

Are You Prepared for Disaster?

By taking 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. How many times have you seen people right before a major storm shopping for emergency supplies that should've already been in place at home—even when warnings have been given days in advance? As a result, many of these people are left in a store helplessly staring at a row of emptied supply shelves.

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, for example, many in New Orleans didn't 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've 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've spent in medical missions, I've traveled to 105 nations and gained a unique perspective on world events and human suffering. As a physician, I've organized and led medical teams in 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 Indonesia, to earthquakes around the world, I've 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 currently have a sense of urgency to challenge and prepare individuals and churches in the U.S. to be ready for the disasters we are facing. The increase in the frequency and severity of disasters—whether man-made or natural—over the past few years is undeniable. Yet what is most disturbing to me as I travel and speak around the U.S. 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 and accept that the Bible is true, have a unique worldview. Disasters give unprecedented opportunities for believers to be "salt and light" (Matt. 5:13-14). 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” Once More

We live 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 the challenges I face when encouraging people to be prepared is the “been there, done that” attitude. This is particularly true in light of 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. The Bible states graphically that there will be a period of increasing troubles on earth prior to His return—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 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. 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. Too many people in America have grown accustomed to the idea that it’s 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’ll often be in a position to help your family and neighbors and not be a drain on rescue efforts.

If you haven’t prepared for emergencies and disasters, however, 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?

So what do you need to do to be prepared?

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. And in this case, horses are the common disasters and the zebras are the uncommon or man-made disasters.

A few basic principles apply to most emergencies. In fact, if you plan ahead for what I call "normal contingencies," you'll often find yourself taking the same steps you'd take if preparing for a disaster. When planning for potential disasters, think practically. Anticipate what natural disasters you're 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'll 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've identified the types of hazards you are most likely to encounter, go over each of the hazards and review them with your family, discussing matters at age-appropriate levels. Make sure everyone understands his or her role if specific assignments are given to different family members. Include other common hazards even if you don't 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 read 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 involve water, food, money and grab-and-go bags.

1. H2O: What You Need to Know

Having sufficient and safe drinking water available is at the top of the list for essential life and health in time of crisis. One-half to 1 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 or filter available water if it's 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 ensure you've considered how you'll cook your food if 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 (\$1s, \$5s, \$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. But 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 (at least 30 feet, and strong enough to pull 550 pounds), 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 once heard an incredible story related to the I-35 westbound bridge collapsing in Minneapolis in 2007. Though tragically 13 people died, there could have been many more.

According to an email I received, there was a Christian young man within 100 feet of the bridge just before it collapsed. He said he'd experienced a vision of the event before it

happened. He felt as if the Holy Spirit was telling him to “stop,” and so he obeyed.irate drivers behind him honked their horns, and some tried to drive around his car—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’s 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” (NIV).

We’re 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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