

THE JOY OF BEING ZEALOUS STEWARDS
By Austin Pryor

“Zealous” is an interesting word. It means showing great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective. It is good to be zealous, if we are zealous for the right things. The apostle Paul wrote, “It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good...” (Galatians 4:18). What might that good purpose be? Nineteenth-century Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryle offered this description of a follower of Jesus Christ who is zealous for a good purpose:

“Zeal in Christianity is a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way. This desire is so strong that when it really reigns in a person, it impels them to make any sacrifice, to go through any trouble, to deny themselves anything, to spend themselves and be spent, and even to die, if only they can please God and honor Christ.”

One area in which Christ followers are asked to please God and demonstrate faithfulness is in their relationship to their money — how they earn it, spend it, invest it, and give it away. Many people, however, are slow to grow in this area. Perhaps it is a misunderstanding of all that stewardship entails. It’s not just about giving. It is not just for the wealthy. We all are called to practice good stewardship, at every age and income level. “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Someone might understand the responsibility to be a wise steward but fail to progress because he or she lacks understanding in how to do that. Organizations like mine, Sound Mind Investing, can help with that.

But for many the problem is a lack of consistency in following through on commitments. They want to do better, but good intentions (and New Year’s resolutions) are not enough to produce change.

This common failure drew me to the My One Word approach, developed by Mike Ashcraft and Rachel Olsen. It can bring about changes in self-defeating habits and behaviors. Ashcraft and Olsen explain change is possible, but focus is required. Using the My One Word approach, your word might be:

- **Plan**, because every spending and investing decision should flow from a personalized plan.
- **Discipline**, because you have a long-term investing plan but are inconsistent in following it.
- **Patience**, because you have a short-term mentality when a long-term view is needed.
- **Glorify**, because you want your motives for investing & using financial resources to please God.
- **Relax**, because nervousness in following the headlines prevents you from staying the course.
- **Trust**, because God has promised to provide “all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).
- **Faithful**, because following your plan, rather than measuring each outcome, defines success.

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In their My One Word book, the authors provide food for thought on how to select your word and give tips on how to keep it in the forefront of your mind. Let your one word guide you in your spending, investing, and charitable giving decisions through 2025. Then you will be ready for one final word:

- **Forget**, so you can let go of past failings and move toward a more promising financial future. Then you can say with the apostle Paul, “One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

© 2024. Austin Pryor has more than 40 years of experience advising investors and is the founder of the Sound Mind Investing newsletter and website. He is the author of The Sound Mind Investing Handbook, endorsed by many respected Christian teachers, with more than 100,000 copies sold. Austin lives in Louisville, Kentucky, with his wife Susie.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. In what areas of your life do you think people would describe you as being “zealous,” if any? Specifically, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low), how zealous are you in how you manage the use of your personal financial resources?
2. What do you think it means to be a faithful steward of resources God provides?
3. Do you believe that faithfulness – good stewardship – in the use of our money and material possessions is an important element in our spiritual growth? Why or why not?
4. Based on what you have read in this Monday Manna, which “one word” do you think might be most useful for you as you look ahead to the new year and plan for handling your finances?

Challenge

For many of us, our money and how we use it is one of the most private areas of our lives. We might resist if someone asks us about it, feeling they are overstepping their bounds and meddling in very personal concerns.

And yet, a new calendar year is nearly upon us, and we would be wise to re-evaluate how we are utilizing the resources God has entrusted to us and consider ways we might use them more wisely and effectively. If you have a trusted friend, advisor or mentor, you might want to openly discuss this with them and invite their comments and counsel.

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:
Deuteronomy 8:18; Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 22:7; Matthew 6:19-21,24; Luke 16:10-12

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