

A Theology of Thrift



Jerald D. Johnson

Foreword

My friend, Rev. Don Walter, is responsible for this booklet. He suggested that someone ought to write on a theology of thrift, adding that the material should be directed principally to clergy. This sentiment reflects his sphere of responsibility as director of Pensions and Benefits USA in the Church of the Nazarene. I accepted this challenge and have attempted to give the subject my best thoughts.

For several years, I have been concerned about the welfare of those who serve as ministers of the gospel. Not only am I a preacher, but the son of one as well. Also, my daughter and her husband are both ordained ministers. Although it may appear that my concerns are self-serving, I really don't believe this is the case.

In my second pastorate, when I was not yet 30 years of age, a leading layman in my church asked me a startling question. "What are you doing to prepare for retirement?" I replied that I was still paying on a pledge I had made at my previous pastorate, and that retirement was probably the furthest thought from my mind.

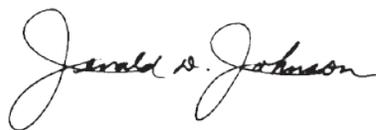
I felt my response was rather humorous. The layman didn't think it was funny at all. He was serious. He proceeded to guide me into a modest investment that in no way

would detract, time-wise, from my calling. Likewise, if the investment didn't materialize as one would hope, there would be no embarrassment to me or the church. In fact, no one really needed to know about it.

The guidelines I learned then were valuable, and I am convinced they are valid ones for all ministers to follow today. In fact, I am now convinced that these are basic principles of personal money management that have universal application. That's how I have found it possible to talk to ministers in other countries about financial security.

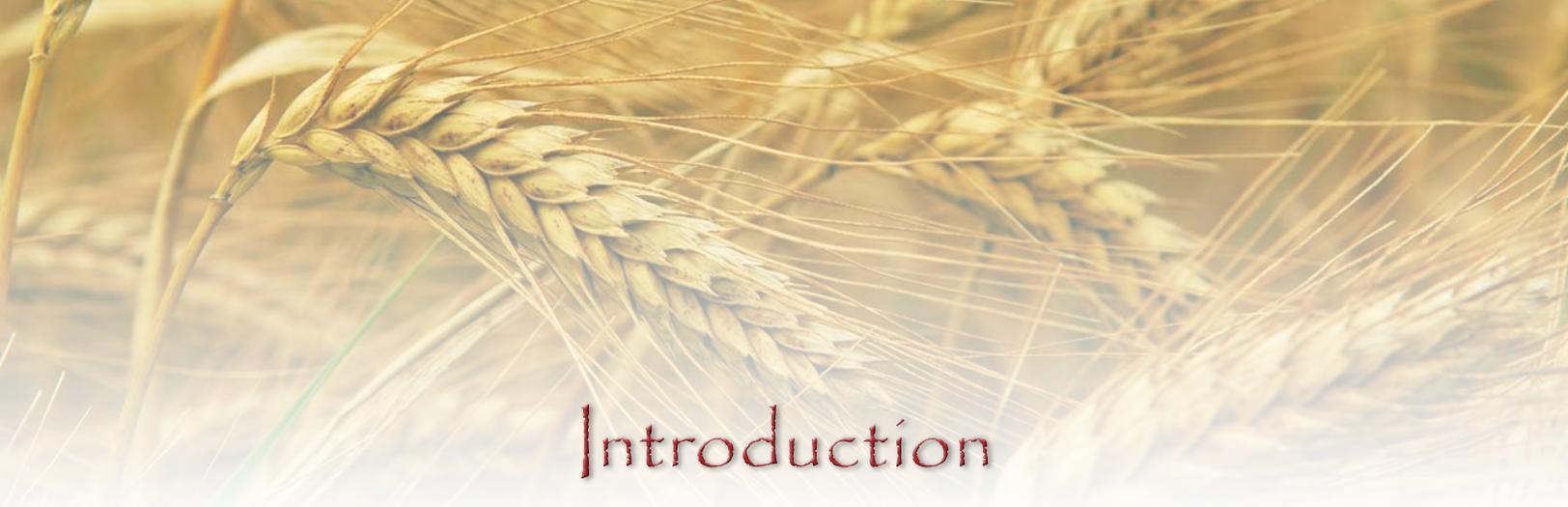
With all of this in mind, I decided I would place my thoughts on paper, under the suggested heading, "A Theology of Thrift." To my friend, Rev. Don Walter, I say thanks for the idea. I hope that some of what I have written will assist my ministerial colleagues and their families. I believe God wants them to be at peace as they travel on to eventual retirement from active service. Perhaps the thoughts I share here will help achieve this.

Jerald D. Johnson



General Superintendent
Emeritus





Introduction

Is God concerned with the subject of thrift? More importantly, should ministers and preachers of the gospel spend time dealing with personal money matters? Doesn't it detract from obedience to a divine call? Doesn't the call to ministry imply obedience to "leave all and follow Jesus"—to leave nets on the boat, put hands to the plow, and take up the cross?

These servants give their best. They serve sacrificially, and the years slip by. It doesn't take long to live a lifetime. Advancing years suggest retirement is imminent. Physically and emotionally they are ready; but financially, retirement appears impossible.

Nagging questions begin to challenge the minister's own faith, among them: "Will my denomination be there to support me when no local church is there to do so?"

The reality is that many ministers need support. When that support is absent or inadequate, we tend to panic and are tempted to fault someone. Husbands may blame wives; wives may blame husbands; both blame the church; and family members join in the chorus. The long awaited retirement that should bring satisfaction and reward is fraught

with anxiety and uncertainty.

Where is justice in this? The human spirit, so resilient and restorative in days gone by, is strained to its limit. Feelings of self-pity emerge with questions like: "Did it have to end like this?" "Could it have been different?" "What went wrong?"

The Old Testament says "go to the ant... consider its ways and be wise!...It stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest" (Prov. 6:6-8). On the other hand, Jesus says, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'...your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt. 6:31-34).

A "theology of thrift" requires a search for God's thoughts on economic matters. The

God, who provides
and meets our needs,
is not required to wait
until we face a crisis
to meet those needs.

Proverbs clause and the one from Matthew appear to counsel opposing actions, yet both are attributed to divine inspiration. Does God's word contradict itself here?

I believe the directive here is not "either-or," but rather "both-and." Although

ministerial service does require certain sacrifices, God, who provides and meets our needs, is not required to wait until we face a crisis to meet those needs. He can prepare us ahead of time.

The great Old Testament story of Joseph illustrates not only this possibility, but forms the basis for a theology of thrift. Six major components in this narration stand out as principles to guide our understanding of a theology of thrift. They are:

1. Divine directive;
2. Guidance sought;
3. Advice heeded;
4. A community cooperated;
5. Thrift modeled; and
6. Future secured.

Genesis 41 contains the story. The setting is Egypt. Joseph, the young son of Jacob, has been sold as a slave, taken to Egypt, away from his home and his family, and unjustly imprisoned.

While Joseph is in prison, Pharaoh has two dreams—one about cows and one about grain. Although Pharaoh seeks understanding of these dreams, none of the wise men of Egypt can interpret the riddle. Then Pharaoh is told of a young prisoner named Joseph who can interpret dreams. Pharaoh sends for the prisoner to come and stand before him.

The story continues with verse 25:

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has

revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. The seven lean, ugly cows that came up after they did are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.

“It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

“And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.”

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?”

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you” (Gen. 41:25-39).

Principle #1

DIVINE DIRECTIVE

From time to time, the news media reminds us of the power of El Niño. The phenomenon occurs every few years when trade winds shift in the Pacific Ocean. This shift drives warm equatorial water against the coast of South America and displaces the cold currents from Antarctica that usually wash the coast.

In certain areas of South America and on up the Pacific coast as far as Northern California, the people were warned to brace for possible flooding, mud slides, drought, and crop failures. Furthermore, changes in the Pacific affected the Atlantic causing drought in parts of Africa and diminishing India's life-giving monsoon rains. In the face of all these warnings, prudence demanded preparation wherever possible.

In Joseph's time, Egypt had no way to predict such drastic weather changes. God, however, wanted people to be aware of what was to come, so he communicated a directive to help an entire nation around a

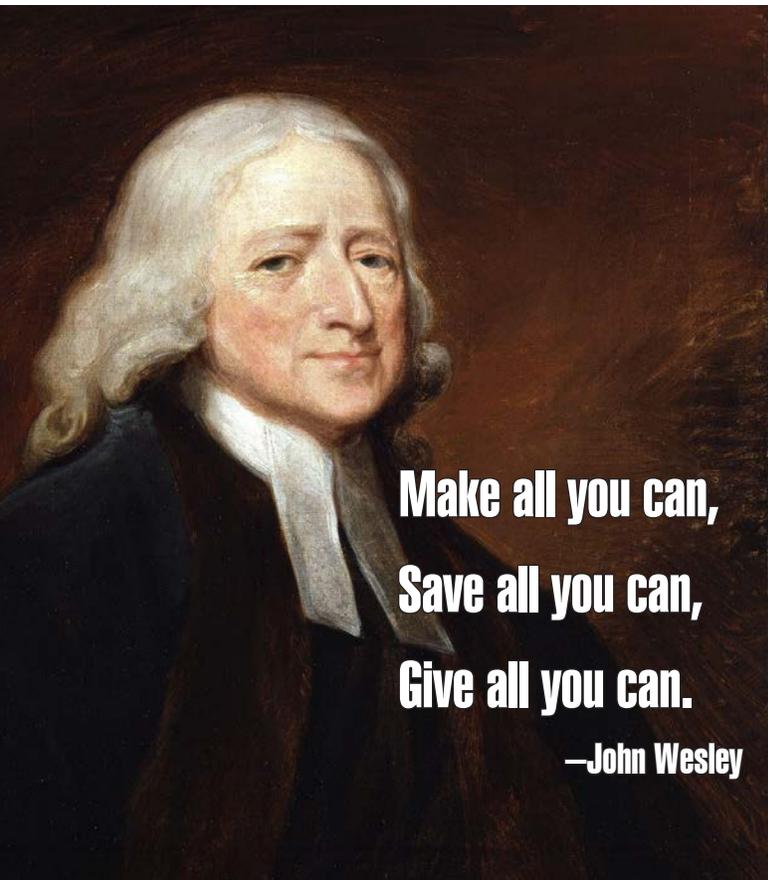
The bottom line to all Joseph said was simply, "Prepare."

major economic catastrophe. As His warning, He used two dreams He gave to Egypt's Pharaoh—dreams that needed interpretation. Through God's providence, Joseph was available at the right time to explain their meaning.

The bottom line to all Joseph said was simply, "Prepare." Egypt had seven years in which to do so. They couldn't waste time. They had to begin immediately. If they wanted to survive, they would have to heed God's directive.

Reminding ourselves of what Jesus said in Matthew 6, we might conclude that seeking first God's kingdom includes preparation for tomorrow as well as for today. Therefore, the one who seeks first the kingdom does not need to "worry about tomorrow," for God has already prepared for the events of tomorrow.

In his sermon, "The Use of Money," John Wesley admonishes us to *gain* all we can, *save*



**Make all you can,
Save all you can,
Give all you can.**

—John Wesley

all we can, and *give* all we can. Are these comments contradictory? Should a sincere preacher of the word focus on gaining and giving, but pay no heed to saving? Many would suggest there is nothing left over to save, so the contradiction is no problem for them. Is it really true, however, that there is nothing left over to put aside for a future time?

Many of the poorest of preachers proclaim and practice the principle of tithing. This is as it should be. If a pastor is able to turn back to his or her church 10 percent in *giving*, couldn't that same pastor consider another 10 percent in *saving*? If not 10 percent, then how about at least setting something aside for the future?

We hardly need a bad dream to alert us to the eventual crisis of being too old or infirm to carry on in active ministry. Some, however, have not taken time to prepare for the inevitable. For them, a warning in a bad dream would be welcome compared to the nightmare they experience in coming to the end of active ministry with too little set aside to provide for retirement.

God directed His message to Pharaoh. Preparation for the future was prudent and proper for him and Egypt. How much more so, for those of us who serve God, is it prudent and proper to prepare for the future? Much of the future cannot be perceived and for

this we need not worry. But some of it *can be anticipated*, and for this we should prepare so there will be no worry.

The young minister starting out need not delay—indeed, should not delay—setting aside funds for the future. With a lifetime ahead, it would be a pity to wait until limited time places impossible demands on resources. How much better to put aside \$5, \$10, or \$25

a week now than to try save \$100, \$200, or more a week in the last few years of active service.

The Pharaoh of Egypt had but seven years to prepare. He would need all of them to be ready for the succeeding seven. If there were to be eight, nine, or even more subsequent years of famine, then seven abundant years hardly

The young minister starting out need not delay—indeed, should not delay—setting aside funds for the future.

would be enough.

None of us knows how many years of retirement we should plan for. Despite graphs, charts, and family medical histories, there still is no way we can foresee the future. The divine directive would indicate that plans be made early to avoid worry. John Wesley's counsel makes a lot of sense (cents?) even today.

God's instruction to Pharaoh was to prepare for the future by saving now. God's concern for your tomorrows could prompt Him to direct you to begin a program of saving, even if it's a small amount. Begin doing so now if you haven't already started.



Principle#2 GUIDANCE SOUGHT

Pharaoh sought someone to interpret his dreams. Had he wrestled with them himself, likely the famine would have come and destroyed his nation. Wisely he chose to search for someone to help him understand what was going to happen. He learned there would be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine.

The interpretation included counsel to use the seven years of plenty to prepare for the seven years of shortage.

Unlike Pharaoh, preachers far too often fail to seek outside financial counsel. This may be an attempt to protect the ego. Probably, however, it's because they themselves are called upon constantly for advice in so many different areas. Some even may feel they have all the answers. Yet, Proverbs 12:15 reminds us "a wise man listens to advice."

Pharaoh was smart enough to know he needed help. When he couldn't get answers close by, he turned to a foreigner—a prisoner! The young man's interpretation seemed logical, prompting Pharaoh to trust him further.

Like Pharaoh's own counselors, who failed to deliver good information, there are financial advisers to be avoided. Distance particularly needs to be kept from those who offer ways to make big money in a hurry.

Ministers need to be especially wary of "get rich quick" schemes. A minister's basic spiritual commitment may be the main cause of vulnerability at this point. After all, almost every minister makes financial sacrifices to serve Christ. Some may reason that, had God allowed, surely he/she would have been free to follow another career path where income would have been greater. Thus, the reasoning continues, God has provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to the poor preacher to compensate for all he or she has missed. In blind faith, the minister gets involved and, more often than not, the results are tragic.

An impulsive response to money schemes is, in reality, the same as that of many gamblers. They figure there is a quicker, easier way to achieve financial security. Wise people remind us, "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." Joseph said there would be only seven years in which to

A wise man
listens to
advice.

prepare for the next seven. There would be no time to waste. Preparation would require all seven—no shortcuts or quick fixes.

Pharaoh chose to pay attention, and he began to plan accordingly. He trusted Joseph's interpretation of the dreams God had sent. Why not trust him further? Obviously, the young interpreter of dreams understood much more about planting crops and reaping harvests than did Pharaoh. He also knew how much grain would be needed and where to store it for the coming famine.

Since preachers generally are schooled in disciplines other than economics, they should seek financial counsel from experts. Many laypersons have knowledge that would be invaluable to their pastors. Of course, ministers must be willing to listen and make use of the information they receive.

Granted, there may be pitfalls in seeking aid from individuals within the congregation. Some church members are cautious—even reluctant—to give financial advice, and for good reasons. Unfortunately, some preachers have ulterior motives, seeking not only advice, but money from parishioners. Borrowing money from laypeople rarely, if ever, can be justified. Likewise, asking for handouts from laypeople for personal reasons is taboo.

In addition to lay consultants and other experts, Nazarene ministers in the United States have available to them Pensions and

Benefits USA—an entire staff of people knowledgeable in such matters as retirement, taxation, housing, and compensation. The linkage between P&B USA and Fidelity Investments provides additional valuable resources for retirement planning—at no cost to those who participate in the Nazarene 403(b) Retirement Savings Plan.

When Pensions and Benefits USA took the initiative of encouraging Nazarene ministers to enroll in Social Security, a few felt they

could do better another way. The retirement years may find these individuals woefully short for having listened to someone else.

Our people in Pensions and Benefits USA have no vested interest to protect. They receive no commissions. They simply are servants of the Church who are well-versed in the field of clergy finance, and

focused on the welfare of Nazarene ministers. This in itself is reason to trust them.

They reminded us over and over that the Basic Pension would not be adequate to meet retirement needs. They used the expression “safety net” to describe the Basic Pension and Social Security benefits together. To this, they added the counsel, “Enroll and *participate* in a tax-sheltered annuity.” They then proceeded to set up one of the finest 403(b) programs anywhere.

Those who took their advice seriously generally have faced retirement with the confidence Pharaoh and the Egyptians had

There are situations where, because of forethought in planning their own future, even retired ministers have enough to share with others.

going into the seven years of famine. What Egypt set aside proved to be enough not only for its citizens, but for surrounding nations as well. There are situations where, because of forethought in planning their own future, even retired ministers have enough to share with others.

Happy is the pastor who is able to continue a life of serving and giving, even financial giving, on into the years of retirement. Of course, this comes only by spending time in preparation, seeking sound counsel when needed, and putting it into practice.

Principle#3

ADVICE HEEDED

Who was Joseph to provide advice to the ruler of Egypt? Whatever else one may think of Pharaoh, we must concede he was a wise and thoughtful leader. It's a big person who will take time to listen, read, and test what others have to share, and then proceed to act. As already noted, ministers are called upon to be advice-givers in many different areas. We're spiritual counselors, but often we also are called upon to be marriage, financial, even political counselors—or whatever else may be sought by people both in and out of the church. Consequently, a minister may be tempted to shy away from personally seeking advice. Finding help, however, should not be viewed as a sign of weakness. For Egypt's Pharaoh, it proved to be both his strength and the economic salvation of his nation.

There is danger only if the wrong advice is followed. Steps must be taken to avoid this.

Testing “get rich quick” schemes will show God not only has nothing to do with them but, for moral and ethical reasons, they do not fit into His plans whatsoever.

Another area of vulnerability is governmental obligations. The minister is never excused from paying taxes, whether income tax or Social Security. Some argue Social Security is going to run out of money, and that eventually no one will receive benefits. Of course anything is possible, but it isn't likely the Social Security system will go broke. Politicians understand they have constituents who count on the government program being there to assist them in retirement. It is more probably they will do



what they can to assure this happens.

Others argue they could invest their money elsewhere and gain larger returns than those provided by Social Security. This may or may not be true, but the record of those who avoided paying Social Security taxes suggests it is not a sound pattern to follow. Again, there are moral and ethical implications. If a church, as a part of the pastor's financial package, pays a Social Security allowance and gives it directly to the pastor, then that minister is morally obligated to make the payments to the government. Tardiness in meeting deadlines is hardly excusable. Also, late payment penalties make delays expensive.

The "Josephs" in Pensions and Benefits USA encourage all ministers to keep up with Social Security payments and to make them on time, and they continue to encourage local churches to help their ministers with this obligation through a Social Security allowance. Of course, this means Social Security benefits become part of the minister's financial security at the time of retirement.

Because ministers in the United States are allowed to exclude proper housing expenses from the salary package for income tax purposes, future retirement benefits for the minister may be better than his or her lay parishioners may otherwise expect. Distributions from the Nazarene 403(b)

Retirement Savings Plan may be designated as housing allowance, thus qualifying as tax-free for federal and state income tax purposes.

As vital as a church's financial obligation toward its minister is its contributions to the Pensions and Benefits Fund. In recent years, turbulent economic conditions have

hurt many American families and, likewise, giving to the church. No one understands this better than pastors. But pastors also understand the need to help one another.

From the beginning of the General Board of Ministerial Relief in 1919, Nazarenes have pulled together to help their pastors. In those early days, it involved each minister sending a dollar a year, along with 10 cents per church member,

to provide an emergency fund. Today, each church's P&B Fund allocation remains important in assuring benefits are available for more than 14,000 active and retired ministers and widowed spouses.

Payment of the Pensions and Benefits Fund provides not only funding for retirement benefits, but also affords some "extras" for U.S. Nazarene ministers. For example, Emergency Medical Assistance assists with medical needs that have not been covered by other sources. Requests for this assistance are channeled through a minister's

Distributions from
the Nazarene
403(b) Retirement
Savings Plan may be
designated as housing
allowance, thus
qualifying as tax-free
for federal and state
tax purposes.

district superintendent and advisory board. This benefit alone has been a blessing to many of our pastors—active and retired.

Payments to the P&B Fund also provide eligible ministers and spouses with basic group term life insurance coverage at no cost, as well as basic long-term disability coverage. All that is required is for a pastor's church to contribute at least \$1 annually to the P&B Fund. In addition, P&B USA makes available supplemental group term life insurance and long-term disability coverage at favorable rates.

As stated before, payment of the Pensions and Benefits Fund primarily provides funding for retirement benefits. It still maintains the promises made under the old Basic Pension Plan. The amounts payable in retirement benefits are based on a defined formula and years of qualifying service that are still accruing for grandfathered active participants.

Information is available from Pensions and Benefits USA to determine exact projections on pension payments.

As of January 1, 1996, this Basic Plan gave way to the new defined contribution plan—today's 403(b) Retirement Savings Plan. Payment of the P&B Fund also provides resources for these retirement accounts for each eligible active minister. Again, it's important that churches and their pastors contribute additional funds to their 403(b) accounts.

These accounts are maintained with

Fidelity Investments. An added benefit of this relationship makes the multitude of investment/retirement helps made available online and at local Fidelity offices. This is where a minister would be wise to follow the pattern set by Pharaoh, who unashamedly and wisely heeded the assistance of others.

Information available from Pensions and Benefits USA is worthy of *full* consideration. Carefully followed, it will allay unnecessary anxiety regarding one's financial security at the time of retirement. They will recommend that your strategy includes more than Social Security, the Basic Pension, and the base

contributions made to your Nazarene 403(b) account. They will urge you to make periodic contributions to your retirement account and to consider the various investment options wisely.

Their advice is informed, and is based on time-tested economic principles. Additionally, P&B staff, as well as members of

the Board of Pensions, have a deep desire to serve the servants of our church.

For persons who are apprehensive about making decisions about stocks, Fidelity Investments offers Fidelity Freedom Funds®. All you need to do is select the year that most closely matches when you plan to retire. The asset allocation strategy for each fund increasingly grows more conservative as the time of retirement approaches. While no investment is guaranteed to grow, these funds offer an option based on reasonable financial standards.

For persons who are
apprehensive about
stocks, Fidelity
Investments offers
Fidelity Freedom
Funds.



Principle #4

A COMMUNITY COOPERATED

The standard of cooperation set in motion by Joseph led to success.

For seven years, the land produced plentifully (Gen. 41:47) because many, many farmers throughout Egypt worked together, and God blessed their efforts. The cities provided storage for the grain as it grew and was harvested. The total effort resulted in “huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea.” In fact, the entire venture was so successful that even keeping records of it became impossible (Gen. 41:49).

It would be difficult for a minister to prepare for the future if it were not for the cooperation of many people and agencies. The Nazarene 403(b) Retirement Savings Plan offers opportunity for effective cooperation. Pensions and Benefits USA makes valuable contacts and establishes working relationships with experienced financial institutions on behalf of Nazarene ministers. Consequently, the best of resources are available to plan participants.

Of course, on the local church level, a

pastor serves a congregation. In turn, the congregation is privileged to serve its pastor. Cooperation is carried out in agreements made between the church board and the pastor. Such agreements include salary, housing, expense reimbursements, and employee benefits—not the least of which is funding the retirement plan.

The church and the pastor both do their part. Contributions are matched, deductions are made, and payments are sent on time. The pastor has a right to expect that kind of cooperation from the church, but cooperation is a two-way street. The church has a right to expect comparable participation from its pastor. The “we really do need each other” principle works, but only if it *is worked*.

The pastor shouldn't wait on the church board to take the initiative. Like church members who undoubtedly give attention to financial matters at their places of employment, pastors should give attention to financial matters where they serve.

The attitude by some that financial sacrifice is expected of ministers simply because they are preachers may carry into church situations. Thankfully, such attitudes are changing—although it's still true that a minister's total compensation package often falls short of what it ought to be. Falling short of what it *ought* to be and what it *can* be may be two different matters.

There are churches that are stretched to the limit with their finances. In these instances, ministers, more often than not, are willing to make the necessary financial sacrifices in order to help the church balance its budget. Yet there is reason to believe that many churches, claiming a shortage of funds, could have more if the members carefully exercised

principles of personal stewardship. This is where cooperation may enhance the situation.

Pastor and parishioner alike must practice tithing. If they don't, the church treasury will be low. The pastor's commitment to 10 percent has a way of inspiring people to follow the example. Normally, if a congregation is a tithing church, it will be generous when it comes to compensating the pastor.

Community cooperation creates an

environment for developing and expanding church programs without stress and strain. Note what Joseph was able to achieve. Because of careful planning and thrifty diligence, the day came when Egypt had plenty while neighboring nations suffered. If Joseph's

The pastor's
commitment to
10 percent has a way
of inspiring people to
follow the example.



story is any indication, then God's people need but follow principles of thrift to have enough, while those who do not will suffer.

This applies to those in the ministry. Indeed, there can be dignity—even honor in poverty. The Bible calls us to look upon the poor with mercy and compassion. Some ministers may find themselves in such a plight through no negligence on their part whatsoever.

Usually, such carelessness reflects lack of cooperation on all fronts. It's not just between the church board and the pastor; it also may be that there is a lack of cooperation in the pastor's family to assist with meeting necessary financial goals. This kind of working together requires someone to assume leadership, and if the pastor does not take charge at this point, then the spouse ought to do it. The overseer (pastor), according to 1 Timothy 3:4, must manage the family well. This includes financial management.

One credit card between a minister and spouse is probably a maximum. If you have a credit card, then pay the bill in full each month. Usually, this enables you to avoid interest charges.

If credit cards can't be resisted, then the scissors treatment may provide the best solution. Avoiding credit card abuse also demands discipline in ignoring the many offers for new and different cards which flood our mail boxes. Initially, interest on those cards may be less, but it doesn't take long for the card company to demand more—usually *much* more.

The best solution to family financial

The best solution
to family financial
constraints are
budgets worked out
between husband and
wife.

constraints are budgets worked out between husband and wife, and even with the children when appropriate. The family leadership sets the example and then requires cooperation from all. Frugality, financial discipline, and careful planning all have their rewards. They remove strain from the family circle. Furthermore, they

provide a strong foundation for long-range planning.

As someone said, it doesn't take long to live a lifetime. All things being equal, the years roll by and retirement is upon us. How reassuring is it for those who have learned and practiced financial responsibility before the first "fixed income" check arrives.

Cooperation is an important key to success in these matters.

Principle#5

THRIFT MODELED

Paul urged Titus, “In everything set them an example” (2:7). Without knowing it, Egypt, under Pharaoh and Joseph, set an example for us by proving the value of thrift. Egypt’s abundance in a time of great need did not happen because of careless and profligate spending during the years of plenty. Rather, for seven years, they carefully laid in store all they could.

Some cultures allow members of an older generation to lean on the succeeding generation for security in their old age. This explains some cultures’ seeming obsession with having as many sons as possible; however, the concept is not how Paul envisioned it. “After all,” he said, “children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children” (2 Cor. 12:14).

This ideal is not always possible. Circumstances could reverse the responsibility. When it’s necessary, children should do what they can for their parents, and, hopefully, do so gladly. Most parents welcome a return of the love they gave freely for their families. Yet, if this burden can be eased through careful planning by the parents themselves, placing this responsibility on the next generation may be avoided.

Besides the tangible

rewards to being thrifty, there are intangible ones as well. Not the least of these is the opportunity to model stewardship to a new generation, thus assuring perpetuation of the concept. Occasionally (and fortunately only occasionally), children of ministers criticize the church for the bad financial plight in which their parents find themselves. Some even have gone so far as to take their own tithe and use it to support their parents, feeling justified to do so, since “the church failed them.”

When this takes place, one almost can be assured the generational sequence of tithing will be broken. Perhaps it *was* the church’s fault, but perhaps it wasn’t. Who is to judge? How much better to address the problem earlier in life than to wait for a critical moment. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7), and this grace of giving is available to all—even ministers.

Cheerful giving has a way of influencing others with feelings of joy. A pastor who enjoys giving will inspire a church to do the same. This often is seen in the pattern which

follows pastors in allocation commitments. If the budgets of a church were paid where the minister served previously, one may rest assured budgets will be paid at the



Meaningful giving
does not necessarily
mean sizeable giving.

pastor's next assignment.

Meaningful giving does not necessarily mean sizeable giving. The widow who gave her two mites was recognized by God. Some, we are told, are responsible for ten talents, others are responsible for five, and some just for one. Here is the biblical principle of giving: "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor. 8:12).

One cannot really give the widow's mite, or tithe the one talent, unless there is a commitment to do so. This commitment leans on an inventory of one's resources, and this requires time and attention. It is logical to include an assessment of one's future planning in such an accounting. By so doing, one more easily might encourage future generations to practice biblical principles of stewardship.

The burdens of ministry are great and, in

the minds of some, practicing and modeling sound financial principles may add to them. However, there is reason to believe that, if one simply will take what one has, carefully administer it, including portions belonging to God now and an amount to be used by God's servant later, it will lead to a certain amount of contentment in service which might not otherwise be obtained.

All of this points to the need for one simply to live within one's means. Thrift modeled will be emulated. The surrounding nations must have learned great lessons from Egypt during the seven years of famine!

Again, the Pensions and Benefits USA makes its resources available to every Nazarene minister in the United States. They are available to help you meet the biblical challenges of planning and thrift. Jacob and his sons took advantage of the resources made available to them and found answers to their needs. The example was followed. Provision was ample, not only for them but for their children as well (Gen. 50:21).

Let it be said that Nazarene ministers take advantage of the resources available to them, enabling them to set examples of thrift and stewardship not only to the denomination they serve, but to their own families.



Principle#6

FUTURE SECURED

Everyone knows that a global or national financial calamity could alter everything I have said. The financial meltdown of 2007-2008 represents just such a disaster. While giving to the church at every level declined in the

Whether there is a financial crash or not, one should not be burdened with unpayable debts.

aftermath of this meltdown, contributions have stabilized, and, as of this writing, giving continues to improve. In fact, 2012 was a year of record giving to the P&B Fund. While we praise God for this outpouring, we acknowledge that the legacy of giving displayed by generations of Nazarenes continues to be passed along.

Regardless of what happens in the future, basic biblical

principles of thrift remain valid. For example, whether there is a financial crash or not, one should not be burdened with unpayable debts. Reasonable loans to provide housing and transportation do not necessarily fall into this category, as long as one makes purchases based on a sound assessment of the ability to repay the loans.

The jury may still be out on school debts. Unfortunately, many young ministers continue to enter their first pastorates with huge amounts owed to educational institutions. Christian ethics require the repayment of these loans. Perhaps adequate counseling at some point would have helped, but regardless, the bills must be paid.

The big problem for many students is that they choose to incur a large debt before they consider how they will pay it. Consequently, they become mired in debt without the means for paying that obligation. It would be a great benefit if churches, when calling pastors, would inquire about college and seminary financial

obligations, and

offer to assist with payments as long as the pastor remains with them.

This could be the best solution of all. At any rate, school bills are a part of the total picture and, even



with the gloomiest of economic forecasts, one should think carefully and prayerfully before cutting short educational preparation for ministry.

When it comes to both housing and transportation, discipline must be applied and caution exercised. Is it possible to get by with one car instead of two? For just about any minister, three cars would surely eat up the budget. When it comes to housing, whether renting or buying, calculate thoroughly and adequately so that monthly payments are not oppressive.

Would it do disservice to the scriptures to substitute words such as “car” or “house” for the word “tower” in Luke 14:28? Jesus said, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30).

Here’s the bottom line: borrowing for necessities demands prudence and careful budgeting. Ministerial families should live within a budget, and do so without a covetous eye on what others may have. This goes for planning future retirement as well.

It’s reasonable to believe a minister may not have as much in retirement as, for example, a neighboring professional who had a greater income during the working years.

Yet it’s amazing how many preachers actually retire better off than some of those neighbors. There are logical explanations for this. Their lifestyles were different. Most ministers avoid costly divorces with heavy alimony and child support. They commit themselves to clean living, protecting themselves from costly habits. A simpler lifestyle provides simpler tastes which are more easily satisfied. Likewise, their spiritual commitments keep their material wants to a minimum, while their basic needs are met.

Add to all of that the joy ministers have in giving and serving—joy which carries over into old age. Because of all of the above and more, they are able to continue serving and reaping the accompanying joys and blessing. Robert Browning expressed it beautifully. “Come grow old along with

me, the best is yet to be.” It bears repeating one more time that life is very short. The Christian steward’s retirement planning is for a brief time when compared with the length of life itself.

Our Christian faith assures us that we live not for one world but for two. Heaven is our goal. Therefore, we do not store up for ourselves “treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.” Rather we store up for ourselves “treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19-20).

For that brief time called retirement, we

Ministerial families
should live within a
budget, and do so
without a covetous
eye on what others
may have.

have options available that may allow us to continue our lives of stewardship and service right up to our last breath here on earth.

When Joseph brought his father and brothers to Egypt to live, they knew it wouldn't be forever. Their ultimate goal was to return to Canaan. In the meantime, however, they "acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number" (Gen. 47:27). Retirement is not a time simply to quit and say, "It's all over." It's a time of change, but it has the potential of being a time of productivity as well.

As long as there is health—mental and physical—there is service to be rendered.

The minister deserves happy and joyful retirement years. May it be so for all of God's faithful and loyal servants. If pastors will plan, prepare, and set aside what they can now, then it just might be so.

*E'en down to old age all My people shall
prove
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable
love;
And when silver hair shall their temples
adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My
bosom be borne.*