

Are You Prepared for Disaster?

By taking just a few simple steps of preparation, Christians can not only save countless lives, we can also truly be “salt and light” for the world when crisis hits

After New York City's World Trade Center was bombed in the 1990s, a man who worked in the Twin Towers planned an escape route for himself should a similar disaster occur again. When a plane struck his building on Sept. 11, 2001, the man was trapped on one of the floors above the point of impact. Heeding the warning and following his predetermined plan, he was one of the few in that section of the building who made it out alive.

This man's preparedness helped to save his life. Instead of being reactive when crisis hit, he was proactive because he had a plan and had prepared himself for whatever came his way. Sadly, that's rarely the case. I'm always amazed that just before disasters, when warnings are given days in advance, such as with hurricanes, the majority of people have to go shopping for emergency supplies that should have already been in place at home. The supplies may be gone and shelves empty within a few hours.

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, for example, many in New Orleans did not heed the warnings or develop a plan for handling a break in the levees. The possibility of such a breach had been discussed for years before the disaster occurred. Yes, there were governmental snafus, but individual preparedness could have resulted in a lower death toll. Proverbs 27:12 says, “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it” (NIV).

For Such a Time as This

In the nearly three decades I have spent in medical missions, I have traveled to 105 nations and have gained a unique perspective on world events and human suffering. As a physician, I have organized and led medical teams in a number of major world disasters since the early 1990s. From cyclones devastating Bangladesh, to the refugee camps created by the Rwandan Civil War, to hurricane-ravaged Nicaragua and Honduras, to tsunami devastation in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, and earthquakes around the world, I have been there. Leading teams into these areas of desperate need and destruction has given me the practical experience to now turn my attention to the United States.

I have recently had a sense of urgency to challenge and prepare individuals and churches in the United States to be ready for the disasters we are facing. There has been a tremendous increase in the frequency and severity of disasters over the past few years. Whether man-made or natural, the word *disaster* seems more and more a part of our lives. What is most disturbing to me as I travel and speak around the U.S., however, is that around 90 percent of people are *unprepared* for even common disasters.

At one conference, where first responders made up the majority of the audience, very few of them had actually made preparations for their own families. They were trained and ready to help others, but had neglected their personal preparedness. It reminds me of the story of the cobbler whose children had no shoes.

For some time I have felt the need to address the issue of disaster preparedness from a Christian perspective. Why Christians? Doesn't everyone need to be ready for emergencies? The answer is, of course, yes. However, those who believe in the God of the Bible, have a personal faith in Jesus Christ and accept that the Bible is true, have a unique worldview. Disasters give unprecedented opportunities for believers to be

“salt and light.” In times of crisis, Christians and churches can—and should—play a unique role in responding to those in need. The church is a natural haven of refuge in troubled times.

If You Cry “Wolf” One More Time

We are living in troubled times. Everywhere I travel people share with me a feeling of uncertainty and unease about the future. Many speak about the need to be prepared, but too few follow through.

One of many challenges I face when encouraging people to be prepared is the hysteria that swirled around Y2K for several years before Jan. 1, 2000, which left many people skeptical when no major problems occurred. For some people, it was like the story of “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.” However, I believe major disasters were averted due to the incredible efforts made to minimize any negative impact.

Just like the years before Y2K, there are concerns that the increase in disasters in America is related to the possible return of Jesus Christ. The Bible states graphically that there will be a period of increasing troubles on earth prior to the return of Jesus. There will be wars, famines, diseases, earthquakes and other disasters.

Many Christians believe God will spare them from the prophesied disasters by taking them to heaven (rapture) before the worst problems occur. This belief has hindered some Christians from taking practical steps for disaster preparedness.

Reputable prophets warn that the turmoil in the Middle East may break out into a full-blown war between Israel and its hostile neighbors before the end of this year. Other prophecies warn of international economic collapse and various natural disasters, including major earthquakes. Should these prophecies be accurate, there will be major worldwide economic

and governmental upheavals resulting in skyrocketing prices for essential goods with food shortages reaching catastrophic levels. Such events portend civil unrest.

I believe we have a window of time to get prepared now, before the end of 2012. I believe we are in a “Joseph situation.” He was instructed to prepare for a looming crisis. His actions saved not only Egypt, but also his family and surrounding nations, from starvation.

Ready or Not?

I challenge you to take immediate steps to be prepared to face emergencies and disasters, both natural and man-made. Too many people in the United States have grown accustomed to the idea that it is the responsibility of the government—local, state or national—to take care of emergencies or respond to disasters. For most disasters and emergencies, this works out just fine. But as Hurricane Katrina vividly demonstrated, when hundreds of thousands of people are affected at one time, the normal emergency structures are overwhelmed and the state of individual preparedness becomes crucial. If you are prepared, you will often be in a position to help your family and neighbors and not be a drain on rescue efforts.

If you have not prepared for emergencies and disasters, you have an increased likelihood of becoming a victim who will need assistance. When major disasters strike, it may take days before rescue teams can reach you. Your preparedness may make the difference between life and death. *Be prepared. Don't be a victim!*

Horses or Zebras?

During my medical training my professors taught me how to diagnose various diseases. When faced with a difficult case, I was advised to think first of what was most common and consider that diagnosis. They would also ask, “When you hear hoof beats behind you, do you think of horses or zebras?” The

answer is, of course, "Horses." Horses are the common disasters and the zebras are the uncommon and man-made disasters.

Some basic principles apply to most emergencies. In fact, if you plan ahead for what I call "normal contingencies," you will often find yourself taking the same steps you would take if preparing for a disaster. When planning for potential disasters, think practically. Anticipate what natural disasters you are most likely to encounter. Approach preparation from a standpoint of doing the prudent thing, not from a basis of fear.

Good planning will help relieve much anxiety. Be ready to handle disasters common to where you live, such as fires, flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, thunderstorms, extreme cold, extreme heat, etc. (horses). If you are prepared to respond to these common disasters, then you will most likely be better prepared to face man-made disasters, such as water pollution, toxic waste spills, arson, nuclear plant malfunction or even terrorism (zebras).

Once you have identified the types of hazards you are most likely to encounter, go over each of the hazards and review, discussing matters at age-appropriate levels with your family. Make sure everyone understands his or her role if specific assignments are given to different family members. Include other common hazards even if you do not specifically run a high risk where you live. Most people travel and may face hazards while away from home.

It's impossible to address every aspect of how to prepare for crisis in a single article. Because of this, I highly urge you to get a copy of my book, *When All Plans Fail*, which goes into detail about disaster preparation from a Christian perspective (including a 21-day action plan). For this article, however, let me stress some of the most important steps you should take to be ready for disasters. The top four are water, food, money

and grab-and-go bags.

1) H2O: What You Need to Know

Having sufficient safe drinking water available is at the top of the list for essential life and health in time of crisis. One half to one gallon per person, per day is needed. Either the water needs to be stored or you must have access to fresh water and have the ability to purify and/or filter available water should the water be contaminated. Water purification capability is essential. In addition to boiling water, there are a number of water filtration systems, tablets and solutions that will purify contaminated water.

2) Don't Get Caught With Your Pantry Down

The second priority in preparation is having adequate food on hand. A minimum of two to four weeks of food should be stored in your home, though I recommend three to six months if at all possible. Rotate your food supplies to prevent food being outdated. Store what you eat and eat what you store.

Various food storage options include bulk foods (whole grains, dried grains, beans, etc.), dehydrated foods, commercially canned goods, peanut butter, MREs (meals ready to eat) and freeze-dried foods. Some freeze-dried foods can be stored for more than 20 years. Don't forget to include a manual can opener. For whole grains, obtain a manual whole-grain grinder. Have at least three days of food in your grab-and-go bags at home and in your vehicles. Don't forget baby and pet foods. Also consider gardening and home canning.

Plan ahead to make sure you have thought through on how you will cook your food should you lose access to your normal means of cooking. There may be power outages, flooding and even limited access to fire wood. Alternative cooking options in emergencies include charcoal grills, camp stoves, candle warmers, fondue pots, campfire or fireplace cooking and solar cooking.

3) Cash Is King

The third priority is having enough money on hand to cover immediate expenses in the event of a crisis. In times of disaster or evacuation, ATMs and cash registers at stores may not be available due to loss of power. Have at least \$500 stashed at home in small bills (ones, fives, 10s and 20s). You don't want to pay for a \$5 item with a \$100 bill. Keep a full month's expenses at home if you can afford to do so.

4) Grab-and-Go Bags

Grab-and-go bags are needed at home, in vehicles and at the workplace. Specific recommendations are too lengthy for this article and will vary somewhat from person to person. Before waiting to get all your "ducks in a row," at least have a bare-bones emergency bag. Recommended items include: portable water purification system, water purification tablets or liquid, flashlight (small, waterproof), whistle, small first-aid kit, good walking shoes, work gloves, strong cord or rope (550-lb test, min. 30 ft), multi-tool, waterproof matches, duct tape, bandage scissors and extra money.

9-11, 911, 91:1 (The Secret Code for Believers)

Developing a keen sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is a part of disaster preparation. I heard of an incredible story relating to the time when the I-35 westbound bridge into Minneapolis collapsed in 2007, tragically causing 13 deaths. There could have been many more.

I was forwarded an e-mail with the testimony of a Christian young man who was within 100 feet of the bridge just before it collapsed. He said he had experienced a vision of the event before it happened. He felt as if the Holy Spirit was telling him to "stop." He obeyed.irate drivers behind him honked their horns. Some tried to drive around his car at first, until the bridge suddenly gave way before their eyes. People went up to him afterward to thank him for stopping.

It's amazing to think that the lives of others may be so

greatly affected by our sensitivity to hear from the Lord, especially during times of disaster. It is an awesome responsibility to remain spiritually sensitive for the protection of our family, our neighbors and ourselves.

The wisdom of being prepared for foreseeable difficulties—natural or man-made disasters—is obvious. Paying attention to seemingly minor details can make a major difference. And as a physician, I know only too well the truism that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

The numbers 9-11 instantly conjure up in everyone’s mind the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City on , 2001. With interest I note that when we have an emergency we are instructed to dial 911. For believers, we have our own emergency code: Psalm 91:1. “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

We are facing daunting days ahead in our nation and around the world. I encourage you to seek the face of the Lord with renewed intensity to prepare yourselves and your families for the days ahead.

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