

# FaithLink

Connecting Faith and Life

## Preppers and Faith by Laura Brekke



FEMA recommends that households have ten days of supplies on hand in the event of an emergency, but many “preppers” prepare for much longer. What are the benefits of preparing in advance for an emergency? What are the downsides? What role does Christian faith play in emergency preparedness?

FaithLink is available by subscription via e-mail ([subservices@abingdonpress.com](mailto:subservices@abingdonpress.com)) or by downloading it from the Web ([www.cokesbury.com/faithlink](http://www.cokesbury.com/faithlink)). Print in either color or black and white. Copyright © 2019 by Cokesbury. Please do not put FaithLink on your website for downloading.

### What Is a “Prepper”?

In 2018, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) changed its emergency preparedness recommendations to suggest that families should have ten days’ worth of food and water on hand instead of the previously recommended three days’ worth. This increase was made in light of more severe and prolonged hurricane seasons in recent years. For many American families, the very idea that you should have any stockpile of food and water may come as a surprise, but to those in the preparedness and survivalist communities, ten days is just a drop in the proverbial bucket.

*Prepper* is a term used for people who are serious about emergency preparedness and survivalism. This goes far beyond the ten-day kits encouraged by the US government. For many in the prepper community, anywhere from three months to a year or more of food, water, and other necessary supplies is the goal. Preppers stockpile not just nonperishable food and water but also water filtration systems, guns and ammo for defense, and a plethora of other gear. Some even make plans for alternative housing in case of a severe crisis.

For many preppers, disaster—natural or otherwise—is just around the corner, and being prepared for these emergencies isn’t just good advice; it’s a way of life. Self-reliance is an intrinsic value to the community, and many are skeptical that the government will provide any meaningful help in a disaster.

“For me and my wife, survivalism and preparedness is not the doom-and-gloom mindset that kind of drove the

genre in the past,” Brad (full name not given), the creator of Full Spectrum Survival, told VICE news and multimedia company. “For us it’s more of a methodology of preparedness and independence that we live by.”

**REFLECT:**

- Have you heard of preppers before? What did you already know?
- Do you have emergency supplies on hand in your home? Have you been in a situation when it would have been helpful if you had them?
- What role can Christian faith play in being prepared for disasters?

## More Than Just Doomsday

In 2012, National Geographic Channel launched *Doomsday Preppers*, a reality show featuring different American families preparing for end-of-world situations. The show focused on people prepping for highly specific scenarios—like the collapse of the power grid or extreme civil unrest—often with state-of-the-art technical gear, an assortment of armaments, and well-supplied lodgings for their small crew. This image of the rugged survivalist is popular in the media, especially among far-right communities who stress self-reliance at all costs, but it’s far from the only form of prepping.

Preppers can be found in all environments, from backwoods homesteads to urban condos. Cliff of Seattle (full name not given), founder of the Urban Prepper YouTube channel, says his concerns over the volatility of the tech industry led him into prepping. “For me it just seemed like the responsible thing to do, just like it would be responsible for me to have life insurance or to have auto insurance, or have us all on a medical plan,” he said in an interview with VICE. Having an organized stash of food and water is just the beginning. For urban preppers, learning the skills to help out in a disaster situation is key. Cliff agrees. “Why prepare for zombies if you’re not prepared to have a flat tire?”

But fear of an unknown future drives many preppers, both liberal and conservative alike. Con-

cerns about civil unrest, global climate change, and a deep mistrust of government can lead some preppers into panic. This anxiety isn’t just for online conspiracy enthusiasts. Even some of the wealthiest members of Silicon Valley are prepping. Many have purchased land outside of the city, and some have gone so far as to have corrective vision surgery specifically so they don’t require glasses in the event of an emergency. Steven Huffman, the mid-thirties CEO and founder of the website Reddit, is one such techie. “If the world ends—and not even if the world ends, but if we have trouble—getting contacts or glasses is going to be a huge pain,” he said in an interview with *The New Yorker*.

For Huffman, deep-seated anxieties around our societal structures have led him to stockpile food, water, and ammo. Most preppers recommend one gallon of water per person per day and a minimum of 2,000 calories of food supplies per person per day. “I think, to some degree, we all collectively take it on faith that our country works, that our currency is valuable, the peaceful transfer of power—that all of these things that we hold dear work because we believe they work,” Huffman said. “While I do believe they’re quite resilient, and we’ve been through a lot, certainly we’re going to go through a lot more.”

**REFLECT:**

- What social anxieties do you have about the future? Is prepping a good way to deal with these anxieties?
- What would a healthy Christian response to anxiety about the future look like?

## Prepping Faithfully?

On the other end of the spectrum, some are speaking out about the ways anxiety is affecting our larger community. Robert A. Johnson, a hedge-fund manager and economist, says that the constant talk amongst his peers of fleeing what they perceive as the disintegration of American society is irresponsible. “Twenty-five hedge-fund managers make more money than all of the kindergarten teachers in America combined,” he said.

Instead of running away from society's problems, Johnson argues, those with excess wealth should work to address problems like income inequality and underfunded public schools.

According to Johnson, you can't outrun society's ills. But you can use your resources to change them for the better, and that's as good or better than stockpiling rice and beans for an uncertain future.

This emphasis on doom and gloom can be counterintuitive to the Christian gospel of hope and resurrection. While there will always be uncertainties about the future, the hope Christians place in Jesus Christ means facing these uncertainties with boldness and not fear.

For some forms of the Christian tradition, prepping is an expression of Christian hope. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, commonly known as the Mormons) prepping for

disasters is a principle taught by the church itself. Called "Provident Living," members are encouraged to have a year's supply of food and water for each member of their families, in addition to a year's supply of financial resources. However, this large supply of resources isn't intended just for the families storing the food and water, but for the whole community. For the LDS church, being prepared for inevitable disaster means being better able to be a good neighbor in times of need.

*REFLECT:*

- How does Jesus' command in Matthew 25:40 to care for the least of these fit into the philosophy of prepping?
- Is stockpiling food, water, and emergency supplies the best or only form of prepping? What are other ways to prep for the future?
- What role does the hope of resurrection play in how you look toward the future?

## Core Bible Passages

Preparing for a disaster is part of the biblical narratives. For preppers, Joseph's preparation for the famine in Egypt (**Genesis 41–46**) represents a biblical story where thinking ahead and storing up supplies offered relief and stability to a community that otherwise would have been in crisis. This presentation of emergency preparation isn't about individuals, however, but about a community pooling resources (in this case grain) for seven years to prepare for a seven-year famine. These preparations, however, came from the governmental level rather than the local or familial level.

The Joseph story must be also held in balance with several of Jesus' teachings. In **Matthew 6:19-21**, Jesus warns against storing up earthly goods, and the parable of the rich fool from **Luke 12:13-21** warns about building oversized silos for grain and dying before you can use them. Earthly supplies can distract us from what's really important, and what may start off as preparedness can too easily slide into hoarding.

Christians must wrestle with what storing up treasure on earth means in relation to material goods like emergency supplies. While Joseph stored food for the multitudes, what does it mean for individual Christians to store up food or other supplies for themselves? Christians are called to be hopeful and not fearful. In a world where many people respond to the future with fear, we're told not to be afraid. As we consider prepping and the associated cost of earthly supplies, Christians must prayerfully engage these Scriptures.

*REFLECT:*

- What role does Christian hope play in emergency preparedness?
- Are emergency supplies earthly treasures? Why or why not?
- What witness does the Joseph story give us about prepping?

## Prepping in Luxury

While most preppers across America are middle-class folks working with limited budgets, there are some in the upper tiers of society with the means to secure high-end end-of-the-world accommodations. While New Zealand is a favorite international escape for the rich and prepping, there are also options closer to home.

Located outside Concordia, Kansas, the Survival Condo Project, as described by *The New Yorker*, boasts twelve full-floor apartments housed in an underground Atlas missile silo, originally used during the Cold War. The full-floor units all sold at \$3 million dollars apiece. With everything from an indoor climbing wall to a movie theater to a classroom ready for students, the Survival Condo Project is designed to meet all the needs of a small community—as long as you can afford the price. There has been such a demand that project CEO Larry Hall has already started work on refurbishing another silo and has his eye on four more.

According to Hall, the interior can support a total of seventy-five people and provides food and fuel for five years. By raising tilapia in fish tanks and growing hydroponic vegetables under grow lamps run with renewable power, the complex could theoretically function indefinitely.

### REFLECT:

- Disaster bunkers aren't new, and many have been around since the 1950s. How does the Survival Condo Project fit into the American disaster narrative?
- Why do you think there's such demand for this type of high-end bunker?
- Community is an essential component of the Christian life. How should Christians respond to these kinds of ultra-elite survival communities?

## United Methodist Perspective

The United Methodist Church is committed to responding to communities in crisis. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) operates domestic and international relief efforts to respond to natural and human-made disasters. UMCOR believes that “when disasters happen, it is local churches that provide the first response to their communities.”

Already this year, UMCOR has given over \$100,000 in grants to respond to spring storms. After a tornado decimated parts of Dayton, Ohio, McKinley United Methodist Church set up a water station to aid those affected. They gave away up to 3,000 cases of water to the devastated community, but saw even greater needs. “If you factor in the poverty rate of this city, which really hasn't recovered since General Motors left in 2008, you literally have people who went from desperate to desolate overnight,” Rev. Peter Edward Matthews of McKinley UMC said in a UM News Service article.

The United Methodist Church responds to natural disasters across the United States, from flooding in the Midwest to the aftermath of hurricanes in southeastern states to wildfires in California. Caring for communities is an essential ministry of the UMC. “Our new normal is [that] these areas are going to keep flooding for the foreseeable future,” Catherine G. Earl, director of disaster response and US partner relations for UMCOR, told UM News Service. “What that means to UMCOR and our partners . . . is a much more focused look at what we can do to move people out of harm's way.”

### REFLECT:

- Preppers often focus on individual survival. How does the UM response counter this focus?
- In what ways can your local congregation become involved in relief efforts?

## Helpful Links

- “The Purpose of UMCOR Relief Supply Kits” is a brief video (1:19) from the General Board of Global Ministries about UMCOR’s various relief supply kits: <https://youtu.be/8aDLCHO2wTQ>
- FEMA’s “Emergency Preparedness” recommendations:  
<https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4339/emergency-preparedness>
- FEMA’s Ready.gov website gives tips on making a plan for your family in case of a disaster and tells how to build an emergency kit:
  - » “Make a Plan” at <https://www.ready.gov/plan>
  - » “Build a Kit” at <https://www.ready.gov/kit>. (Please note: As of this writing, this webpage shows FEMA’s kit recommending supplies for three days instead of the newly recommended ten days.)
- *Emergency Preparedness for Natural Disasters and Extreme Weather: A Handbook for Churches* is an e-book publication from the United Methodist Insurance Company. It may be accessed at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website\\_UMI/Resources/documents/UMI-disaster-e-book-2018\\_FINAL.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_UMI/Resources/documents/UMI-disaster-e-book-2018_FINAL.pdf)
  - » Or request a free copy of the e-book (PDF) at [http://folio.umc.org/GCFA-41218\\_ebook.html](http://folio.umc.org/GCFA-41218_ebook.html)

---

*Laura Brekke is the Benfield-Vick endowed chaplain at Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia and an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (USA).*

---



Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/106609035052/> or at <http://www.facebook.com/faithlinkconnectingfaithandlife>.

## Next Week in FaithLink

Connecting Faith and Life

### Podcasts

by Jill M. Johnson

Over 60 million Americans listen to one or more podcasts on a weekly basis. What is the history of podcasts, and why is their popularity growing? How can online audio broadcasts be a resource for our spiritual formation?

FAITHLINK: CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE is a weekly, topical study and an official resource for The United Methodist Church approved by Discipleship Ministries and published weekly by Cokesbury, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2222 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., Nashville, TN 37228. Scripture quotations in this publication, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Common English Bible, copyrighted © 2011 Common English Bible, and are used by permission.

**Permission is granted to photocopy this resource for use in FAITHLINK study groups.** All Web addresses were correct and operational at the time of publication. E-mail **comments** to FAITHLINK at [faithlinkgroup@umpublishing.org](mailto:faithlinkgroup@umpublishing.org). For **e-mail problems**, send e-mail to [Cokes\\_Serv@umpublishing.org](mailto:Cokes_Serv@umpublishing.org).

To **order**, call 800-672-1789, or visit our website at [www.cokesbury.com/faithlink](http://www.cokesbury.com/faithlink).

## Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we join as a community that is fed by your Word. Help us to hear with open ears and hearts. Lift every concern and worry as we gather this day, that we may be fully present with one another and with you; in Christ's name. Amen.

## Leader Helps

- Have several Bibles on hand and a markerboard and markers for writing lists or responses to reflection questions.
- Open the session with the provided prayer or one of your own.
- Remind the group that people have different perspectives and to honor these differences by treating one another with respect as you explore this topic together.
- Read or review highlights of each section of this issue. Use the *REFLECT* questions to stimulate discussion.
- Ask:
  - » Who has emergency supplies on hand?
  - » What led you to have these supplies?
  - » Why might you decide to add them if you don't already have them?
- Watch the video from Global Ministries (see "Helpful Links") on the kinds of kits they store. Ask:
  - » How can your local congregation contribute to this ministry?
  - » Can having similar kits on hand at the church or in our homes be a form of ministry to your community? Why or why not?
- Discuss the FEMA recommendation to have at least ten days of food, water, and other supplies. Ask:
  - » Is this realistic?
  - » How might the church encourage this level of preparedness in your congregation and community?
  - » How does having a ten-day supply equip a Christian to serve others in the midst of a crisis?
- Close the session with the provided prayer or one of your own.

## Teaching Alternatives

- Invite a member of UMCOR or another local relief organization to come to your group and discuss relief efforts. Have your group brainstorm ways that your church can be a disaster response community. Before meeting, encourage members to make a list of disasters most likely to strike your region, and use that as a planning tool.
- Read through FEMA's "Build a Kit" online information (see "Helpful Links"). Have your group bring supplies and assemble kits together—even assembling extras for low-income members of your congregation.

## Closing Prayer

Holy God, you have called us to serve you with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. Equip us to go out into the world to heal what is broken, to bring hope in devastation, and to be a lamp in the midst of darkness. We pray this in the bold name of Jesus. Amen.