



CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

God's Story: The First Great Commission

GOAL OF THE STUDY

Much about the Great Commission should inspire and interest the group. The first verb, “Go” (actually a participle in the Greek text) reminds us of our need to be aggressive in engaging people around us and not waiting for them to find us. In the context of this study on stewardship and discipleship, the last half of

the commission is of particular interest: Jesus expects us to teach people to live according to God’s will. This emphasis on obedience is often new to those who have been steeped in the truths of justification by grace through faith alone.

ANSWERS

- 1 The first two chapters of Genesis provide two distinct accounts of the work of creation, the first from a more heavenly or divine perspective, and the second focused on humans and their place within creation. For this study, the first account will suffice. The repetition of key words and phrases gives beauty to the text, and emphasizes the intentionality and regularity by which God created. There was nothing random about it. God had a plan, and he executed that plan. There is a pattern in the progression of the days. The first three days mark distinctions (between light and dark, water and space, water and land) and the next three days detail the adornment of the spaces that had been created: stars for the firmament, fish for the sea, birds for the sky, and animals for the land.
- 2 Beginning at verse 14, each new thing added to the creation is added for a reason: sun and moon to measure time and to give light, fish and birds and animals to fill the spaces that he had created. Beginning at day three, God begins to pronounce his judgment on each phase of the creation. The recurrent phrase drives home the theme: it was good.
- 3 The simple explanation in the context of the study is that God is giving a commission to the fish and birds. They have a job to do: be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters and the space above the earth. It is intriguing that a similar commission is not given to the beasts created to occupy the earth. Instead, it is left to man to “fill the earth.” Every part of the creation has a place and a task within God’s grand plan. Even the land has a commission—be dry and hold back the sea.
- 4 Psalm 148 is an exuberant and delightful indulgence in the wonder of creation living purposefully before the Creator. The psalm follows the same progression as the days of creation, with each character in the masterpiece of creation called upon to praise God. The way that each gives its praise should be coming into focus: each gives praise simply by doing what it was created to do. When stars shine, they praise God. When snow falls, it praises God. When the mountains and hills stand firm, they praise God. When creatures do what they were created to do, they praise God.
- 5 The first point is that humans are made in God’s image and likeness. Just what this means has been the subject of perennial and often less-than-helpful discussion. This study does not necessitate a definitive answer. It is enough to point out that there

ANSWERS cont.

is something unique and special about the creation of humans. They are set apart and given a particular relationship with the Creator. The second main point is that humans, like other creatures, have a particular task to fulfill. They are designed to rule. The relation between bearing God's image and being shaped to rule should be obvious. This image-bearing puts humans in the "God-spot" with respect to the rest of creation. Humans have the burden of providing care and oversight. They are created to stand in for God in relation to the whole of creation.

- 6** There is debate about whether it is still necessary for us to be fruitful and fill the earth, but the commission delivered in the garden has yet to be revoked. Growth of the kingdom through conversion is necessary, but there is nothing second-rate or insignificant about growth through large Christian families. Read Psalm 127:3, 5.
- 7** God never offers another rationale for the existence of humans. While humans should offer praise to God (a practice exhorted throughout Scripture), this verse and the surrounding context remind us that the best way to give praise to God is to do that for which one was created, and humans were created to "subdue and rule" the creation. Our reason for being is what it has always been; we are created to govern and steward the creation, caring for it and cultivating it. The universal nature of the parallel curses in chapter 3 also argues for the universal nature of this commission.
- 8** In the second creation account, one of Adam's first tasks was to name the animals. This demonstrated his authority, as well as his intimate association with each part of the creation. Even before the fall, the creation needed care and guidance. In our contemporary world, this is still true. We are responsible for subduing and ruling the creation. We delight in the good creation and enjoy the wonders God has made, and we do it with a sense of awe and responsibility. We are stewards left to watch over what God has created. Thus, Christians have cause to be interested in the care and preservation of every part of the creation—yet without worshipping the creation.
- 9** The environmental aspect of stewardship is very real and very important. In ages past, Christians were typically on the leading edge of those seeking to protect the creation and striving to preserve what God had made. However, the agenda of many environmentalists is not the agenda of Christians. We do not worship the creation. We do not see ourselves as merely one particular life-form that managed to evolve to the point of mastery so far achieved. We are not frantic about efforts to save "spaceship earth" because we know that God's plan is still in force and that ultimately God will fulfill his purposes. So, Christians invest in efforts to care for all that God has made, and they express a sense of respect for every part of the creation, but they also recognize the burden of oversight and cultivation of the creation. Fallow ground is certainly no more holy or pristine than a cultivated garden or a field of wheat. The key is responsible use and care of the creation. The creation is not merely ours to use, nor are we alien beings invading the sacred space of nature. We are creatures tasked with the care of the rest of creation to live in a healthy relationship with all that God has made.
- 10** The exhortation from God in Genesis 1 tells us everything we need to know to lead purposeful and meaningful lives. This is no small gift in our western culture that is increasingly unsure about many things—much less the meaning of life! For Christians, there is tremendous comfort and assurance to realize why we are here and what we are supposed to be doing. We are here to serve the creation. We are here to embrace the materiality of the creation and to work with passion and purpose for the protection of all around us: rocks, fish, birds, animals, and most importantly, fellow men and women. The creation around us needs what we have to give. We learn to see every action of life, then, in terms of the service we are providing to fellow creatures—from mowing the lawn, to giving blood, to balancing the company's books. It is what God put us here to do.