to know God commanded they do this. That was God's purpose for putting man in the garden, as verse 15 so clearly states. The implication here is that if man and woman refuse to be stewards, then they are living in disobedience to God. In the words of theologian John Calvin, they should not “abuse those things which God requires to be preserved (Genesis, 125).” They should not abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.

Remember, we have already said this dominion mandate applies to us today. We are to be stewards of God's creation. I think of it personally this way: the creation is God's artwork. I dare not scribble over it in crayon. If you have a splendid piece of artwork in your home – let's say it is a real beautiful painting, a real gem – then I do not think you want your child to walk over to it one day when you are not paying attention and to scribble across the painting in Crayola Crayon or marker. Do you? You love your child. God loves us. But you have warned your child to care for the painting, not to destroy it. So too, God has warned us to care for the world He has made, not to ruin it.

We are to cultivate and to keep the land. This world is God's but He has put you and me here as stewards of it. We are custodians of the earth. I like what Robert Harbach said, we are to make the world "a beautiful mirror of the glory of the Creator." A beautiful mirror of the glory of the Creator. I agree.

And so, these words cultivate and keep really do bring us back to this matter of work. You and I have work to do in our time here on earth, as in jobs. But we also have work to do in the creation itself. Christians definitely ought to care about the environment. By saying this I am not making a political statement, I am making a biblical statement. According to God we are stewards of what is His handiwork and we do not want to ruin it unnecessarily.

The reality is that whatever stewardship looks like in practice, it takes some effort, just like tending to this first garden did. Weeds are an awful thing. Where I live we have some bricks outside and every time I go walking along there I have my eyes open for weeds and even grass growing up through the cracks in the bricks. Sometimes I set aside time and bend down there to yank them out with my hands. After spending significant time on this it is always frustrating to come along a few days later and see the weeds and grass has sprouted back up again! UGH! I have to bend down and go through my process all over again. It is a never ending battle!

Near my bricks there are some plants and flowers we like to grow, and it is amazing how the weeds spring up there, near the roots of what we are growing and, again, I have to get down on my hands and knees and weed out that which will kill and destroy what I am hoping will blossom! Likewise, cultivating and keeping a whole garden is not easy work. I believe Adam and Eve spent much of their days doing it. For them, still in perfection, this was a joy and a pleasure. For us, post-fall and dealing with pain (that we get from tending our gardens) this is not always a joy. But the type or the kind of work is the same.

I am sure the Spirit of God will speak to you about what you can do to cultivate and keep His creation and to be a good steward of what He has given you. Caring for the environments in which we live should not be left to the godless, pagan people in our country and world. God's people should be an example to others of how to cultivate and keep the earth. As John Milton wrote in his poem, *Paradise Lost*, "This Paradise I give thee; count it thine. To till and keep, and of the fruit to eat (B.8, as quoted from Harbach [66])."

What we have been saying, as we study Genesis 1 and 2, is crucial for us in establishing our foundation, our biblical worldview, in answering critics of Christianity who very often assume we do not care at all about the environment. What we must demonstrate by way of *action* and what we must articulate by way of *words*, is that we believe we are stewards over what God has made. And we invite them, whoever they may be, into the Bible to see how at least certain elements of their passion fits with what God has commanded them also to do. Depending on the Holy Spirit, let's be equipped to speak the truth in love to people we know who have this criticism of us.

I have some other things I want to share with you on our response to the climate change activists; some other dynamics to address, but I think this is a good stopping point for today. And this gives me a chance to do something I have not done in a while and that is to remind you about the free God Is Podcast. If you are listening on the podcast, then you already know this, but those on the radio please listen to this again by visiting [godisministry.org](http://godisministry.org), that's [godisministry.o-r-g](http://godisministry.o-r-g). On the website you will see each day's podcast. You can click play and listen right there, or subscribe and get this automatically downloaded to your mobile device.

Never miss a day! And/or listen again at [godisministry.org](http://godisministry.org). And, once you find the podcast you want, click the link for "Read Along" and up pops the manuscript. So you can read along while you listen. This is also the best way to preserve any quotations I use that are of interest to you. On the podcast, click "Read Along."

And, write to me. I love hearing from you, and would appreciate a note. [mark@godisministry.org](mailto:mark@godisministry.org) and God Is PO Box 802 Winchester Massachusetts 01890. Join us again next time for God Is!

---END---