



GRATEFUL  
LIVING

# TERRITORY

*Sermon script to go with the PowerPoint slides.*

**Opening Story** (Tell this story OR watch the video [at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q) )

The howls of wolves were unmistakable. The moon was full, and the pack was on the prowl. Inside a mountain hut a small group of researchers huddled anxiously in a corner. Strangely, they weren't at all worried about the wolves outside. Instead, their attention was focused on a computer screen displaying results from years of research.

These researchers were studying the Yellowstone National Park ecosystem in the United States, where wolves were reintroduced in 1995 after being killed off nearly 70 years prior. Remarkably, the findings suggested that the presence or absence of just one species—the wolf—could potentially affect an entire ecosystem.

Shortly after the wolves were brought back to the park, the elk that the wolves hunted changed their behaviour and moved away from their favourite grazing areas. The aspen forests and streamside vegetation began to grow again when the smaller trees were no longer consumed by the elk. Next, amphibians, reptiles, beavers, and songbirds all made impressive comebacks as vegetation increased. Tree roots stabilized the stream banks and reduced erosion. Beaver activities raised the water table. Thus, the wolf's presence in Yellowstone appeared not only to improve the ecology and richness of the ecosystem dramatically, but indirectly changed its physical geography as well!

So, what can we learn from Yellowstone's wolves? Complex relationships exist among plants, animals, and their environment. By altering just one component, we often change that environment in unforeseen ways. The lesson is clear: we should reflect very carefully on how we treat God's creation. *Story adapted from 'Christians and Environmental Stewardship: Creation care or crying wolf?' by William K. Hayes. Read the full article at <https://www.adventistreview.org/1601-45>*

**SLIDE:** Today, God's creation is certainly struggling under the weight of sin, even more than when Paul wrote this in Romans, "For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." *Romans 8:19-22 (NLT)*

**SLIDE:** There's a Great Controversy, a universal battle going on, and it includes the territory, the environment, that God has asked us to care for.

- God's blueprint says that the earth is God's, and He invites us to carefully manage it and protect it. But Satan's counterfeit says that the earth is just a result of random evolution, so do what you want to it.
- God's blueprint reminds me that my land is God's land, and I am committed to using it for His glory. But Satan's says that God has no say or jurisdiction over how I use my land.

- God wants to bless me with a long life on the land that He has given me. But Satan says that the earth is only here to be exploited by humans to make money.
- Because of God's love for me I will protect the environment from things that will pollute and damage it, even though Satan suggests that the earth is going to burn soon so there's no need to care for it.

**SLIDE:** God invites us to be faithful stewards and managers of all that He entrusts to us. When we understand that God owns everything, our 'ownership' ends, and 'stewardship' begins.

A steward is a person who manages something on behalf of the owner. God owns this world, and He asks us to manage it wisely and carefully for Him. Even our local creek or beach or forest is owned by God, and we are invited to care for it.

**SLIDE:** Right back in the beginning, in Genesis 1:26 we read, "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."" *Genesis 1:26 (NKJV)*

What does that word 'dominion' mean? Are we to exploit the environment in any way we want?

**SLIDE:** The very next chapter gives us a beautiful insight into how we have dominion over creation. "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it." *Genesis 2:15 (NKJV)*

There's a beautiful gentleness about the words 'tend' and 'keep'. It speaks of protecting and caring for all God's creation.

**SLIDE:** Ethiopia's forests were nearly all destroyed in the 20th century. Today there are around 35,000 tiny islands of green forest in the dry, barren landscape, most of them with churches at the centre. Some of them are just two hectares, while others are up to 400 hectares.

**SLIDE:** Why are these little forests preserved primarily around churches? Because the churches know it is their responsibility to preserve the forests, like mini Edens. "Symbolizing the Garden of Eden ... , the woods are revered as places of worship to be cared for and cherished but are not considered to be living deities."

God's creation is not God. God is not in the trees and rocks and rivers, He created them, yes, but they are not God. We care for them because their Creator asks us to, not because they are the Creator. This is a very important thing to remember in our world where many religions and spiritual practices tell us that the environment is God. We are to worship God, not His creation.

**SLIDE:** Sadly, after the perfect Creation of this earth, sin entered, and we lost some of our respect for the territory God entrusted to us. In Jeremiah we read, "I brought you into a

bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.” *Jeremiah 2:7 (NKJV)*

**SLIDE:** American author and modern-day prophet, Ellen G. White wrote, “Human beings were to cooperate with God in restoring the diseased land to health, that it might be a praise and a glory to His name. ... The earth is the Lord's vineyard, and is to be treated according to His plan.”

**SLIDE:** She continued, “Those who cultivated the soil were to realize that they were doing God service. They were as truly in their lot and place as were the men appointed to minister in the priesthood and in work connected with the tabernacle.” *Ellen G. White, SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 1, 1112*

Wow! How beautiful is that?! When we are farming the land and caring for it we are as truly working for God as the church minister!

**SLIDE:** “The home of our first parents ... beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace. Men, in their pride, delight in magnificent and costly edifices and glory in the works of their own hands; but God placed Adam in a garden. This was his dwelling. ... In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. ... To the dwellers in Eden was committed the care of the garden, “to dress it and to keep it.”” *Ellen G. White, Patriarchs & Prophets, 49-50*

How can we get it so wrong? Why do we have a tendency to damage God’s creation instead of care for it? What a terrible impact sin has had on our planet.

**SLIDE:** Isaiah wrote prophetically when he said, “The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.” *Isaiah 24:4-6 (NIV)*

**SLIDE:** And in the Bible’s most prophetic book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we read of the future of people who destroy the environment, “The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.” *Revelation 11:18 (NKJV)*

What does the Seventh-day Adventist church believe and teach about environmental care? In 1992 our world church voted the following statement, and we should all seek to uphold it in belief and in practice.

**SLIDE:** “The world in which we live is a gift of love from the Creator God, from “Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7; 11:17, 18). Within this creation He placed humans, set intentionally in relationship with Himself, other persons, and the surrounding world. Therefore, as Seventh-day Adventists, we hold its

preservation and nurture to be intimately related to our service to Him.” *General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Executive Committee, October 12, 1992*

It's simple. If we love God, we will love His creation. And we show the genuineness of our love by caring for the plants, animals, ecosystems and all that our Father has lovingly blessed us with.

In 1995 the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church approved this statement about the ecological crisis and our response to it:

**SLIDE:** “The ecological crisis is rooted in humankind’s greed and refusal to practice good and faithful stewardship within the divine boundaries of creation. Seventh-day Adventists advocate a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism, goods-getting, and production of waste. We call for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world’s resources, reevaluation of one’s needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.” *General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee, 1995*

On page 113 of the book *Counsels on Stewardship* by Ellen White we read this important statement, “A steward identifies himself with his master. He accepts the responsibilities of a steward, and he must act in his master's stead, doing as his master would do were he presiding. His master's interests become his. The position of a steward is one of dignity, because his master trusts him.”

**SLIDE:** So, how can we be faithful with the territory, the environment, that God has entrusted to us? A faithful steward does what their Master would do if He were present. What would God do?

Let’s never forget that God cares for His creation. Jesus reminded us of it in Matthew 10:29 when he said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.”

Let’s all seek to reveal our love for God and His creation as we make our daily decisions about recycling, shopping, land clearing, travel and even what we eat. When Jesus returns, I pray that He will find us faithfully caring for His creation.