

The teachFASTly.com resources are not intended as a complete curriculum. The activities are designed to be woven into your existing teaching. This Quick Stop Lesson Plan is therefore not a single lesson plan, but rather a quick way of exploring the themes of an Activity Map. It includes one Discover activity, one Delve activity, and one Debrief activity. Together, these may take more than a class period, and you may want to add other activities between them. For more information, visit www.teachfastly.com.

Stewardship, Science, and Faith

The focus of this Activity Map is to explore stewardship in relation to environmental science and from the perspective of theology. It explores such questions as:

- What is the biblical basis for practicing stewardship?
- How and why should we practice stewardship, and what are the benefits of stewardship?
- What happens when we don't practice stewardship?
- What are practical ways that anyone can get involved in the task of stewardship?
- How do we teach others to practice stewardship?
- How are science, ethics, and faith connected with concrete environmental concerns?

Questions like these invite us to see stewardship in a new light, with opportunities for collaboration between science and Bible/religion teachers.

The activities in this Activity Map are designed to engage students in thinking theologically and practically about stewardship in tandem with the learning they draw from your regular science curriculum. The activities ask students to focus on context: (1) students are asked to carefully consider the context when interpreting the Bible; (2) they are asked to think about the practical context of their life in relationship to stewardship; (3) they are asked to carry their learning into the context of their relationships, and to see its connection to faith as it reshapes their practice; and (4) they are asked to consider how their beliefs affect the larger context of the world in which they live.

It is recommended that work on this topic be coordinated between science and Bible teachers, and that good communication with parents be practiced.

This Quick Stop Lesson Plan on **Stewardship, Science, and Faith** contains the following activities and attachments from www.teachfastly.com, which are combined for your ease of use in a downloadable ZIP file:

DISCOVER Activity: Hebrew in Science Class?

Activity Attachments

- *Hebrew in Science Class Handout*
- *Hebrew in Science Class Slideshow*

DELVE Activity: Ruling and Stewardship

Activity Attachments

- *Ruling and Stewardship 1 Handout*
- *Ruling and Stewardship 2 Handout*
- *Ruling and Stewardship Slideshow*

DEBRIEF Activity: The Vegetables of Stewardship

Activity Attachment

- *Vegetables of Stewardship Handout*

DISCOVER

Activity: Hebrew in Science Class?

Time: 20 minutes

In Brief

This is a starter activity to introduce the Bible's language of stewardship. It helps students see how faith, stewardship, and science can connect. It introduces key words in the original language of Genesis, and gets students engaged in interpretation of how Genesis talks about the role of humans in the natural world. Students are asked to explore the meanings of four key words that appear in Genesis and how these meanings might relate to stewardship, and asked to look at further passages to explore God's care in creation.

Goals

Students will understand that Genesis 1 includes imagery of forceful ruling, as well as of careful service and preservation.

Students will understand how other biblical passages can help frame an interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis in relation to human stewardship of creation.

Thinking Ahead

This activity could be used in a science class as preparation for work on environmental stewardship, or in Bible class as part of a cross-curricular collaboration between Bible and science teachers. The activity *What's in a Name?* could be used instead of, or as an extension to, this activity.

The early chapters of Genesis are a common point of reference for considering how the Bible views humans in the context of the cosmos. This activity focuses on four key words that appear in the Hebrew text in these early chapters that frame our understanding of how humans are to interact with the rest of the world. These four words are:

- *Radah*
- *Kabash*
- *Shamar*
- *'abad*

Radah means "to reign or rule over (like a king)," and *kabash* means "to subdue, bring under control or submission, enslave." Both are used in Genesis 1:28. *Shamar* means "to keep and watch or preserve, to exercise great care," and *'abad* means "to work or serve." These two words appear in Genesis 2:15. A deeper discussion of the meanings of the words can be found in the activity *The Stewardship Triangle*.

You might take time to consider your own assumptions as you prepare to engage with students:

- Do you think of Genesis as only relevant to science in terms of arguments about the age of the earth or the validity of evolutionary theory?
- Do you associate Genesis mostly with humans having dominion over the earth or mostly with caring and serving?
- Where do your assumptions come from, and how might the nuances of the text be used to alter them?

Preparing the Activity

Needed:

- A copy of the **Hebrew in Science Class Handout** for each student
- Internet access for students

Teaching the Activity

This can be used as a homework assignment or can be done in class, if students have internet access in school.

Give students the **Hebrew in Science Class Handout**. Ask the students how, if at all, they think the book of Genesis is connected to science. Explain that they are going to do some investigating around a particular theme in Genesis 1 and 2 that might be less familiar than origins debates.

The handout asks students to research the meaning of each Hebrew word online. Once students have done this, they should write a definition for each word that draws upon information from at least three sources. Then they should create an English sentence using each Hebrew word, which illustrates the word's intended meaning. Finally, ask students to find where each word appears in Genesis 1-2.

Review students' findings the next day, or after the activity if it is done during class.

Attempt to come to a consensus with the class on the meaning of each word. Have the students read their example sentences while the class listens. Remind students that it is normal for words to have a range of meanings in different contexts. Ask for some initial thoughts on how the ideas these words bring up might be relevant to how we think about science:

- Can we think about science as control or service?
- Is science related to stewardship?

Keep the discussion brief at this point.

Next, discuss with students how we should approach the ambiguity of the language in the Genesis passage. The words studied include the ideas of ruling over (subduing, controlling) and caring for (tending, preserving). How would we go about deciding what to understand from these words?

Elicit the need to compare other passages to get a broader perspective of how the Bible views God's care for creation. Give students the following passages (using the **Hebrew in Science Class Slideshow**) or have them look the passages up:

- Psalm 104:10-17 – This passage speaks of God caring for animals and plants, as well as human beings. Many commentators suggest that being made in God's image, as described in Genesis, includes imitating and enacting God's rule. If this is true, how might Psalm 104 help us read Genesis 1?
- Matthew 10:29-31 – This passage affirms the value of human beings by invoking God's care for sparrows. Would the promise to humans here make sense if God did not actually extend care to sparrows?
- Matthew 20:25-28 – This passage focuses on serving other human beings. Is what the passage shows us about Jesus's view of what it means to rule relevant to how we might read the call to rule in Genesis? If Genesis speaks of ruling over the natural world like a king, how does the rest of the Bible think a king should exercise authority?
- Revelation 11:18 – While this passage likely refers to armies pillaging, and not modern issues like pollution, it sets judgment in the context of God's care for the earth. How might this passage set limits on the ruling over creation portrayed in Genesis 1?

These verses don't have to be used simply as a way to hammer home a correct answer. Questions such as those suggested above can help draw students into thinking about how to build a more consistent interpretation through reading multiple passages together. Emphasize that the case is not closed simply because we looked at a few more verses—for a thorough investigation, we would have to consult many passages in their context across the whole Bible. Explain, however, that the connections they just made are the kinds of connections that offer a case for Genesis 1 calling us to care for and preserve the non-human creation. Return briefly to the question of how science could be part of this care for creation.

Optional Extra

As an optional homework assignment, you could ask students to identify an additional passage. Have them explain its relevance to the question of how to engage with Genesis 1, and to questions of human stewardship of creation. Although this assignment is intended as a brief introduction to the topic, you could extend it and assess student understanding by having students investigate further, and then in a writing assignment build a biblical case for connecting science to stewardship.

DELVE

Activity: Ruling and Stewardship

Time: 45 Minutes

In Brief

This activity explores in more detail the biblical picture of humanity's relationship to the natural world and of the call to stewardship. It engages students in careful interpretation of Genesis and active reflection on ethics in relation to science and the environment. By investigating the use of key words in Genesis and comparing passages in Genesis 1 and 2, students will explore the concept of rule.

Goals

Students will understand the case for reading the biblical call to rule over creation in terms of care and stewardship, and not simply power.

Thinking Ahead

This activity can be used as a continuation of and to augment the learning in the activity Hebrew in Science Class? When combined with the activity on The Stewardship Triangle, it could also provide an opportunity for cross-curricular cooperation between Bible/religion class and science class, by using explicit cross-referencing of what is being discussed in the other classroom.

When we think about the Bible and ethics, our minds may go to the Ten Commandments, but there is already an ethical picture of human responsibility for creation in the first chapters of Genesis. This activity gives students a more detailed understanding of what Genesis is—and isn't—saying. It employs a model adapted from Calvin DeWitt's book *Song of a Scientist* to bridge between theology, science, and action.

This activity does not just focus on giving students the right answers; it seeks to engage them in responsible interpretation of the biblical text. You might consider how your teaching practices could enhance or inhibit students' wrestling with this process:

- Do your teaching practices reduce learning to an information checklist or a set of right political answers, or do they provoke students to deeper engagement and exploration?
- How will you balance the number of questions and statements you offer as you teach?
- How will you use silences after key questions to allow reflection?
- Will any of your behaviors imply dismissal of student thoughts that do not fit the plan?

Preparing the Activity

Needed:

- A copy of **Ruling and Stewardship 1 Handout** for each student
- A copy of **Ruling and Stewardship 2 Handout** for each student (optional)
- Presentation slides from the **Ruling and Stewardship Slideshow**

Teaching the Activity

Give students copies of the **Ruling and Stewardship 1 Handout**. Using Slide 2 of the **Ruling and Stewardship Slideshow**, project the following two words on the screen: *Radah* and *Kabash*. If you have used the activity Hebrew in Science Class?, ask students if they remember the English meanings of these Hebrew words. If not, define them (and reveal the definitions on the slide):

- *Kabash* - subdue, bring under control or submission, enslave
- *Radah* - reign or rule (like a king) over an enemy

Next, on the same slide, display Genesis 1:28 (NET):

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue (kabash) it! Rule (radah) over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."

Ask students to jot down three adjectives that describe what kind of rule this feels like, and then collect some examples. Answers may include "dictatorship," "harsh," "forceful," "commanding," "powerful"—it is fine for students to use negative words at this point.

If you have used the activity Hebrew in Science Class?, remind students that there is debate about the precise meaning of these words in Genesis. If not, point out that for some people, the words justify an aggressive stance toward the non-human creation. For others, the words mandate care and careful stewardship. It might seem straightforward to get from a command to "rule" and "subdue," to the view that we should use creation as we see fit. So how do people get from words that focus on control and submission, to the idea of care and stewardship?

The following steps help students make this connection.

These verses imply an image of ruling like a king. What kind of king does the passage seem to be suggesting as a model?

Display Genesis 1:26-27 (Slide 3). Ask students what these passages add to our understanding of the kind of leadership that is meant. Draw students' attention to the connection of ruling with the image of God. This suggests delegated authority, rather than absolute authority; our ruling is to reflect the character of God's ruling.

How does God rule? Ask students to describe how God rules, and again, ground their comments by referring to biblical texts.

Use Slide 4 to present and discuss Psalm 72:8, 12-14 (NET):

*May he rule (radah) from sea to sea,
and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth!*

...
*For he will rescue the needy when they cry out for help,
and the oppressed who have no defender.
He will take pity on the poor and needy;
the lives of the needy he will save.
From harm and violence he will defend them;
he will value their lives.*

And Psalm 145:9 (NET):

The LORD is good to all, and has compassion on all he has made.

Ask students to articulate what the implications might be if we put these passages alongside Genesis 1:26-27. You could also refer students to passages such as Psalm 19 (creation shows God's glory) and Psalm 104 (which details God's care for the non-human creation).

Now display the words *shamar* and *'abad* (Slide 5). If you have used the activity Hebrew in Science Class?, ask students if they remember the English meanings of these Hebrew words. If not, define them (and reveal the definitions on the slide):

- *Shamar* - to keep and watch or preserve, exercise great care
- *'abad* - to work or serve

On the same slide, display Genesis 2:15,19 (NET):

The LORD God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for (shamar) it and to maintain ('abad) it.... The LORD God formed out of the ground every living animal of the field and every bird of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

Ask students to jot down three adjectives to describe what kind of rule this feels like, and then collect examples. Answers may include "service," "gentle," "caring," "parental," etc. Ask how this second broadening of the context affects how we understand what it means to rule over creation. Connect this to the idea of stewardship. Genesis 1 and 2 belong to the same text, so we need to read them together. Ruling in Genesis 1 and 2 seems to involve (Slide 6):

- Ruling creation in God's image; showing what God is like (kind, just, compassionate)
- Subduing the dangers of creation, working to meet our needs (building homes; using resources wisely and sustainably; creating culture—art, music, technology), and having children to continue this task
- Lovingly caring for, preserving, and serving this creation; knowing it so we can know how to care for it

Note that reading Genesis 1 and 2 together does not resolve all debates as to which actions constitute wise rule or stewardship, or exactly which interests should be protected; it simply shows that there is a case for seeing more going on in the Genesis call to rule than the exercise of raw power over the world.

Raise the question of what the New Testament has to contribute to the conversation.

Draw students' attention to Matthew 10:29-31 (God's care for humans and sparrows). Ask students to consider how Jesus's way of ruling and leading others is portrayed in the New Testament. Answers may include "he sacrificed himself," "he washed other's feet," "he was gentle and caring," "he healed others," "he cared for the poor, the widow, and the sick."

Display Mark 10: 42-44 (Slide 7):

Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. But it is not this way among you. Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all." (NET)

- How does this connect to the Genesis passages?
- How does it compare with the picture of proper kingship provided in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (in which the king is instructed not to amass personal resources)?

The New Testament pictures Jesus as Lord of all creation, yet laying down his life for the world. Ask students to articulate how this might connect with the picture of ruling that they just explored in Genesis. If there is time, you could also consider examples of how ruling over others is viewed in other parts of the New Testament, such as Titus 1:7-8.

Optional Extra

Have students read the first five paragraphs of page 4 from Lynn White's 1967 essay "**The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis**" (<https://www.uvm.edu/~gflomenh/ENV-NGO-PA395/articles/Lynn-White.pdf>). This should take about 10 minutes. Explain that this was a short but influential essay that argued that Christianity played a large role in the ecological crisis we are approaching today. Discuss with students:

- How does White describe Christianity's view of man?
- How does White describe Christianity's view of the purpose of creation?
- What does "anthropocentric" mean? Does White believe that Christianity is an anthropocentric religion?
- What are his reasons for this?
- As Christianity replaced other religions in Europe, how did it view the use of nature?

Distribute the **Ruling and Stewardship 2 Handout**, which contains a response by Steven Bouma-Prediger to White's argument. Discuss with students:

- What critiques are raised of White's influential essay?
- Are Christian cultures excused from ecological degradation?
- Have Christians only ever understood dominion as domination?

The following questions could be used for a concluding discussion:

- If Christians have sinned through poor stewardship practices, what would be appropriate responses to God and toward the world?
- If Christians see environmental problems that did not arise through their own choices, what would be appropriate responses to God and toward the world?
- If Christians see sinful actions done in the name of environmental concern, what would be appropriate responses to God and toward the world?

DEBRIEF

Activity: The Vegetables of Stewardship

Time: Homework

In Brief

This activity builds upon the Fruits of Stewardship activity and can also draw from various other activities in this Activity Map. It requires that students reflect on what they have learned, and formulate written responses to differing opinions on stewardship, drawing upon both science and theology. It does this in the context of practicing the virtues involved in respecting those with whom we disagree.

Goals

Students will articulate a position on environmental stewardship and respond to other positions using both science and theology.

Students will demonstrate understanding of the relevance of the biblical themes of ruling, service, and the image of God to thoughtful analysis of stewardship, and the ability to relate these themes to issues informed by science.

Thinking Ahead

Beliefs about the environment, human responsibility, and their relationship to the Bible vary; often they are not expressed in carefully considered ways. Learning how to rationally and respectfully discuss these issues with others, and share theological ideas in a Christ-like way, can bear positive fruit in relationships and affect change in people's behavior and action.

Teaching students to engage in these types of conversations is one way to help them practice the virtues needed to communicate well in the midst of disagreements. Having to write out one's thoughts and beliefs on stewardship is an important step in getting students to learn, to own their thinking on this topic, and to crystallize their viewpoints on their human calling.

Consider how this activity resembles or differs from your usual assessment practices:

- Do your usual practices take into account a relational context outside of class?
- Do they direct students' attention not only to what is known, but also to how we respond to others in the light of our knowledge?
- Do they invite students to see learning and virtue as connected?

Preparing the Activity

Needed:

- Copies of the writing prompt found in the **Vegetables of Stewardship Handout**

Teaching the Activity

Distribute the writing prompt **Vegetables of Stewardship Handout** to students. It can be used as a test essay, take home essay, or a journaling exercise.

The text of the prompt:

Imagine that you are at a holiday dinner with your extended family. You, being the lucky person you are, get seated right between your two talkative and opinionated “favorite” uncles. One asks what you’ve been learning in school these days, and you reply that you’ve been learning about stewardship.

Uncle #1 snorts and says, “Stewardship?! Isn’t that just some tree-hugger type of stuff? Genesis clearly says that God put us in charge of the earth to use it how we want. It’s there to provide for us. Fact.”

Uncle #2 hears Uncle #1 and replies, “That’s nonsense. Humans have no special role or place here on earth. Everything has equal value and should have equal rights to life—no matter how it lives. We’ve also got to protect our resources on this planet, because our children will need them.”

Develop a response to both of your uncles in the form of a letter to them that accomplishes the following:

- *Identifies and affirms what you agree with in both uncles’ statements*
- *Identifies and explains, with gentleness, what you disagree with in both uncles’ statements*
- *Makes clear connection to relevant biblical and theological arguments related to ruling, service, and image of God and shows how these arguments might speak to each uncle’s view*
- *Gives at least one significant example of how scientific understanding can inform the discussion*
- *Clearly outlines your own position on stewardship and the reasons for it*

Explain to students that you will be looking for:

- Responsible use of sound scientific understanding. (Can students give valid examples of how science helps us understand human environmental impact?)
- Responsible, careful use of theological and biblical material. (Do students balance, for instance, the biblical imagery of ruling, of serving/preserving, and the status of humans as being made in the image of God?)
- Evidence that students have thought about how to communicate with humility and gentleness in the midst of disagreements.

You may wish to adapt the prompt to ask students to make use of specific scientific concepts that you have been covering.