

Are you always on the lookout for wisdom regarding your personal finances? Of course you are! Everyone is and should be—yes, even the most seasoned of finance professionals themselves are wisely honing their skills and seeking the best learning and data in order to give great counsel to others! So, all Christians have been appointed a steward of what they've been given by God, no matter whether what we are stewarding is overtly financial...or non-financial! And frankly, the core starting point of stewardship is *increase!*

Not convinced? Here's a quick test. So, God has blessed you with a very good year financially. Right off the bat, *that's His increase!* So, what do you do then? You call your financial advisor and say, "Hey, can you help me with some effective ways to lose this money?" Of course not! Instead, you say something like, "Hey, help me grow this money so that I can meet some of my future stewardship responsibilities!" Some may call that a greedy heart and it just might be! But true Jesus-followers call it stewardship.

Still, beyond money, God expects us to be stewards of *everything* in our lives—from our gifting to our family to our time to the Word itself, and yes, to our money—without exception, we are to turn whatever we've been given into something that grows. And if you haven't reflected on this lately, let's remind ourselves that God is big on the idea of "*increase.*" In fact, He's big on the whole *practice* of increase! And that's true, despite the fact that many of His critics routinely complain, criticize, and just plain ignore that God prescribes and facilitates increase *for* those—and also *through* those—who would follow Him in obedience. So...how about several verses from the Bible about the realities of increase?

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...'" Genesis 1:27-28a (ESV) Hey, do the math there! Every time a husband and wife have a child, that's a 50% increase in humanity! And yeah, God started it all off with a command to multiply...to increase!

And how about these verses? "May the Lord give you increase, you and your children! May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth!" That's Psalm 115:14-15. Yes, far from discouraging increase in the life of His people, God is the Giver of increase, the Giver of blessings!

And how about God's message to Job about the fullness of His increase? "And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great." That's in Job 8:7. Oh, is that too "Old Testament-y" for you? Then how about a little New Testament...with Jesus Himself teaching? "And [Jesus] said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.'" (Mark 4:24) Yes, here's the principle, and I'm quoting that key phrase again: "still more will be added to you!" But notice something really important here—the believer must take action by "paying attention" and using a measure that will precipitate additional increase!

Oh, you might say, I get it now...you're giving us the so-called "prosperity gospel." Actually, what we're really talking about is how God works in His relationship to us as believers. The better we do in stewarding of the resources entrusted to us, the more He entrusts to us! How do we know that? Well, right from Jesus' Parable of the Talents. So, here's His clear teaching about the stewarding of talents, with "talents" being the technical term for money central to the story. Notice that the parable is *totally* about stewards being entrusted with—and held accountable for—*increasing the resources of another!*

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have

been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.’” (Matthew 25:14-29)

Whoa, here’s the deal, folks! Is this parable about money? Yes, it’s about both good stewards and a poor steward of money and the master’s shifting resources to the best “increaser!” After all, who would *you* hire to manage money? But it’s also relevant to *everything* we steward—because everything we do in life is a stewarding for God and His purposes! And it’s clear that God will shift more of those things to us to steward when we are faithful. And don’t forget the Word itself here—how about Matthew 13:23? “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” That’s increase!

So, just what *is* the big picture here? Well, that’s clear from the Word, too: we are to steward for God’s Kingdom! Colossians 1:13 reminds us that we as believers have already been transferred to the Kingdom of God’s Son...who is, by definition, the King! And the government of King Jesus is going to *increase* without end! How do we know that? Well, here’s what Isaiah prophesied centuries before the Cross.

“For to us a child is born, and to a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Wow, how about all that? God’s is a “forevermore” Kingdom—the *only* forever Kingdom—one of which the increase of King Jesus’ government and peace there will be no end! And then there’s this key for us in the “here-and-now.” Paul wrote this to Timothy about King Jesus: “...God our Savior who desires that all people be saved!” That’s right! Our here-and-now stewardship of God’s Kingdom is to go forth with the Gospel of grace and make disciples of all nations...yes, to actively participate in God’s increase! So...

By the Word of God, we’re led by the Holy Spirit to grasp the biggest picture of all. Our stewardship of the Word, our personal gifting, our family, our time, and our money—that’s *all* to be directed toward increase, fulfilling Kingdom purposes! No matter our vocation—pastor, doctor, baker, candlestick-maker—we are offered the opportunity to steward and increase as part of God’s Kingdom purposes!

For eternal context, we would do well to be reminded of Job’s wisdom from the Old Testament—yes, this wisdom after so very much had been taken from him! “And [Job] said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’” (Job 1:21) So, duh, all that “in-between” after our birth and before our death is key!

And that’s all going to be manifested for believers when we go before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Yes, Christ will perfectly scrutinize our every action taken in this life...and those actions will either burn up or be rewarded for being a fruitful part of Jesus’ government. The fantastic rewards bestowed by Christ will surely be amazing for all those who actively take part in His multi-faceted increase. Yes, Jesus is the Great Steward of His Kingdom...and we are His under-stewards! That’s simply breathtaking!

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. When it comes to increase, do you tend more towards passivity or more towards increase when it comes to stewarding your money? Stewarding your gifting? Stewarding your family? Stewarding your time? Stewarding the Word? Explain.
2. Does your local church intentionally support increase in the local body's stewarding of each of these areas? Discuss each area.
3. Hannah in the Old Testament totally dedicated her son to God. Early church believers were on board with stewarding needed resources to others. And the missionary journeys in Acts were the very essence of helping steward souls into God's Kingdom by proclaiming the Gospel of grace. But—take a step back and consider: over the past several decades, has the American church been successful overall with her stewardship of the good news of the Gospel of grace? And the stewardship of loving their neighbors? Whatever your thinking, be specific in your examples.