

"HALLELUJAH! THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO FOR BEING PREPARED
PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY FOR TRIBULATION AHEAD."

—PASTOR MARK BILTZ, FOUNDER OF EL SHADDAI MINISTRIES AND AUTHOR OF *BLOOD MOONS*

BE THOU PREPARED



EQUIPPING THE CHURCH
FOR PERSECUTION
AND TIMES OF TROUBLE

CARL GALLUPS

FOREWORD BY CHARL VAN WYK, AUTHOR OF *SHOOTING BACK*

PRAISE FOR *BE THOU PREPARED*

Across the earth, there is a growing sense that we are now rapidly approaching the last days. Now is the time to get ready. Pastor Carl Gallups' latest work draws upon his past as a police officer with his present calling as a pastor to give us a solid and well thought out action plan to prepare for what lies ahead. – JOEL RICHARDSON, *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, PREACHER, AND FILMMAKER

Be Thou Prepared is of paramount importance and could save not only your life, but the lives of your families and also many others. – CHARL VAN WYK, PASTOR, MISSIONARY, AND AUTHOR OF *SHOOTING BACK*

Carl Gallups has been given the ability to answer the questions that are silently in all our hearts these days ... *Be Thou Prepared* is a book that every ministry, every church, every Pastor or leader, every community leader, and every adult Sunday school should discover. – JIM BAKKER, HOST OF *THE JIM BAKKER SHOW*

Hallelujah! The first Christian manifesto for being prepared physically and spiritually for tribulation ahead. – PASTOR MARK BILTZ, FOUNDER OF EL SHADDAI MINISTRIES AND AUTHOR OF *BLOOD MOONS*

Be Thou Prepared challenges us to be ready for tough times ahead in America ... This is a must-read for all who see disturbing trends in America, especially for Christians, and want to be ready to defend sacred Biblical principles in a permissive and secular era. – DR. GRACE VUOTO, EDITOR OF *POLITICS AND CULTURE* AT WORLDTRIBUNE.COM AND HOST OF *AMERICAN HEARTLAND* WITH DR. GRACE ON WTSB AM 1080, RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

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In *Be Thou Prepared* Carl Gallups brings a refreshing level of peace and calm to the discussion which is much needed in a time when Christianity is under open assault and the call for God's people to "get ready" has never been so urgent. – MICHAEL D. SHOESMITH, AUTHOR, SYNDICATED WRITER, EXECUTIVE EDITOR OF PNN NEWS AND MINISTRY NETWORK

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DEDICATION

To Yahweh Yireh, my provider no matter the circumstances of life, and to His Son, Yeshua HaMashiach, my rescuer – my Savior and Lord. Also to the multitudes that have come before us who have suffered dearly and paid with their lives for the privilege and honor to bear the title Christian.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. – EPHESIANS 6:13

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail. – BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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FOREWORD

On July 25, 1993, I was sitting in a Sunday church service in Cape Town, South Africa. Suddenly the front door swung open. Terrorists strapped with automatic rifles burst in. Lobbing hand grenades into the congregation, they preceded to open fire.

Kneeling behind a pew, I drew my snub-nose revolver and returned fire, sending the cowardly attackers fleeing. The now-infamous Saint James Church massacre left eleven churchgoers dead and over fifty wounded. Without intervention, matters would have been worse. One of their leaders later admitted his desire was to kill every Christian present.

The reason I responded was because, by God's Grace, I'd sat in the church before and pondered over my possible reactions should such an attack happen. I knew that I needed to be prepared.

This is what Carl's book is all about: being prepared!

Carl didn't write this book to grind a political axe or tread familiar turf that political pundits debate on talk shows. Carl is an experienced, decorated Florida law enforcement officer, as well as a seasoned church leader with a great big pastor's heart. Not only has he confronted the criminal mind, but he has also consoled the flock. He has a heart for our Savior, loves people, and wants the best for them.

By contrast, a close missionary friend of mine flies into areas where tough men fear to tread. "Safety," he often says, "is overrated." Is he on a suicide mission? Not at all. He goes wherever he's called to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is willing to take risks to help the helpless, struggling, and marginalised of this world so that they can avoid an eternal disaster – a fate far greater than anything we can ever imagine on this earth – an eternity outside the presence of almighty God. But, be sure, his family back home in the United States is well taken care of.

Carl is likewise calling Christians to be prepared, not only for our own

benefit, but for the kingdom's benefit. The call has gone out in *Be Thou Prepared*: prepare for disaster, to provide for your family. "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). But also prepare for those you are going to have the opportunity to reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ when the time comes.

I cannot overstate how vitally important and timely this book is. You cannot ignore these pages; in them are not only the answer to physical but also to your spiritual well-being.

The Bible describes a tense time in Israel when the kingdom of Saul was going to be turned over to David. There was a need for great wisdom and discernment during those times. Two hundred leaders of the tribe of Issachar were singled out as men who understood the times and knew what to do. "And the children of Issachar," wrote the ancient prophet Ezra, "which were men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). Carl is one of these men. We are living in a time of great need of intelligence and wisdom, and also skilful analysis. This I believe is what is made available in this insightful book.

Be Thou Prepared is not a book dealing with superficial ideas thrown together just for the lesson to be taught. Rather, it is full of real life examples of tragedies that real people, like you and I, have lived through and were determined to overcome. This book is meant for prayerful and practical application. Prayer must be used as a launching pad for action rather than an excuse for inactivity. It's of paramount importance and could save not only your life, but the lives of your families and also many others who have not understood the times and readied accordingly.

Your decision to read this book is a decision to act – the first essential step in a serious encounter. Waste no time to enjoy the read; get a copy in the hands of friends, family, neighbors, and other church groups, and

build strong relationships as you network together, preparing for the future.

– CHARL VAN WYK, MISSIONARY AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SHOOTING BACK: THE RIGHT AND DUTY OF SELF-DEFENSE*

INTRODUCTION

BE THOU PREPARED

The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty. – PROVERBS 22:3

“IT HAPPENED BEFORE. IT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN!”

That is how a now-famous resident of New Orleans, Louisiana, known as Zeitoun, ends his harrowing true story.

Most people could never guess how his bizarre story actually began.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina plowed through the Gulf Coast, with its most destructive fury reserved for the city of New Orleans. On that fateful day the city’s massive levee system was breached, and wave upon wave of frothy water rushed into the city and the surrounding area, flooding homes and turning streets into deadly canals and every low spot into a potential death pit. Some places were over twenty feet underwater.

The levees had been designed to withstand a Category 3 hurricane. Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast as a Category 5. Over 80 percent of New Orleans was submerged. Within days, normal societal living collapsed – right in the middle of one of America’s oldest and most celebrated cities.

Those blessed to have survived the ordeal found themselves living in an upended and surreal world, immediately devoid of justice, protection, government, laws, and, much less, simple matters of respect and day-to-day human decency. Food and clean water were at a premium.

Emergency medical care was nonexistent. The chances of living until the next day became questionable, even doubtful, for many. Just a few days

before, life had been completely “normal.” Now, the city resembled a third-world war zone.

Several days before the storm hit the Gulf Coast, Zeitoun had sent his wife, Kathy, and his children to stay with relatives in Texas, saying he would stay behind to protect the family’s home and personal property. He never dreamed he would soon be caught in a nightmare ... one that haunts his family to this day.

In the days of the storm’s aftermath, Zeitoun paddled his old canoe, which had miraculously survived the storm, through the deadly street canals, seeking to offer assistance to neighbors who might be injured, stranded – or worse.

Predictably, Zeitoun discovered plenty of people in need. He found them clinging for life to any object they could grab. Some were floating in the water; others were injured, hungry, and sick. He helped however he could, rescuing a Baptist pastor and his wife and even allowing a stranger to live in his home for shelter. He is credited with saving or rescuing at least ten people who were in desperate need. “God left me here for a reason,” he said. “I did what I was brought up to do.”

Then, six days after the storm hit, his life took an outlandish twist.

Zeitoun was on the phone, in his own home, talking with his brother, who lived in Syria. Suddenly, the front door burst open, and a group of men dressed in military fatigues and bulletproof vests leveled M16s and automatic pistols at him. They demanded Zeitoun’s identification papers. He explained to them that he was in his own home and that he was a city resident and a business owner. That did not seem to matter.

Soon Zeitoun found himself under arrest and carted away in cuffs. He was taken to a government holding facility that had been constructed using a Greyhound bus terminal. He was placed in a fenced holding cage. Eighty armed military guards equipped with assault rifles and security dogs surrounded him and the other “prisoners.”

Zeitoun was kept incarcerated at the bus station and was allowed no

phone calls. Meanwhile, his wife, Kathy, went into a state of deep despair. For two weeks she received no word from her husband. She concluded that he probably was dead.

Finally, on September 19, Kathy learned of her husband's detention when she received a call from a missionary who told her he had seen Zeitoun in prison.

Zeitoun was imprisoned for almost a month before he was finally released on seventy-five thousand dollars' bail, for having "looted" his own house. Eventually the charges were dropped.

Kathy has since been diagnosed with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including memory loss and dizziness. She says, "Katrina was a great reality slap. I was naive before – I felt I had things under control. But I've come to the conclusion that I don't control anything. I'm in control of nothing."

When a reporter from the UK's *Guardian* asked Zeitoun if he feared another Katrina scenario, he replied, "It happened before. It could happen again."¹

The final death toll of Hurricane Katrina was 1,836. Today, 705 additional people are still reported as "missing."²

ARE WE REALLY PREPARED?

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:42, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (NASB). When He gave them that command, He was warning His followers to *always* be prepared. The context, of course, was that of addressing the timing of the Lord's eventual return. However, it is in the day-to-day living and watching for the Lord's return that a life of "being prepared" must be lived. Two thousand years of *living life* has occurred since Jesus gave the first disciples that instruction.

The members of the early church, even while it was still in its infancy, soon learned of their need to protect one another, provide for one

another, and minister to one another's basic emergency needs. From the first days of their existence as a church they faced situations of hunger, physical persecution, and even natural disasters. We are descendants of that early community of believers. The legacy of preparedness is our responsibility to faithfully carry on.

Multitudes may never come to Christ as Savior and Lord unless we have first sheltered them or fed their starving bellies or clothed their freezing or naked bodies. Is the church prepared to meet those needs?

In the meantime, this fallen creation continues to groan in anticipation of the coming of the Lord (Rom. 8:22), and sometimes its "groans" result in astounding devastation – inflicting human misery and societal challenges and upheavals.

QUESTIONS

Crisis scenarios present themselves to the church, and individual families, on a regular basis. Is the church prepared to bring relief in those instances of destruction and dire emergency? An equally important question might be: are the families that make up the body of Christ prepared to weather those storms themselves?

Does the church really need to spend its precious resources preparing and planning for tough times, or should it simply "trust in God"? Is it not somehow a demonstration of a lack of faith to be concerned with making provisions for emergency situations?

What is the church's biblical responsibility in meeting the needs of the world around it? Should the church take the place of government benevolence programs? Are not these federal social programs at least part of the reason we pay our taxes in the first place?

Should not the church be more focused on winning the lost than on implementing "social programs"? And, what about the church's responsibility to *take care of its own*? Should not these considerations come first? Indeed, these are important and valid questions. Individual

church congregations, and even entire denominations, still grapple with these concerns, and these are not the only important questions. There are many more like them.

How far should today's congregations go in providing security during worship services and other meetings? Should a church "arm" itself – with individual members making up a "security team"? Is it going too far to have visible, armed, uniformed law enforcement officers on the church grounds during services and church events?

Should a church (or a Christian family) overly concern itself with making "survival prepping" plans for emergency situations or what some disparagingly call "doomsday scenarios"? Can a church sustain its gospel outreach ministries and extended missions efforts while at the same time conducting expensive social assistance ministries and benevolence programs?

SHOULD WE PREPARE?

There *are* biblical responses to all of these questions. There is also a biblical balance as to how we should implement the responses. The experience of the early church provides us with several models of response that we will examine.

To the foundational question of, *Should the church make common-sense preparations for unforeseen emergencies and the possibility of tough times to come?*, the biblical answer is a resounding "Yes!" There simply is no escaping this truth.

There are two prevailing reasons for this. First, it was the hallmark of the early church not only to prepare for tough times but also to actually minister effectively in those turbulent days. Secondly, prudent preparation is a part of a normal person's everyday life. After all, do we not prepare and think ahead in practically every other area of our life? Of course we do. Why should the church body be any different?

Consider the following: Do you wear a seatbelt when you drive? Do

you strap your children in as well? Do many of our homes have burglar alarms, smoke alarms, and fire extinguishers? Do a number of church members also have some means of personal protection or home protection, sometimes even owning and carrying firearms? Do you carry a spare tire in your car?

Do you possess all manner of insurance policies? Do your doors have locks on them? If you live in an area prone to natural disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods), do you have a plan in place in the event of such emergencies?

If you answered yes to any, or all, of these questions, why in the world do you do these things? Why not simply “trust in God” in each of these matters? The truth is, in our everyday activities of living, we are in a constant state of preparing, planning, and protecting.

IS PREPARATION A MEASUREMENT OF FAITH?

Of course, as believers, we should “trust in God.” That should be a *given* among His faithful children. After all, the next beat of our heart and the next breath we take belong to Him. We must “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7 KJV) because, in the final analysis, we have no guarantee of another moment of life. Yet it is God Himself who, through His Word, emphasizes the wisdom in planning, thinking ahead, and preparing – especially making preparations for ministering to the needs of others and for the possibility of tough times to come.

The issue is not a matter of having “enough faith” or “trusting God”; it is a matter of *faithfulness* to God’s clear instructions in His Word – especially when it commands us to be faithfully prepared and when it also demonstrates how preparedness has been carried out among His people down through the ages.

So really the question is not so much, “*Should* we prepare?” The focus should be on the question, “*How* should we prepare?”

How should today’s church effectively and biblically prepare to take

care of its own, as well as the world around it? What is the church's responsibility in times of crisis? How should we respond to terrorism, natural disasters, disease and pestilence, war, homelessness, hunger, financial destitution, and the many other issues of suffering and tribulation faced by people who may be in our congregations or just outside our doors? Should we "store up" for tough days ahead? Should we make plans and preparations for direct persecution or an attack on our specific congregation?

There are additional considerations that could potentially affect all of us. What about the possibility of a war coming to our own soil? This is a horrible thought, to be sure, but many countries of the world live with this distinct possibility every day. September 11, 2001, should have taught us this lesson – or have we forgotten already?

Imagine those living in today's Israel (always under constant threat) saying, "I have made no preparations for my family. We have no food, water, or other emergency supplies. We will just trust in the Lord." Would you not consider them to be abdicating their God-given responsibilities to provide for their families? The Bible proclaims that a person who does not *provide* for his or her family is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). And providing for ourselves and others, especially in emergencies, takes *preparation*.

Consider that in Old Testament times, Joseph warned Pharaoh of the coming drought and famine because the Lord had first revealed to Joseph the impending disaster in a dream. Joseph helped Pharaoh plan ahead and lay up food and supplies for the coming days of natural disaster. God even used Pharaoh's preparations, under Joseph's leadership, to provide for the family of Jacob, who eventually migrated to Egypt to survive the years of famine (Gen. 41, 45–46). By faithfully making these plans and preparations, Joseph spared millions of lives, and the Lord ultimately received the glory for it all!

Similarly, more than four hundred years later when the Israelites

were leaving their captivity in Egypt, under Moses' direction, God had directed them to prepare for the journey ahead of time. Amazingly, He had instructed the Israelites to ask their captors for supplies! Something supernatural happened in the process when God's people were faithful to follow the Lord's command:

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me."

The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise," they said, "we will all die!" So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered [richly received from] the Egyptians. (Ex. 12:31–36)

Next think about Nehemiah, who, while leading God's people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem during the Persian captivity, also instructed his workers to *arm themselves* in order to protect their families and their labors from enemy attacks. "I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places," wrote Nehemiah, "posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows" (Neh. 4:13). They were fully prepared to defend themselves if need be as they worked to complete their assignment from God.

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. (Neh. 4:13)

In the New Testament, the Lord sent several prophets to warn the brethren to prepare for a soon-coming, widespread famine. History records the literal fulfillment of this prophecy around AD 46. And it was most severe in and around Jerusalem.³

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27–30)

Notice how the church immediately took action. They apparently divided up the tasks according to their individual abilities, took up love offerings of assistance, and arranged for the safe delivery of their assistance packages.

The early church fervently preached that the fellowship of believers must provide for the needs of its own. But they were *also* to faithfully minister to the needs of the world around it. Consider these verses:

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 John 3:17–18 NASB)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress. (James 1:27)

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15–16)

A MULTIFACETED APPROACH

Reflect upon the many ways in which the early church took measures to meet people's needs: through special collections, the feeding of widows, dividing responsibilities among its members, assisting one another in times of persecution, and so on. Eventually, the early church even developed a network of support, not just to their local congregants but also to all Christians across the regions of the Roman Empire. They did this through offerings of love, managed and distributed by faithful emissaries, so they could more effectively support one another and the unprepared world around them.

The examples of the early church and the ways they might apply to

the modern body of believers are numerous, and we will explore many of them.

We will also talk honestly about the increasing persecution being leveled at the church – *worldwide* – but especially the calculated targeting of the church in the United States. We will deal with the sometimes-controversial issues of church security measures, Christians arming themselves, and “turning the other cheek” scenarios – and the biblical and practical responses to each.

We will also examine sensible, logistical measures that churches and families can take in making emergency preparations and in the planning of how to minister to others within the body of Christ in all manner of situations and trials. In addition, we will explore the importance of churches being thoroughly prepared to wisely impact the world *outside* its doors – the world to which we are charged with the responsibility of showing the love of Jesus Christ.

Even if one never needs to implement disaster procedures, think of the life lessons and biblical ministry example that will be displayed to your children and perhaps carried on through them as a family legacy in the years to come. Your biblical measures of preparing, love, thoughtfulness, and ministry to others will not return void.

Relax! Let not your heart be troubled. This is not a scaremongering book. It was not written by a wild-eyed, shaggy-bearded survivalist dressed in camouflage and eating tree bark while slurping down wiggling, slimy grubs.

Rather, it is written by a longtime senior pastor and a former Florida law enforcement officer. I also happen to be a husband, a father, and a grandfather who cares deeply about the future welfare of our nation as well as the future of America’s churches.

Most important, this book was written for Christians, members of the body of Christ, brothers and sisters in Jesus, wherever one might live or worship.

We live in remarkable times, in biblically stirring times, and, in many ways, in increasingly perilous times. As the Lord issues the command to His people, “Be thou prepared!”, we must be ready to faithfully respond, “*All that You have spoken, we will do!*” (Ex. 19:8).

TRUTH POINTS

- ❑ Planning ahead for potential disasters and crisis situations is not a sign of faithlessness. Rather, it is the wisdom to be faithful with what God has entrusted to us.
- ❑ Even if one never needs to implement disaster or emergency preparation procedures, the very act of planning for them creates an atmosphere of integrity, thoughtfulness, and life lessons for others.
- ❑ The act of planning, thinking ahead, and aggressively preparing for the potential of tough times is a specifically biblical and godly activity in which each church and every Christian family should be involved.

Knowing what to do, for the sake of good, but not doing it, is *sin* (see James 4:17).

PART I

PREPARING THE SOIL

“... TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED”

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.... it was distributed to anyone who had need. – ACTS 4:32, 35

Pastor Sumiyoshi said, “Jesus asked me [in my dream], ‘Are you evacuating?’”

For Sumiyoshi, the question from this numinous experience reminded him of what Jesus had asked His disciples just before His crucifixion: “Will you abandon me too?” Pastor Sumiyoshi told his interviewers, “Those reminders led me to make my own decision to remain in my community.”¹

“People were saying, ‘The nuclear power plant is very dangerous,’ or, ‘We will have another tsunami.’ I asked myself, ‘*To whose voice shall I listen?*’” Pastor Sumiyoshi said he decided to listen to the overwhelming voice of God and not to man’s voice. “I learned this one thing,” Sumiyoshi related, “That is the challenge to us about our own faith.”

The date was March 11, 2011. The earthquake measured a magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale. The seismic catastrophe set off a resulting tsunami that ferociously slammed Japan’s northern coast and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. On March 12, the plant began to spew sizable amounts of radioactive material over the once-serene landscape. Fukushima became the largest nuclear disaster since the Chernobyl meltdown in 1986. Almost a million people were driven from their homes by the disaster, including nearly one hundred thousand who instantaneously were forced to evacuate to a location about thirteen

miles away from the doomed nuclear facility. Japan, one of the strongest economic powers of the world, was instantly crippled for the first time since World War II.

WHEN THE CHURCH ECLIPSES THE GOVERNMENT

“Nearly 20,000 people were killed, and hundreds of thousands more became homeless by nightfall,” wrote Soohwan Park of the 2011 disaster. What was the response of the body of Christ to such a horrendous and nightmarish disaster? In the July 2013 article “Redeeming Disaster in Japan,” *Christianity Today* reported:

Within 24 hours of the earthquake, local churches, agencies, and relief groups started to mobilize thousands of volunteers from more than 80 nations.

More than two years after the triple disaster, the Christian level of engagement in the disaster zone remains significant. There is no precedent for this kind of faith-based effort after natural disaster in Japan’s 2,000-year history.

After his dream, Sumiyoshi and his wife decided to stay and serve their community. His small local church, Nakoso Christ Church, started serving a few thousand people in a remote town that was overlooked by big agencies and government services.

The relief work by local churches is occurring in the context of the government’s painfully slow response....

Only 1 percent of Japanese claim Christian faith. Among Christian leaders, Japan has the stigma of being “a hard soil to plant the gospel.” That soil may have loosened since the disaster.

The world’s churches, filled with the love of Jesus Christ, mobilized. They took seriously the biblical principle that was in practice in the first-century church: ministering to those who are struck with disaster, to anyone as they have need. As a result, the work of the prepared church eclipsed that of the Japanese government, one of the wealthiest of the world’s governmental systems.

Once again, humanity saw the amazing ministry power of God’s prepared people, a phenomenon that began almost two thousand years earlier.

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH – PREPARING THE SOIL

From the time the church was birthed by the Holy Spirit in downtown Jerusalem, the nascent body of believers was faced with the task of caring for its members as well as the community in which it existed. They were consistently looking for ways to “loosen the soil” of the ministry fields around them. They understood that by following the example of Jesus Himself, they could more effectively cultivate the unbelieving world to hear the gospel message. Apparently, the duty of human benevolence ministry was never a question of “should we?” Rather it was largely a matter of “how do we do it?”

There were few, if any, monolithic government welfare and insurance programs in the early days of the New Testament church. There were not yet any “church networks” upon which to draw. For quite a while, there was just the one church – and the power of the Lord.

Particularly important to the early church was the care of those in emergency or natural-disaster survival situations and, at times, those suffering out-and-out persecution.

TRUTH POINT

Sometimes the gospel is a difficult seed to plant, especially in certain types of soil. However, ministering first to the needs of the people who live in that tough terrain is often the way to loosen the soil! This was a premier lesson learned and put into frequent practice by the first-century church.

Hunger, financial concerns, widowhood, regional famine, and eventually imprisonment, executions, and the scattering of persecuted believers were all problems facing the first-century church and found within the pages of Acts and the historical records of the time period that Acts represents. And the book of Acts closes with the church barely

three decades old! Yet, central to the story of the early church was its consistent emphasis on meeting the needs of the hurting people within the body of Christ as well as those outside its doors.

Also, let us not forget that the unfolding biblical account of redemption clearly reveals that the same Creator of the universe who sent His own Son to suffer for our salvation, also proclaimed that His followers would not be free from suffering while living and ministering in this fallen earthly existence. Jesus was clear in communicating this inescapable truth, along with Paul, Peter, James, John, and most of the other writers of the New Testament. They had much to say about the necessity of the body of Christ taking care of its own, especially in times of intense need and suffering. The apostle Luke tells us that “all the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” (Acts 2:44–45).

REJECTED BY THEIR OWN

Early on, many of the church’s members were already beginning to suffer the consequences of breaking with their “Jewish tradition.” They were finding themselves in need of the basic necessities of life as they were being rejected by their families, communities, and synagogues. The church responded – immediately.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4:32–35)

REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH?

From the preceding two passages, some have argued that the early church was actually experimenting with a primitive form of communism.

On the one hand, the Bible is unambiguous – those who *have* should share with those who are in real need. Therefore, in the strictest biblical sense of caring for one another, a sort of *redistribution* is a valid part of living faithfully before God as a family of believers.

However, when the passage is read in its entire context, we discover the complete, and important, truth of the matter: When there was an emergency need among the people that was not being met, brothers and sisters in Christ sold their property, if necessary, to meet the needs of members of their church family. The early church, by and large, concluded that their responsibility to their brothers and sisters in the Lord, and even their neighbors in the surrounding community, was more important than their private ownership of property. Many of them were more than willing to sell what they had in order to come to the assistance of others. However, this also means that they retained ownership of their personal property *until a specific need arose*. This, then, led them without compulsion to sell that property to help someone else. Their giving was a matter of the heart, not a matter of “law.”

This truth is underpinned in Acts 5, when Peter clearly established Ananias and Sapphira’s absolute right to the ownership of their personal property and to do as they pleased with the proceeds of its eventual sale: “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold?” he asked them. “And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal?” (Acts 5:4).

It seems, then, that private property was most certainly held by members of that ancient society and even by Jewish members in the Jerusalem church. Thus, they did not literally, and at *all times*, “hold all things in common.” A hyperbolic method of stating an important truth was simply employed with those particular words.

The important thing to notice here, once again, is the unmistakable pattern of the early church – they were concerned with being prepared to meet the desperate needs of their fellow believers. They understood that this was an important part of the church’s holy calling and purpose,

so they developed plans for meeting those needs within the cultural confines in which they operated.

THE EARLY CHURCH ORGANIZES FOR ACTION

Even in the earliest days of the church, Christians struggled with strategic planning to meet the needs of the elderly among them, and especially the widows:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:1–4)

We know from the scriptures that the apostle Paul delivered gifts of financial assistance, donated by the outlying sister churches of the Roman Empire, to the church in Jerusalem. We further discover that when Paul was in prison (several times) as a result of his gospel ministry endeavors, individual Christians as well as entire congregations frequently made certain that his basic needs were being met.

Discussion concerning the apostle Paul’s collection for the *mother church* and its surrounding sister congregations at Jerusalem occupies significant portions of his letters (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8:1–9:15; Rom. 15:14–32). This collection of benevolence was so vital to Paul that he was willing to face hostility (Rom. 15:30–31) and was ultimately arrested in Jerusalem, at least in part because of his actions of generosity (Acts 24:17).

Observe the passion with which Paul carried out his mission of service to fellow Christians who were struggling through particularly tough times. Paul is here relating his testimony of his calling from the Lord and his subsequent visit with the elders at the church in Jerusalem: “James,

Cephas and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do” (Gal. 2:9–10).

Note James and Peter’s appeal for Paul to “*continue* to remember the poor.” This clearly indicates it was something Paul was already doing, apparently on an ongoing basis. If Galatians was written before the Jerusalem council spoken of in Acts 15, then this meeting with the elders more than likely occurred when Paul delivered aid from the church in Antioch to the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27–30).

Additionally, some of the non-believing Jews in the Jerusalem area ostracized, belittled, and severely persecuted some of the believing Jews. Many believers were no longer welcomed in proper Jewish society; often even their own family members rejected them. Some Jewish believers lost businesses, jobs, and important social contacts. During this time, there would have been dramatic increases in loan defaults, debt, and poverty among the early Jewish believers in Christ.

On top of all this – there was famine in Judea. Believers there desperately needed the support of the outlying congregations, and Paul was passionate about teaching the sister congregations about how to assist fellow Christians in times of severe need.

SHOULD THE WEALTHY FOOT THE BILL?

One website specializing in biblical hermeneutics gives the following interesting insight into the early church’s learning process during the time of Paul’s offerings for the believers at Jerusalem:

It was a common practice for the rich to take responsibility for ensuring the grain supply in times of shortage. Therefore, an expected practice for the Antioch community would have been for the leadership to develop a list of the wealthiest Christians in the city, and call on them for support. However, the church responded as a unified body, not relying upon the most wealthy to aid the church in Jerusalem,

effectively placing the responsibility of benefaction upon all Christians, and not just the wealthy. It should be noted, though, that *the response was by ability*, of which the wealthy would have had more.² (emphasis added)

Note that the response was based on “the ability” of each giver. The point was that each Christian had a biblical responsibility to give, with a cheerful heart, according to his or her capacity to do so. Observe how plainly Paul states this matter to the church at Corinth:

There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord’s people. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we – not to say anything about you – would be ashamed of having been so confident. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. (2 Cor. 9:1–10, emphasis added)

A MAN REAPS WHAT HE SOWS

Notice Paul’s reiteration of the general biblical truth that when God’s people make it a priority to minister to the needs of those around them – as well as those far away – the Lord promises to return the blessing upon those benevolent people. And this is the heart of missions giving and missions work: when we bless others, God blesses us so that we can continue to bless others!

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor. 9:6 NASB)

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (Gal. 6:7 NASB)

The main point of the preceding examination is that the early church was vigorously involved in meeting people's physical needs and faithfully and logistically ministering in dire times. The apostolic church considered "remembering the poor" to be among its most basic moral imperatives. They came to understand that the extent of a congregation's responsibility to help others is not always determined by how much need there is in one's immediate vicinity. They learned that there is an eternal biblical mandate for the church to participate in a comprehensive and networked expression of unity and shared faith – as well as a mandate to minister to those in need, both spiritually and physically.

This is a rich heritage and defining hallmark of the true church of Jesus Christ. A church that has faithfully prepared to minister to the needs of the hurting world around it is a church that is destined to reach the lost for the kingdom of God.

TRUTH POINTS

- ☐ The earliest apostolic church had no governmental system from which to draw resources, and for the longest time neither did they have a *network* of churches on which to lean. Neither of these facts stopped them from being prepared to minister to the world around them.
- ☐ The scripture is clear: a suffering-free life (in this world) is never promised to the born-again believer or even to the church family as a whole.
- ☐ The early church learned the importance of pooling resources and organizing around the various gifts of its members in

order to prepare to meet the ministry needs of its mission field.

- ❑ For decades, most of the members of the early church were Jews. Many of these Jews had been disowned by their families and friends, expelled from the synagogues, and had lost their jobs. Thus, the early church found that its largest mission field was often located among its own persecuted ranks.
- ❑ The early church considered its need to “remember the poor” to be one of its most basic moral and biblical imperatives.

PREPARING FOR THE OPPORTUNISTS

If a man will not work, he shall not eat. – 2 THESSALONIANS 3:10

I remember the gripping days of the beginning of the Gulf War, in January 1991, as if it were yesterday.

I was a thirty-five-year-old senior pastor at the time. With Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, there seemed to be consensus that, perhaps, something deeply spiritual was stirring in the Middle East. People who had not set foot in a church in years were now suddenly drifting toward worship services. Numerous churches reported a swelling of their attendance to capacity crowds.

CNN, the world's first twenty-four-hour news channel, barely over a decade old at the time, covered the US response to the Kuwait invasion live. It was the first such live-as-it-happened war coverage in television history. America's part in the war ensued on January 16, 1991. What would soon become the historic Operation Desert Storm was under way.

The next day, in retaliation for the coalition invasion, Iraq shocked the world by launching eight Scud missiles into Israel. On that same day, Jeffrey Zaun, America's first fighter pilot to be shot down in the Gulf War, was taken captive. His battered face was plastered all over our television sets and in our newspapers. The emotions of the American public were running high.

I recall that after several more American pilots had been shot down over Iraq, a young woman, with a small child at her side, visited one of our Sunday morning worship services. After the service, the woman sought counseling and related to the church leadership that her husband

had recently been among the pilots shot down in Desert Storm.

Our church is located in a military region. Naval Air Station Pensacola is just a few miles away – as are NAS Whiting Field, Hurlburt Field, and Eglin Air Force Base. Thus her story had an element of plausibility. A few distraught church members suggested we immediately take up a love offering for her in these *difficult* times. The church leadership and I suggested we wait until her story could be verified. Some thought we were being cruel. Our leadership thought we were being faithfully prudent.

Long story short: we eventually discovered the woman was faking the tale. She had no connection to the military whatsoever. She was playing upon America's heightened frenzy of the day for her own personal gain. She had set out to "game" the church, taking advantage of the ripe opportunity *and using her child as a prop*.

When I called other churches in our area to warn them of the ruse, to my heartache I discovered that the same woman had already taken advantage of several of those congregations, as she had been making her rounds from church to church, receiving "love offerings." The other churches were appalled to think that they so easily had been duped. But it happens all the time.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Do not think that the early church was entirely naive in their ministry of helping others or that the apostolic body of believers had no opportunists looking for ways to "cash in." Even the very first church was not immune to such abuse.

In every generation and in every culture, there are the charlatans and deadbeats among us, always looking for an occasion to play on the goodwill of God's people. Sometimes the church and its individual members become an easy mark for the opportunists.

It is not a pleasant thing to consider, but a giving, loving, ministry-

prepared church will have attempts made by con artists to abuse its goodwill. A sensible church will make plans to deal with these sure-to-come scenarios.

Sometimes the ill-intentioned even officially insert themselves among the body of believers as church members. Once they are comfortable in the “system,” the con begins. After several decades in the capacity of senior pastor, I have seen and intervened in a myriad of con jobs attempted on our own church family. So part of being prepared is also being wise, using biblical discernment, and being willing to practice some tough love. (See appendix 1 for a tried and tested solution for these kinds of situations.)

The early church was certainly not immune to such encroachments of decency. Apparently, even some of the “widows,” as well as some of their families, had learned how to “game” the church and its benevolent spirit. In giving instructions to the young pastor Timothy, Paul had to address the issue head-on, and he did so in a shockingly straightforward manner:

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. (1 Tim. 5:3–7)

FAMILIES FIRST

The Word of God is clear: families must first take care of their own. The church is not a “savings and loan” institution, it is not a money distribution center, and it is not an endless pit of free silver and gold for the taking. The church’s mission is not to “take people to raise” for the rest of their lives. The church’s concern for helping people in need comes *after* the needy person’s own family has first been made aware of the situation and given opportunity to make the necessary provisions.

Observe the rest of Paul's instructions in this difficult matter:

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house.

And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busy-bodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need (1 Tim. 5:8-16).

DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

The early church was maturing. There was likely a certain level of innocence as the apostolic church first began to minister to others' needs. However, it soon learned to be discerning, even in the matter of benevolence.

However, the charlatanry went beyond just the widows and certain irresponsible families. It extended to the greater culture itself. Once again, Paul had to step in with the biblical principles and rules – this time to the church at Thessalonica:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people

we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. (2 Thess. 3:6–15)

So the balance was struck; we must love the lazy brother, but do not feed him until he is willing to earn his keep! The church is not to become a naïve body of “suckers.” However, we should never tire of doing the right thing. The proper balance must be achieved for the church to maintain its effectiveness in ministry.

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8)

After all, in preparing to give real assistance to people who have genuine emergency needs, we must always remember – the money and resources we use to bring relief are entrusted to our care by the Lord Himself. We are to be faithful stewards of those resources while not worrying about feeling guilty for taking the necessary steps to protect the financial integrity of our ministry efforts.

It is through this faithful diligence that the church can maintain its preparedness to minister to those with legitimate needs.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

There can be little doubt that the first-century church was determined to care for the poor among them and even for the destitute who lived far from their home ministry fields. They laid their plans, and they prepared themselves appropriately.

We should also remember that in the days of the early church, there were few, if any, government assistance programs for the poor and the

hurting. The church understood its place in the matter of human suffering and began to fill the void in the culture's human needs. Observe the following insight from an excellent article in the *Christian Worldview Journal*. The article is titled "Poverty and the Church":

But [the early] Christians did not only take care of their own poor. They ministered to the sick and dying, purchased slaves to set them free, clothed the naked, and fed the hungry whether they were Christians or not. This was recognized by Julian the Apostate, the Roman Emperor who attempted to re-paganize Rome after Christianity was legalized. Julian complained, "These impious Galileans [i.e., Christians] feed not only their own poor, but ours as well."

Julian's reaction was based on the fact that the pagan world was not much given to charity, and so the Church's role in feeding the poor created a space in Roman society that was not under imperial authority and therefore undermined his rule. As the Church has moved away from its ancient practice, it has surrendered this area once again to Caesar.¹

Certainly, here is an important lesson and admonition for the modern church in America. Our nation is blessed with tremendous resources. Accordingly, we have reared several generations with the tendency to develop an "entitlement mentality." Even a number of modern church members have succumbed to the mentality of "let the government provide," and "I deserve, *and I want*, my fair share from the government coffers." Sadly, a large number of churches have given in to the unbiblical spirit of the matter as well and have gladly relegated much of the benevolent work of the body of Christ to ever-increasing government programs.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Gal. 6:9)

Please be reminded of these words from [chapter 1](#), describing what happened in Japan when the churches of the world responded to the 2011 earthquake and nuclear disaster in a networked, prayerful effort.

The government was unable to immediately respond to the tragedy, but the church was not:

Within 24 hours of the earthquake, local churches, agencies, and relief groups started to mobilize thousands of volunteers from more than 80 nations.

More than two years after the triple disaster, the Christian level of engagement in the disaster zone remains significant. *There is no precedent for this kind of faith-based effort after natural disaster in Japan's 2,000-year history.*² (emphasis added)

BUT WE CAN'T DO IT ALL!

It is a fact that an individual church family cannot feed and clothe the entire world. No singular church would be able to house a complete city in a time of disaster. We have our limits. We cannot minister to everyone in need. But this truth does not relieve us of our responsibility to do what we *are* able to do. This is why it is often important to *network* with other churches and organizations of like faith to meet the greater needs around us. (We will explore this more fully in [chapter 15](#).) We are obligated to prepare for the task to which we *have* been called and to go through the doors that the Lord clearly opens before us.

When we prepare ourselves to minister to the physical needs of those among us and around us, we also open up a multitude of doors of opportunity through which we can take the gospel message of salvation and eternal purpose found in Jesus Christ. When people see we genuinely care about their physical needs, they are often more apt to listen to our message of redemption through Jesus Christ. After all, this was the ministry pattern of the Lord Jesus Himself.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." (Matt. 14:14–16)

We must understand that the commands to prepare and to minister to the needs of others are holy commands. We should faithfully heed

these instructions if we expect the Lord's continued hand of blessing upon the kingdom work in which we are involved – and upon our lives.

After all, the hand that supplies bread and fish to the empty belly, clothing to the naked, protection for the widowed and orphaned, and shelter to the homeless also *loosens the soil*, which is often necessary to reach the heart and soul of the hurting person with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is the highest mission to which we have been called.

TRUTH POINTS

- ❑ The biblical response to an obvious abuser of goodwill is to lovingly offer him or her a method of repentance, redemption, and rehabilitation – but not to foster or enable continued deceitful behavior.
- ❑ Even though the church should not be naïve in these matters, it should also never grow tired of doing good.
- ❑ We must be faithful stewards of our resources while not worrying about feelings of guilt for taking the sometimes tough and necessary steps to protect the financial integrity of our ministry efforts.
- ❑ Even though a singular church cannot “do it all,” that does not relieve us of our responsibility to do what we are able to do, especially as the Lord opens doors before us.

THE STORMY BLASTS OF LIFE

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. – PROVERBS 6:6-8

No other nation in history has enjoyed so much peace, prosperity, and safety in day-to-day living as the United States of America. This is certainly one of the main reasons why millions from around the world risk life and limb every year in order to enter our country, legally or illegally. Few, if any, other countries of the world are faced with the magnitude of this reality.

Yet, even in the midst of our immense blessings, we certainly are not immune to the calamities and emergencies of life. Even America is not exempt from terror attacks, the ravages of war, disease, pestilence, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, volcanic eruptions, drought, homelessness, hunger, poverty, nuclear threats, massive power outages, fuel shortages, mass shootings, massive solar coronal effects (cosmic EMPs), and practically every other malady that can befall humankind living in a fallen world. The stormy blasts of life still assail – even us!

Should we, therefore, really expect the modern church to be exempt from perils, and even targeted persecution, or from its responsibilities to minister in such times? Rather than being immune to such trials, many believe the scripture is clear that the church will experience even greater tests and intensified tribulations as the return of Jesus Christ draws closer.

THE NECESSITY FOR PRUDENT PREPARATION

With the explosive advance of communication, information, and transportation technologies that mankind has witnessed in just the last several decades, there is a corresponding increase in potentially calamitous situations the church might need to address or even endure themselves. Let us consider just one example of this modern disaster potential.

What might the world (or your life) look like a few seconds after an EMP (electromagnetic pulse) incident? There are several ways this could occur. One very real possibility would be through a missile-borne nuclear weapon detonated in outer space, high above the center of the United States. Such an attack would set off a massively destructive shockwave of electricity. Barely a week goes by that some scientific organization or military expert does not warn us that such scenarios are realistic.

A calamity of this nature could mean that a large number of the nation's automobiles, airlines, computers, industry infrastructures, cellular networks, nuclear plants, weapons systems, communication systems, and power grids would come to a grinding halt. If that nightmarish situation were indeed to unfold, can you imagine the chaos that would erupt when grocery stores, gas stations, banks, and transportation networks were immediately crippled or rendered useless? Is your family prepared? What would your church do in such a scenario?

Newt Gingrich, a former congressman and presidential contender, has written and spoken widely on this very topic. He warns that an EMP attack would absolutely destroy electrical circuits from coast to coast, and everything from laptops to entire hospitals would be completely disabled.¹

Even though this phenomenon might sound like something out of a science fiction novel to some readers, consider the following quote from a July 2014 article in *Forbes*, on the subject of EMP attacks:

In 1962, during the depths of the Cold War, the U.S. military exploded a nuclear

weapon high above an atoll in the Pacific Ocean. Dubbed Operation Starfish, this exercise was part of a larger project to evaluate the impacts of nuclear explosions in space. The missile, launched from Johnson Island, 900 miles from Hawaii, was armed with a 1.4-megaton warhead, programmed to explode at 240 miles above the earth. It detonated as expected. What was not entirely expected was the magnitude of the resulting electromagnetic pulse (EMP).

The EMP was powerful enough to affect the electric grid in Hawaii, blowing out streetlights, and resulting in telephone outages and radio blackouts....

Since then, there has been an enormous increase in our dependency on electronics, computers, and microelectronics. An attack may never happen. But the more vulnerable the U.S. is to such an attack, the more likely it is to be used against us.²

Because of the genuine likelihood of a devastating EMP occurrence, Congress in 2000 mandated the creation of an EMP Commission. The commission is a collection of prominent scientists tasked to examine the effects of an EMP on our national grid and all of the critical infrastructures that depend on it.³

In an exclusive article by WND in August 2014, we learn of the dire warnings coming from the government's EMP Commission:

In a 2004 preliminary finding and again in a 2008 final, more in-depth report, the EMP Commission showed in considerable detail the catastrophic impact an EMP would have on such critical infrastructures as telecommunications, banking and finance, petroleum and natural gas delivery, transportation, food and water delivery, emergency services and space systems.

In issuing the 2008 report, which made a series of recommendations, the EMP Commission chairman, William Graham, said that an EMP event, whether natural or man-made, would cause "unprecedented cascading failures of major infrastructures." In that event, he said, a regional or national recovery would be long and difficult, and would seriously degrade the safety and overall viability of our nation.⁴

The danger of an EMP phenomenon severely affecting you and your family does not come merely from some type of human-designed weapons system either. Consider the historical example of the heavily documented Carrington super flare, which occurred in 1859.

In this dramatic event, a coronal mass ejection hit Earth's magnetosphere and generated one of the largest geomagnetic storms on record.

During this “natural” EMP event, telegraph equipment from Europe to North America failed. Some telegraph operators reported receiving electric shocks. Telegraph pylons produced showers of crackling sparks. Several telegraph systems were reported to have continued sending and receiving messages despite having been purposely disconnected from their power supplies.⁵

And this disruption was in an age of very few “electronics.” Can you imagine the potential devastation to our current way of life if a solar discharge of this magnitude, or worse, were to occur? Common sense dictates that you need a plan for your family if suddenly computers, cell phones, radios, television, automobiles, and other devices on which your day-to-day functioning depends, were to *catastrophically fail*.

However, an EMP occurrence is certainly not the only conceivable disaster scenario. I use this example only because it is a relatively new, and some say highly probable, area of catastrophic concern. Growing, centralized population centers around the world, coupled with a rising expansion in global population, often turn floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, weather extremes, and earthquakes into tragedies of historic proportions. How should the church respond? Is the church *prepared* to respond appropriately?

Additionally, today’s church must give serious attention to the universal concerns of radical terrorism, the ravages of the continual outbursts of wars, frequent and violent civil disobedience, and the growing problems of homelessness, world hunger, disease, plagues, and pestilence. These concerns are further magnified by the ever-increasing, agenda-driven, and targeted assaults upon the church and Christianity the world over. I will ask again, is *your church* prepared? Is *your family* prepared?

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my

It could be that your head is spinning right now. I know we have covered a lot of awful disaster scenarios in a rather short space. Tragically though, the frequent response when considering the magnitude of such harsh realities is either denial or “paralysis by analysis.”

When disastrous reality comes to call, sometimes little that is truly constructive gets done by the very people God has called to respond. It is the prayerful purpose of this book to help bring a measure of remedy to that malady.

A BLESSING TO RECEIVE, A BLESSING TO GIVE

Never forget, the gospel message proclaims that even in the midst of adversity, a believer in Jesus Christ can experience abundant life. That life is found not only in the *receiving* of assistance and relief in time of need, but especially in the *giving* of comfort and life-sustaining aid to others – particularly while we are still blessed to be living in relative peace with the ability to render such aid.

The church is the body of Christ. When one member hurts, we all hurt. When one is comforted, we all are comforted. “God has put the body together,” wrote Paul, “giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:24–27).

This is the great spiritual truth around which the life of our church and our families must be built. We are only a viable part of this earthly life for a short wisp of time. We are not here to build up a “pleasure paradise” in which to wrap ourselves, only to leave it all behind when we

draw our last breath. Jesus was clear in His instructions in this matter:

[Jesus said,] “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)

Then [Jesus] called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Mark 8:34–37)

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt. 6:19–21)

“‘For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’” (Matt. 25:42–45)

And [Jesus] told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16–21)

We are here ultimately to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ, preparing hearts and lives for that glorious day in which the Lord of glory will reign on the face of the earth. Until that day arrives, we are to be about the task of winning souls and ministering to the needs of the hurting world around us – beginning with the members of the body of

Christ itself.

The stormy blasts of life will continue to assail us, just as they did the earliest church, until the Lord returns in glory. And the storms can come from many different directions and sources. In the meantime we must, like the nascent first-century church, work continually to *loosen the soil* so that the seeds of the kingdom and the promise of eternal life through Jesus might be fruitfully planted, even in the midst of the storm.

*INCIPIT**

Stand firm, and you will win life. – JESUS OF NAZARETH (LUKE 21:19)

Three apostles – Peter, James, and John, revered shepherds of the fledgling flock of God at Jerusalem – had just laid hands of blessing and commissioning upon Stephen and several other men. These freshly selected leaders were then charged with the immediate task of settling a dispute among the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews. The dispute involved the daily distribution of food. It seemed some of the Grecian widows were complaining that they were being overlooked in the meal distribution process in favor of the Hebrew widows. The task appeared simple enough – mundane, even.

However, it was in Stephen's performance of that simple ministry duty that the Lord of the universe began to move in his life in an extraordinary way. God anointed Stephen with a special endowment of miraculous power, equipping him for the ministry to which he had been called and ordained. He began to preach and teach, even in the Temple courts, with a spiritual authority that was striking, convincing, deeply convicting – and infuriating to the leaders among the Orthodox Jews in the crowd.

Barely had the early church begun when it faced very real persecution. A group of the Jewish legal ruling body, the Sanhedrin council, rushed upon Stephen during one of his sermons in the temple area. They took hold of him, angrily dragged him through the streets of Jerusalem to the edge of the city, and there they murdered him – stoned him to death – with the full and onlooking approval of a respected

teacher of the Law, a Pharisee of Pharisees. His name was Saul. Evil thoughts likely were already building in Saul's mind. He had a career to advance, and he believed he now knew just how to accomplish his plans.

The storm clouds of persecution were gathering. Tragically, the brand-new church now had its first martyr. Believers began fleeing for their lives, looking for a safer haven in which to live. Father turned against son and mother against daughter, brother against brother and sister against sister, just as Jesus had predicted. There was a growing fear that there would be more deaths to come. And, most certainly, there would eventually be countless more.¹

THE SCATTERING OF THE CHURCH

What would the church do now? The book of Acts tells us precisely what they did: "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, *and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria*" (8:1; emphasis added).

Astonishingly, the scattering of the church further proliferated the spreading of the gospel message. Acts 11:19 tells us that "those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews."

PROPHECY REALIZED

Jesus had spoken with certainty to His earliest disciples concerning persecution. He had never hidden the truth from them, nor had He minced His words: *if they followed Him, they would be persecuted*. Some of them, He warned, would even be murdered on account of living for Him. Yet, in His first recorded public sermon, known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed, "*Blessed* are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Blessed* are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your

reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10–12; emphasis added).

Jesus also told His followers that some of the persecution they would suffer would even come from their own families: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.” But worse, He warned, “All men will hate you because of me” (Matt. 10:21–22). As it turned out, the very first persecution the early Christians suffered was from their own people, the Jews.

It would do the entertainment-driven modern church well to remember that it was Jesus Himself who warned that as His return drew nearer, the persecution would only grow worse:

“Tell us,” [the disciples] said, “... what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Jesus answered: “... you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (Matt. 24:3–13) They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.... You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. (Luke 21:12, 16–17)

However, Jesus also gave the church the proper perspective concerning their persecution simply for loving Him:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (John 15:18–21)

PERSECUTION – THE UNWELCOME LEGACY OF GOD’S PEOPLE

From reading the book of Acts alone, we discover there were several highly organized efforts within the first decade of the church's existence to persecute the church in Jerusalem. [Chapter 4](#) records the beginnings of those efforts: "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day" (vv. 1-3).

When morning had come, the Sanhedrin examined Peter and John: from where had their power come to heal a severely crippled man *with just a word and a touch*? The two disciples faithfully used this "opportunity" of persecution to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. After their presentation to the council, the Jewish leaders sent them out of their midst momentarily while they deliberated:

"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. (Acts 4:16-22)

As it turned out, the very first recorded persecution of the early church and its leadership had actually presented yet another opportunity to take the good news right to the hearts of the Jewish leadership of Jerusalem. Jesus' prophecies to this effect were already being accomplished. He had foretold: "They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. *And so you will bear testimony to me....* I will give you words and

wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” (Luke 21:12–13, 15; emphasis added).

As we continue to turn the pages of the New Testament, we quickly learn that direct, and often brutal, persecution of the early church was a consistent concern, one for which the apostolic church had to be continually prepared. Sometimes they would hide their members or leaders. Other times they found themselves ministering to the needs of their persecuted brothers and sisters who had been incarcerated for their faith and preaching. Still other times, the only option they had was to huddle together in seclusion and earnestly pray for the imprisoned or persecuted ones among them.

In Acts 12 we read of yet another Christian who was murdered for his faith in Christ and for his leadership in the Christian movement.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. (Acts 12:1–5)

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (Eph. 6:11–13)

Notice that the first two recorded Christian martyrs were both Jews. Notice also, both of these men were *killed by Jews* – their own people.

Stephen, as we have already seen, was killed by Jewish religious leaders. James was killed by a Jewish king who was also an official agent of Rome. Herod was apparently attempting to further placate the powerful and influential leaders among the Jews, many of whom desired the elimination of the wayward Judaistic sect. After Paul's conversion to Christ, most of his beatings, stoning attempts, false accusations, and imprisonments would come at the hands of his own people, the Jews.

The first-century Jews became absolutely furious with this new Jesus movement or – the Way – as they often called it (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Relentlessly, the Jewish officials, and any mobs they could incite, persecuted, harassed, imprisoned, and even killed some of the members of the early church in an attempt to wipe it out. But the church continued to grow, and thousands continue to come to the faith in spite of (and some would say because of) its continual battle with persecution.

However, some of the toughest times the early church would ever experience were still to come. Soon, the power of the Roman Empire would turn against Christianity. How would this turning find its life? Through government decrees and power-hungry, blood-thirsty rulers. Like a lion the days of evil would soon pounce upon the early church. But the early Christians were not without notice – their prophets had warned them.

* Latin – *It begins*

OF GODS AND EMPERORS

“The God we serve is able to save us from [the blazing furnace], and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not ... we will not serve your gods.” –
DANIEL 3:17–18

The entire affair had begun with a perverted bloodlust. The heroic Germanicus fought bravely that day in Smyrna’s amphitheater in AD 160. He actually provoked the wild animals to attack him, gaining the outspoken admiration of some of the onlookers, who would later tell the story throughout the town.

It seems that when the despised Christian was thrown to the lions, the fearsome animals refused to eat him. The Roman proconsul in charge of the event embarrassingly cried out to the unscathed man in the arena, “Germanicus of Smyrna! Cooperate with us! You will die this day regardless – so act the man!”

Germanicus moved toward the beasts, showing no fear whatsoever. He jabbed at the wild animals, delivering growls and roars as fearsome as their own until the big cats finally descended upon the youthful martyr. The crowd roared in spontaneous delight as the lions ripped at the man’s flesh and ferociously scattered the bloody pieces in their fury. “Down with the atheists!” they cried. (To them, “atheists” were any who did not believe in the Roman gods.) “Get Polycarp now!”

As two Roman soldiers roughly dragged the old man into the arena, Germanicus’s remains were cleared away. The crowd went into an almost uncontrollable frenzy when they first caught a glimpse of the man. This was a spectacle-death they had longed to witness. Polycarp

was purported to be famous among the cult of the hated Christ followers! He was one of the most revered leaders of the congregation of despicable *atheists* at Smyrna.

The news of his arrest had spread throughout the city. Polycarp, the eighty-six-year-old bishop of Smyrna, had refused to burn incense in an honorary worship ceremony for Emperor Marcus Aurelius. This insolence was not only an illegal act but also a blatant blasphemy! Everyone speculated that the recent, unbearable drought had more than likely been brought about by the presence of these blasphemous heathens, the Christians. Killing their wretched leader would teach them all a lesson! And here the man stood – in their arena! The people yearned for his death.

“Are you, sir, Polycarp of Smyrna?” the proconsul shouted into the arena.

“I am he,” Polycarp answered, his head held high.

“Have respect for your old age; swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent and say, ‘Down with the Atheists!’”

Polycarp looked grimly at the wicked heathen multitude in the stadium then smiled and mockingly gestured toward them. “As you wish!” he said. “Down with the atheists!”

Aware of the mockery Polycarp had leveled at the Roman crowd, the proconsul screamed, “Swear it! Deny Jesus Christ, and I will set you free.” His face burned red with a growing anger.

There was an unforeseen pause. The crowd hushed, anticipating a recanting of Polycarp’s faith. The beating sound of the flags of Rome filled the arena as the wind furiously whipped them together in the afternoon breeze. Polycarp looked around the arena as though peering into the eyes of each individual present. Finally he spoke. “Eighty-six years have I have served Jesus Christ,” Polycarp declared, “and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior now?”

“I will throw you to the lions if you do not repent of your atheism and

your insolence,” the proconsul shouted.

“Call them!” Polycarp replied. “It is unthinkable for me to repent of what is good, to turn to what is so obviously evil.”

“If you do not fear the animals, Polycarp, I will have you burned!” his captor threatened.

“Fire burns for an hour and is then extinguished. You know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why do you wait? Bring on whatever you desire. Here I stand.”

It was all done in the time it takes to tell the horrid story. The furious crowd quickly collected wood and bundles of sticks from nearby shops and public baths. They would do to him as he had requested.

When the pile was ready, Polycarp voluntarily took off his outer clothes, unfastened his belt, and removed his sandals. But when they went to nail him to a burning stake, Polycarp proclaimed, “Leave me as I am, without your nails, for He that gives me strength to endure the fire will enable me not to struggle.”

So, instead, they bound him with his hands behind him. Ready to be an acceptable burnt offering to God, Polycarp looked up to heaven and said, “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice. I bless you and glorify you, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. To you be glory both now and forever. Amen.”

The crowd lit the tender, howling as the flames danced to life. As the fire roared, they pierced Polycarp with spears. But Polycarp never cried out. Instead, he looked into the heavens, smiled, closed his eyes, and with one last plunge of a spear into his side, he was with the Lord.¹

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

According to early Christian tradition and extant historical writings from that time period, the apostle Paul was also eventually martyred, by beheading, under the vile emperor Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus. Nero had murdered his way to power and eventually had his own mother killed. This is the emperor to whom Paul appealed his criminal case, brought against him by the Jewish religious leaders and recorded in Acts 25:11.

According to very early Christian tradition, Peter was also crucified in Rome under Nero. It is traditionally related that Peter was crucified upside down, at his own request, because he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus Christ.

According to documented Christian tradition, several other well-known disciples' lives ended in martyrdom as well. Among them were Mark, Philip, Andrew, Jude, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Simon the Zealot. The apostle John was not martyred; though reportedly, many had tried to kill him. John died of old age after first being exiled to the island of Patmos, where he received from the Lord what became the book of Revelation. By the early AD 300s, there were at least a dozen other prominent leaders of Christianity who, according to tradition, were killed for their faith in Jesus as Messiah.²

It was not uncommon, as the years progressed, for the early Christians to have their teachings, scriptures, and practices perverted by rumor, innuendo, and out-and-out fabrications. For decades the rumor persisted that Christians were cannibals.³ More than likely this false accusation arose in response to the words of Jesus when He said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

Of course, the context of that declaration was in line with Jesus' teaching on total commitment to Him as a faithful follower and disciple. His statement would also point to the symbolism expressed in the final Passover meal He would share with His disciples just before being taken

to the cross. Nonetheless, the vile rumor gained a vicious life of its own.

The first documented case of imperially sanctioned persecution of Christians came under the aforementioned Nero (AD 37–68). The early Christians were considered a mere sect of Judaism during the earliest period of the church's existence. Judaism was a legal religion; therefore, the Christians were not singled out for general persecution until Nero's time.

The Roman historian Suetonius recorded that in AD 64 a great fire broke out in Rome. It reportedly burned for six days and seven nights and destroyed almost three-quarters of the city. Nero eventually blamed the Christians for the fire, although some suspected it was actually the work of Nero himself.⁴

It was during the persecution under Nero's dominion that many Christians, especially in and around Rome, began to worship, literally, underground. The Roman catacombs were subterranean rooms and a labyrinth of passageways that served as crypts in which the ancient Romans had buried their dead. The early Christians could withdraw into this mazelike network of tunnels and hide from those wishing to turn them in to the Roman authorities. Unfortunately, the use of the public mausoleums as hiding places only served to spur on the outrageous rumors concerning Christian worship practices. Some Romans believed it was in the catacombs where the Christians held secret child-sacrifice rituals and conducted their rumored ceremonies of cannibalism.⁵

Christianity became punishable by death during Nero's reign, yet pardon was available to those willing to renounce their religion by offering sacrifice to the emperor or to other Roman gods. (The emperor was considered to be a god and was worshipped as a god by his subjects.)⁶

The Roman historian Tacitus published his book *Annals* just a few years after the great fire of Rome. (Tacitus was a young boy living in Rome during the time of the persecutions.⁷) The following account

comes from that publication:

Therefore, to stop the rumor [that he had set Rome on fire], he [Emperor Nero] falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most fearful tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were [generally] hated for their enormities. Christus, [Jesus Christ] the founder of that “name,” was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition – repressed for a time, broke out yet again, not only through Judea, – where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and disgraceful flow from all quarters, as to a common receptacle, and where they are encouraged. Accordingly first those were arrested who confessed they were Christians; next on their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city, as of “hating the human race.”

In their very deaths they were made the subjects of sport: for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day waned, burned to serve for the evening lights. Nero offered his own garden players for the spectacle, and exhibited a Circensian [circus-like] game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the dress of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot. For this cause a feeling of compassion arose towards the sufferers, though guilty and deserving of exemplary capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but were victims of the ferocity of one man.”⁸

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Rev. 12:17)

The reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian (AD 284–305) goes down in history as the most infamous of the pervasive persecutions of Christians in the Empire. The year 303 was the most concentrated period of bloodshed under his reign. He issued an edict imposing stringent obedience to the worship practices of the Roman Imperial cult. All Christians were required not only to offer pagan sacrifices but also to acquire official certificates of worship from those who had been witnesses to their offering. Modern historians estimate that during this period as many as thirty-five hundred Christians were executed by the

authority of the Imperial executive orders.

Fortunately for the Christian faithful, Diocletian's bloody reign of terror against the early Christian church would be the last imperial persecution. In AD 313, Constantine I and Eastern Roman emperor Licinius ratified the Edict of Milan, which finally ensured tolerance for Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

EMPERORS WHO WOULD BE GODS

Foxe's Book of Martyrs is a literary classic. Written by John Foxe, this timeless martyrology was first published in English in 1563. Much of the book discusses a period that Foxe called the "Ten Primitive Persecutions" of Christians under various emperors in the Roman Empire. The ten persecutions extend from the time of Nero to the legalization of Christianity under Constantine.

I have reproduced a paragraph or two under each of the ten persecution periods, as recorded by Foxe (unless otherwise indicated), to give you a taste of the atmosphere under which the early church lived for about the first three hundred years of its existence.⁹

THE FIRST PERSECUTION (UNDER NERO, AD 67)

The first persecution of the Church took place in the year 67, under Nero, the sixth emperor of Rome. (I have already expanded on this period of persecution.)

THE SECOND PERSECUTION (UNDER DOMITIAN, AD 81)

The emperor Domitian, who was naturally inclined to cruelty, first slew his brother, and then raised the second persecution against the Christians. In his rage he put to death some of the Roman senators, some through malice; and others to confiscate their estates. He then commanded all the lineage of David be put to death....

A law was made, "That no Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion." ...

If famine, pestilence, or earthquakes afflicted any of the Roman provinces, it was laid upon the Christians. These persecutions among the Christians increased the number of informers and many, for the sake of gain, swore away the lives of the innocent.

Another hardship was, that, when any Christians were brought before the magistrates, a test oath was proposed, when, if they refused to take it, death was pronounced against them; and if they confessed themselves Christians, the sentence was the same.

THE THIRD PERSECUTION (UNDER TRAJAN, AD 108)

In the third persecution Pliny the Second, a man learned and famous, seeing the lamentable slaughter of Christians, and moved therewith to pity, wrote to Trajan, certifying him that there were many thousands of them daily put to death, of which none did any thing contrary to the Roman laws worthy of persecution.

Trajan being succeeded by Adrian, the latter continued this third persecution with as much severity as his predecessor.... In Mount Ararat many were crucified, crowned with thorns, and spears run into their sides, in imitation of Christ's passion.

THE FOURTH PERSECUTION (UNDER MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS, AD 162)

Marcus Aurelius ... [was] toward the Christians sharp and fierce; by whom was moved the fourth persecution.

The cruelties used in this persecution were such that many of the spectators shuddered with horror at the sight, and were astonished at the intrepidity of the sufferers. Some of the martyrs were obliged to pass, with their already wounded feet, over thorns, nails, sharp shells, etc. upon their points, others were scourged until their sinews and veins lay bare, and after suffering the most excruciating tortures that could be devised, they were destroyed by the most terrible deaths.

THE FIFTH PERSECUTION (UNDER SEVERUS, AD 192)

Severus, having been recovered from a severe fit of sickness by a Christian, became a great favorer of the Christians in general; but the prejudice and fury of the ignorant multitude prevailing, obsolete laws were put in execution against the Christians. The progress of Christianity alarmed the pagans, and they revived the stale calumny of placing accidental misfortunes to the account of its professors, A.D. 192.

Leonidus, the father of the celebrated Origen, was beheaded for being a Christian.... Rhais had boiled pitch poured upon her head, and was then burnt, as was Marcella her mother.... Cecilia, a young lady of good family in Rome ... converted her husband and brother, who were beheaded ... The lady was placed naked in a scalding bath, and having continued there a considerable time, her head was struck off with a sword, A.D. 222.

THE SIXTH PERSECUTION (UNDER MAXIMUS, AD 235)

A.D. 235, was in the time of Maximinus. In Cappadocia, the president, Seremianus, did all he could to exterminate the Christians from that province.

During this persecution, raised by Maximinus, numberless Christians were slain without trial, and buried indiscriminately in heaps, sometimes fifty or sixty being cast into a pit together, without the least decency.

THE SEVENTH PERSECUTION (UNDER DECIUS, AD 249)

This was occasioned partly by the hatred he bore to his predecessor Philip, who was deemed a Christian and was partly by his jealousy concerning the amazing increase of Christianity; for the heathen temples began to be forsaken, and the Christian churches thronged.

These reasons stimulated Decius to attempt the very extirpation of the name of Christian; and it was unfortunate for the Gospel, that many errors had, about this time, crept into the Church: the Christians were at variance with each other; self-interest divided those whom social love ought to have united; and the virulence of pride occasioned a variety of factions.

The heathens in general were ambitious to enforce the imperial decrees upon this occasion, and looked upon the murder of a Christian as a merit to themselves. The martyrs, upon this occasion, were innumerable.

On January 3, AD 250, Decius issued an edict ordering sacrifices to the gods to be made throughout the Empire.¹⁰

The edict required everyone in the Empire, with the exception of Jews, to sacrifice and burn incense to the Roman gods and to the well-being of the Emperor. This sacrifice was to take place in the presence of a Roman magistrate. After the offering was made, the person would then receive a certificate called a *libellus*, signed by a magistrate that the law had been followed and the sacrifice made.¹¹

Refusal to make the required offerings of sacrifice resulted in the deaths of several renowned Christians, including Pope Fabian, Babylas of Antioch and Alexander of Jerusalem. Also, it is recorded that numerous Christians, including Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, went into hiding.¹²

Such large numbers of Christians performed the sacrifices, that authorities at Carthage were overwhelmed by the numbers seeking a certificate. The officials were forced to issue notices instructing the mass of people to come back the next day.¹³

THE EIGHTH PERSECUTION (UNDER VALERIAN, AD 257)

“Began under Valerian, in the month of April, 257, and continued for three years and six months. The martyrs that fell in this persecution were innumerable, and their tortures and deaths as various and painful ... neither rank, sex, nor age were regarded.” In Africa the persecution raged with peculiar violence; many thousands

received the crown of martyrdom. At Utica, a most terrible tragedy was exhibited: three hundred Christians were, by the orders of the proconsul, placed round a burning limekiln. A pan of coals and incense being prepared, they were commanded either to sacrifice to Jupiter or to be thrown into the kiln. Unanimously refusing, they bravely jumped into the pit and were immediately suffocated.

THE NINTH PERSECUTION (UNDER AURELIAN, AD 274)

The principal sufferers were: Felix, bishop of Rome. This prelate was advanced to the Roman see in 274. He was the first martyr to Aurelian's petulancy, being beheaded on the twenty-second of December, in the same year. Agapetus, a young gentleman, who sold his estate, and gave the money to the poor, was seized as a Christian, tortured, and then beheaded at Praeneste, a city within a day's journey of Rome. These are the only martyrs left upon record during this reign, as it was soon put to a stop by the emperor's being murdered by his own domestics, at Byzantium.

THE TENTH PERSECUTION (UNDER DIOCLETIAN, AD 303)

The fatal day fixed upon to commence the bloody work [of persecution], was the twenty-third of February, A.D. 303, that being the day in which the Terminalia were celebrated, and on which, as the cruel pagans boasted, they hoped to put a termination to Christianity. On the appointed day, the persecution began in Nicomedia, on the morning of which the prefect of that city repaired, with a great number of officers and assistants, to the church of the Christians, where, having forced open the doors, they seized upon all the sacred books, and committed them to the flames.

PREPARED FROM THE BEGINNING

The early Christian church was not only defenseless against harassment, but was often the direct and targeted object of sometimes intense abuse – from the church's birth in downtown Jerusalem to the death of Stephen and then continuing for centuries to come. But these early Christians were in a constant state of preparation. After all, they had suffered their earliest persecution with the crucifixion of their teacher and Lord, Jesus Christ.

However, within a few decades of the birth of the church, the body of Christ would begin to possess the earliest collection of the New Testament documents. They would once again be reminded through the

words of Jesus, the teachings of the apostles, and the instructions of Paul that if they followed Jesus Christ as Lord, persecution would come their way – *they had to be prepared*. The early church was constantly reminded that even many of the faithful people of God who had come long before them, in Old Testament days, paid the ultimate price for their faithfulness.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. (Deut. 31:6)

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Heb. 11:35–40)

By the time the early church was given the book of Revelation through the hands of the apostle John, who had been sentenced to isolation in a prison camp for his faith in Christ, they were reminded of the ongoing danger of imminent martyrdom, as well as tougher times yet to come:

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives. (Rev. 2:8–13)

From the ancient work *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which is purported to have been written by an eyewitness to Polycarp's death, we read:

All the martyrdoms which God allowed to happen (remember that the devout will ascribe all things to his sovereignty) were blessed and noble. Who could not admire their honor, their patience, and their love for the Lord? They were whipped to shreds till their veins and arteries were exposed, and still endured patiently, while even those that stood by cried for them. They had such courage that none of them let out a sigh or a groan, proving when they suffered such torments they were absent from their bodies – or rather that the Lord then stood by them and talked with them.

By the grace of Christ they despised all the cruelties of this world, redeeming themselves from eternal punishment by the suffering of a single hour. The fire of their savage executioners appeared cool to them, because they fixed their eyes on their escape from the eternal unquenchable fire and the good things promised to those who endure – things “which ear has not heard, nor eye seen, nor the human heart imagined” but were revealed to them by the Lord.¹⁴

Even though few Christians would actually wish for persecution or martyrdom, the church has discovered from the beginning that, often out of the times of persecution, consequences arise that actually serve to advance the kingdom work of Jesus.

Within the first three hundred years after its birth, the church went through many unimaginable trials and persecutions at the hands of not only the Roman emperors but also the Orthodox Jews. Some Jewish leaders even used their political connections with the power of Rome to expand their personal persecution against the church. Romans and Jews – often enemies of each other – in the cause of persecuting the church were sometimes united.

All the while, in spite of the horrendous persecution, the gospel message spread and grew more influential, and so did the church. What an extraordinary turn of events it was when the Roman emperor

Constantine declared his personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord!

FROM TERROR TO PEACE – TO TERROR

Within one generation's lifetime, the Roman Empire went from the cultic, worshipful homage of some of its emperors and the most savage acts of its numerous persecutions of Christians, to fully embracing Christianity. From a line of emperors, some of whom thought they were gods, came an emperor who claimed he'd had a supernatural vision from the true God of heaven – and then proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord.

And so, for a while, the church experienced a great measure of peace. But it would not last long, nor would persecution ever be entirely eliminated. In many ways, throughout the world and the nations yet to be born, hatred for God's people would only grow worse.

The lion was still on the loose – and he was filled with rage.

The battle was far from over. In fact, it had only just begun.

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Persecution often serves to ...

take the gospel message to those who would not otherwise hear it or listen to it, especially those in places of authority

strengthen the resolve and faithfulness of individual believers, as well as the community of faith as a whole

cause the greater society around the church to empathize with them in their persecution, thus loosening the soil for more gospel seeds to be planted

offer opportunities for the Christians to demonstrate the true love

of Christ and forgiveness for their persecutors
deepen the faith-walk of the individual Christian who is enduring
the persecution

COMING TO AMERICA

Malala Yousafzai targeted and criticized Islam. She was against Islam and we tried to kill her, and if we get a chance again we will definitely try to kill her, and we will feel proud killing her. – SHAHIDULLAH SHAHID (FOX NEWS, OCTOBER 7, 2013)

At 10:30 a.m., on a steamy, hot Missouri day in August 2011, Alaa Alsaegh was driving in heavy morning traffic in St. Louis. Alsaegh was an Arab immigrant from Iraq to the United States and a convert from Islam to Christianity. Sometime before that morning, Alsaegh had published an Arabic-language poem, “Tears at the Heart of the Holocaust,” featured on the blog *Arabs for Israel*.¹

His poem expressed his Christian love for the Israeli people and his desire for the Israelis and the Palestinians, longtime enemies, to exist together peacefully in the Middle East. After his poem was published, he quickly received the predictable and hateful Internet threats, which he did not take seriously. After all, he was living in America. He had freedom of speech and freedom of worship. He was safe. The law, the U.S. Constitution, and a culture that treasured religious tolerance protected him. He was certain Christians were not persecuted in the United States, as they were in the Middle East.

As Alsaegh made his way through the choking traffic on Compton Street, approaching Park Avenue, the driver of a small automobile suddenly cut him off and slammed into his car. Another car came to a screeching stop inches behind him and hemmed him in, rendering an escape route impossible.

The occupants of both offending vehicles scrambled from their cars

and descended at once upon Alsaegh. Snatching open his doors, they piled into his car, some in the front seat, others into the backseat. A couple of them appeared to be dressed in some sort of security guard uniforms. A gun was shoved into Alsaegh's face. His upper torso was slammed into the steering wheel, pinning him down and rendering him immobilized. There was no escape. *This is outrageous!* he thought. *Surely, someone in this traffic snarl will come to my rescue.* But nobody came.

He felt a knife penetrate his body. He had been stabbed! What is happening? What is this about? Won't someone please help me?

Suddenly, his shirt was forcefully ripped off his body. His back was laid bare, his body still pinned against the steering wheel. He felt the searing pain of the knife carving a figure into his back, starting at one shoulder, across to the other, and then down at an angle toward his waistline. As the razor-sharp knifepoint sliced through his flesh, he soon realized what image was being emblazoned on his back, in blood and ripped skin. It was the Star of David.

His attackers began to mockingly recite the words to his poem about Israel as he squirmed under the knife's relentless piercing. They laughed like hyenas torturing their prey. "Do not publish any more pro-Israeli poems!" they told him. "Let this be a warning!"

Not a soul among the numerous onlookers had come to his aid.

After his assailants had finished their hideous deed and fled the scene, witnesses finally descended upon Alaa Alsaegh as he lay in shock, slumped over his steering wheel in downtown St. Louis, the United States of America, 2011. Someone called an ambulance. They were lucky they did not have to call the coroner.²

THE RISE OF ISLAM AND SHARIA IN AMERICA

Giving cause for alarm, illustrated by the preceding example of direct persecution of Christians in our own homeland, has been the startling rise in the Islamic population and influence in America.³ The Muslim

population has doubled since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and continues to grow.⁴

Added to the increasing number of Muslims is a corresponding call for the imposition of Sharia law within the growing American Islamic communities. As of this writing, two dozen states have already engaged in legal battles over the issue of possible Sharia law enactment.⁵

Of course, most Christian Americans know that sharia law is diametrically opposed to Christianity and its free expression. Sharia is also responsible for much of the direct persecution of Christians around the world, now including the United States of America, as Mr. Alsaegh's case so dramatically illustrates.

To further punctuate the valid concern of Christians regarding Islam's growing influence in America, consider the example of Yasir Qadhi (aka Abu Ammaar Yasir Kazi). Qadhi is an American imam and a professor of religious studies whom *New York Times Magazine* describes as "one of the most influential conservative clerics in American Islam."⁶

Qadhi was born in Houston, Texas, to Pakistani parents but spent his formative years in Saudi Arabia. After graduating high school, he returned to the United States and earned a doctoral degree from Yale University. As of November 2013, he was a faculty member in the Religious Studies Department of Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee.

This highly influential Muslim cleric, with continual worldwide media access, has openly declared, "There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah," and Christians are "by necessity and by definition ... the most evil of all evils." Like all "unbelievers" and "polytheists," Christians are "filthy." They are "*najusa*" (feces, urine) – "a filthy impure dirty substance ... if they don't [convert to Islam,] their life and property are *halal* [free for the taking] for the Muslims."⁷

After Qadhi's statements were released, in his own voice, on a YouTube video, he claimed that the video was a "cut and paste" affair, reconstructed to make him look antagonistic toward people of other

faiths. However, others believe Qadhi is not being truthful, since so much of what he voiced in the video is found in the Quran, Islam's sacred book. As a conservative Muslim cleric, Qadhi's profession is teaching the doctrines of the Quran – all of them. Some who have viewed the video believe that in denying any hostility toward Christians, Qadhi was merely “lying to infidels.” This deceitful practice is a legitimate Islamic teaching called *taqiyya*.

Additionally, in January 2014, WND reported that retired US Air Force general Tom McInerney, who served as both assistant vice chief of staff and commander in chief of US Air Forces Europe, had confirmed the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood inside the US government. “There’s a list of them,” McInerney said, “at least 10 or 15 of them in the US government”⁸

Particularly concerning to McInerney was the relationship of Huma Abedin to the United States government. She was brought into the federal government by the Bill Clinton administration as a top assistant to the First Lady, and then went on to be deputy chief of staff to Hillary Clinton when Hillary was the secretary of state. Abedin is married to former Democratic Congressman Anthony Wiener. Oddly enough, Wiener is of Jewish descent.

As alarmist as General McInerney's pronouncements may have sounded to some Americans, for several years prior to WND's reporting of the matter, a number of government officials and concerned citizens had been urging America's media, federal law enforcement, and congressional lawmakers to explore the evidence pointing to active influence operations by the Muslim Brotherhood in the United States. The call largely fell upon deaf ears.

The Muslim Brotherhood, globally recognized for their anti-Semitic stance, was founded in 1928 in Egypt. They are known to have joined forces with Adolf Hitler to further their agenda to rid the world, and particularly the Middle East, of Jewish influence. Out of the Muslim

Brotherhood, various experts claim, grew the more modern-day elements known as al-Qaeda and ISIS (or ISIL). Though today these groups often try to disavow their current relationships, history plainly documents that the three are related, and intricately interwoven, in their roots as well as in many of their ideals.

On June 13, 2012, five members of Congress called for a comprehensive investigation into Muslim Brotherhood influence operations within the US government. These members – Michele Bachmann (R-MN), Trent Franks (R-AZ), Louie Gohmert (R-TX), Tom Rooney (R-FL), and Lynn Westmoreland (R-GA) – were resoundingly and widely criticized for calling for such an investigation, “even by their own Republican leadership, including John McCain (R-AZ), John Boehner (R-OH), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Mike Rogers (R-MI).”⁹

Michele Bachmann alleged in her letter to the deputy inspector general that Mrs. Weiner (Huma Abedin) has deep ties to the Muslim Brotherhood through her late father, her mother, and her brother – all purported to be active members of the organization.¹⁰

And now it appears that even the left-leaning *New York Times* has confirmed at least some of the fears of those who felt they had been crying in the darkness all this while. Breitbart reported:

The *New York Times* published a comprehensive article on September 7th [2014] entitled, “Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks.”¹¹ The article documents multi-million dollar donations to Washington-based think tanks that include the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Atlantic Council, by foreign governments as a way of buying influence in Washington. For example, the government of Qatar made a \$14.8 million donation to the Brookings Institution. It is a matter of public record that Qatar is a key funder and supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood and, indeed, that supporting Muslim Brotherhood parties has been a cornerstone of Qatar’s foreign policy.¹²

YOU MIGHT BE A TERRORIST IF ...

Another very poignant fear, shared by many Christians – and Americans in general – concerns the insidious beginnings of government

persecution of its perceived enemies. In July 2012, the Christian News Network reported that two different studies, funded in part by the United States Department of Homeland Security, listed Christians as “perpetrators of terrorism.”¹³ The studies were titled *Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism – United States*¹⁴ and *Hot Spots of Terrorism and Other Crimes in the United States, 1970 to 2008*.¹⁵

First, let us examine what these reports actually state, in context. Then we will analyze the political rhetoric by isolating the main themes of the government’s “concerns.” Two categories of particular concern in the *Profiles* report are described under the headings of *Religious* and *Extreme Right-wing*:

RELIGIOUS

(I_REL)

Categorical Variable

Religious groups seek to smite the purported enemies of God and other evildoers, impose strict religious tenets or laws on society (fundamentalists), forcibly insert religion into the political sphere (i.e., those who seek to politicize religion, such as Christian Reconstructionists and Islamists), and/or bring about Armageddon (apocalyptic millenarian cults). There are five main varieties of religious terrorism: (1) Islamist terrorism; (2) Jewish fundamentalist terrorism, primarily inside Israel; (3) Christian terrorism, which can be further subdivided into fundamentalist terrorism of an Orthodox (mainly Russia), Catholic, or Protestant stamp (which, in the US, is especially aimed at stopping the provision of abortions) and terrorism inspired by apocalyptic Christian identity doctrine; (4) Hindu fundamentalist/ nationalist terrorism; and (5) terrorism carried out by apocalyptic religious cults....¹⁶

EXTREME RIGHT-WING

(I_RIGHT)

Categorical Variable

The extreme far-right is composed of groups that believe that one’s personal and/or national “way of life” is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group), and believe in the need to be prepared for an attack either by participating in

paramilitary preparations and training or survivalism. Groups may also be fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation), anti-global, suspicious of centralized federal authority, reverent of individual liberty, and believe in conspiracy theories that involve grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty.¹⁷

While the report, to be fair, certainly lists several “religions” or faith groups, as well as societal philosophies – some of which could truly be constitutionally, historically, and legally considered as “suspect” terrorist concerns – it alarms many mainstream Americans to see that certain words and phrases are included in this report that define *them* – specifically.

Let us now examine what these two sections of the report revealed as “government concerns” in America relevant to who may or may not be a “terrorist,” the *enemies* of America. We will do this by isolating the specific language used to identify Christians and constitutional patriots:

- “forcibly insert religion into the political sphere” (the word “forcibly” is extremely subjective – depending on who is doing the interpretation)
- “seek to politicize religion” (government ideal: religion should stay out of “politics”)
- “Armageddon (apocalyptic millenarian cults)” (*Armageddon* is a biblical term coming right out of the book of Revelation; groups that believe in this biblical concept are called “cults” by the government)
- “Christian terrorism ... Protestant ... aimed at stopping the provision of abortions” (see Exodus 20:13)
- “apocalyptic Christian identity doctrine” (in other words, you are a “terrorist” if you hold a literal interpretation of New Testament end-time prophecy – especially the book of Revelation)

- “groups that believe that one’s personal and/or national ‘way of life’ is under attack ...” (this would include a large percentage of the American public in general, according to many of the latest polls)
- “... and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group) ...” But wait! Has our nation not *already* been attacked by a specific “ethnic and religious group” (9/11 for example)? Are we now terrorists for being concerned that this same group may attack us again?
- “... and believe in the need to be prepared for an attack.” Oops! You are already in trouble for reading this book. So we are terrorists just because we participate in survival preparation? Does this include stocking up on food, water, medicines, clothing, and arms and ammunition for *self-defense*? Again, it would depend upon which administration is interpreting the report.
- “Groups may also be fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation), anti-global, suspicious of centralized federal authority, reverent of individual liberty, and believe in conspiracy theories that involve grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty.” What? Esteeming “individual liberty” is a *terrorist* act? And being “fiercely nationalistic” (i.e., a patriotic constitutionalist)? And believing in conspiracy theories?

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Do you find the words of the Homeland Security report and the terminology used to define *terrorists* a bit chilling? The vast majority of Americans are unaware that such a report, and the accompanying definitions of America’s enemies, even exists.

Based on the preceding bullet points, America’s *Founding Fathers*

would be considered terrorists! And according to a number of public polls that highlight the deepest concerns Americans have regarding certain important issues, many of today's citizens would be considered terrorists as well. A WND Freedom Index poll from Wenzel Strategies, conducted in 2010, indicated that more than 49 percent of Americans believe their personal freedoms are quickly eroding. Two thirds of those polled believe the country is "headed in the wrong direction." Are these large numbers of American citizens now to be labeled as potential "terrorists?"¹⁹

And what about the more recent concerns regarding the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Boko Haram violence in the Middle East and the possibility of such violence spreading to the United States and other Western nations? A 2014 Pew Research Poll shows a growing fear of terrorism among Christians, not just in the United States but globally! Are these fears unfounded? If we are concerned that Islamic terrorism might reach our shores in unprecedented ways in the future, are we considered terrorists for such apprehensions?²⁰

These issues of grave concern include but are not limited to: Islamic terrorism, a potential looming World War III, the need for extreme preparation measures, a coming economic collapse, and the inevitable loss of our Second Amendment right to protect our homes, families, churches, and nation. There is also a deep national anxiety over the issue of abortion, the erosion of individual liberties guaranteed to us by the Constitution, ever-increasing federal authority, and the death of American exceptionalism.

ARE CHRISTIANS TARGETS OF PERSECUTION?

Are Christians in America being targeted for persecution? Christian military personnel certainly are, and the persecution is coming from both without and within.

In the summer of 2013, retired lieutenant general Jerry Boykin

expressed grave concerns about the threat against religious liberty in the US military. Boykin, a former US deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, is now the executive vice president of the Family Research Council. According to him, anti-evangelical forces “are essentially saying there is no appropriate time for a Christian to try and influence a person by sharing the Gospel.... This is a very real issue. I think in a very short period of time – I’m talking about within the next year – you could see Christians in our military services just absolutely afraid of sharing their faith in any public forum.” Coast Guard Rear Admiral William D. Lee agrees. During a speech at a National Day of Prayer event in May 2013, he warned that Christians in the military face a very real threat of oppression.²¹

In October 2013 Fox News reported that, according to Michael Berry, a former Marine Corp JAG officer and then attorney with the Liberty Institute, “the U.S. Army is teaching our troops that evangelical Christians and Tea Party members are enemies of America, and that they can be punished for supporting or participating in those groups.” In that same article, titled “Does Army Consider Christians, Tea Party, Terror Threat?” Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, is quoted as saying, “On the very base that was the site of mass murder carried out by a radicalized Muslim soldier, it is astonishing that it is evangelical groups that are being identified as a ‘threat.’”²²

Another article commenting on the same issue, reported, “A U.S. Army training instructor listed Evangelical Christianity and Catholicism as examples of religious extremism along with Al Qaeda and Hamas during a briefing with an Army Reserve unit based in Pennsylvania, Fox News has learned.”²³

In April 2012 an official US Army training presentation specifically identified evangelical Christians as religious extremists. On a PowerPoint training slide entitled “Religious Extremism,” Evangelical Christianity is displayed as the number one threat on a list of extremist religious

groups. That same list also includes al-Qaeda, Hamas, and the Ku Klux Klan.²⁴

Consequently, many Christians in America are left wondering: “While an undeniable onslaught of anti-Christian legislation and attitudes continues to sweep through our land, coming at us from many different angles, how much longer will it be before the United States joins the list of nations in which being a Christian is not a safe thing to be?”

Could it be that real, and much more intense, Christian persecution is on its way to the United States of America? Many American Christians believe, with apparent validity, the answer to that question is yes.

Even Franklin Graham, the well-known son of evangelist Billy Graham, has weighed in on the matter. In a March 2015 Fox News interview, Reverend Graham stated, “I believe we’re going to see persecution in this country. We’ve already seen many laws that have been passed that restrict our freedom as Christians. I believe it’s going to get worse.... We do have a problem in this country and we are losing our religious freedom and we’re losing it a little bit day by day.” Rev. Graham emphasized, “The storm is coming.”²⁵

So, do your own assessment. According to the government’s definition – if you are a conservative Christian and a deeply devoted constitutional patriot – you might be a terrorist! Do you now understand why many American Christians fear that real persecution may be on its way to our shores – sooner than ever expected?

As it turns out, *you might be a suspected terrorist if...* you are a Bible-believing Christian who supports the ideals of the founding fathers and the constitutional republic they were instrumental in founding. Go figure.

So, what do you think? Any chance that real persecution of Christians might be on its way to America? Do you see any similarities between what has been happening in our nation and what happened in the Roman Empire days of the early church?

Might it be wise for the church to *prepare*?

GATHERING STORM CLOUDS

[Jesus] replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” – MATTHEW 16:2–3

“The following scene happened more times than I can remember. A brother was preaching to the other prisoners when the guards suddenly burst in, surprising him halfway through a phrase. They hauled him down the corridor to their beating room. After what seemed an endless beating, they brought him back and threw him – bloody and bruised – on the prison floor. Slowly, he picked up his battered body, painfully straightened his clothing, and said, ‘Now, brethren, where did I leave off when I was interrupted?’ He continued his gospel message! I have seen beautiful things!”¹

Are American Christians simply suffering from a persecution complex? Could it be that we, as some accuse, are happier when we merely imagine that we are being persecuted? Or could it be that we just feel guilty because of the tremendous freedoms, under protection of law, we enjoy on a daily basis while millions of Christians around the world are suffering violent abuse? Perhaps we have an innate need to feel as though we, too, are being persecuted.

Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001) was a Christian minister of Jewish descent who suffered intense persecution for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in Romania during the horrifically dark days of communism’s sweep of Eastern Europe. It was during those dangerous times that he publicly declared that Christianity and Communism were

incompatible ideologies. He also consistently and loudly denounced the government's control of the churches. For these truthful declarations he was imprisoned for fourteen years and brutally tortured.

During part of his gloomy incarceration, he spent three years in solitary confinement. His cell was buried twelve feet underground with no lights or windows and barely a sound to be heard. The guards wore felt on the soles of their shoes to keep the prisoners in total and maddening silence.² Wurmbrand was eventually released for a ransom amount of \$10,000, though the going rate for most political prisoners at the time was \$1,900.³

Wurmbrand is, undoubtedly, best known for his book *Tortured for Christ*. In that amazing work, he wrote of the paradoxical compromises and resolutions to persecution that one must often make when in the hands of murderous captors: "It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their [the communists'] terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy."⁴

Wurmbrand eventually founded the international organization Voice of the Martyrs. Though he has gone to be with the Lord, his organization continues to aid Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith.

In the face of so many documented accounts of truly horrific persecution, some ask, "Why do many American Christians appear to be fixated upon the relatively nonexistent persecution in the United States? Could it be that many of us have been conditioned to believe that almost any negative experience that comes our way in the course of our Christian living can be defined as 'persecution'?"

The answer to the question probably lies in how one interprets the word *persecution*, for truly, there are different levels of maltreatment for

expressing one's faith. Persecution can range from simple harassment to threats of employment termination to imprisonment and brutal torture – even execution. The one being harassed and bullied for his or her faith in Christ certainly feels the sting of that relatively minor level of persecution. However, someone being brutally tortured and executed would surely choose the sweet release of simple harassment were it made available. Would you not agree?

Persecution can be expressed in the form of mere inconveniences to our daily routine, punctuated by loss of friendships or verbal assaults upon one's sanity and character. Practically any group of people can pull the “persecution card” at any given moment. This seems especially true of those who find themselves, or consider themselves, to be in almost any sort of minority group.

As an example of the relativity of the definition of “Christian persecution,” let us make a couple of quick comparisons and then ask some uncomfortable questions of ourselves.

Consider the horrifying murders of Christians living in Orissa, India. The first assault occurred in December 2007. This hostility was followed by even more pervasive violence in August 2008. What these eruptions had in common was that both onslaughts were coordinated by anti-Christian elements within fundamentalist Hindu factions. In both situations, no one intervened to stop the killings.

In the 2007 Christmas attacks in Orissa, twelve Christians were killed, two thousand homes were looted and destroyed, and four Christian churches were damaged or demolished. In the 2008 Orissa attacks, more than five hundred Christians were killed. Some fifty thousand more were driven into the jungles, where many of them still live in fear as of this writing. At least five thousand Christian homes were destroyed, and dozens of churches were ransacked or burned down. Dozens of Christian women were sexually assaulted, and more than forty shops owned by Christians were looted.⁵

Contrast the Orissa persecution with that time you might have been refused an invitation to a party or other social gathering because of your belief in Jesus Christ. Or consider that occasion when your feelings were hurt because you saw an offensive portrayal of a Christian on a television sitcom or that moment when someone called you an offensive name at work, at school, or on the Internet.

Now reflect on the following account of the 1999 events in the South Pyongyang Province in North Korea. A unit of the North Korean army was in the process of widening a highway connecting Pyongyang to a nearby port city. While razing a vacant house, soldiers found, hidden in the basement, a Bible and a list of twenty-five names. The list identified a Christian pastor, two assistant pastors, two elders, and twenty church members. The church members' occupations and places of employment were listed beside their names.

The twenty-five outed Christians were rounded up and held in custody without a formal judicial hearing. Later that month, the parishioners and their pastors were transported to the road construction site. Spectators had been arranged and seated – to observe the coming execution. According to eyewitness accounts, the five church leaders were bound and made to lie down in front of a steamroller. They were then formally accused of government subversion and of being Christian spies.

The twenty church members were detained next to their pastors. The pastors were ordered to denounce their faith in Jesus Christ, whereupon they would be allowed to live. They were commanded to serve only Kim Jong-il and his father, the first dictator of communist Korea, Kim Il-sung. The brave clergymen, following the example of Jesus Himself, did not respond to their captors.

The steamroller operator was given his orders. For their refusal to deny Jesus Christ, the pastors would be run over by the heavy machinery. According to a report cited by the *New York Sun*, "Some of the

fellow parishioners assembled to watch the execution cried, screamed out, or fainted when the skulls [of their pastors] made a popping sound as they were crushed beneath the steamroller.”⁶

Persecution in America for “being a Christian” can certainly be considered a relative matter – at least for now. However, many believe they see the frightening storm clouds of a coming real persecution gathering on the horizon.

JUSTIFIABLE UNEASINESS

Most of today’s American Christians probably would not truly define themselves as living under abject persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We are indeed a blessed nation.

More than likely, the vast majority of Christians living in the United States would describe their lives as relatively persecution-free, with the highest-intensity “persecution” leveled against them being described as occasional harassment or social alienation. Certainly, we hear of a student not being allowed to mention God in a speech or of a flower shop or bakery being sued because they would not offer their services for a homosexual wedding ceremony. These examples are serious, growing concerns for Christian Americans, to be sure. However, we don’t hear of Christians in America being imprisoned, tortured, or killed simply for expressing their faith in Jesus Christ. Such violent Christian persecution is certainly not government sanctioned. Not yet, anyway.

Nevertheless, here is the legitimate concern of numerous American Christians and their leaders: persecution of Christians, even intense and extreme persecution, may well come to us if we are not vigilant in preserving our freedoms and rights. And we have these concerns because we are painfully aware of the following three verified facts.

1. WORLDWIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IS REPORTED TO BE AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH.

According to statistics reported by Voice of the Martyrs, more Christians

were killed for their faith in the twentieth century alone than have been martyred in the total history of Christianity.⁷

In July 2014, Pope Francis declared that the twenty-first century has seen more Christians under siege for their faith than during the time of the early church.⁸

A prominent 2010 survey revealed that at least 75 percent of religious persecution reported from 2008 to 2010, around the world, was directed at people of the Christian faith.⁹

A January 2014 Reuters article announced that the reported cases of Christians killed for their faith, worldwide, doubled in 2013 from the year before. Syria accounted for more than the whole global total in 2012, according to the annual survey. The study claimed that there were 2,123 documented “martyr” killings alone in 2013, compared with 1,201 in 2012.¹⁰

In June 2014, when the Islamic terrorist group ISIS, an off-shoot of al-Qaeda, flared into a violent rage and ran roughshod over northern Iraq to “cleanse” the area of Christians, more than ten thousand Christians were forced to flee their communities in and around Qaraqosh, Iraq’s second largest city.

In the wake of the alarming ISIS incursion, heartbreaking reports of targeted Christian persecution began to pour out of the country. One such report alleged that a Christian man was forced to watch the brutal rape of his wife and daughter because he could not come up with the heavy, Islamic-imposed tax upon Christians. The grief-stricken man eventually took his own life.¹¹

It was further reported that ISIS specifically targeted Christian women, burned churches, and indiscriminately murdered Christians throughout Iraq.¹²

By July 2014 almost five thousand Christians were forced to flee for their lives from the Iraqi city of Mosul. Islamist insurgents issued an ultimatum to northern Iraq’s dwindling Christian population to convert

to Islam, pay a religious levy, or face death. “If they refuse this,” the Islamists said, “they will have nothing but the sword.”¹³

By late 2014 there were at least twenty thousand orphaned children as a result of the ISIS brutality in the Middle East, as well as hundreds of thousands of displaced Christians struggling to survive.¹⁴ Just weeks earlier, they had been living their lives as usual.

Several studies, reported from reliable sources, claim that more than one hundred thousand Christians a year, worldwide, are killed for their faith. They claim this trend has been occurring for over a decade.¹⁵

Admittedly, there are reasonable arguments against using those alarmingly high figures to report actual Christian persecution and martyrdom. For example, often there are civil wars in various third world nations in which more than one hundred thousand Christian deaths may occur each year, for years on end. Detractors ask, “Were these people really killed only because they were Christians?” And indeed, some of those civil wars involved “Christians” killing Christians. Considering that a number of these civil wars also occur in Muslim nations, others would argue that many did in fact die because they were Christians.

Nonetheless, in light of the alarmingly high and reliable statistics that we do possess concerning pervasive Christian persecution in various places around the world, many believe that the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:21 are already beginning to ring true: “For then [in the last days] shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (KJV).

If the oft-quoted claims presented by the preceding resources are even close to correct, it is not beyond reason for American Christians to be genuinely concerned that perhaps intense persecution may find its way to our shores as well.

American Christians are quite aware that, thus far, there are no governmental decrees in our country allowing abject persecution of any

faith system. For that we are deeply thankful to the Lord and to the government officials who jealously guard our constitutional protections. However, we still watch with alarm as an increasing number of acts of violence are committed upon Christians in the United States merely because they are believers in Jesus Christ.

THIS IS FOR REAL!

On September 15, 1999, Larry Gene Ashlock walked into the sanctuary of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The time was 6:55 p.m.; the youth praise band was leading worship and conducting a skit from the sanctuary stage. The lights had been dimmed for the concert-style worship service.

Ashlock opened fire upon the worshipping crowd with his 9-millimeter semiautomatic handgun. “A lot of people started applauding because they thought it was part of this skit,” a witness to the atrocity explained.

Apparently the applause further enraged the murderous gunman. Ashlock screamed out, “This is for real! This is for real!” and continued to fire away with his weapon. As he unloaded his weapon upon his shocked and unsuspecting victims, Ashlock cursed religion and Christianity, declaring, “This religion is a bunch of bull----.”

Finally, there was one last gunshot, and all went quiet. When the lights were turned up, it was discovered that the gunman had killed himself with the final shot. By the time the bloodbath was over, seven people – three adults and four teens (not including Ashlock) – lay dead, all in the name of the hatred of Christianity ... in Fort Worth, Texas.¹⁶

The collective contemplation of many of America’s Christians, upon hearing the news of this brutal crime, was, “This only happens in third world countries. This is not supposed to happen in America.” We really are not yet used to Christians being targeted in America.

HE HATED CHRISTIANS

In December 2007, twenty-four-year-old Matthew Murray killed four people and wounded five others who were attending Sunday morning worship services in Colorado, before being gunned down by a church security guard.

Murray's shooting spree took him to two different locations. His first attack took place at Youth with a Mission, a training center for missionaries in the Denver suburb of Arvada. The other related shooting occurred at the New Life Church in Colorado Springs. Murray was found with a rifle, two handguns, and a cache of ammunition. It was officially reported that he had fired more than forty rounds into the church by the time of his death. There were more than seven thousand people on and around the church property at the time of the shooting.

A law enforcement official present at the scene of the crime, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it appeared Murray, despite growing up in a reportedly Christian home, "hated Christians."¹⁷

So, as we read continual reports of similar, and much more frequent, atrocities occurring around the world and then when we see that they happen in our own backyards, we are alarmed, and many believe we are troubled for good reason.

Todd Starnes, White House journalist and syndicated radio host of *Fox News & Commentary*, claims:

I've documented hundreds of instances of religious persecution in the United States. And the targets have been exclusively Christians.

The military labeled evangelical Christians and Catholics as religious extremists. Christian organizations like Family Research Council and American Family Association were labeled by the military as domestic hate groups.

The list of attacks on Christians goes on and on – from students ordered to stop praying in front of the Supreme Court to chaplains being told they could no longer pray in the name of Jesus.¹⁸

As it turns out, then, numerous atrocities are already being committed against Christians in America. Many in the Christian community fear that the anti-Christian attitudes and even anti-Christian

violence will only escalate. Their fears may prove, in the long run, to have been unnecessary, but never doubt – the concerns are not unfounded.

2. HISTORICALLY CHRISTIAN-FRIENDLY NATIONS HAVE EVENTUALLY BECOME VICTIMS OF HORRIFIC PERSECUTION.

American Christians also recognize that there are forms of Christian persecution in the United States that often go unnoticed. They are expressed through television sitcoms, movies, literature, and news articles wherein Christians are consistently portrayed as homophobes and fearmongers, and preachers and their flocks are shown as foolish, bigoted, and irrational. Numerous Christians are aware that these were the very same tactics used in Nazi Germany to finally turn vast numbers of the population against the Jews. Once that turning was accomplished, unbridled and brutal persecution of the Jews and other minority groups followed.

Persecution is also often obscured in America's public school system. A 1986 study conducted by then New York University professor of psychology Dr. Paul Vitz and a committee, examined ninety social studies and history textbooks used in U.S. public schools. The results showed that almost every reference to the early Christian influence in the United States had been removed.

Worse, according to Dr. Vitz, "Religion, traditional family values, and conservative political and economic positions have been reliably excluded from children's textbooks." Out of sixty textbooks (approximately 15,000 pages), none "have even a single mention of people who go to church or synagogue, who worship or pray or have any religious influence on their lives or on society." Not one word.¹⁹

Many fear that historical revisionism is a consistent and growing trend in America. In September 2010, headline articles appeared decrying the fact that certain public school textbooks had been

discovered to offer a glorified view of Islam and a denigrated understanding of Christianity.²⁰ The same charges were leveled again in February 2014.²¹

Of course, the rewriting of history is also another way that once-Christian-friendly nations eventually fell into extreme forms of government-sponsored persecution of Christians. In Nazi Germany, for example, the government powers did not simply wake up one day and decide to start shipping Jews and other minorities away to prison camps, torture chambers, and ovens. Rather, the persecution resulted from a progression of many years of propaganda and demonization.

In 2004 Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. Parents of young children in two different schools sued the school system after teachers read or gave them books they considered counter to their religious beliefs. The lawsuits were unsuccessful. (One book, about different types of families, included a family unit headed by a same-sex couple. The other book, *King & King*, was about two princes who married each other.)

Federal courts ruled that the parents *did not have the right* to remove their children from class or even to be notified if a discussion of same-sex marriage came up in the classroom.²²

3. THERE ARE VERIFIABLE, TARGETED CAMPAIGNS AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA.

There can be little doubt that certain radical pro-homosexual groups and campaigns are actually targeting Christians, Christian businesses, and Christian churches in order to force their agenda and desires upon the Christian community at large. Many believe this to be the beginning stages for potentially serious persecution of Christians in America.

This targeting activity is not simply a figment of the imagination of a small group of paranoid Christians. The radical homosexual groups are actually admitting their agenda and publicly declaring their intentions.

The *Christian Post* reported on this phenomenon in 2007:

Two homosexual groups plan to launch a national campaign targeting the most influential megachurches and its leaders in an attempt to change their views on gays and lesbians.

Soulforce, which promotes “pro-gay” interpretations of Scripture, and COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) are currently recruiting LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) parents and their children along with other supporters for “The American Family Outing” in 2008. Selected families will visit six major mega-churches to “educate” the public on the issue of homosexuality.²³

In 2014, *American Thinker* reporter Patricia Dickson wrote:

It appears that the gay community is targeting Christians and the Christian church. If that is indeed the case, what do they want from the church?

If gay couples were to win every court case against Christian business owners or if the law somehow changed so that every Christian pastor is forced to perform same-sex weddings in the church, would they be satisfied? I do not believe that they would because their battle is not a political one, it is a spiritual one.

The gay community is constantly attacking the church as if the church were singling them out. However, it is the other way around; the gay community is singling out the church. How else do you explain gay couples running straight to Christian business owners as soon as their state lifts the ban on same-sex marriage?²⁴

In September 2014 WND reported:

A confessed domestic terrorist sits in prison after using information obtained from the Southern Poverty Law Center to target workers at a Christian organization in Washington, a case that drew little attention from government officials.

A “gay”-rights advocate, he attacked Christians identified by SPLC as members of a “hate” organization for their opposition to homosexual behavior.

Now, an alleged Muslim terrorist has described his brutal killing of a New Jersey teen “for being American” as a “just kill,” and a radio talk-show host says he’s not going to let it slide this time.

“It was, in fact, an act of jihad, perpetrated by a fellow American who sympathized more with those who want to annihilate us than with his own country and its people,” said radio host Todd Pettengill of “The Todd Show” on WPLJ in New York City.²⁵

The sad truth of the matter is that while radical gay groups relentlessly target churches and the Christian community with vitriol,

the genuine, Spirit-filled, Christian church is the only place where gay individuals may be able to find true concern and empathy, and an opportunity for healing – should they prefer that kind of ministry.

If there were to come a time when a gay person desired a change in his or her life or wanted to obtain biblical counseling, the church should be the first place that individual would be able to turn. Same goes for a woman who has had an abortion or anyone who is broken by sin. And when they do turn to us, our responsibility is to tell them the truth about these matters, in the love of Jesus Christ, and to point them to that same Christ to effect their healing.

IS HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?

Portraying Christians as less than tolerable humans. Revising Christian history and minimizing Christianity's importance to the nation's heritage. Passing subtle – and then extreme – antichristian or anti-biblical laws. And ultimately, directly targeting and identifying the “undesirable” groups as harmful. These were the general *modi operandi* of governments that eventually became severe persecutors of Christians. From the Roman Empire to Nazi Germany to the days of the evil Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania, these were the methods by which the frog was slowly boiled alive. Many American Christians claim they can already feel the heat of the intensifying flame sweeping across our land.

Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Eph. 4:15)

Consequently, a large number of America's Christians would probably argue that we do not suffer from a persecution complex nearly as much as we are concerned, *deeply* concerned, about the direction the country is taking. We have no desire to play the “persecution card” at every corner of discomfort that is wrought upon us. We take no special delight in

suffering persecution. We want pity from no one.

United States citizens have been blessed to enjoy a taste of freedom such as the world has never known. With all of our faults, we have been offered a little slice of paradise, a land where the freedom to worship or not to worship, for all people, has been diligently protected and held up as a sacred trust. Tens of thousands of our sons and daughters, down through the years, have fought, bled, and died to uphold these freedoms that are unimaginable in other countries.

Now, however, a great number of us believe we see these precious liberties and blessings under serious attack. We are witnessing our Christian liberties being engulfed in a slow, but ever-increasing, process of erosion.

We know from the sad history of Christian persecution in other parts of the world that persecution results from a progression. It rarely happens all at once. First, God's Word begins to be ignored. Then His people face teasing and tormenting. Next, legislation is introduced, aimed at neutralizing Christianity's affect on society. Soon God's people are labeled as "terror threats" and misfits. And finally, there is out-and-out persecution. We've seen it all before. Now, many of us see the procession marching forward in America. This is why we are concerned.

The simple truth of the matter is that we would rather not listen to the skulls of our friends and families popping under the rolling wheels of heavy construction equipment while we are forced to look on in horror and helplessness. We would rather that our children and grandchildren not have to live in that kind of America. Therefore, we must remain vigilant.

Fight the fight, finish the race, and keep the faith. – ADAPTED FROM 2 TIMOTHY

4:7

TRUTH POINTS

Regarding the Persecution of Christians in America

- ❑ Many argue that there are at least the beginnings of persecution of Christian Americans through direct or indirect government sanctions, such as hate-speech laws, and cultural innuendos.
- ❑ The rise of Islam, the growth of America's Muslim community, and the continual calls for Sharia-based rulings in America give immediate cause for alarm to America's Christians.
- ❑ Anti-Christian educational methods, textbook revisions of American history, the outspoken call for the targeting of Christian churches by certain activist groups, and church shootings and other acts of violence aimed directly at Christian congregations substantiate the undercurrent of Christian persecution that is building in America.
- ❑ A number of the same methods (i.e. marginalization, isolation, and demonization of entire people groups) used by Nazi Germany and other repressive, persecuting regimes of history are now being employed in our current American culture.
- ❑ Many Christians observe an overall trend in America to denigrate and marginalize the Christian concepts of morality, marriage, home, family, and parenting – principles upon which the nation was historically and undeniably founded.

PART II

PREPARING THE CHURCH AND YOUR FAMILY FOR ACTION

STEMMING THE TIDE OF EVIL

(EQUIPPING BELIEVERS TO REENGAGE THE CULTURE)

This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”
But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” – JEREMIAH 6:16

The heat of the July 2012 African sun seared their backs as they fled their attackers. But the panicking wad of people ran with all their might, despite the sweltering temperatures. They were fleeing for their lives.

A group of fifty people – men, women, and children – converged upon the little village home of their pastor. He hastily opened the door, allowing all fifty inside. His heart was filled with compassion, but his eyes betrayed the terror he felt.

The panicked throng who had come seeking shelter were attempting to escape from the latest outbreak of rage, stemming from a decade-long era of violence and persecution. The fifty were Christians. The village was Maseh, in Nigeria.

Their attackers were enraged radical Muslims from the Islamic group known as Boko Haram. For ten long years the assaults had been relentlessly leveled against the Christians of the area. For the most part, the Christians were poor peasant farmers. But, the Muslims, in a systematic Christian-cleansing campaign, had been destroying their crops and driving them from their lands. As a result, many of the Christians were starving. Their children were becoming illiterate, as schooling for them had become merely an impossible dream.

The Christians had been told, time and again, that the Nigerian military had made it a policy to “protect” the Islamic population – in deference to all others. Even though there had not been a single instance of Christians destroying mosques, the occurrence of Muslims pillaging and destroying Christian churches was becoming commonplace. So, the Christians were continually running for their lives while the government sheltered the Islamic murderers.

On this particular day, the fifty had hoped to find some mercy and refuge in their pastor’s home. The attackers descended upon them with no regard for sanctuary or mercy, yelling their vile threats and curses. “Denounce your Christian faith, turn to Islam, or you will die – you and your families – *all of you!*”

As they clung to one another in the little home with their pastor and his wife and small children, the Muslim horde gathered outside. The door was abruptly kicked in with a booming crash. A burst of bullets sprayed around the inside of the house. Several of the horror-stricken occupants fell into pools of quickly gathering blood. Those who were still alive smelled the odor of fresh smoke. The invaders were torching the house! They intended to burn them alive! The children screamed. Parents clutched their weeping little ones closely to their sides.

Before they could completely gather their senses, the home was engulfed in angry, searing flames. Every man, woman, boy, and girl left standing was burned alive as their persecutors joyfully celebrated outside, to the pitiful screams of their victims.

The Islamic destroyers then bolted toward the village church. They burned it to the ground as well. And the raids continued – village to village. In a dozen village raids, more than a hundred Christians were slaughtered. Every one of the village churches in that multi-village attack was destroyed.¹

BACK IN AMERICA ...

Meanwhile, in America, the vast majority of the churches went on with their business, as usual. The next Sunday, American Christians gathered to sing their hymns and listen to well-oiled homilies. Few spoke of Maseh, Nigeria. The silence was deafening.

History has borne out how egregious persecution aimed at specific groups is proliferated when the body of Christ fails to boldly address the atrocity or mobilize against it. The church must do its due diligence and consistently instruct its members in the biblical truth concerning the prevailing persecution patterns and the spiritual warfare that is ultimately behind it.

The problem is especially enhanced when church leaders do not address the evils of that society's godless leadership patterns, anti-Christian legislative agendas, and apostasy within the church as a whole. Again, let us turn to the example of Nazi Germany.

Christians in the Middle East and Africa are being slaughtered, tortured, raped, kidnapped, beheaded, and forced to flee the birthplace of Christianity. One would think this horror might be consuming the pulpits and pews of American churches. Not so. The silence has been nearly deafening.²

Observe the documented similarities between the rise of Hitler's Germany in 1938 and the current path on which the United States of America is traveling. See if any of the following situations sound familiar:

- Prayer was taken out of Germany's schools in 1935.
- Christmas and Resurrection celebrations were forbidden in the schools.
- Abortion became the new and expected "normal."

- Selective gun registration was mandated, eventually followed by guns being confiscated by the Nazis.
- Free speech steadily faded. The media told only the pro-government side of a story.
- The green agenda, steeped in paganism, was adopted.
- The church in Germany did not want to make waves or engage in controversy, so pulpits refused to address serious issues or politics.
- The German church was steered into mysticism – like today’s American pulpits that are okay with Christian yoga-type deceptions. Hitler knew this would make the church weak and ineffective. Most, but not all, churches in Germany were riddled with compromise.
- Many German pastors wanted to be popular and find favor with the government. They certainly did not want to offend anyone.³

Once these factors, along with other political elements (socialized health care, out-of-control government spending, repressive taxation, and so forth), were in place, Hitler’s Nazi Germany advanced its demonic agenda. Integrated into that agenda was the systematic execution of nearly 20 million undesirable people, including at least 6 million Jews.⁴

These historical facts, coupled with the alarming trends taking place in today’s America (discussed in the preceding chapters) should serve as a wake-up call to America’s churches, especially those churches that have become largely disengaged from the world around them.

This admonition is not meant to be judgmental or overtly condemning. It is simply a statement of fact. A number of America’s churches are now engaging the culture or have always been involved or are just becoming involved, but there are still a great many that are not. Now is not the time for America’s churches to retreat behind four walls

and stained glass windows! Certain prophetic passages of the New Testament speak of this truth as well:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – *having a form of godliness* but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. (2 Tim. 3:1–5; emphasis added)

What is the “power” that some would deny, according to this scripture? Since Paul was directing this prophecy to a young Timothy and to the church of which Timothy was the pastor, it makes contextual sense that Paul was cautioning the church not to fall into the trap of being sucked into the degradation of the culture around it.

Paul was forewarning that even some of the people of God, while holding to a *form of godliness*, would, by and large, neglect to be salt and light to the world in which they have been called to minister. In other words, a number of churches would decline to engage the culture around them. They would rather please, or appease, the culture than to confront it with its blatant sin and the truth of God’s Word. In the neglecting of these things, they would be denying the power they could have possessed and the change they could have effected.

WHAT IF MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS “REENGAGED”?

In America in survey after survey millions of professing Christians admit that they are not even registered to vote. And according to some polls, millions of those Christians who are registered admit to voting less than 50 percent of the time in any given election!⁵

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48)

Think of it. What if millions more Christian voters in America, along with their pastors, actively participated in the processes of the constitutional republic with which God has blessed us? What if they were actually *grateful* to the Lord that they had the opportunity to be involved, an opportunity that billions of people in other nations of the world do not possess?

And, what if those millions of now disengaged Christians actually voted (or ran for office!) and did so according to clear biblical principles? Do you not believe our nation could perhaps be in an entirely different circumstance right now? It is conceivable that Christians would be able to elect practically any candidate they desired ... if they were seriously and consistently *engaged*.

This is not to suggest that simply being involved in the political process (or the act of voting alone) is America's only hope of salvation. Far from it. America's only hope of real salvation is *repentance*: a vast turning back to God, beginning with its leadership and its churches.

However, reengaging in the processes of civic responsibility can certainly be a part of the repentance process as well. God has given us a gift that, by and large, we have squandered, a gift that other nations (and Christians) of the world envy.

We are still free to work openly within the fabric of our own government and government processes to effect great and godly change as well as to preserve the biblical liberties we still possess. We are the only nation in the history of nations to have bestowed so much potential power upon the people, and especially upon the people of God! Many Christians believe that for God's people to disdainfully treat such a precious gift is sin, plain and simple.

The Christians in Rome did not have this great blessing. Neither did the Christians in Nazi Germany. Look what happened in those cultures. Today, millions upon millions of Christians living in China, North Korea, the Middle East, and certain parts of Africa do not have this gift either.

One must wonder how they view the church in America – blessed beyond measure – a church body that often does not seem to recognize or appreciate the blessing or the potential power it possesses but fails to employ.

PREPARING AMERICA’S PASTORS

“Pastor Cornell, you’ve got to know about this!” The voice on the other end of the line was obviously distressed. “You won’t believe it when I tell you this! They are getting ready to run a gay man for public office! I know the man personally, and I know his family. I even know his partner.” The caller was another pastor living in the same small community.

“How can I help in this matter?” Pastor Cornell asked.

“You have a lot of influence in the community. You have a big voice. You have access to a lot of people. You need to let folks know what’s going on! If they want to vote for him, fine. It’s just that people need to know that he’s certainly not a conservative Christian. He’s trying to pull a fast one on the voters of the county.”

“Tell me the details,” Pastor Cornell answered, “Who is it? What office are we talking about?”

“Well, preacher, it’s the school board,” the caller revealed. “But that’s not the only bad part. The worst part is that this homosexual is telling everyone, even the news media, that he is a conservative Christian! And he is running on a Christian-sounding platform. And the media is reporting it that way! It’s all a big ploy! Most of the voters of the county have no idea he’s homosexual! And as you know, a very large part of the voters of this county are truly conservative Christians.” The caller went on to explain how he knew the candidate was in fact a homosexual, and then he presented the details of the evidence to Pastor Cornell.

“Okay,” the pastor said. “And how should I tell people that you are involved in this? When people ask me how I knew all of this, may I tell

them that you are the one who first brought the information to me? Will you stand with me as I take this information to the public?”

The caller nervously cleared his throat. “Uh ... no! Please don’t use my name! I can’t afford for folks to know that I told you. I don’t want to be involved!”

A CULTURE OF CHALLENGE

And there are the six words that have neutralized a large number of America’s pulpits – *I don’t want to be involved!* The preceding story is true, with a few details changed to protect the innocent (and guilty). I know the pastor to whom this happened, and I know the pastor who called him. Both are good men who love the Lord, but in this circumstance, the caller is a pastor who all too easily abdicated the authority and responsibility that God placed within his specific realm of duty.

America’s twenty-first-century culture presents a plethora of trials for both those in the pulpits and those in the pews. Pastors, individual church families, and entire denominations must decide where they will stand on vitally biblical issues such as abortion, homosexual marriage, divorce, living together before marriage, domestic violence, pornography, racial discord, and whether or not the church and the pulpit will engage in direct political participation.

There are also decisions about whether or not the church will take seriously its role in direct, hands-on mission efforts – relief ministries for the homeless, the poor, the hungry, the abused, the orphaned, and those affected by natural disasters – as well as whether or not it will seriously engage in general emergency preparedness.

In late July 2014, George Barna, of the Barna Group, revealed amazing information he had been compiling over the previous two years of research.⁶ His investigation involved the lack of preparedness and involvement on the part of America’s “conservative” pastors in engaging the American culture concerning controversial biblical matters – like the

ones we just outlined.

Barna said, in a radio interview with American Family Radio: “What we’re finding is that when we ask them about all the key issues of the day, [90 percent of them are] telling us, ‘Yes, the Bible speaks to every one of these issues.’ Then we ask them: ‘Well, are you teaching your people what the Bible says about those issues?’ – and the numbers drop ... to less than 10 percent of pastors who say they will speak to it.”

Barna went on to say, “So the thing that struck me has been that when we talk about the separation of church and state, it’s that churches have separated themselves from the activities of the state – and that’s to the detriment of the state and its people.”

According to this same report, when asked why they did not engage the culture to which they had been called to minister and why they did not preach the important, yet controversial, truths of the Bible to their people, the pastors cited, among other things, fear of losing members, fear of losing financial support, the extremely controversial nature of political subjects, and a lack of familiarity with the details of the issues.

Probably the most telling words of the Barna interview had to do with the lack of preparedness on the part of America’s so-called conservative pastors, “When you look at what they get in Bible school or in the seminary, they are not taught to get people engaged in these particular issues. They are taught just to exegete scriptures; they are taught something about the history of where those scriptures came from – but they are not prepared.”

Think of it. If the preachers, pastors, and prophets of our day are not prepared to confront society as it continues to turn from God, *who will do it?* Will the public school system do it? Will Congress lead the way? Will the Supreme Court raise the banner? Will the entertainment industry do it? Will our local politicians light the path?

Who will make certain the next generation knows that real marriage is between one man and one woman and that the human race did not

evolve from an accidental chemical soup and that babies in mothers' wombs are real people and that they are the literal future of our nation and of the church? How will future generations of parents know what God's Word says so they can tell their children, in the event the preachers fail to tell them? Who will teach the church that it is our responsibility to roll up our sleeves when disaster strikes our neighbor? Who will teach the church how to get involved, how to be engaged, how to impact our world through the binding up of its wounds? Who will tell them, if the shepherds do not? Who will lead the way if the church does not?

Who will prepare the next generation to stand up under the coming persecution that will inevitably result from an unchecked and rotting culture because too many hesitant preachers before them failed to stand? The predominance of the task falls upon the shoulders of today's pastors and today's churches, plain and simple.

AN ANCIENT WARNING FOR TODAY'S CHURCH?

Jeremiah 6:14, 16, 17

[The shepherds] dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace....

This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.'"

THE DILEMMA OF ROMANS 13

"Preacher!" the obviously distraught government official said, "I need to

talk to you. Come over here for just a moment.” The county official and I stepped to a hallway, which afforded us a relative amount of privacy. The government administrative halls buzzed with the activity of a flurry of voters engaged in yet another “wet-dry” county alcohol sales referendum.

“Now, preacher,” the stern-faced government official said to me in an almost threatening tone, “you just need to leave this alcohol issue alone. You need to stay out of politics! I’m tired of you thinking you’ve gotta speak up every time some political issue arises that you don’t like. Just stick to your pulpit and stick to your Bible. Let us handle the politics!” He shifted his stance to an even more aggressive position, his brow furrowed in disgust. I listened without remark. It was obvious he was not finished with his chastisement.

“My own pastor was preaching about this very thing just last Sunday,” the aggravated commissioner continued, “He was preaching on Romans 13, how the church ought to stay out of the government’s business and faithfully obey the government’s laws.”

I was dumbfounded. However, a lecture like this was not unexpected from this particular commissioner. I had known him for years and had believed this was exactly how he felt. I just could not believe that he had actually *said* the words out loud! However, I chalked up the commissioner’s convenient interpretation of his pastor’s sermon to a church member simply hearing what he wanted to hear. Nevertheless, this encounter illustrates the diabolical and deceitful ruse being wrought upon America’s pastors and churches, even at the levels of local government.

But was the commissioner’s characterization of Romans 13 correct? This biblical exhortation is often used to discourage Christians and pastors from questioning government authorities or from actively participating in the various political processes. Sadly, the trick often works on pastors and Christians who do not know the context of Paul’s

teaching here. Let us examine it together:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Rom. 13:1-7)

The context of this scripture is supremely important. The message of it is that the Christian and the church should generally and peacefully obey the laws of the land and pay their lawfully expected taxes. I agree wholeheartedly. It is a fact that the church was not planted upon this earth to become a political action committee designed to overthrow ruling administrations and governments. The Lord of glory *will* take care of those weighty matters upon His return.

Also consider that the people of Paul's day did not have the First and Second Amendment rights that we enjoy in the United States. Neither could they vote for their leaders or run for office! Without those abilities they could not have been *expected* to possess the responsibilities that go with them. Many, including myself, believe that these responsibilities and great blessings of freedom were given to us as a gift from God; *and to whom much has been given – much is expected.*

Imagine the absurdity of the following scenario: You are living during the Roman times. Because you have very little say in your government's affairs or in the selection of your highest rulers, you often find yourself praying, "If only I had the ability to have a voice in the government. If only I could choose my leaders and help make a difference concerning

which direction our government heads.”

Poof! You are instantly transported to the modern-day United States. The gift for which you so earnestly longed has been given to you on a silver platter. But now, when asked to be involved in the societal and political processes, you respond, “Oh no! We must not speak against our government at all; Romans 13 makes this command clear!” Do you see how ridiculous many of America’s Christians have become in interpreting this biblical matter?

Certainly, we should live in peace with the society around us, as much as it is biblically possible to do so. This includes living at peace with the governing authorities. Even a poorly run government is better than total anarchy and abject lawlessness. This is why Paul pointed out to his readers that governments are supposed to serve as a restraint to the flood of evil that would surely come if there were no government at all.

However, we are never relieved of our biblical responsibility to be the salt and light of the kingdom truths. Our founding fathers fully expected that the church would be involved in the political and civic processes of our new society. Without that involvement, many of our founders feared our culture would quickly rot to the core. They wrote extensively concerning their feelings in this matter.

On top of the preceding truths, the Bible records Christians refusing to give in to the political norms and whims of the governing authorities of their day, especially when those authorities stepped into the arenas of biblical matters. Consider the response that Peter and John gave to the Sanhedrin council after being told, in effect, to renounce the public exercising of their faith in Jesus Christ: “Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard’” (Acts 4:18–20).

Paul himself, the one who wrote Romans 13, was often jailed, beaten,

or stoned because he refused to kowtow to ecclesiastical authorities, even the Roman authorities, concerning matters of his biblical faith in Christ. In fact, Nero executed Paul, after first imprisoning him in Rome, for his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

America's founding fathers did not incorporate the First Amendment in the Constitution to *prohibit* Christianity from influencing state-established institutions. They *expected* our nation to be (generally speaking) Christian in nature and character (as opposed to Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Deist, atheist, or what have you), and they expected our government to reflect that bias while still providing equal protection for all. This is the defining principle and glory of America!

Accordingly, American Christians must stay engaged in the political and civic affairs of the country with which God has blessed us. We live in a unique nation, and we are thus in a unique situation. Christian principles founded this nation. The blessings of liberty we now enjoy, which enable us to take the gospel to the world around us and to exercise our faith without legal reprisal, were secured for us within those founding principles. If we do not stay involved and if we give in to fear and threats, or simply opt out of our biblical responsibilities of cultural engagement, we may invite similar persecution upon ourselves or upon the generations that will follow us.

THE CO-OPTING OF BIBLICAL ISSUES

John Eidsmoe, a widely admired American attorney and professor of constitutional law, sums up the situation in this often-quoted statement: "Those who object to Christian expression in public life frequently use the phrase as a code word to mean, separation of church from reality. They say, 'Christians can stay in church and pray and sing, but leave the real problems of the world to us.'" ⁷

As a rule, our culture has deceitfully co-opted certain biblical issues and recategorized these concerns as the exclusive domain of the political

realm. Then the scheming political arena says to the church, “You need to stay out of politics and away from these political issues! Separation of church and state!” Satan has pulled a deceitful scam on the church, has he not? Sadly, numerous pastors, churches, and even entire denominations have bought into the lie and abdicated biblical issues solely to the arena of politics.

Observe just a few examples of how the shift occurs: Are Middle Eastern affairs and the existence and future of Israel at the top of the list of today’s political issues? Yes, they are. But are they not also biblical issues?

What about abortion and the corresponding federal laws and court rulings that are attached to the issue? Consider the topics of human origins, creation, and the teaching of evolution as scientific fact. Are these merely political matters? Are they not also exceptionally valid biblical issues as well? Yet they are all considered to be deeply (and some would say *exclusively*) political issues in today’s world.

Consider the definition of what constitutes a legitimate marriage. What about the biblical definition of sexuality itself? These matters are now declared to be political issues, government matters, and mere legislative concerns. But they are also very real biblical concerns as well. What about the matter of the radical homosexual agenda? How about the related hate-crime laws, marriage laws, and the civil rights issues associated with the movement?

The question of gun control and personal protection is a deeply biblical matter, applying directly to our lives and the protection of our God-given liberties. Yet pastors and churches that dare to speak to this issue are often ridiculed by the prevailing powers.

Accordingly, when a particularly heinous crime or highly publicized incident occurs having to do with any of these issues, politicians will seize upon the ripe opportunity and shout into the public arena (because the preachers often will not address the matters), “*I know what – let’s have*

more government regulations thrust upon your liberties! Oh yes ... and churches, you stay out of all this.”

And, according to Barna’s findings mentioned previously, many of the shepherds do stay out of the way purposely. They do not want to become “controversial.” They want the powers in control to leave them alone. Worse yet, some shepherds deeply desire to be *friends* with the world’s powers. As a result, sometimes today’s shepherds even *embrace* the new norms of society and then completely relinquish any biblical mandate concerning them to the politicians and to government decree. The Bible is clear concerning such attitudes among God’s people:

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. (1 John 2:15)

CIRCLING THE WAGONS

So how should pastors, Christians, and churches handle direct Christian persecution when it comes to America? Of course, each case is a bit different, and each should be considered with much care, thought, prayer, and biblical prudence. However, the overarching answer in most cases would be at least to “circle the wagons.” That is to say, *get involved*, become engaged in meaningful action, use every legal means possible to stand up to the persecution, and, if possible, constructively minister in the midst of it. Consider the following example of how this *circling-the-wagons* technique was effective in producing exciting results.

In late 2014 a story unfolded before the eyes of the nation that shocked the Christian community to the core. America’s churches got a taste of real-life, out-and-out, government-sanctioned persecution specifically targeted against Christians – perhaps the first of its kind in America’s history.

In September of that year, Christians throughout America learned that Houston's openly lesbian mayor, Annise Parker, had subpoenaed five prominent Houston pastors. The subpoenas were issued for the purpose of routing out sermons and other documents that the conservative Christian pastors had produced that may have touched on a controversial and recent pro-gay city ordinance, the topic of homosexuality, or Ms. Parker herself. Immediate outrage ensued.

In May 2014 Mayor Parker and two openly homosexual city council members had forced through the city's legal process a nondiscrimination ordinance that would have given special rights and protections to homosexuals and lesbians. The so-called bathroom bill passed the vote of the city council despite avid opposition from the Houston community. Much of the outspoken opposition was led by local churches and pastors.

As a result of the mayor's aggressive homosexual agenda, citizens collected more than 50,000 signatures on a petition (the legal requirement was only 17,200) to put the issue before Houston voters instead of a mere city council "declaration." Under Parker's leadership, the city council rejected the petition on a "technicality."

After the council's rejection of the petition, Mayor Parker took her revenge. That is when she issued the subpoenas against the pastors who had been involved in the petition drives. She declared that if the pastors refused to turn over any relevant sermons and other documents, she would charge them with contempt of court and possible fines or jail time.⁸

The mayor demanded seventeen different categories of information from the pastors, including text messages between their congregants and themselves and copies of their sermons on issues such as homosexuality, gender identity, or the mayor.⁹

Churches and church leaders across America began to circle the wagons. Calls for immediate action ensued. The American Family Association got involved, along with the Alliance for Defending Freedom

and other national defense-of-liberty organizations. Conservative talk radio hosts, from the top-ranked Rush Limbaugh on down, became engaged in alerting the nation to what was happening.

In response to the subpoenas, *The Blaze*'s Glenn Beck, Fox News' Mike Huckabee, and Texas senator Ted Cruz suggested that Christians from all over the nation should mail in religious documents – including the Bible – to the mayor's office and to City Hall.¹⁰

ARE YOU WILLING TO GO TO JAIL?

In October 2014 two of the pastors who were subpoenaed were interviewed on Fox News by Sean Hannity. Hannity said to one of the persecuted pastors, "Pastor, I'll ask you this. From my perspective, under no conditions should you comply with this unlawful edict and set a precedent this way. Are you willing to go to jail to defend your rights to preach and freedom of religion?" The pastor stated unequivocally that he would not turn over his sermons or any other information to the mayor – and he was willing to go to jail if necessary.¹¹

They triumphed over [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Rev. 12:11)

Shortly after news of the city's subpoenas made the national headlines, as many as one thousand Bibles were reportedly mailed to the mayor's office, along with a plethora of recorded sermons mailed in by various pastors around the nation who preached messages that condemn the practice of homosexuality. The mayor eventually decided to back off the request.¹²

The mayor's announcement came only one day after pastors from across the nation descended upon Houston to support the persecuted local pastors. The pastors declared they were taking a stand against

violations of their First Amendment rights. After receiving the surprising national backlash, Parker instructed the city’s legal team to narrow the scope of the subpoenas. The mayor insisted she “never intended to intrude on manners of faith, but only focus on the petition process.”¹³

Stemming the tide of evil – one attack at a time – the church standing arm in arm, willing to sacrifice, and individual Christians willing to suffer in order to hold back the evil if at all possible. This is one way the church can stand united in times of persecution. Truly, this is how the church has always stood united since the beginning of its days in downtown Jerusalem.

When pastors, church leaders, and other Christians are willing to go to jail, if necessary, to protect their God-given liberties and responsibilities; when they speak up and speak out for one another; and when they bathe these injustices in fervent prayer and networked, united actions, often our liberties can be preserved. But even if those liberties are not protected – we must never bow down and worship the “gods” of the evil that continually march against us.

We must be willing to daily put on the full armor of God so that when the day of real evil comes, we can stand (Eph. 6:13). This is our heritage. This is our ultimate calling – and it is our ultimate *power* from God.

“But even if our God does not deliver us from your fiery furnaces – we will not serve your gods, O King.” (Dan. 3:18, author’s paraphrase)

PREPARING THE CHURCH FOR TROUBLED TIMES

(EQUIPPING BELIEVERS TO RESPOND)

Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called and his work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry. It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it. – A. W. TOZER (THE PURSUIT OF GOD)

“Christianity as we know it in Iraq is being wiped out,” the congressman proclaimed.

“I believe what is happening to the Christian community in Iraq is genocide. I also believe it is a crime against humanity.” These were the remarks of Congressman Frank Wolf of Virginia in July 2014 as he went to the House floor to alert his colleagues of the genocidal crisis.

Wolf’s alarming assessments were made in response to the Islamic terrorist faction ISIS, which was ripping through Iraq that month – pillaging, murdering, raping, and destroying Christians and their communities.

“Where is the West?” Wolf went on to say, “Where is the Obama administration? Where is the Congress? The silence is deafening. The West, *particularly the church*, needs to speak out.”

He continued to illuminate the desperate situation, “All Mosul churches and monasteries are seized by ISIS. There are around thirty. The cross has been removed from all of them. Many of them are burned, destroyed and looted. Many others are being used as ISIS centers.”¹

A CHURCH PREPARING ...

Where is America's church? Ouch! Most of us were cheering the congressman's remarks until he got too close to home. But he was right. Where is your church on these matters? Are the persecuted even mentioned from the pulpit or lifted up in prayer, much less given relief assistance?

Additionally, how does the church in America prepare itself to minister in the *midst* of persecution? How do we equip the body to respond to and handle similarly treacherous times, especially if that treachery were to come to our shores? How do we prepare America's churches for the possibility that we might one day be faced with the evils of direct, government-sponsored, "legalized" persecution of Christians in America?

A CHURCH PREPARED TO TEACH

The church must first prepare itself by consistently and contextually teaching the great biblical truths about the reality of persecution. It is especially important to teach about the persecution that is inevitable when one follows Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus was not silent on this matter. The Scriptures are honest in warning us, but often today's church is not so honest about the matter. It is not a popular message; consequently, some of America's preachers steer clear of those portions of God's Word altogether. The largest church "empires" are built upon a noticeable lack of preaching on the topic of the persecution that often comes with living a life dedicated to Jesus Christ. And yet, an abundance of material dealing with persecution is available in Christian bookstores, including wonderful videos that can be used in equipping the church to understand this topic in a biblical manner. (See the Resource section of this book for some ideas on securing information on this topic.)

The bulk of the responsibilities for the teaching of this great doctrinal truth will, of course, fall upon the church leadership. However, the biblical teachings on persecution and the Christian responses to it should also spill over into personal Bible study, home-cell groups, men's and

women's Bible studies, and even family discussions. In addition, a wise church leadership will appropriately prepare its children and students in the contextual biblical understanding of the topic of persecution.

There is a great temptation to preach and teach the encouraging, motivational, and *feel-good* messages only. There are plenty of scriptures that speak of encouragement, to be sure, and in order to preach the whole word of God, they certainly should be included in a well-rounded preaching and teaching plan. But a church that does not deal with the biblical realities of Christian persecution, especially those spoken of by Jesus Himself, is doing the body of Christ a great disservice. We are rendering our people uninformed and perhaps causing the church as a whole to become selfish and self-centered, even soft.

Pertinent topics that ought to be frequently preached upon should include:

- the biblical teachings on perseverance
- the importance of *faith living*
- the problem of evil (why it exists and God's plan for dealing with it)
- the problem of suffering
- persecution in the early church and early church history
- current persecution around the world and the biblical history, teachings, and implications of that persecution
- the responsibility of Christians to be involved in aiding other Christians around the world who are targets of persecution
- biblical responses to persecution (outreach, relief, prayer groups)
- Bible heroes who suffered for their faith

A CHURCH PREPARED TO LEARN

The church should be thoroughly equipped with the knowledge of what is happening in the world around it. Christians are being persecuted every day. Tens of thousands are being killed every year. Persecution, to some degree, is already happening in the United States. These facts speak to the reality of the times in which we live, and many Christians are not aware of even the basic facts.

Sadly, a number of America's Christians are unaware, or under-educated, concerning the historical atrocities of Christian persecution in North Korea, Romania, Communist Russia, or China. Many are not even remotely familiar with what is currently happening in those areas or in the Middle East and various other Muslim countries. Christian persecution is exploding globally right under our noses. If these facts of history and the modern-day persecution in the nations around us are not addressed by America's pulpits and remain unnoticed by those in the pews, they are bound to be repeated on our own shores, relatively unhindered.

Congregations must be willing to learn the historical roots of persecution so they will recognize the same signs among us. They must be prepared to speak out against it and to battle it by every lawful and biblical means possible.

In short, the church must always be in the process of learning and staying abreast of what is happening around them. The early church certainly had to live in this manner. To put it plainly, we must be biblically able to discern the times in which we live. And, most important, we must be thoroughly and faithfully prepared to effectively minister during the times in which God has placed us.

PERSECUTION IS NOT THE CHURCH'S ONLY CONCERN

The latest national studies and surveys indicate that a mere 5 to 10 percent of the nation's population is prepared, in practical and logistical

ways, to adequately deal with either a natural or man-made disaster. This deficiency of preparedness could put our entire local and national disaster response capabilities at a monumental risk of being overwhelmed.²

The majority of America's churches are probably similarly ill prepared when it comes to being equipped to minister to the traumas of life within our specific mission fields, much less in the world at large. Increasingly, many Christians are beginning to understand that churches should play a substantial role in expanding the number of people who are prepared logistically, as well as spiritually, for the challenges that might lie ahead for our nation and even the global community. This spirit of preparation among the people of God can only enhance our churches' abilities to bring people to a biblical faith in Jesus Christ.

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

THE HURDLE OF SELFISHNESS

I am convinced that one of the most prevalent reasons that more of America's church congregations do not engage in vibrant, hands-on, life-changing ministry in the lives and conditions of others is *selfishness*. I have been in the ministry long enough (three decades at the time of this writing) to have observed this particularly unbiblical and crippling outlook in the attitudes of individual Christians, pastors and other church leadership, and even entire congregations. The early church had to overcome this selfish tendency of the fleshly nature early on. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) paid for it with their lives – the supernatural penalty served as an object lesson to the entire church body. The apostles and the church leaders who came after them continually warned

the church about slipping into this ministry-stifling mind-set.

A CHURCH PREPARED TO MINISTER

Years ago, when my grandson was just a toddler and first learning to speak, he came up with an interesting phrase, complete with the appropriate corresponding body language. The phrase is still referred to in our family to this day. We use it to remind one another of the stigma of *selfishness*.

My grandson soon learned that if he extended his right hand and opened and closed his tiny fist in a grasping gesture and then uttered the phrase, “*Ahhh meee!*” he would get a response. Usually his request would be granted. What was he indicating? The best we could figure, he was attempting to say, “I want that” or “Give it to me” or “That is for me!” He even learned how to pooch his little pudgy lips just right and wrinkle up his cute little nose so that he displayed the most pitiful and needy look possible. He also discovered how to add the word *peas* (please) to his urgent request. Can you visualize the scene yet? “*Peas. Ahhh meee! Peas!*”

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:3-5)

As you might probably imagine, the gesture was hilarious – at least at first. However, it soon became quite annoying, as we discovered that he had learned to use it as a means of manipulating his environment, thus assuring that his every wish was soon granted. “*Ahhh meee!*” “Give it to me – *now!*”

Sadly, the general American lifestyle of comfort, prosperity, and convenience appears to have created an “*Ahhh meee!*” generation. A number of America’s churches may be guilty of creating the same spirit.

We live in an entitlement society. A good number of church members seemed to have acquired the entitlement mentality as well. Some churchgoers expect that the church and its leadership owes them something at all times.

Other Christians treat the church as though it were a mere arm of the government welfare system. This is not a healthy environment in which to prepare the church for meaningful ministry to the hurting world around it. Would you not agree? Neither is it a biblical environment. Church leadership is responsible for changing the dynamic. There must be a paradigm shift in an “*Ahhh meee!*” church.

So what do we do about it? It is never fun to help a particularly immature person to grow up. It is probably even less fun to help an entire church family (we are speaking of its *group mentality*) to grow up. There will be much resistance. You must prepare for some members to leave, and some of them will pitch a fit as they exit. But the task must be accomplished if we are going to have a healthy, mature, persecution-ready, ministry-enabled church.

The way leadership helps a church mature is by teaching, leading, and modeling servanthood. We are talking about rolling up your sleeves and getting your hands dirty; helping in the lives, misery, heartache, trauma, and persecution of other people, while at the same time faithfully ministering the eternal truths of the Word of God.

CLEANING UP THE SLOP

Let me relate an anecdotal story that will demonstrate how this principle works, at least on a small scale. Years ago, I was on my first mission trip to Peru. We have since that time developed a complex and ongoing ministry with our brothers and sisters there. But on the first trip, I was standing on the stage in a large congregation of very poor believers in the outskirts of Lima, in the Comas district. I was being introduced to the congregation when I happened to hear an odd noise coming from

somewhere on the stage behind me. I turned, discreetly, to look. I noticed that the very low-profile baptistery was overflowing. The stage was in the process of flooding!

The associate pastor, who was introducing me, went on with the introduction, seemingly undaunted by the melee occurring behind him. I saw a herd of women rushing the stage with towels and trying to invisibly go about the task of holding back the dirty flood while the “distinguished” guest from America was being introduced.

I could finally stand it no longer. I threw off my jacket, rolled up my sleeves, grabbed some towels, and fell to my knees to help the women. I was able, with my vastly longer arms and reach, to soak up large quantities of the water, get the water turned off, and help them stop the disaster.

When all was finished, I rose to my feet to complete my official introduction to the church, the place where I would spend the week ministering. The congregation was in shock. They looked at me as though I had three heads. I was humiliated for a moment. Had I violated Peruvian custom? Had I stepped over some cultural line of taboo? Why were they looking at me like that? There were few smiles. Most wore looks of stunned amazement.

I sheepishly made my way to the church’s pastor, who was still seated down below the stage, on the front row, and had not moved during the ordeal. He leaned over and put a hand on my leg as he whispered in my ear, “Get up and preach, Pastor Carl. These people will listen to anything you have to tell them now. They have never, and I mean never, seen a visiting pastor on his hands and knees, cleaning up dirty slop with a towel. They don’t even know you, and they already are in awe of you – they *love* you. Give them the Word of God!”

A knot formed in my throat as he spoke. I had an overwhelming relief that I had not severely offended the people. Then I felt an overpowering sense of wonder as I realized that the “flood” might have been from the

Lord – or at least He had *used it*. (He has used floods before for His purposes.)

The Lord knew what I would do. He knew it would endear the people to the message from His Word. Numerous people in that church family in Peru, all these years later, still speak of the day when *the stage flooded, and Pastor Carl cleaned it up*.

It was such a little thing to me. I imagine most of the readers of this book would have responded in a similar manner. To the Peruvians, though, it was unthinkable that a “renowned” visiting pastor would get down on his hands and knees, soil his clothing, and in front of everyone work like a common laborer to help them spare their church from disaster. My actions became a living sermon in the people’s hearts that day. I had no idea of that when I reacted on impulse to help them clean up the mess. But I learned a lot from that experience. And the spirit of it later spread, unexpected by me, to my own church.

Not only did God honor those simple actions of servitude in Peru, but also, after we returned home, the mission team that was with me related the story to our own church. They were proud of what God had done, but something else happened. I noticed that our own church soon exploded with a servant spirit as well.

THE SERVANT SPIRIT BUILDS UPON ITSELF

It was not long after that trip to Peru that devastating hurricanes pummeled the Gulf Coast. After spending months ministering to our own church family and the people of our local community, we began to seek out people who were in worse condition than we.

Our church sent out a scout team into Mississippi and Louisiana. Our scouts found that many churches and relief organizations were already all over the Gulf Coast, assisting various communities. Then the Spirit of the Lord moved upon our “spies” as they were spying out the land. They began inquiring of the authorities, “Where can our church help,

especially where no one else seems to want to help?”

The local authorities immediately knew of such a place. They told our scouts that there was a small community in Gulf Coast Mississippi that was primarily made up of African Americans. The community was very poor and lived off the beaten path, the authorities explained. Several of their churches had been decimated, and few of the aid workers had been willing to go into the backwoods, extremely poor, and mostly African American area to help. The more visual and “glamorous” areas appeared to be receiving the bulk of the help, as well as most of the media attention. Even some of the authorities were distraught over the lack of help the little community was receiving. They looked at us with almost longing eyes, as if to say, “Would you *really* be willing to go *there* and *help them*?” So – we went.

The long and short of the story is this: we wound up assisting in and helping to coordinate the massive efforts to completely rebuild three African American churches in that little town. The project took several years. We poured our own money and sweat into it. We made many trips and spent long hours with the people. We even had people working on securing grants and funds, as well as labor assistance, from other churches across the nation to help us.

In those several years, our ministry teams and I were invited into several pulpits and worship services in the little community to preach and teach. Our student ministry teams pummeled the area with love, plenty of hard and nasty work, and the ministering of backyard Bible studies and vacation Bible schools over those several years.

We developed deep and lasting ties with a people we otherwise would have never known. We served. We loved. We worked. We got dirty. We laughed, and we cried among those with whom we worked and served. Word spread of our ministry. A church in Louisiana later beckoned us for similar help. We responded. They were overwhelmed. And our church matured even more.

There are so many more stories I could tell from my own church experience. Our church is now renowned as a “roll up your sleeves and get down in the dirt” serving kind of church. Our children, youth, and young adults have learned how to be servants to others in times of need – and how to work. They now *crave* it. They *look* for it, and God provides ... always.

The point is this: we are trying to prepare our church to *work* and to *serve* in the event that real persecution comes to America. Times of severe need in the lives of others are already here. Opportunities to meet people’s needs are all around us. More emergencies and disasters are most assuredly on the horizon. We want our people to know how to minister to the desperate needs of others. We want them to know how to serve one another as well. We are still learning and still growing. We have a long way to go. But we are going. And that is the point. But for a number of American churches, that is a step that has yet to be taken.

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” (Matt. 10:42)

If your church is an “*Ahhh meee!*” church, take the initiative to help it become a working, serving, get-your-hands-dirty church. The Christian church family experience should not be a Sunday-only thing. We are a family of believers! We must learn to care for and serve each other as a family as we continually look for ways to minister to the needs of others around us. At the same time, we must continually lift up the good news of Jesus Christ.

In learning to “be the church” in this manner, your church will come alive with the presence of God. And you will be prepared, in times of persecution and in times of desperate ministry need. You will not be caught unawares.

If the self-serving spirit is currently entrenched in your church, help it get out of the trap of the deadly and immature “*Ahhh meee*” syndrome. We are living in tumultuous times, serious times. The anxieties of life must not be all that drive us. They must not be allowed to greedily consume our resources. Our ever-present goal should be to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ – *together*.

A CHURCH PREPARED TO LEAD

Oftentimes your church can set an example and inspire others as you go about the “routine” of the dirty work of serving. I instruct our church ministry teams frequently: do not “lord it over” others among whom you are laboring, and do not do your works of ministry “to be seen of men” (see Mark 10:42–45; Matt. 6:1–2). Simply go about your work excellently, humbly, and with a Christ-honoring spirit. Make certain that in everything you do, your goal is to lift up the name of Jesus and exalt the Word of God – and the Lord will do the rest.

The result of this general spirit of ministry has been that churches and ministry groups around the nation, and even in other parts of the world where we have ministered, have also come alive with a ministering and sacrificial spirit. From time to time we actually have a church tell us that because of our example, their church entered into a totally different spiritual dimension of sacrificial service. It has been overwhelming to watch it happen.

The spirit of sacrificial giving and service is absolutely infectious. Consequently, we have learned over the years that while we are ministering, we are also in the process of *modeling*. As a result, we are silently, biblically, with no attitude of presumptuousness, making disciples. Again, this was the prevailing model of the early days of the New Testament church.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation,

drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. (Luke 21:34)

Over my many years in ministry service, I have had the opportunity to be around a number of other ministry groups and student ministry outreach teams. Most of them have been stellar in their service and decorum. However, every now and then I run into a group that comes into a church, or onto a ministry field, and the attitude that exudes from the group is, “Look how blessed you are to have us among you. Look how wonderful *our* ministry is!” I have grown to loathe that spirit. One can usually spot it a mile away – or at least you can hear their trumpets blowing from that far!

As a result of those occasional bad experiences, we have become almost dogmatic about insisting that our ministry groups not only enter a ministry field with an overwhelming spirit of genuine humility but also continually *thank* the people among whom we are ministering – for their permission to join with them in their lives and in their ministry field. Just that simple attitude of gratitude often helps others to adopt the same spirit. We have become a church that leads, without even trying! In so doing, perhaps we are helping other church families along the way to become churches prepared to serve – and to lead – especially in times of great distress.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.” (Matt. 6:2)

THE ULTIMATE PREPARATION

Please forgive me for using so many examples from my own life,

ministry, and personal church field. I certainly do not intend to imply that we have everything nailed down perfectly or that we are somehow a model church. It is just that, as of this writing, this has been the only church where I have been the senior pastor. I have been at Hickory Hammock Baptist Church in Milton, Florida, since 1987. The congregation “raised me up” from a young man – and hopefully I have also helped them to grow as we have grown together.

I have learned much by being blessed to work in one ministry field over these several decades. In so doing, I have been able to watch the growth in several generations of people. Babies who were born when I came to the church are now adults with children in the children’s ministries. Those who were ten or older when I arrived, now have youth in our student ministries. Some who were children are now on staff or are leading in worship and teaching ministries in our church. It has been a humbling experience to watch these things happen among us.

Which leads me to the most important point of all concerning preparation: one cannot fully be prepared for anything life might throw at him or her, much less abject persecution, unless one is truly *born again* in the first place.

This may seem like an obvious statement. But we must never lose sight of the primary purpose of the church body – to lead people into a right and redeemed relationship with God the Father through a born-again relationship in Jesus Christ. That only happens through the leading, prompting, and birthing-again process of the Holy Spirit of God. And it is our responsibility to see to it that the message of the gospel is properly disseminated. Our marching orders and the gospel in a nutshell are both found in Romans 10:

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly

bleses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (vv. 9–15)

I pray that *your beautiful feet* will forever be about the Father’s business of taking the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world around us while we still have the ability and the time to do so. We must continually strive to be the church – *prepared!* This too was the hallmark of the early church.

Now let us discuss some practical methods of church and family preparation as we equip ourselves to handle tough situations and emergency disaster scenarios. Rarely does a week pass that someone does not ask me a question about realistic matters of preparation in their daily lives as well as the sticky issues of church security measures. It seems that many members of other churches are hesitant to make these kinds of inquiries of their pastors or church leaders for fear of being labeled as unduly fearful, lacking in faith, or worse yet – some kind of radical *prepper*.

So, as a pastor and former law enforcement officer who continually answers these questions – and does not feel you are strange for asking them – let me endeavor to answer the ones I am asked most often. The chapters that follow may prove to be the most important considerations of all for a number of congregations and Christian households.

DEVELOPING A PREPARED CHURCH

- ❑ The church must be prepared through teaching. The great biblical truths of persecution, suffering, providing for the needs of others, the early church’s response to these matters,

and so forth, must be continually impressed upon our church family and especially the younger people.

- ❑ The church must be made ready to learn: we must always be learning the great lessons of humility, service, sacrificial giving, and selflessness. These have to be modeled, first by the leadership and then by the church as a whole – even to other churches.
- ❑ The church must also be made ready to be a hands-on ministering church, a body that is ready to roll up its sleeves and get involved in the tough areas of life and emergency needs. Giving to monetary relief funds is important, but equally important to the maturity of a church family is the actual doing of the tough ministries of disaster relief and crisis intervention.
- ❑ The prepared church will be a body that eventually leads other churches into the same kinds of biblical ministries. This phenomenon will most often occur through ministering networks and through ministering in the backyards of other churches whose communities are in crisis situations. Actively recruit and invite other churches to partner with you in your established ministries.

SHOOTING BACK

(WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?)

Altogether, those chosen to be gatekeepers at the thresholds numbered 212. They were registered by genealogy in their villages. The gatekeepers had been assigned to their positions of trust by David and Samuel the seer. They and their descendants were in charge of guarding the gates of the house of the LORD – the house called the Tent. – 1 CHRONICLES 9:22–23

My knuckles whiten as my fingers grip the cold steel. Motionless I stand at the entrance of the church. My eyes freeze, unfocused on the scene before me. It is like watching a replay of a sports match: you see it all and yet you see nothing. I am vaguely aware of the curdling screams coming from inside, but outside all is quiet, just that sickly sweet silence before we human beings are impelled into motion. Why am I standing here? Why do I have a revolver in my hand?¹

These are the opening words to Charl van Wyk's horrifying story of participating in the defense of a church in Cape Town, South Africa, during an armed assault on its congregation. He tells the story in his book titled *Shooting Back: The Right and Duty of Self-Defense*.

The harrowing terrorist attack of July 25, 1993, later became known as the St. James Church massacre. The terrorists unexpectedly burst into the church, firing weapons and throwing grenades. Pews shattered, along with bodies of once-worshipping people. The church floors and walls became instantly painted in blood, human flesh, and mangled bodies. Strangely, the atmosphere inside the sanctuary was punctuated with an eerie silence.

Van Wyk dropped to one knee, pulled the .38 revolver he had always carried (even to the disdain of certain church members), and fired. After

he fired two rounds inside the sanctuary, he darted out through the church door and found a getaway car waiting, with another armed terrorist standing by, assault rifle in hand.

The attackers exited the building and headed to the waiting car. They had discovered, to their shock, that they had not confronted a completely unarmed and helpless church. Van Wyk shot again, emptying his gun in their direction. The cowardly assailants fled, probably believing they were not going to have another chance to attack without more armed resistance.

As the terrorists were fleeing, Van Wyk said the only thought that went through his mind was, *Lord, why haven't I got more ammunition? Why? Why? Why?*²

Charl van Wyk was credited with saving many lives on that fateful morning. Had someone not been able to shoot back, there is no telling how long the murderers would have hung around their targeted *killing field* of the St. James church.

There were one thousand worshippers in attendance that day. Eleven people died, and fifty-three were wounded. The headlines could just as easily have read, "St. James Church Massacre: All One Thousand Helpless Congregants Slaughtered."

But Charl van Wyk was ready. They were not helpless. Van Wyk considered it his God-given responsibility to make *certain* they were not helpless.

DID JESUS SAY TO "SHOOT BACK"?

It is a fact that Jesus had several meaningful things to say concerning self-defense as well as preparing for the possibility of a self-defense scenario. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus used an illustration from the natural world as He proclaimed specific kingdom truths: "When a strong man, *fully armed*, guards his own house," He said, "his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes

away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder” (Luke 11:21–22, emphasis added).

Of course the context of Jesus’ statement was of a strictly spiritual nature. Jesus was reminding His listeners of Satan’s desire to plunder and destroy one’s walk with the Lord. The point is, however, that Jesus used a specific example from everyday life as though arming oneself for personal security and the protection of one’s home was a perfectly *natural* expectation; in other words it was a self-evident truth. That was why Jesus could use it as such a commonsense analogy. That is why the crowds so clearly understood the illustration Jesus employed.

Many Christians believe that it is our responsibility – it is even our divine duty – to be prepared, to the best of our ability, to protect and defend our loved ones and the sanctity of our homes and churches. Of course, we would often rather prefer to have a law enforcement officer on the scene handling the situation for us. However, we know this is not always possible. On occasion, the need to defend oneself is immediate: the police might not be able to respond until long after the time for necessary action has passed.

WHAT ABOUT “TURN THE OTHER CHEEK”?

“But,” someone might ask, “what about the command Jesus issued to His followers to ‘turn the other cheek’?” This is a fair question, but one that demonstrates the need to understand *context* when properly handling the Word of God.

With the command to “turn the other cheek,” Jesus was simply instructing His followers not to become obstinate, disobedient, and lawless in our day-to-day walk with Him. We are to live at peace with those around us as much as it is possible on our part. We are to be cooperative and kind, especially to those in authority over us. We also are to obey the government’s laws when they do not directly encroach upon our profession of faith in Christ. If we can “go the extra mile” or

even refuse to retaliate when someone has been unkind to us, that method of daily living becomes a tremendous witness to the world around us.

The biblical context of “turn the other cheek” certainly does *not* mean refusing to defend one’s own life or the lives of those around us for whom we are responsible. Think of it. If your home were forcefully entered in the middle of the night, and the plunderer, armed with a knife and a baseball bat, were headed down the hall to your children’s bedrooms, would you think that you were supposed to “turn the other cheek” and let him have his way with your children? Would you not use every means at your disposal to neutralize the situation and save the lives of your children?

Yes, it is our responsibility – it is even our heavenly *obligation* – to judiciously provide for our own security, especially in matters of life and death.

Also consider that on Jesus’ last night with His disciples in the upper room, He specifically told his disciples to “buy a sword”: “Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and *he that hath no sword*, let him sell his garment, *and buy one* (Luke 22:36 KJV, emphasis added).

The biblical context of this verse is exactly what it appears to be. Jesus obviously meant for the command to be taken literally. He was warning His disciples of potentially very tough days ahead for them and their families. There is no way around it. Jesus actually told his disciples to acquire a sword (the sword of their day was the ancient equivalent of a firearm, a personal protection weapon!) and to be ready to defend their families if necessary.

EACH WORE A SWORD AS HE WORKED

Additionally, we must not forget the clear call from other places in the Bible for God’s people to be ready to defend themselves and their families

from the attacks of potentially murderous persecutors.

Let us remember the days of the man named Nehemiah. This anointed man of God was charged with the responsibility of rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem after the Persian conquerors had issued a decree allowing God's people to return and begin the work. But enemies (persecutors) came heavy against Nehemiah and his people:

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?"

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. *They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.* (Neh. 4:1, 2, 7, 8, emphasis added)

Nehemiah first assessed the reality and the gravity of the matter at hand in order to *prepare*. He saw that his enemies were dead serious in their intentions to persecute them and even to directly attack them. So, the next thing that Nehemiah did, after lifting up his prayers to the Lord, was arm his workers. They carried weapons while working on the walls!

After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and *fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.*" When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while *the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor.* The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand *and held a weapon* in the other, and each of the *builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.* But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us! "So we continued the work with *half the men holding spears*, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out.

At that time I also said to the people, “Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.” Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; *each had his weapon*, even when he went for water. (Nehemiah 4:14–23, emphasis added)

The message is clear. God will fight for us, and He will fight *with* us. He hears our prayers and blesses the work of our hand, especially when we are involved in His clear will and in His directed work. However, we are to use our brains as well. When we see encroaching persecution, when we know that our enemies intend to destroy us, the principle of God’s Word is: *equip yourself!* Pray for God’s protection, but be ready to defend yourself if necessary. And never forget: you are also doing God’s work when you are equipped and ready to protect those around you who have been entrusted to your care.

As yet another example, do not forget God’s people, the Israelites, on their escape from Egypt and their journey in the wilderness. They were under cruel persecution, simply because they were God’s people. Ultimately the Lord instructed them to arm themselves and to divide the men into fighting units. They were prepared to defend themselves and their families, as well as the innocent and helpless in their care. As a matter of fact, for the next forty years in the wilderness, they fought several battles with hostile tribes who intended to kill them all.

But the fact of the matter remains, Christians will be persecuted – even martyred – until Jesus returns for His church. He warned His disciples:

Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues.... And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.... And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake. (Matt. 10:17, 21–22 KJV)

The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2 KJV)

In His Sermon on the Mount prophecy, Jesus warned the disciples, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you.... For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Matt. 24:9, 21–22 KJV).

Jesus knew what the future held. He did not leave us in the dark. He knew that, just before His return, Christians would endure the most difficult time the world had ever seen. Many of them would be persecuted, even put to death. But it was this same Jesus who also told His disciples, “Buy a sword” (see Luke 22:36) and “flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:16).

There will be some who will fall into the hands of persecutors with little to no opportunity to defend themselves. There will be others, however, who will have the chance to flee, and still others who will be able to fight for life and liberty for themselves and those around them.

WHAT ABOUT THE MARTYRS?

A man once asked me, “Pastor, if my life is being threatened for my biblical beliefs, should I fight back, flee, or give my life for my faith as a martyr?” Good question!

I answered, “If the Lord has made it clear to you in that situation that you must lay down your life for your testimony, then you must obey the Lord. He will honor your obedience. However, we are also told by Jesus, and other scriptural examples, that in normal situations of day-to-day life, we should be prepared to defend ourselves or to ‘flee to the mountains.’”

Then one might point to the martyrs of old, as well as the current-day martyrs, who refused to fight back, refused to defend themselves, refused to flee. To take that kind of stand is one’s personal choice and responsibility before the Lord. Especially when your choice involves the lives of others around you.

But remember this as well: many of those who died as martyrs *had no choice*. They had no weapons! They had already been disarmed by evil regimes and had been enslaved or brutally repressed. When the time came to fight, they *could not*. Neither could they flee. They were powerless to resist at all. This is no small consideration.

This is precisely the situation in North Korea, where most of the world's persecution against Christians currently occurs.

I would imagine that many of the North Korean Christians die with heartfelt and bold declarations of faith upon their lips. We are often humbled and inspired to think of their great faith and courage. At the same time, we pray those kinds of choices and unspeakable horrors do not come to our nation, our churches, and our families.

The Bible speaks of those who willingly laid down their lives for their faith in God. Many Bible students would immediately think of Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Perhaps they would think of Stephen, the apostle Paul, or the martyrs spoken of in Hebrews 11. But most of us fervently pray that we will never be placed in those unthinkable circumstances. If we are, however, the Word of God is clear that God will give us the grace in those particular times. Sometimes He even gets in the fire with us or delivers us from the fire, even in the heat of what we thought was impending doom.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was [astounded], and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. (Dan. 3:24-25 KJV)

However, the clear biblical principle – from Jesus' own lips to the pages of Nehemiah and elsewhere – is that when we can do so, we have an obligation to defend ourselves and our loved ones, as well as the innocent and incapable around us. Are you ready to do so? Are you prepared to do so?

The truth of the matter is that we live in a dangerous world. So we take precautions, we use our common sense, we prepare ourselves – and we trust God with the details of our lives, especially those we cannot foresee and for which we cannot prepare.

Ultimately, the Lord is *always* the final and eternal trust of those who have a personal walk with Jesus Christ. But we are no less righteous to use the intelligence God gave us to prepare for the dangers of life around us, including the possibility of direct persecution. It really is that simple.

The ability to protect one's self is a God-given right. If God's people had not taken that responsibility in a serious manner, down through the ages, many suppose that the planet, under Satan's domain, would have been rid of Christians and Jews thousands of years ago.

THE FOUNDERS UNDERSTOOD SELF-PROTECTION

America's Founding Fathers understood the biblical concept of self-protection. Perhaps they would have even called the idea "self-evident."

It is an often-underreported historical fact that the British government imposed a two-stage repressive gun control agenda upon the American colonies. That program indubitably gave rise to the American Revolution.

The British gun control plan involved the 1774 import ban on firearms and gunpowder, the 1774–75 confiscations of firearms and gunpowder, and the frequent use of indiscriminate violence to achieve these goals. It was these heavy-handed gun control actions that eventually transformed mere political tensions into an all-out war.³

As a matter of fact, the very first battles of the American War of Independence were fought over government-imposed gun control. The British government had instructed General Thomas Gage, the military commander of Massachusetts, to attack and commandeer a large cache of weapons and ammunition being stockpiled by the colonial militia. Those failed efforts concluded with the assaults upon Lexington and

Concord.

Each of these egregious British abuses provides helpful understanding of the purposes of the Second Amendment, drafted by our Founders after the War of Independence. That amendment, clearly, was not written to merely protect the rights of target shooters, sportsmen, and hunters. It was given specifically to protect the rights of individual citizens to arm themselves and to defend themselves, their homes, their churches, and their property with firearms. There really can be no reasonable, honest, and historically accurate translation of the Second Amendment outside this understanding.

The following are a few examples of the discernment our Founders had in this matter:

Firearms stand next in importance to the constitution itself. They are the American people's liberty teeth and keystone under independence ... from the hour the Pilgrims landed to the present day, events, occurrences and tendencies prove that to ensure peace security and happiness, the rifle and pistol are equally indispensable ... the very atmosphere of firearms anywhere restrains evil interference – they deserve a place of honor with all that's good. – GEORGE WASHINGTON ⁴

And that the said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to infringe the just liberty of the press, or the rights of conscience; or to prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms. – SAMUEL ADAMS⁵

Observe Patrick Henry's famous declarations regarding the necessity to arm and protect oneself from the evil forces that desire to enslave a free people:

"The great object is that every man be armed" and "everyone who is able may have a gun."⁶

Are we at last brought to such humiliating and debasing degradation, that we cannot be trusted with arms for our defense? Where is the difference between having our arms in possession and under our direction, and having them under the management of Congress? If our defense be the real object of having those arms, in whose hands can they be trusted with more propriety, or equal safety to us, as in our own hands?⁷

Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect everyone who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force. Whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined.⁸

The fact of the matter is, the freedoms we enjoy today were borne on the backs of Founders who fervently declared our God-given rights and then jealously guarded them. Many of them laid down their lives for those liberties we often take for granted.

We are free because people who came before us defended our freedoms with their lives, guns, prayer, and their faith in God. This is an uncomfortable and inconvenient truth for the would-be gun controllers of today's political realm, but it is a fact of American history nonetheless.

WHEN YOU CANNOT DEFEND YOURSELF

To illustrate the stark truth Patrick Henry so vividly stated, let us revisit a fact affirmed in an earlier chapter: Hitler's ghoulish persecution and extermination procedures could only have worked by first disarming the "undesirables" within his nation. The naysayers of gun-control history often dispute this truth, but let us examine the well-documented facts of the matter.

In 1919 the German legislature, long before Hitler's rise to power, had already passed a law that effectively banned all private firearm possession. That pre-Hitler regime then set out to seize from its citizens the firearms that were previously in circulation.

In 1928 the Reichstag loosened the regulation but then put in place a stringent gun registration regulation that allowed only *selected groups* of citizens to acquire separate permits in order to own, sell, or carry guns.

Ultimately, the 1938 law signed by Hitler completely deregulated the acquisition and transfer of rifles and shotguns, as well as all ammunition. Meanwhile, many more classifications of people, including Nazi party members, were dismissed from gun ownership regulations altogether.

However (and here is the catch), Hitler's new gun-control laws *forbade*

Jews and several other specifically persecuted classes of citizens from possessing guns. Once the gun regulations were fully ingrained and the selected populations were disarmed, the slaughter began. Six million Jews were summarily murdered by legal decree and, by and large, with public acceptance.⁹

According to the book *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944*, Hitler made the following proclamation sometime between February and September 1942:

The most foolish mistake we could possibly make would be to allow the subject races to possess arms. History shows that all conquerors who have allowed their subject races to carry arms have prepared their own downfall by so doing.

Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the supply of arms to the underdogs is a sine qua non for the overthrow of any sovereignty. So let's not have any native militia or native police.¹⁰

Numerous authorities now estimate as many as 20 million targeted people from various “undesirable” groups were led to their demise under Hitler's disarmament-policy terror. Hitler's *gun control* worked like a charm: his subject races were not authorized to own firearms. Only the “elite” could do so. Hitler's gun-free zones became his killing fields.

Patrick Henry's ominous words rang true in Nazi Germany: “Whenever you give up that force [arming oneself for self-defense], you are inevitably ruined.”

But this agenda of disarming citizens before massive persecution ultimately ensued has certainly not been used by Nazi Germany alone. The hands-down-worst mass butcher of the twentieth century was Mao Zedong of Communist Red China. This psychotic tyrant governed his country with the mentality of a common street thug. Mao declared, “Political power grows out of the barrel of the gun.”¹¹

Thus Mao ruled his country and its subject territories with the iron fist of absolute power, undergirded with the foundational doctrine of “gun control.” The fundamental mind-set of Mao and almost every other

maniacal despot has been: *First disarm the masses, and then one can do as one pleases.*

According to the authoritative *Black Book of Communism*, an estimated 65 million Chinese perished as a result of Mao's repeated, ruthless attempts to fashion a new "socialist" China. Anyone who tried to frustrate his agenda was executed, imprisoned, or died from manufactured famine. Of course, the disarmed masses could not defend themselves from his mania.¹²

"Deaths from hunger reached more than 50 percent in some Chinese villages," wrote Lee Edwards of the Heritage Foundation. "The total number of dead between 1959 and 1961 was between 30 million and 40 million – the population of California."¹³

Between 1915 and 1917 one and a half million Christian Armenians were massacred in the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Many more were not killed but were enslaved or forced to convert to Islam. How did this atrocity occur? Christians were not allowed to own firearms in Turkey. Possession of a firearm by a Turkish Christian resulted in immediate execution.¹⁴

In Rwanda a system of vigorous gun control was imposed upon the people first. Then in April 1994, more than five hundred thousand Tutsis were executed in fewer than six weeks by the Hutu-controlled animist/humanist government. They could not shoot back. They had no weapons with which to defend themselves and their families.¹⁵

As mentioned previously, today's number one culprit for the tyrannical reign of terror over its own citizens is North Korea. It is the world's worst persecutor and murderer of Christians. Of course, North Korea's common citizens are not allowed to shoot back; they have been completely disarmed. Do you see the pattern?

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF "GUN" CONTROL

There is a seldom-mentioned biblical example of God's own people being

first disarmed by those who wished to persecute and enslave them. Their persecutors levied a “gun control” agenda against Israel.

King Saul had disobeyed the Lord time and time again out of his own egotistical desire to rule over both people and priests. Because of the king’s wicked actions, God’s hand of protection was lifted from Israel. Their most dreaded enemies, the Philistines, swept down upon them and subdued them.

One of the first things the Philistines imposed upon the Israelites was “gun control laws.” Okay, they were not really *gun* control laws; more like *sword* control. Regardless, it was the same thing. Swords were the pistols, rifles, and shotguns of that day. Observe what happened:

Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, “Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!” So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. The price was two thirds of a shekel for sharpening plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads. So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them. (1 Sam. 13:19–22)

The *sword controllers* of the ancient Philistine period are today’s radical gun control legislators. They are feverishly at work, attempting to make certain that only a precious few are armed – namely, *them*. This is how persecution of people of faith begins; it has always been so.

While many of today’s American Christians are under the impression that aggressive government gun control attempts are a relatively new leftist agenda, nothing could be further from the truth.

Howard B. Rand (1889–1991) was an inventor, attorney, and the founder of Destiny Publishers. Even in his day, he was deeply concerned about the American left’s infatuation with gun control. Rand feared the devious agenda would be ultimately used to dominate America’s citizens including, of course, America’s Christians:

Now the right of citizens to keep and bear arms is fundamental in preserving true

freedom, so much so that subversive forces in sundry and subtle ways first move to disarm the citizens of a nation which they later plan to dominate. We have witnessed such move in the past while states which have already passed laws violating Article II of our constitution did so under the pretext of disarming the criminal. The states which have violated this fundamental principle of the protection of its citizens against armed violence have not only failed to reduce crime but have contributed to the increase in violence and crime. The criminal, who never disarms, knows he is dealing with law-abiding unarmed citizens. Honest men and leaders never fear an armed, law-abiding civilian population.¹⁶

SOBERING TRUTHS

The act of shooting back is not as exciting as Hollywood or video games would make it appear. The potentially deadly measure should always be considered as a very last and sobering resort. Sadly, people are almost daily put in the position of having to fire a weapon at someone, to neutralize a deadly threat. This not only includes duly sworn law enforcement officers but private citizens as well.

The thought of taking another person's life, or even severely wounding another human being, is unimaginable to most people. Even some of the most highly trained and seasoned police officers, as well as military personnel, still have difficulty with actually shooting someone. Among those who do get involved in a deadly shoot-out, a number of them suffer some sort of trauma afterward, sometimes for the rest of their lives. Therefore, as we examine the necessity of "shooting back," let me urge you to forever keep in mind the seriousness of the matter at hand. There is nothing glamorous about it.

The decision to own, carry, and use a firearm for personal protection is a matter that requires much thought and prayer – and training as well. Conversely, the decision *not* to own, carry, and potentially use a firearm for personal protection are also weighty ones. For reasons already discussed, if a person chooses not to be adequately prepared with a weapon in the matter of personal security, one may very well be abdicating a biblical and moral responsibility.

That said, most of us are indeed grateful to those who *do* responsibly

defend and protect the rest of us. We appreciate dedicated and patriotic law enforcement, military personnel, and those ordinary citizens, such as the Charl van Wyks of the world, who have responsibly taken up the task to exercise their God-given and Second Amendment-protected rights.

WHY WE ARE THE “LAND OF THE FREE”

Unbeknownst to many, Americans own more firearms per capita than any other nation. It is a freedom that many of us take for granted, but one that is under attack every single day of our lives.

As of this writing, the statistics indicate that there are 88.8 guns per every 100 people in America. Those same figures show that there are approximately 270 million privately held guns in America. This number translates to a little less than one gun (.81) for every man, woman, and child in the country. The second-ranking country, India, a country over three times our population, has only 46 million privately held firearms.

For further comparison's sake, Israel has only 7.3 privately owned guns for every 100 people, which means that America's rate of gun ownership is twelve times larger than Israel's.¹⁷

In 2012 the United Nations released a report of the nations of the world with the highest murder rates. Honduras came in at number one, with 90.4 homicides per 100,000 people. The United States, the largest gun-owning nation in the world, did not even make the top ten list. We were not even close.¹⁸ In that same year, the United States had a homicide rate of only 4.8 per 100,000 people.¹⁹

These facts might also explain, in spite of the continual encroachments upon our liberties, why we are still the freest and most powerful nation on earth, and a nation wherein Christians are some of the world's least persecuted – at least for the time being.²⁰

Could it be that most American Christians have no idea how bountifully the Lord has blessed us?

LET THE POLICE PROTECT US!

“Churches and other places of worship are intended to be sanctuaries, holy sites where people come to pray and to worship God,” Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta wrote. “Before this legislation takes effect ... I will officially restrict the presence of weapons in our Catholic institutions, except for those carried by the people that civic authorities have designated and trained to protect and guard us, and those who are duly authorized law and military officials.”²¹

Archbishop Gregory wrote these words in May 2014. He was decrying a new law, recently passed by the state of Georgia, permitting licensed gun owners to carry firearms in schools, restaurants, government buildings, and churches. Gregory’s comments reportedly reflected the sentiments of leaders of other denominations as well.

What a shame. Gregory apparently believes, along with other church leaders, that it is the *government’s* responsibility to provide for church protection through official police and military forces. In the meantime, Gregory was, inadvertently I am sure, telegraphing to the world of would-be church attackers, *Come and get us!*

Perhaps he has forgotten, or is not aware of, the 2005 Supreme Court ruling declaring that police are under no constitutional obligation whatsoever to protect an individual from harm.²²

This is no small matter when it comes to church security. The Supreme Court, in effect, has declared that churches, as well as individuals, have a duty to responsibly provide for their *own* day-to-day protection.

The Second Amendment guarantees the right of individual citizens to protect themselves *with firearms*. The Supreme Court has upheld those rights on several occasions. The state of Georgia has affirmed and codified the right of its residents to protect themselves in what have become some of the most vulnerable areas of our society: formerly *gun-free zones*. What churches and other holy sites were intended to be and

what they have now become are often two different things.

WHAT DO THE CHURCH SECURITY EXPERTS SAY?

A number of church security experts and a growing number of pastors and church members would vehemently disagree with Archbishop Gregory. Carl Chinn, a church security consultant, suggests arming designated churchgoers during services as a way of providing the ultimate in extra measures of security: “I do believe if an active shooter comes in – and I’ve earned the right to have this opinion – I do believe there is nothing like a firearm that can stop another firearm. I advise them that it’s a good thing to do with trained responders, not just good guys with guns, but people who have some level of training.”²³

In 1996 a crazed gunman took Chinn hostage during the time Chinn worked at Focus on the Family ministries. Nine years later, he was at the New Life Church shooting in Colorado. That shooting left two young sisters dead and their father wounded. In the Colorado incident, an armed church guard fired her weapon and wounded the perpetrator before he killed himself.²⁴

Some churches are even offering certified gun-training classes, especially in those states where this type of training is required before a person can obtain a concealed weapon permit.

A number of other churches are beginning to encourage their congregants to consider the lawful carrying of concealed weapons, even in Sunday worship services. The leadership of these churches argue that by making a church a *gun-free zone*, filled with women, children, and teens, the state is practically inviting a maniacal shooter to unleash his murderous fury.

In the final analysis, the decision whether or not to carry a firearm, especially in a church service, is a weighty one – and a personal one. There also are a myriad of legal and liability considerations before one undertakes to be a regular carrier of a firearm. Do not even entertain the

idea without much prayer and consideration. If you are unfamiliar with the regular handling of a firearm, please obtain professional and adequate training, regardless of what the law requires.

Also remember: even if a person *does* carry a gun on church property, that does not guarantee that he or she will survive a church shooting, much less be able to successfully thwart an attack. Using a firearm might also mean that one inadvertently wounds, or even kills, an innocent bystander. These are horrible and unthinkable scenarios, but they must be thoughtfully and prayerfully considered nonetheless. After one makes the choice to carry a gun, he or she is then liable before God and the laws of governing authorities for how that monumental responsibility is exercised.

“I do believe there is nothing like a firearm that can stop another firearm.” – Carl Chinn, church security consultant

THE LUXURY OF DEBATE

From about AD 33 until today, Christians have grappled with the issue of self-defense versus turning the other cheek or suffering martyrdom. In the end, the choice lies with the one who is being persecuted and the particular elements of that situation.

However, in the normal course of everyday life in America, many believe that if we do not faithfully prepare to take the commonsense, precautionary steps to protect our liberties, families, and churches, we may very well not have the luxury of debating about what to do if all-out persecution ensues. We may eventually find ourselves, as many of the first-century Christians did, utterly defenseless – standing before the lions.

TRUTH POINTS

- ❑ It is a fact that Jesus had several meaningful things to say concerning the topic of self-defense. (Luke 11:21-22)
- ❑ With the command to “turn the other cheek,” Jesus was simply instructing His followers not to become obstinate, disobedient, and lawless in our day-to-day earthly walk with Him. The command had little to do with not defending your life or your family’s life in a direct and deadly attack. (Luke 22:36)
- ❑ The Bible is replete with examples of God’s people being called to arm themselves for protection of home, congregation, and family. (Luke 11:21-22)
- ❑ America’s founding fathers understood the biblical concept of self-protection and provided for it in the Constitution. (Luke 22:36)
- ❑ Americans own more firearms per capita than any other nation. We are also arguably the nation of the greatest freedoms and the least amount of direct persecution upon Christians. Many would assert that there is a strong correlation between these two facts. (Neh. 4:1–23)
- ❑ In 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that police are under no constitutional obligation whatsoever to protect an individual from harm. We are ultimately responsible for our own commonsense self-protection. (Prov. 22:3)

CHURCH PROTECTION ASSESSMENT

(PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHURCH SAFETY)

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. – JESUS OF NAZARETH (LUKE 11:21 KJV)

In my law enforcement career ... I've never seen so many angry people, and angry people will hurt you," claims Jimmy Meeks, church security specialist. "In people there's a lot of anger, and when you're angry you just don't care where you commit your crime."¹

Even though there were scattered incidents of church violence before, according to Meeks, the year the tidal wave of violence began to pound down upon America's churches was 1999. He calls that year "the year the dam broke."

If you are a church leader, imagine this scene: A suspicious man casually walks into your church on Sunday morning. He seems disconnected. He is alone. He is wearing a loose-fitting shirt not tucked into his pants, with a baggy T-shirt underneath. He stops and surveys the crowd from the back of the room. Finally, the stranger seems to reluctantly take a seat in the back of the auditorium. As he plops down in a pew, you breathe a sigh of relief. No one else in the church gave the man a second glance. Maybe you were too quick to judge.

Still, you have a strange feeling about him, but you do not want to appear rude, nor do you wish to be seen as judgmental or guilty of stereotyping. So you continue on normally, putting the bad thoughts out of your head. I mean, after all, *what are the chances?*

A few minutes later, the man rises, pulls a semiautomatic pistol from under his shirt, and suddenly opens fire, spraying bullets around the sanctuary and through the crowd of worshippers. You watch helplessly, almost in slow motion, frozen in fear and shock, as the murderer brutally slays innocent and screaming men, women, and children frantically scrambling for their lives – most of whom you know and love.

Of course, *now* you wish you had said something or had done *something*. Now you wish you at least had some minimum-security measures in place. You cannot believe that you did not at least have others trained to watch, seeing what you saw. But it's too late. The unthinkable has happened. And now you must live it.

What will you do? And when the media and law enforcement arrive, what will you tell them? How will you respond when they ask you what security measures you normally take around the church?

Sadly, most churches do not prepare a plan for this type of horrific event until *after* the fact. Some polls, formulated for determining church readiness, indicate that as many as 75 percent do not have a church security plan of any sort.

The sad fact is that assaults and deaths attributed to violence in and around America's churches continue to mount. Often there is negligible national media attention, unless the import of the incident is of an almost monumental and unavoidable nature.

WARNINGS TO CHRISTIAN AMERICA

In September 2014 the FBI released a report indicating an alarming rise in the frequency of "active shooter incidences" across our nation. The reporting article was titled "FBI: Mass Shootings on the rise in America."²

The FBI currently defines an active shooter as "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area." The referenced FBI study acknowledged 160 "active shooter" incidents between 2000 and 2013. In these 160 reported

situations, the gunmen killed 486 people and injured another 557.

More startling, perhaps, than the shocking number of deaths in these scenarios, is that the rate of shootings has significantly spiked. There was an annual average of 6.4 active shooter incidents in the first seven years of the study. That average rose dramatically to 16.4 per year over the last seven years of the reporting period.

In December 2012 alone, there were ten violent crimes committed on church property in America. Each case involved either deadly force or aggravated threats of violence.³

From 1963 to 2007, there were eight mass murders at church facilities or on church grounds in the United States. The FBI defines a mass murder as a single scenario in which four or more people are killed. However, the number of occurrences where between one and three people were killed or seriously wounded in church settings has increased over the past fifty years. Those incidents number in the hundreds.⁴

From the infamous Sixteenth Street Baptist Church massacre in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, in which four young girls were killed by a dynamite bomb, to the December 9, 2007, Colorado Springs, New Life Church shootings in which four people were gunned down on two different campus locations before the shooter was killed by a church security officer, the church killings continue to mount. The shooter in the New Life Church tragedy, before his rampage, had posted on the Internet, “Christian America, this is YOUR Columbine!”⁵

Numerous stories continue to appear on Internet news sites of pastors being shot at or killed in their pulpits or somewhere else in and around the church properties. Some of the attacks were perpetrated because of personal vendettas against the particular pastor; others were out-and-out madman attacks against the church or against Christians as a whole. Regardless of what motivates the attacks, an increasing number of American churches have assessed that there is a legitimate need to implement stepped-up church security measures.

PRACTICAL CHURCH SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

In most churches, implementing a solid church security policy really is a simple matter of using common sense, praying, seeking wise counsel, and planning thoughtfully and deliberately.

Each congregation will have its unique considerations and circumstances with which to contend.

Because each church is distinctive in its security needs, I will not provide a specific template of security policies here. However, there are several general factors that every church needs to consider. For example, what are the demographics of your congregation, and what are their specific needs? Do you have a large number of children and teens? If so, are your workers trained, and have they had thorough background checks? Or is your congregation largely made up of senior citizens? If so, do you have accessible first-aid supplies and perhaps an AED (automated external defibrillator) unit? Are there any medical personnel who are regular attendees of your church? Do you have their names and phone numbers handy? Are you aware of their specialties in medical care and skills?

I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses.” (Neh. 7:3)

Are you a rural congregation, a suburban church, an urban church, or an inner-city church? What are the common criminal activity statistics for your area? What are your specific infrastructure security needs?

Do you have a burglar alarm system, fire alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, clearly marked emergency exits, and basic emergency medical supplies? Do your children’s care areas have panic alarms or

other means of notifying someone of an unexpected emergency, intrusion, child abduction, or attack? What are the firearm laws in your state? Do they allow people to carry a concealed weapon in a church service? Surprisingly, there are states that do not. What are your insurance carrier requirements concerning the use of firearms for church security purposes? What is your legal counsel's advice concerning liabilities in the matter of firearms protection on church grounds?

Does your church have a plan in the event a suspicious-acting person enters your worship services? What happens if an unknown individual exits his or her pew during the sermon and walks toward the stage area or toward the pastor or other worship leaders? Who does what? How is that situation going to be handled? Are your church greeters instructed in their responsibility as first-line *eyes of security*?

What about your church's entrances and exits? Are they adequately manned? Do you need video surveillance, both inside and outside your buildings? Do you have adequate locking and security systems on your doorways? Are there any hallways, bathrooms, closets, or unused rooms that are not secured while your congregation is largely involved in a worship service? Who is designated to regularly check these areas, as well as the outside of your buildings and parking lot areas?

Even though a church may not be adjudicated liable for any and all unforeseen emergency situations it might encounter – and no two situations are alike – there *are* matters of liability for *not* considering the basics, and especially for having no plan at all. Most liability statutes would state that since you are publicly inviting people to come onto your grounds and into your facilities, you owe those attendees a reasonable expectation of security.

Carefully formulate your own plan because, in the process, you will most likely discover matters that are absolutely unique to your church. One size certainly does not fit all church situations and considerations.

And, of course, legal liabilities are not nearly as important, in the long run, as are the lives of the precious people who are in the reasonably expected care of your church while on church grounds. This responsibility belongs to our “gatekeepers.”

The gatekeepers had been assigned to their positions of trust by David and Samuel the seer. They and their descendants were in charge of guarding the gates of the house of the LORD – the house called the Tent. The gatekeepers were on the four sides: east, west, north and south. Their brothers in their villages had to come from time to time and share their duties for seven-day periods. But the four principal gatekeepers, who were Levites, were entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. They would spend the night stationed around the house of God, because they had to guard it; and they had charge of the key for opening it each morning. (1 Chron. 9:22–27)

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!

- Carefully assess the needs of your own congregation.
- Conduct background checks on all children and youth workers as a matter of routine policy.
- Make certain you have adequate emergency medical supplies and a list of medical professionals in your church.
- Assess your specific infrastructure security needs (alarms, entrances, dark corners, parking lots, empty rooms, etc.)
- Make certain your children’s areas are as secure as possible, with panic alarms and a good communication system available.
- Know your area’s firearm laws, restrictions, and liabilities.
- Develop a plan with security personnel and designated church members for dealing with overly “suspicious” people on or

about your property.

- Consider different forms of strategically located video surveillance.
- Establish a regular “patrol” ministry team.
- Instruct your greeters to be a first line of defense when it comes to reporting suspicious visitors or activities.

The number of questions we have examined here may seem a bit overwhelming at first. And they are undoubtedly not the only considerations, but they are a good start. As previously stated, many of the questions really are commonsense considerations and can be answered rather quickly when a group of concerned and responsible leaders sit down to discuss them and then formulate a comprehensive plan.

ESTABLISHING AN INFRASTRUCTURE INSPECTION TEAM

Another important step your church can take is to assemble a team of alert and observant people to do a thorough inspection of your buildings and property. Have them do an inventory of very specific items and areas to determine your church’s specific needs. The following are some of the most important items and locations of consideration for the inspection team to investigate:

- Fire alarms
- Burglar alarms
- Smoke alarms
- Emergency entrance and exit alarms

- Fire extinguishers
- Security of all entrances and exits
- Empty and/or unused rooms security
- Danger areas
- Children's areas
- Interior and exterior video surveillance
- Panic alarms
- Emergency lighting
- Fire escapes
- Window escapes
- Dark and/or hidden corners or spaces (interior and exterior)

Once your investigation is complete, formulate plans and procedures to rectify problems and beef up those areas that are weak. Routinely update the inspections.

Additionally, your church may wish to consider a professional assessment of security needs for your facilities and property. There are practiced and certified companies that specialize in these assessments. Some of the larger police departments and sheriff's offices will also provide this important service for a church. See the Resources section of this book for some places from where you can get more information.

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE AMONG US

One of the foremost concerns in today's church is that of adequately protecting the most vulnerable who are in our care. Those groups most

certainly would include our preschool, children, and student ministries.

Churches depend largely upon volunteers to make their ministry programs work. Some of these ministries require a large number of volunteers, and sometimes the work requires the ministry workers to be relatively isolated with the children involved. Sadly, we all too often read of the tragedies that can ensue in these situations, especially where prudent precautions were not taken from the beginning.

Minimum considerations for children and student ministry volunteers include these:

- Never allow (as matter of policy) children's workers to be alone (one-on-one) with a child.
- Consider the use of video monitoring equipment.
- Establish a no-touch policy among the children and students themselves. They are to keep their hands off each other. This is especially important among teens. Of course, this policy should extend to the adults working with children and students as well. Appropriate instances of touching will certainly take place in normal personal relationships and ministry endeavors. However, even these instances might cause a problem if a reliable witness does not observe the touching. This is why children and youth workers should never be alone with those under their charge. And certainly, children and youth should never be left in a position of isolation such that unwitnessed touching might occur.
- Do not allow workers to take a child to the bathroom unless an adult witness is present.
- Consider conducting a ministry preparation course for those desiring to serve as volunteers in children's and student ministries.

- Install observation windows in doors and/or walls of vulnerable areas of child ministry.

The question is often asked, “Should we conduct background checks on those who desire to work in our children and youth ministry areas?” Most experts agree that any church, no matter the size, should certainly take this basic step of protecting the children and their families. Criminal background checks are not 100 percent foolproof, yet they are a vital first step in providing reasonable and expected protection. Policies should be made easily available to all current and prospective volunteers. A minimum volunteer screening policy should include the following:

- Clearly state the organization’s position and practice for screening volunteers.
- Identify those volunteer positions that require screening.
- Identify the screening required for each volunteer position.
- Identify the scope and sources for conducting background checks.
- Identify the offenses or findings that would disqualify an applicant or current volunteer.
- State the fees involved in screening and the responsibility of the volunteer for all or any portion of the fees.
- Identify the frequency of background screening.⁶

CONDUCTING A VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

Simply because a church might have a number of risk factors should not preclude that church from continuing its vigorous pursuit of ministry outreach. A quality vulnerability assessment can help a church determine the potential needs and strengths of its current security

arrangements. In my many years of experience in law enforcement as well as in full-time ministry endeavors, I have observed the following common risk factors:

- Urban neighborhood churches have a statistically greater chance of random acts of violence.
- However, churches in rural areas may appear to be easier targets for vandals and burglars and are often the most vulnerable.
- Every church and/or denomination possesses beliefs and societal positions that might make them vulnerable to attack from angry people of opposing views.
- Churches that provide food, lodging, or financial assistance can also attract mentally disturbed people or even the criminally minded. Turning down a request for assistance can sometimes produce violent reactions. For this reason, many find it best to have an application process for assistance – with a reasonable wait period and a method whereby the church contacts the requester. See appendix 1 for a sample application.
- If your church might be more vulnerable to attack if it is in the constant limelight in public venues of advertising and special events.
- Some family conflicts (domestic violence, divorce, child custody cases, and so forth) may play out in a violent way on church property. A church should always be aware of such a possibility.
- When someone makes a profession of faith, is baptized, and/ or joins the church, it may cause resentment from other family members who do not like the changes that the commitment imposes upon their home or family. Be aware of this possibility and

be prepared to offer ministry up front that might serve to neutralize this type of situation.

- Former church members may have grievances. Even years later, they may determine to act violently upon those grievances.
- Active, loving members of your congregations have other problems in the general community of which you might not be aware. (Examples include past arguments, legal disputes, financial disputes, loan disputes, or a recent, heated and unresolved exchange between the parties.) Sometimes these can cause an aggrieved person to track a member down while on church property.
- When church violence occurs anywhere and is highly publicized in the media, copycat violence can erupt. Churches need to be extra cautious on these occasions.⁷

OUR GOALS

Once you have given serious consideration to the foregoing matters, you and your congregation are then ready to effectively implement various logistical and tactical measures, thus enhancing your overall security and day-to-day safety. Again, your overall goal should always be to advance the kingdom of Jesus, but establishing a ministry of integrity and a ministry field of expected safety is often the first step in our ability to reach out to others with our ministry.

People who are fellowshiping and worshipping in our midst should have at least a reasonable expectation of safety and of diligence on the part of the ministry. When people experience the fulfillment of these important expectations, then the soil is prepared for the church to plant the seeds of the gospel of salvation into their lives. And those seeking ministry are more apt to be receptive to those ministries. These always should be our foremost objectives.

A CHURCH SECURITY MINISTRY TEAM

(TACTICAL AND LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATION)

We prayed to our God and posted a guard. – NEHEMIAH 4:9

Now we move to a discussion of even more detailed measures of practical application. Many churches are beginning to understand that developing a detailed strategy for a security ministry is an important step in overall safety preparation. The following are some important considerations to this end.

ESTABLISHING A CHURCH SECURITY TEAM

Every church should assemble a team of people of like mind in the matter of church security. They should be assigned the following tasks:

- Devise plans for routine and regular patrols of danger areas and potential problem spots, specifically focusing on children's and youth areas but also including areas of primary congregation gathering.
- Have several of your security team members clearly designated with colored vests and/or identification badges. This serves as a deterrent. Others can serve as "undercover" security.
- Consider specialized communication equipment for these identified security team members (walkie-talkies or cell phones with dedicated text and call lists). See the details discussed in the

next section, titled “Establishing Emergency Communications Procedures.”

- Train them to look for the unusual, such as people wearing long coats or heavy clothing in hot weather (to conceal a weapon), people who go in and out of the building excessively, a suspicious person who exits the service at inappropriate times, an unknown person who sets down a bag or container and walks away, someone who sits in his or her car the entire time that services are in progress, and so forth.
- Arrange for church security training from security professionals, if at all possible. Larger sheriff's offices and police departments can provide seminars of this type for your church. There are also private companies that specialize in church security training sessions.

See the resources section at the end of this book for a listing of online sites that have church security team manuals. You can customize these manuals for your own church and your own security needs. Also see appendix 3, where a sample security ministry manual is outlined.

ESTABLISHING EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PROCEDURES

Emergency communication protocols can be as simple as having dedicated workers, staff members, department heads, and Sunday school teachers who will commit to monitor their text messages or have speed-dial capabilities on their cell phones. Long-range walkie-talkies are inexpensive and effective, and they can easily be used by roving security teams. E-mail blasts can also be used.

Emergency communication and notification is essential to proper church security procedures. Use cell phones and/or walkie-talkies.

Consider the often effective use of strategically placed LED strobe lights that warn large groups of people of a potential danger situation taking place at a specific location on the church properties.

Flashing emergency LED lights that are activated by strategically placed switches can be employed as church-wide warning devices. Some churches have placed these types of lights in their sanctuaries. The warning indicators are activated by the pushing of a hidden button or the pulling of a switch (similar to a fire alarm apparatus). These activation devices should be located in potentially high-risk areas, such as preschool, children's, or youth meeting zones. Once the "panic" switch is activated, an LED light begins to flash in the main sanctuary or some other strategic location (or more than one) so that a large number of people are immediately made aware of a potential problem in a certain area. You may wish to consider having an additional LED strobe that would flash on the outside of your building so that members who are outside can be alerted as well.

INVESTIGATE PROFESSIONAL SECURITY OPTIONS

Check with local security companies for the possibility of employing professional guard services. Often, local sheriff's offices or other police agencies will provide these services for a reasonable fee. If you cannot afford these services on a frequent basis, consider using them for special events or on a rotational and occasional basis. The presence of official uniformed security is a huge deterrent, even if it is only used intermittently. (These professional services should be used in addition to your own security team members.)

A security team member carrying a concealed firearm is a matter of serious legal and liability consideration. Check with your insurance company and your local and state laws before determining a written policy in this regard. Also, determine if you have active and certified

peace officers as members of your church who would be willing to serve as armed security agents when they are in attendance. We are blessed to have several such officers at the church I pastor. They are always more than willing to be a visible security presence for their church family.

The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty. (Prov. 22:3)

IMPORTANT CHURCH SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Formulate an Individualized Church Security Plan

Planning is one of the most important first steps you can take to tighten church security. This involves writing a plan that answers the question, “What should we do if ...?” This plan should be developed by key church leaders and added to a policy and procedure manual that can be updated as needed.

2. Use a “Professional” Church Security Ministry Team

If you are blessed enough to have church members with a public safety background, use them as part of a volunteer security team. Schedule them to be available anytime there are church services or events. Provide these team members with specialized information and instructions specific to your church security needs so they can help respond in the event of an incident. If your church is not disinclined to have armed personnel on your premises to help provide that level of security, this team could fill that need.

3. Offer Church Global Security Training

Take advantage of the eyes and ears of all church members to report suspect or unusual behavior and help them understand their role in church safety. Train employees and volunteers concerning the general church security plan. Having a working understanding of the plan will help them know what to do in any number of situations that may threaten the church or its members. Part of this training should include spending time explaining why a plan has been created and how members can communicate with church leaders to help ensure church safety.

4. Have Controlled Hours of Operation

Make sure your church buildings have designated public hours of operation and that

someone is in the building anytime the doors are unlocked. Try to avoid allowing employees or volunteers to be alone in an empty building.

5. Formulate Entrance Protocols

Many different people frequently use church campus buildings. This can make it difficult to control who is entering a building and who has keys to the building. Volunteers sometimes end up with building keys and may leave and forget to lock the door behind them. Some churches have taken the measure of having keyed or swipe card entrances that lock automatically when closing. Give consideration to key control and entrance control. Professional security companies have several technological devices that can make this step much easier to employ.

6. Develop Lock-Down Procedures

Develop lock-down procedures, especially in children's areas. Determine the best approach to protecting church members in the event of a threatening or unsafe situation.

7. Update Membership Regularly

Have a church communication plan in place to make church members aware of new security measures. Make these communications public so that if anyone who intends to do harm is sitting among the flock, he or she is made aware that a myriad of eyes are constantly watching.

8. Have Regular Prayer Coverage

God's Word promises us that there is supernatural power in prayer. Teach your church to be diligent in praying for church safety. Use your prayer teams to cover the domain of church safety along with their other prayer requests. Sadly, the world has drastically changed in the past few decades. It is now all the more important to think strategically about church safety. The Bible says we should not have a spirit of fear, but we should use common sense and wisdom in our approach and planning for the unexpected.

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Tim. 1:7 KJV)

CONFRONTING A SHOOTER

This is an area about which few wish to converse, but it must be done.

Statistically speaking, a shooter coming to *your church* may be highly unlikely, but your congregation will feel much safer if there is a plan in place for such a possibility.

According to church security experts, these steps should be taken if a violent intruder enters your church:¹

- Alert the entire security ministry team and the police.
- Evacuate worshippers when possible and lock doors in areas that can be secured.
- Have trained security personnel approach and incapacitate the intruder.

Make certain your congregation knows you have a plan in place to address a hostile intruder. They should also know the steps you want *them* to take, such as evacuating calmly or seeking shelter.

Jimmy Meeks, a national church security specialist and police officer in Hurst, Texas, advises, in stark terms, “You’ve got to go wild on this [church shooter] that comes in your congregation. There has to be a group of men sitting strategically that are just going to go berserk and rise up against this person and go after him.”²

In other words, as soon as a true-blue killer, intent on a killing spree, enters a house of worship and begins his wicked deed – all the rules change. The killer must be stopped as soon as possible and as effectively as possible. The process is seldom neat and clean. But if there has been no planning whatsoever – if no thought has been given to the how, what, when, and where as a shooting situation unfolds – the end can be absolutely and overwhelmingly disastrous.

DEALING WITH A CHURCH-SHOOTING SCENARIO

The late Chester L. Quarles was a professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and coauthor of the book *Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship*. He offered some sound advice in the event of a horrific church-shooting scenario:

In a group hostage-taking situation, all aggressive behavior should be avoided. If there is only one adversary, you may be able to stop him. If there are several, the situation is even more tenuous. Starting a firefight, even with a clear shot at one or more assailants, is fraught with danger for all in attendance.

Do what the hostage takers tell you to do. Never say “no” and never say “never” to armed men in a public setting. These words can get you killed. Robbers and hostage takers want control and they want it now! By acquiescing, you can become a “successful victim.” Successful victims survive and usually don’t require hospitalization.

If anyone loses control, some of your people will likely be killed. With this in mind, church leaders should plan for the possibility of an active shooter or a group hostage-taking event, and insure that all ushers, deacons, and members of [your security ministry team] are all operating from the same plan.

If shooting assaults are already taking place, men need to stop the shooter. Unfortunately, the best time to stop the shooter is when he reloads.³

The church where I am the pastor has implemented most of the procedures listed in this chapter. As with every other church setting, ours has its own distinctive features and security needs, so we have made those adjustments where needed.

We have a security team. Our deacons are assigned special patrol

procedures as well. We conduct routine security assessments. We jealously guard the safety of our preschoolers, children, and teens, especially when they are in meeting areas away from the general congregation area. We have our buildings, grounds, and property under constant surveillance, with eyes and boots on the ground, as well as video surveillance devices. We employ the use of roving team members in golf carts, quickly and routinely surveying the entire property. We have others cruising the property in their personal vehicles. Our church has many other detailed procedures in place that will not be disclosed here, for obvious reasons.

However, none of our carefully laid groundwork guarantees we will never have a problem, though it does mean that we are at least prepared, and if need be, we have a fighting chance. We will not purposely allow ourselves to be a building full of sitting ducks. We will protect the Bride of Christ. It is our biblical duty.

Now that we have prepared, we continue to trust in God, as did Nehemiah and his men on the wall, each with a sword upon his side.

THE SEVEN BASIC SURVIVAL NEEDS

(HOW TO PREPARE FOR TOUGH TIMES)

It usually takes me two or three days to prepare an impromptu speech. – MARK
TWAIN

What do we need to do in the event that we and/or our families have to “flee to the mountains” (see Matt. 24:16)? More important, what do we need to do in order to “stay put” and live in and minister to the world around us, especially when we cannot, or choose not, to “flee”?

In either case, the end goal is the same: to survive. Seven basic needs are required to do that. They are water, shelter, food, clothing, medical supplies, weapons, and tools. Let us briefly examine each of these seven needs and its importance for survival.

1. WATER

The human body is made up of about 60 percent water. We must have water to survive. Every living cell in our body needs it. Every system in our body depends on it.¹ Without sufficient water, our heart, kidneys, and brain functions eventually shut down. Water is, without a doubt, our number one need as far as immediate survival needs go. When disaster strikes, make certain you have plenty of water on hand or that you know how to obtain it.

The human body can go many days without food if necessary, but if you go more than three or four days without water, you are in deep trouble. This is especially true if the weather is extremely hot, extremely

cold, or if you have been injured. In these cases, the body's need for water is dramatically increased. You can get water from other fluids, such as juices and milk. Probably the only fluid you would want to avoid entirely is alcohol because it acts as a fairly potent diuretic.

It is advisable to have emergency water supplies stored in appropriate containers. Most people need between nine and thirteen cups of fluids per day to remain healthy, or about one gallon of water per person per day.²

One certainly should have adequate supplies of water cleansing or purifying devices on hand. A bottle of unscented chlorine bleach, without other additives, is often advised as a purifying agent. The usual formula for cleansing water with bleach is one-fourth tablespoon to each gallon. The water should then be allowed to sit for at least sixty minutes before drinking.³

Chlorine tablets, for the specific purpose of water purification, can also be purchased and are much easier to use, transport, and store, than chlorine liquid.

Of course, hard-boiling is also a way to purify most water supplies, especially if you have any doubts at all about its cleanliness. Cloudy water should be filtered before boiling. (Use coffee filters, paper towels, cheesecloth, clean clothing, or a cotton plug in a funnel.)

TYPICAL WATER PURIFICATION PROTOCOL

- Bring the water to a rolling boil for three to five minutes.
- Let the water cool before drinking.
- Add eight drops of household bleach per gallon to maintain water quality while in storage.
- Do not drink water that has an odor or contains solid

materials.⁴

If you suspect the water is unsafe because of chemicals, oils, poisonous substances, sewage, or other contaminants, do not drink the water. Do not drink water that is dark colored, has an odor, or contains solid materials.⁵

2. SHELTER

Exposure to extreme elements – heat, cold, rain, snow – can be a killer, or at least a danger to one’s health and ultimate ability to survive.

Emergency shelter preparation is as varied as the terrain, the environment, and the particular emergency situation in which you might find yourself. Sometimes, something as simple as an automobile or a family camping tent will suffice until other arrangements can be made.

In worst-case situations, a rudimentary hut or canopy may need to be constructed. The main idea, of course, is to quickly get protected from nature’s extremes. There are many ways to accomplish the task of rapid sheltering. A quickly constructed wooden structure using 2 by 4 framing lumber just big enough for one or two people can be covered with a plastic tarp, sheets of tin, or other building materials.

A lean-to shelter constructed from tree limbs and rope or twine can be constructed with a minimum of supplies for an immediate-need shelter. Again, there is a plethora of materials, videos, books, and pictures available to help you understand how to construct such emergency sheltering. Detailed instructions for constructing the various kinds of shelter structures are beyond the scope of this writing, but the matter should be given some thought. At the very least, make yourself aware of known emergency shelter facilities in your area. Also, see the Resources section at the end of this book.

We might ask, “Why are we even talking about survival shelters and

huts? I cannot imagine a scenario in which I would be forced to live outside without assistance for days on end.” I understand the incredulousness of even having to consider such a scenario. But please remember that hundreds of thousands of Iraq’s Christians, living in the oldest and longest-abiding Christian communities in the world, were suddenly blasted from their homes, schools, and businesses and driven into the deserts and wilderness areas – fleeing for their lives. Many of these people were professionals with careers, homes, cars, businesses, and families. The next day, they were refugees, fending for themselves and seeking emergency shelter, food, and water – perhaps never to return to their homes, businesses, or bank accounts. If they are to survive at all, they must start from scratch. Their first priority is basic survival.

I pray we are never faced with such horror, but why should we think that we are categorically exempt from a similar possibility as the world continues to turn? We are not. You would do well to at least familiarize yourself with how to survive a few days and nights in the open environment. Besides the nightmare scenario just discussed, there are plenty of Americans who have harrowing stories of having found themselves stranded in an isolated place or lost in the wilderness and having to struggle with shelter needs in order to survive.

There are several reputable organizations whose websites and literature contain detailed instructions for the construction of primitive emergency shelters. Make certain you look at the resources at the end of this book for detailed instructions for this type of shelter construction.

3. FOOD

Food supply is usually one of the very first things to which people turn their attention when preparing for an emergency. However, as stated previously, a healthy person can survive without food for several weeks if necessary. It is not comfortable, nor is it advisable, but it can be done. Of course, if one has life-and-death dietary needs (diabetes, high blood

pressure, heart problems, and so forth), extra preparation and food storage plans will have to be made.

It is also important to remember that your local grocery stores only carry enough fresh food to last their customer base about three to four days before they need new shipments. Even canned and bottled goods can literally disappear within hours, even from the largest grocery store, when the surrounding population perceives that danger is about to strike. Massive runs on grocery stores and gas stations, for example, are a very common affair in the region where I live – hurricane alley. Within hours, and certainly not more than a few days, many of these businesses are closed because of buyer panic (unprepared people stocking up at the last minute). I have experienced this phenomenon firsthand, living in a hurricane-prone area of the nation.

Thought should also be given to the shelf life of stored foods. Pest control is another consideration. If you are not careful, you may wind up simply feeding the rats and bugs of your area, creating additional problems with which you must deal. The safety and relative ease of getting to your food supply in an emergency situation is also of importance.

With today's technology, storing food for emergency situations has been made so much easier than just a few decades ago. Many companies now specialize in long-term food storage, and some of them even offer prepackaged food supplies with amazingly long shelf life and a huge variety of tasty choices.

On a simpler basis, as in hurricane supply preparation, canned goods, dried foods, bottled water, and jarred goods are plentiful and easy to store. They can be purchased in bulk, stored for weeks or months, and then used and rotated as you replenish your stock. Many of these goods can be eaten without cooking. This is a huge consideration in certain situations.

Do not plan on trying to eat a gourmet meal each day. We are talking

about *survival* food. In the case of raw survival, calories are what are most important. You will need, normally speaking, a lot of them. Many nutrition sites recommend several thousand calories of food intake per day. Believe it or not, one can now purchase *survival bars* that have as much as two to three thousand calories in a single bar of food.

Do not forget you will also need to plan for the basic food preparing items: matches, grills, fuel, cook pots, utensils, plates, cups, and bowls.

In a prolonged power outage, a closed, full, and properly sealed freezer will keep food for several days. After that, you can remove the food and cook it on a grill, smoker, or open fire. The cooked food will then last a little longer, plus you can use the extra food to minister to those around you.

Food in a refrigerator should be fine, as long as power is out no more than four hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours.⁶

EMERGENCY FOOD PANTRY CHECKLIST

Water: 1 gallon per person per day

Food (canned): meats, fruits, vegetables, juices, soup, milk

Staples: sugar, salt, pepper, dry goods (rice, beans, pasta, oats*), potatoes

High-energy foods: peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars, trail mix

Comfort foods: cookies, hard candy, lollipops, sweetened cereals, instant coffee, tea bags

*Consider using two-liter plastic (PETE) bottles for storing dry goods

For the next several days, if you are careful about opening and closing the doors, you should be able to eat out of your refrigerator and freezer.

This is where the importance of a fairly well-stocked refrigerator and freezer comes into play. Those who only have stale milk and coffee in the fridge won't have the other resources to accomplish what we are talking about. The refrigerator will keep things cool for two to three days, depending on your location and the temperatures outside. The freezer will become your refrigerator in three to four days as things thaw out but stay cool.

RULES FOR BASIC EMERGENCY FOOD MANAGEMENT

- Establish a food storage pantry. Rotate and use the food on a routine basis to keep supplies fresh and usable in a real emergency.
- Make use of the modern technology of long-term food storage products that are on the market and already packaged for immediate extra-long-term storage.
- Make sure you have plenty of the “basics” on hand in case of an emergency (matches, lighter, charcoal, propane gas and stove, grill, and so forth)
- If you are prudent, you can eat out of your refrigerator and freezer from several days to a week without power.
- In an emergency situation, don't forget the needs of others, including neighbors, church members, and shut-ins. Some freezers may need to be emptied and the meat and other foods cooked and then distributed to others in need. This

distribution can be done through a church family that has previously laid such a framework of ministry, or Sunday school classes and other specialized ministries.

I can remember several situations in my own experiences growing up on the Gulf Coast during severe hurricane seasons when people in neighborhoods would cook the food from their freezer and give what they did not need to others who were not as prepared or well supplied. Some churches could do the same thing, especially those that have freezers and refrigerators for regular church dinner ministries.

There could also be a specific church plan whereby, in an emergency food situation such as this, church members with extra food (that would otherwise spoil) could prepare the food and bring it to the church for organized distribution among its needier members or people in the surrounding neighborhood.

LONG-TERM DRY FOODSTUFF STORAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Consider using PETE, or PET, bottles for long-term storage of dry goods. PET is listed as recyclable “1” and does not contain BPA. Most single-serve plastic bottles, including those for water, soft drinks and juices, are made with PET. Look at the recycle emblem on the bottom. It should have a #1 in the emblem and the letters PETE or PET below.

In order to kill insects in adult, larva, and egg stages of growth, it is necessary to pull the oxygen content down to *below 1 percent and hold it there for at least two weeks*. Most types of plastic bottles are too porous and leak too much oxygen in, but PETE bottles work well. Use oxygen absorbers. Bulk items need to be dry, about 10 percent moisture or less and very low in oil content.

TYPES OF FOOD ITEMS TO STORE IN PETE BOTTLES:

Grains: oats, white rice, wheat, and corn

Milled grain products: white flour, degermed corn meal, and rice

flour

Legumes: beans, split peas, and lentils

Nonfat dry milk: regular and instant

Dehydrated fruits and vegetables: apples, carrots, onions, and potatoes (must be dry enough, both inside and out, to snap when bent)

TYPES OF FOOD ITEMS NOT TO STORE IN PETE BOTTLES:

Oily or moist grains and milled grain products: brown rice, whole grain flours and cereals, granola

Nuts

Brown sugar

Products containing leavening: cake/pancake mixes, biscuit mixes, etc. In the grocery stores these products are packaged in breathable packages that allow the gas produced by the leavenings to escape.

Home-dehydrated fruits and vegetables: This is “reduced oxygen packaging.” If moist foods, such as inadequately dried vegetables, are stored this way, it could result in a botulism poisoning risk.⁷

SEEDS AND GARDENS – PREPARING FOR THE LONG TERM

Of course, another consideration in preparing for long-term food needs is an adequate supply of seeds. Many forms of food can be grown in pots and in a very small amount of space. Do some research on your seed purchases, though. (Most legitimate seed providers can give you reliable information.) Some plants that are grown from certain types of modified

seeds will not produce seeds that can be grown again the next year. Make certain that the seeds you purchase will grow plants that produce seeds that will germinate after proper storage.

Numerous experts recommend storing your seeds in a tightly sealed glass container. You can also store different kinds of seeds together in individual paper packets, and then place them in one large container. Keep the seeds dry and cool. A temperature between 32 and 41 degrees Fahrenheit is ideal.

EMERGENCY SEEDS

In recent years there has been a surge in the emergence of companies providing emergency seeds. These sources often promise that their seeds are packaged for long life and can be good for anywhere from four years to thirty years. Many of them also promise that the package or can of seeds you will receive will have enough seeds to plant nearly an acre of crops – enough to feed several families, perhaps a whole neighborhood. Of course, these promises sound very encouraging when making emergency preparations. But there really is much more to the process than simply purchasing a can of seeds and putting them in a closet for a “day of emergency.”

First of all, gardening is not a simple matter for most people. You soon learn that you cannot simply throw a handful of seeds in the ground, wait a few weeks, and begin eating. Gardening is a skill that often takes a few years to refine. You should begin to develop gardening skills immediately if you expect to use this method of providing food supplies in an emergency situation.

Of course, seeds sitting on a shelf have very little food value on the day of the actual emergency occurrence. Also, there are many forms of plants that cannot be grown year-round. Even after they are planted, it is often several months before they are ready to cultivate. Much can happen in several months when a real emergency has transpired. Any

actual gardening success will depend on rainfall, general weather conditions, and the ability to stay with your garden in order to keep out pests and intruders of *all* varieties. Simply having a package of “emergency” seeds is not something that should be depended upon, especially in the *short run* during the most critical days of a crisis situation.

In light of all of this, here is some important advice:

- Stock your refrigerator and freezer with enough food to feed your family for a minimum of several weeks. Also keep canned foods and ample dry goods on hand. This would include rice, lentils, beans, peas, and dried fruit.
- If you have never gardened before, begin now. Start on a small scale. Then practice and learn. You will be amazed how much you will learn your first time or two actually planting and harvesting just two or three types of vegetables.
- Make sure you have adequate space in which to grow a garden. If you live in an apartment, use your porch or balcony. You can plant your seeds in five-gallon buckets or similar containers. You can actually grow a relatively large amount of food in a small space if it’s managed properly.
- Don’t forget a water source or some means of collecting rainwater and roof run-off. Without the ability to keep your garden watered properly, all of your other plans will be for naught. Some people install emergency wells – with hand pump capability – on their property. This can be a bit expensive, but the well and pump can be used for a variety of things, year-round, even if there is never an emergency need for it.

Most gardening experts agree that almost no one who is

inexperienced can acquire the knowledge and skills in the first year of gardening that are needed to ensure a hearty supply of all of the seed varieties one might desire or need. This is what keeps seed suppliers in business year after year. Keep this in mind when considering the use of seeds for long-term survival. You may want to begin your seed replenishment education process now.

A number of emergency garden experts insist that *sprouts* are your best bet for a reasonably quick food supply. They can be grown in a matter of days and in almost any climate, at any time of year, with no soil, sunlight, or large space requirements. Four square inches on a countertop is all they need. Many trailblazers and backpackers have learned to continually sprout seeds for a fresh food supply when on multi-month hikes.

Other emergency seed experts recommend that you focus on planting fast-growing, quickly producing crops that will give you food in a month or less. Examples include radishes, carrots, beets, mustards, cress, and related plants.

GROWING QUICKLY PRODUCING CROPS

Asian or Mustard greens – 21 days for baby, 45 days mature

Beets – 35 days for beet tops, 50 days mature

Broccoli – 40 to 45 days for first harvest; can harvest repeatedly

Carrots – 50 to 70 days

Kale – 30 days for baby kale, 60 days to mature

Lettuces – if seeds are first started indoors, lettuce can be ready in just over 30 days from transplanting.

Radishes – some radishes are ready to eat in 25 to 35 days

Sprouts – 4 to 6 days for mature sprouts from organic alfalfa seed, organic red clover seed, organic beans, and organic radish seed

Spinach – 30 days for small plants, 45 days mature. These grow best in cooler weather.⁸

It is obvious that even using these quickly growing garden varieties, there will still be a limited diet available for the first three weeks to a month if you are not currently growing anything when the disaster or emergency situation strikes. This is why a well-stocked refrigerator, freezer, and food closet are important, in addition to an ongoing garden.

CHURCH GARDENS AND WELLS

Some churches are blessed to have enough property to have a nice church garden. A number of churches have discovered that a church garden is a handy thing to have on hand if the church also has a regular dinner ministry of some type.

The church I pastor has a regular Wednesday evening dinner for its attendees. We also have a church garden, from which most of our fresh vegetables come. Maintaining a church garden is an excellent way to involve people in meaningful ministry, and if a church has a large enough garden and enough interested people to participate, it can be a way to minister to the less fortunate around the church on an ongoing basis.

If a church garden is deemed to be a viable option for your congregation, this may also be a perfect time to consider putting a well on the church property. Not only could it be used to water the garden, but in a severe emergency situation, it could be a literal lifesaver to your church family and the surrounding community.

In some areas of the country, it is fairly easy to install your own well by drilling it yourself. Various states and local governments have differing regulations about drilling for water. However, it can be done. In a dire emergency, when regulations do not matter much, it might be advisable to have at least examined how this can be accomplished by using easily obtainable and common materials. See the Resources section at the end of this book for do-it-yourself well-drilling techniques.

GARDENING FOR GREATER MINISTRY NEEDS

I am familiar with a man and his wife in northern Alabama who actually bought a small farm in their retirement years and now grow a large garden from which they supply free food to area homeless ministries and shelters. The couple grows the food, and then workers and volunteers from the various ministries come out and harvest the crop for their kitchens when the time is right.

Our church family, in north Florida, has even sent teams of missionaries up to the Alabama farm to assist in the tilling, harvesting, and distribution process as another ministry outreach of our church. As you can now probably imagine, with some thought, prayer, and creativity there is probably much that your church family could do along these lines of ministry as well.

4. EMERGENCY CLOTHING NEEDS

Another important consideration in emergency survival scenarios is ample and adequate clothing. Again, you probably want to avoid extremes in the personal storage of clothing. However, few people think first of clothing as an emergency supply. Most of us are blessed to have plenty of clothing. But imagine if you had no shoes or heavy jacket in extremely cold weather. What if you did not have enough underclothing? Hmmm. I bet you are thinking about it now!

I advise people, in preparing for their own or family emergency

needs, to set aside a couple of pairs of shoes, used but in good repair – as well as a supply of T-shirts, pants, underclothing, and socks. In addition, throw in some clothing appropriate for your locale, taking weather extremes into consideration. Store them in a box, plastic container, or a dedicated closet. Remember to think of others for whom you might be responsible as you make the very basic and minimum preparations concerning emergency clothing needs.

SUPPORTING A CLOTHING CLOSET MINISTRY

Additionally, a number of churches have clothing closet ministries. We do not have one on our church premises, but we regularly support and get involved with a local ministry that does. The ministry we support distributes the clothing on a regular basis to those who need them in the inner-city community around their church. However, a church that has a regular clothing closet ministry could also find itself in a highly advantageous position, in times of crisis, to minister to its own membership and the immediate community.

STARTING A CLOTHING CLOSET MINISTRY

- Establish a team of people who can help with various tasks in initiating and launching the ministry. This would include advertisement campaigns, collection procedures, distribution policies, and so on.
- Set specific and written operational guidelines for the ministry, such as eligibility requirements for receiving clothing, how much clothing a person can receive and how often, hours of operation, appointment procedures, and record-keeping requirements.
- Determine a space or location for the clothes closet, for example, a church basement, an empty classroom, or a storage building. You may need a bathroom, or other room, with mirrors nearby so

people can try on clothes.

- Collect donated or used equipment that will be needed, such as clothing racks, large plastic bins with lids, hangers, shelves, tables, and chairs.
- Determine what types of clothing you will offer and have a church-wide or community-wide clothing drive to adequately stock the closet with the specifically needed items.
- Announce dates and times of workdays to equip the clothes closet, sort and tag clothing, set up displays, and prepare for opening.
- Set up a system to keep track of guests coming in and the number of items given away, as well as to manage the inventory and keep the closet well stocked.
- Enlist the volunteers who will actually operate the clothes closet. Make certain they know the operating procedures as well as the hours they are needed to serve.
- Give regular attention to the clothing ministry from the pulpit, bulletins, posters, and flyers. Routinely use other creative means of keeping the church family and community informed of ministry needs and functions.⁹

I have a close relationship with a church in south Florida that, once every few months, has a food and clothing giveaway on its front lawn. As you might imagine, this is a monumental undertaking, but it is one that involves many members of its church in meaningful ministry to the poor community nearby. In performing a ministry of this magnitude on such a regular basis, the church is making a huge and biblical statement of the love of Jesus to the community it serves. People are regularly led to Christ as a result of feeding and clothing those in need in such a

magnificent way.

Numerous churches have implemented similar ministry programs. Such endeavors are a wonderful way to “prepare the soil” around the church in which the gospel message of salvation might be planted – with the added benefit of having, on hand, necessary items in times of emergency.

5. MEDICAL AND HYGIENE SUPPLIES

Medical and hygiene needs should also be taken into serious consideration when planning ahead for potential emergency situations. It is surprising how often a disaster strikes and many people are simply not prepared with emergency medical supplies. In some cases, what was once a simple matter of daily, routine medication requirements can quickly become a matter of life and death. Give thought to your particular medical needs and to those of the people around you, and prepare accordingly. Additionally, you can purchase extremely adequate first-aid kits that have very long shelf lives.

It might also be wise to construct a list of those within your church family and circle of close acquaintances who are medical professionals (EMTs, nurses, doctors, surgeons, physician assistants, and pharmacists). The list should include every source of contact information you can accumulate that would assist you in quickly contacting these practitioners. They may well prove to be a lifesaver for you or a family member in an emergency scenario.

BASIC TOILETRIES :

- Toothpaste
- Toothbrushes
- Shaving supplies

- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Toilet paper
- Other personal hygiene supplies specific to your needs

BASIC MEDICAL SUPPLIES:

- Aspirin
- Over-the-counter pain medications
- Cold and sinus medicines
- Allergy medicines
- Antibacterial ointment
- Toothpicks
- Cotton balls
- Hand sanitizer
- Rubbing alcohol
- Vitamins
- Medications specific to your needs

Make a list of emergency medical professionals whom you might be able to call in a dire situation.

Store up basic personal hygiene supplies.

Store up basic medical supplies and emergency medicine for your family's specific needs.

6. PROTECTING YOUR STUFF

It doesn't take long to learn that, no matter how much of the other supplies you had, if you could not protect what you had, you probably would not have it for long. We have already spent much time thinking about the philosophy and biblical nature of armed protection. Sadly, in the case of an extreme disaster or emergency situation, this may be one of your most important preparations.

I can assure you, as a former lawman, that when disaster strikes, those who did *not* prepare often panic. Some people who go into panic mode turn into something akin to crazed animals. They will kill, steal, and destroy anything and anyone to get to your supplies. And they will often do it without thought or regret. This is an extreme scenario, to be certain, but it is a realistic scenario and one that unfolds almost every day somewhere in the world. If that unthinkable scenario ever presents itself in your life, please be prepared.

This does not mean you have to purchase an arsenal of weapons. Nor does it mean you have to possess truckloads of ammunition. If the world gets that bad, we will have other things to deal with, to be sure. We are talking here of meeting your basic protection and food supply needs in an extreme emergency.

As a pastor, living through several devastating hurricane scenarios on the Gulf Coast, I can attest to the comfort I felt when I had to go out into the community that looked like it had been struck by a bombing raid, and I had a firearm neatly tucked away on my person. People can get really crazy when they think that the law has been suspended by an emergency situation. And sometimes, there is little to no law at all – for days. I have lived through such times. I went through one hurricane

situation wherein the local jail had its roof blown off and many of the deputies, who would otherwise be patrolling during the emergency, could not immediately get to work because of damage to their own homes and vehicles, personal emergency needs, and roadway obstructions. Please keep that possibility in mind when preparing for the worst.

I also felt a certain comfort in knowing that I had an appropriate firearm or two as I observed the plethora of squirrels and rabbits roaming the property on which I lived during those many weeks of hurricane recovery. Without power, water, and normal cooking facilities, I told my wife that those little critters were our MREs (Meals Ready to Eat – in military terms). Luckily for the delectable-looking little creatures, we did not run out of emergency food supplies before the stores were restocked and finally reopened. But I was prepared.

Also, do not forget the horrible days of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Local officials summarily seized more than seven hundred guns from storm-terrorized citizens in and around the New Orleans area. Local officials were later confronted over the issue in a lawsuit by the gun lobbying groups who accused the city of violating gun owners' constitutional rights to bear arms and leaving the disarmed citizens "at the mercy of roving gangs, home invaders, and other criminals." In response, the city officials unbelievably argued that federal law does not apply to the plaintiffs' claims against city officials "because the right to keep and bear arms has never been recognized as a fundamental individual right."¹⁰

Of course, as we examined in an earlier chapter, those rights have now been officially recognized in several Supreme Court rulings. But this does not mean that misguided authorities might not still attempt to seize your guns in the case of a calamity situation. It has happened before. It could happen again. Plan accordingly.

WHAT TYPE OF PROTECTION?

The two most frequent questions I receive concerning guns and emergency situations are: (1) What type of firearm should I carry for day-to-day protection? and (2) What is the best kind of gun(s) to have in a survival situation? These are important questions.

For day-to-day carry, in a concealed-carry situation, the best rule of thumb is: *use a gun that you will want to pick up and put on your person almost without thinking*. Please remember that in a daily carry situation, one is not preparing to fight a war. You are simply being prepared to defend yourself in the case of an attack against your person. When confronted by an attacker in a shopping mall parking lot, a small but comfortable firearm in your pocket or on your side is always more useful than a large, high-capacity gun that is securely tucked away in the glove compartment of your automobile.

Also, any firearm is better than having nothing at all. I can assure you that a would-be attacker is not going to ask you what caliber your gun is when you are *bang, bang, banging* it in his direction!

Having said that, you must educate yourself on the different types, sizes, and calibers of defensive weapons that are available for personal carry protection. I normally recommend a revolver for someone who is unfamiliar with firearm handling. Usually, at least a .38-caliber weapon, loaded with hollow-point ammunition, will suffice.

There are a number of very good automatic weapons suitable for personal carry, but they can be dangerous and complicated for anyone who does not use them and practice with them on a regular basis. Some automatics are even subject to jamming. Many elderly people or people with arthritis or other hand limitations find an automatic difficult to use. For these reasons, a revolver is almost always a good choice for personal and daily carry. Of course, you can increase the firepower that you might choose to keep around your home, office, or in your automobile.

Survival weapons are a different matter altogether. Some people

prefer to prepare for the literal possibility of fighting a war. That is your choice; however, I am not addressing that concern in this book. The question at hand is: *what kind of firearm is best for sheer survival situations?*

Numerous experts recommend a .22 caliber rifle as the best all-around survival tool. The ammunition is readily available and cheap, it can be easily carried on your person in bulk quantities, and the firing of the gun is relatively quiet. Even a child, or an inexperienced gun user, can easily handle a .22 if necessary.

With a .22 rifle you can harvest everything from a bird to a deer. Even some larger animals can be brought down with a precisely placed shot. Additionally, if need be, you can also stop or bring down a human or a viciously attacking animal with a .22 caliber firearm. For these reasons the .22 rifle is often touted as a perfectly adequate, if not the best, weapon of all-around survival you can own. Some companies manufacture a .22 caliber rifle in a “survival rifle” model. The rifle breaks down into several pieces that are stored in the butt-stock. There is usually ample room for an extra supply of ammunition in the storage compartment as well, and some of these type survival rifles even float!

7. EMERGENCY TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

The seventh need often proves to be an extremely important factor in emergency situations. Consider the following list of supplies. You may already possess most of these around your home. If you do not, consider purchasing them now. Another option is to plan and partner with your neighbors to ensure that each of you has access to tools and supplies from each other in the case of a disaster situation.

- Air mattresses
- Axe
- Baby supplies

- Basic tool kit
- Cell phone and charger
- Chain saw, with gas and oil
- Charcoal
- Compass and map of the area
- Duct tape and electric tape
- Emergency flare gun and flares
- Zip ties
- Entertainment items (books, cards, games)
- Generator or power inverter
- Hammer
- Hand-crank emergency radio
- Hatchet
- Heavy-duty pry bar
- Knives (sheath, hunting, pocket, Swiss Army)
- Large plastic tarps
- Lighter fluid
- Lighting sources (flashlights, glow sticks, etc.)
- Limb saw

- Manual can opener
- Nails and other fasteners
- Notepad and pencils/pens
- Roll of strong twine or cord
- Pet supplies
- Portable propane container
- Propane cookstove
- Rain gear
- Scissors
- Shovel
- Strike-anywhere matches
- Whistle
- Work gloves

Depending upon your own personal needs, you may think of other items. Remember, it may be days before you can get to a store.

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man. (Prov. 6:6–

A MATTER OF COMMON SENSE

The idea in all of this, of course, is commonsense planning and preparation. These seven basics are the beginning of a rational guide to planning. Thinking about these matters is the intelligent and Godly thing to do. Talking about and formulating a plan is even better. However, nothing substitutes for actual *preparation* as well as hands-on, logistical stocking and gathering of at least the very basic survival needs.

Of course, we all pray that we will never have to live in a basic survival situation. The sad truth is, though, that tens of thousands of Americans every single year are put in these types of scenarios: fires, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, snowstorms, and more. Are you and your family prepared?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

(THE DEVIL CAN BE IN THE DETAILS!)

He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty. A faithful man will be richly blessed. – PROVERBS 28:19–20

Perhaps by now you can see why a book like this might be written. There are so many circumstances of life for which prudent consideration ought to be given. The suggestions and instructions contained herein are not meant to overwhelm you, nor are they designed to cause further anxiety. Hopefully, however, the words of this book might one day save you and your family unnecessary heartache. Admittedly, not every preparation procedure and concern will apply to you.

I certainly am not attempting to present myself as an “expert” in each detail of essential preparation. I simply desire for God’s people to be informed. I have a pastor’s heart. Additionally, my years of firsthand experience in dealing with emergency situations have taught me that in certain cases, if some people had simply given thought ahead of time – and prepared – they could have been spared much grief. In this spirit, then, let us examine several additional items you should think about as you prepare for tough times that may come to your own life, home, family, and church.

SAFE ROOM

Some homes or properties are conducive to the construction of a safe room (or panic room). The idea behind a safe room is that of providing a

fortified sanctuary to which you can retreat, hide, and summon help, if help is available. Also, a well-constructed safe room can increase your chance of survival in a tornado or hurricane.

Some companies even offer ready-built safe rooms. These can be installed in the corners of large rooms, garages, or basements. An outdoor storm shelter can be used as a safe room if it is adequately equipped with force-resistant doors and locks. Here are some basic survival supplies that should be stored in your safe room:

- A firearm and ammunition – in a locked box or coded safe, in case you have to enter quickly and unarmed
- An emergency cell phone with charger – or an outside alarm that sounds at the flip of a switch
- Flashlight and/or glowsticks
- Water
- Food bars
- Basic medical supplies in case you enter the safe room with injuries or have specific daily medicine needs

The construction of a safe room is a highly individual matter and must take into consideration numerous safety concerns, building codes, structural tie-in requirements, and individual family needs. There are several professional companies that can assist with this. Some people simply turn an existing closet into a quick safe room.

SAFE ROOM 101

To create a simple panic room, security expert Chris E. McGoey offers the following advice:

- Select a windowless interior room or large closet.
- Replace the wooden doorjamb with a steel one.
- Install a keyless Grade-1 deadbolt (the American National Standards Institute tests all locks with an arsenal of tools and then grades the lock: Grade 1 is the best and toughest).
- Stock the room with emergency items, as well as a way to summon aid or defend yourself.¹

A “BUG OUT BAG” (BOB)

Many emergency survival experts, even government agencies, recommend having an emergency exit bag prepared. This bag, or backpack, needs to have about two to three days of survival items in it. It can be stored in your home or vehicle. Some people have several of these emergency “bug out bags” stored in various places. The philosophy of such preparation is, “Pray for the best but prepare for the worst.”

If you find yourself in a true emergency requiring a quick exit from the area, you will be extremely grateful that you took time to make preparations for just such an occasion. You can simply snatch up this prepared bag and flee. In the bag are the necessities of life, providing for a few days lead time until further arrangements can be made. The following is a list of items that most BOB experts recommend for a bug out bag. Some of these have already been discussed in the preceding chapter. You should already have them around your home or in your car. Certainly, you can customize your own bag, but these are the most commonly recommended BOB supplies:²

FOOD AND WATER

- 3,600 calories of food per person

- 9 containers of water per person
- Method of water purification

COMMUNICATION

- AM/FM radio with batteries or alternate power source
- Whistle with lanyard
- Cell phone

HYGIENE & SANITATION

- Personal hygiene kit (include soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, sanitary napkins, diapers, razor, and other toiletries)
- Toilet paper

TOOLS

- 30 to 50 feet of nylon rope
- Pocketknife
- Sheath knife
- Roll of duct tape
- Foldable shovel
- Hatchet or axe
- Sewing kit

LIGHT SOURCES

- Flashlight with batteries
- Candles
- Glow sticks
- Road flare(s) or flare gun

WARMTH AND SHELTER

- Waterproof matches
- Alternate fire-starting method
- Tent or other shelter
- Solar emergency blanket or emergency sleeping bag
- Poncho

MONEY

- Have a reasonable amount of emergency cash in your kit. Include quarters and dollar bills, etc. for vending machines

IMPORTANT PAPERS

- Copies of documents such as birth certificates, marriage licenses, wills, and insurance forms
- Phone numbers, credit card information, etc.

FIRST AID

- First aid kit
- Burn gel and dressing

- Snakebite kit
- Insect repellent
- Sunblock
- Special medication

STRESS RELIEVERS

- Games and small toys
- Books for kids and adults (like some inspirational reading)
- Hard candy and desserts
- Paper and pen
- Favorite stuffed animal for children

EXTRA CLOTHING

- Extra socks, underwear, hat, shoes, etc.

GUN AND AMMO

- A small firearm for self-defense or collapsible survival weapon
- Sufficient ammunition

GOVERNMENT “BOBS”

Interestingly enough, even the US government has gotten into the act of individual emergency “preparedness.” In December 2014, the *Washington Free Beacon* reported that the US Treasury Department had ordered emergency preparedness survival kits for each and every one of its government workers at every major bank in the United States. A

spokesperson for the government agency told the *Beacon* that the kits were being ordered in case of potential terrorist attacks.

“After September 11, 2001, emergency preparedness was ramped up to include providing simple survival kits throughout the government to employees working in large office buildings or other potential target areas,” she said in a statement. “As the solicitation mentioned, the kits must also include a ‘reusable solar blanket’ 52 by 84 inches long, a 2,400-calorie food bar, ‘50 water purification tablets,’ a ‘dust mask,’ ‘one-size fits all poncho with hood,’ a rechargeable lantern with built-in radio, and an ‘Air-Aid emergency mask’ for protection against airborne viruses.”

The report went on to explain that “[each employee] will receive a survival kit, which will come in a fanny-pack or backpack that can fit all of the items, including a 33-piece personal first aid kit with ‘decongestant tablets,’ a variety of bandages, and medicines.”³

So if you wanted to know what the government would put in your survival kit BOB – there you have it!

EXIT STRATEGIES

In your emergency planning, do not forget to discuss and map out exit strategies, escape routes, and alternate meeting places in case of separation. Remember, your normal communication or transportation items may not be available or may not work at all in times of extreme emergency.

If you have planned ahead of time where to meet, where to go, how to get there, and what to do in case individual family members must survive on their own (wherever they are) until you can reunite, you will save yourself a ton of worry if that time should ever present itself.

Remember also that the concept of an exit strategy for the believer, especially in times of extreme persecution, goes all the way back to the instructions Jesus gave in Matthew 24:15–18: “*So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the*

prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.”

LARGE-GROUP HOUSING

It is also wise and biblical to consider housing people in your church facilities in emergency situations. The church where I pastor has done this on numerous occasions, especially during times of devastating hurricane activity in our area of the Gulf Coast.

Conduct a thorough assessment of your church facilities. Perhaps establish a ministry team that is responsible for this important task. You will need to consider an emergency food and water supply. You will also want to look at emergency power and light sources, games, first-aid supplies, bathroom and personal hygiene supplies, blankets, basic medications, and so forth. Each church will be unique in its needs.

Consider also the overall use of the church grounds and properties. Some churches, like the one I pastor, are blessed to have large acreage. Thus, we have several power and water sources as well as shelter facilities that could be used in an emergency. Some churches have had wells drilled on their property that can operate from a power supply as well as by hand pump. A number of larger churches have installed alternative power generators that are automatic in nature and operate off natural gas or stored propane. Other churches will be much more limited in property or building size but will still need to assess the use of what they do have to make available to their church family and the community around them in a crisis situation.

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then

vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them. (James 4:13–17)

USING YOUR CHURCH FOR EMERGENCY HOUSING SHELTER

In a dire emergency simply having shelter can be a huge lifesaver. However, it is wise to plan ahead for the possibility of such an event. The church I pastor has been used to shelter hurricane and tornado survivors as well as victims of a railroad car derailment. Without warning, we have been called upon to house large numbers of displaced people for several days.

Establish a supply closet dedicated to emergency housing needs only. You will need to stock it with the following supplies:

- bottled water (which will need to be occasionally rotated for freshness),
- blankets,
- flashlights and batteries,
- toilet paper,
- razor blades,
- toothbrushes and toothpaste,
- soap bars,
- shampoo,
- cleaning supplies,
- basic medical and first aid supplies, and

- games and other entertainment items.

Consider an emergency backup power source. Also consider an emergency water supply (a dedicated emergency well with hand pump or extra-large water containers that are safe for long-term storage).

Carefully assess your buildings and their usefulness in such a scenario. Do you have individual rooms that can be used as temporary group apartments? Do you have adequate bathroom facilities? Are there areas that need to be off-limits? Do you have a means of making those areas secure during emergency housing situations? Even people you are helping will sometimes abuse your facilities and your goodwill.

Be prepared to suspend normal church activities and programs, while perhaps still providing counseling and worship services and even Bible studies and children's ministries. Your church may want to establish an emergency reserve fund *now* for such unexpected emergency times.

Establish policies concerning the possession of certain drugs, weapons, pets, tobacco products, alcohol, and so on.

You will need to provide some type of security and overwatch services during the emergency housing event. These duties would be defined as someone who would at least be responsible to be on the property answering questions, making certain that basic needs were being met, and assuring that people were staying within the approved areas of sheltering.

You will need to provide some type of broad-based emergency lighting apparatus so there are no large areas of darkness or dark corners that can be dangerous to the emergency residents or their children.

Consider the fact that you may have the elderly or infirm in your care.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Sadly, our nation has seen its share of massive, long-lived, and violent episodes of civil disobedience. From the 1960s civil rights riots to the 2014 Ferguson, Missouri, case of a white police officer shooting an unarmed black youth, civil violence and extremely dangerous civil disobedience have been a scourge upon the sanctity of American cities and neighborhoods.

What would you and your family do if a sudden outburst of violent civil disobedience broke out in your town or neighborhood today? Are you prepared? More than likely, few of us have given much consideration to such a scenario; yet when they do occur, they can be deadly, and they can happen quickly.

Our nation has never been immune to such times of danger and civil unrest. Some analysts predict that civil disobedience may grow worse in our nation in the coming years. They base their opinion on factors such as the continual rise in illegal immigration, radical societal movements (gay acceptance, Islamic acceptance, abortion and gun rights agendas, and so on), extreme political and racial divides, and the radical responses that could very well accompany them.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE PROTECTION CONSIDERATION

The following are some commonsense recommendations that you and your family may want to discuss in preparation for the possibility that you may have to deal with civil disobedience.⁴

- Use the sense God gave to you! Do not attend massive protests or involve yourself in a mob action. Certainly do not take your children to such an event. All it takes is for one person to throw a rock (or worse!) at the police or start a fight with a member of the opposing protest group, for a full-scale and extremely dangerous riot situation to explode.
- Make yourself, your home, and your property unappealing to a potential evildoer in such a way that he or she will say, “You know what – it’s not worth it.” This means giving thought to window and door closures, security devices, firearms availability and familiarity, and the general securing mechanisms of your entire property, including ease of escape if necessary. Can you put yourself in a relatively easy position to defend yourself and your

family?

- Think about those things for which you are truly willing to die. This may be a grim thought, but it is one to which serious consideration should be given before a dangerous situation occurs. For example, if you see an angry mob destroying your car parked out on the street in front of your home, and you and your family are safe, secure, and armed inside – do not risk your life for your automobile! That is why you have insurance. Even if it is uninsured, the lives of those within your home are far more valuable. A car is not worth losing your life or the lives of your family members.
- Be prepared for fire, incendiary devices, explosives, or other evacuation-causing scenarios. In short, if you come under attack and your home is set ablaze, you must have exit strategies and you must be armed when you exit your home if you are to have any real chance of survival.
- Do not count on help from the police. In a riot situation and extreme cases of civil disobedience, the police are often not concerned with an individual's emergency needs. Seldom will a local police force have the manpower to attend to every individual need when they are in the middle of dealing with a mass civil disturbance. Furthermore, as stated before, according to the Supreme Court, the police are never obligated to attend to the security needs of any particular individual. Think on that sobering truth – and make preparations for your own safety should the need arise.
- Make certain you have a closet or shelf space dedicated to life-sustaining supplies for any emergency situation, particularly a situation in which you might be unable to leave your home or

property for several days. Stock up on canned foods, dried goods, fresh water, medications, packaged food items, toiletry and bath supplies, and other important items. You should have enough supplies to sustain your family for at least three to four days.

TALK, THINK, PRAY, AND PLAN!

With the wonderful information technologies of today, it is not difficult to find a multitude of reliable and expert companies and websites specializing in each of the aforementioned topics. But the most important element of emergency planning is to *plan*! And plan *ahead* of time.

If calamitous times come to America or to your specific locale, you will be in much better condition to survive the ordeal and minister to others in the midst of it if you have taken the time to properly prepare. In most situations, it will be important for Christians and the church to *stay engaged* in the culture in which it has been placed to minister.

If those calamitous times are prolonged, God will give wisdom to those among us who are in step with His will, to see us through those days. He always has – He always will. The Bible and other historical testimonies are our constant reminders of this great truth.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

(LEARNING TO NETWORK FOR MINISTRY EFFECTIVENESS)

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. – ROMANS 12:4–5

The concept of *community* was undoubtedly a central theme of the early church. Probably no one expressed this better, and in so many ways, than the apostle Paul. He used the imagery of the human body to illustrate the fact that it is the joining of the individual and healthy working parts that make a body “whole”: “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

The early church recognized that it was, indeed, a community of believers working together for the greater goal of advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the world in which the Lord had placed them. Additionally, they understood their responsibility to be a community of faith; each congregation was certainly a local assembly of believers responsible for their own areas of ministry outreach, but they also belonged to the body as whole. They needed each other.

The church was not attempting to build a socialistic framework of simply “spreading the wealth,” nor was it building a local empire of power and influence; but rather, it was building a network of meaningful ministry fellowship and even disaster assistance that extended far beyond its own walls and boundaries. Like a body, the early church

learned to effectively work together to provide for the needs of its own members as well as for the needs of those to whom it was reaching out in ministry endeavors.

A NETWORK OF MINISTRY EMERGES

Anchor Baptist Church in Brevard, North Carolina, serves as just one example of how churches across America are learning to be churches of “community.” In 1985 the church was just a small congregation that few had heard of beyond its own region of local ministry. Yet, in that year, the church established a food bank primarily to help out the elderly and some of the area’s neediest people. Then, in 1989, when Hurricane Hugo hit North Carolina, little Anchor Baptist Church responded to the growing and desperate need for relief workers.

Once Anchor Baptist had engaged itself in that ministry of compassion, it caught the preparedness vision. In 2006 the congregation built a 17,500-square-foot warehouse. That building also serves as a disaster shelter capable of housing hundreds of people if necessary. The church provides boxed meals and emergency clothing for children, as well as home, personal hygiene, baby care, and cleaning needs. They have also divided themselves into teams who can serve as chainsaw crews and carpentry crews, as well as heavy equipment and transportation operators. Anchor Baptist Church has now developed itself into a focal point to supply other churches with relief supplies and information. They have cultivated a network that now includes hundreds of other churches and ministries that exist to meet the emergency needs of others.¹

The early church experienced a similar phenomenon. From the mother church, born in downtown Jerusalem at Pentecost, to the initial persecution and scattering of the church and the emergency needs that scattering created, the church eventually learned to “network.” Out of the scattering ultimately grew the desire to communicate with and to cooperate with the resulting congregations of early believers. Observe

the synopsis of that chain of events as described in the book of Acts:

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (11:19–30)

It is important to point out that it was at Antioch, the hub of the church's community networking, that the believers were first tagged with the name "Christian" – followers of Christ or *representatives of the Christ*. How appropriate! For it is when we are cooperating as a community of faith, reaching out to the world around us with the gospel and endeavoring to meet the needs within our ministry realms, that the unbelieving world begins to get it: they begin to see Jesus fleshed out ... in us! Then the soil is prepared for planting the seed. It should be no surprise that the mainstay of the early church, networking to meet people's needs, should also be on the front burner of today's church.

NETWORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

(Developing a Plan to Get Involved)

- Investigate ways that your church family can assist smaller churches in their ministry endeavors (vacation Bible schools, joint community outreach ministries, logistical planning, emergency aid, and so forth).
- Identify other churches that have existing ministries with which your church might partner (clothing closets, feeding stations, homeless ministries, and medical missions, for example).
- Develop plans and action teams that are “ready to go” in case of an area or regional disaster, such as a hurricane, tornado, flood, or snowstorm. Partner with other churches in this endeavor. Gather resources for emergency assistance now. You will be able to call on them when the disaster strikes.
- Assist in community ministry efforts that already exist or are starting up (like pregnancy resource centers, homeless shelters, and community feeding programs).
- Cooperate with local civic officials and institutions that specialize in disaster relief, including those that offer temporary shelter and emergency food and water assistance.

NETWORKING – PATH TO MINISTRY SUCCESS

Becoming a church that has a sense of community and is involved in ministry networking is usually not something that happens overnight. It often is a mind-set that a church family must grow into. First, the church family has to mature to the point that it begins to see *beyond itself*, just as the early church did. That maturing family of believers then must come to understand that this truly is the reason the church exists! Some churches “get” this very quickly; others take a bit longer. But when

church members and leadership begin to catch the vision and then they cast the vision to the greater body, results begin to follow.

As always, our primary function is to lead people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Then we must disciple them and teach them to join the various ministry outreach teams so that they may faithfully use their gifts of the Holy Spirit. But oftentimes, before we can effectively evangelize people, we have to look for creative ways to reach out to them. You may want to examine and duplicate other church ministries around the nation that are in a ministry field similar to yours. Of course, your own church may be led into an area of fairly original ministry endeavors. Either way, the journey can be an exciting one for a church family!

Many years ago, when we were still a very small congregation, we determined to provide a biblical and godly alternative for our own church family to the community's customary Halloween celebration. Churches have been doing similar things for ages. However, we are blessed to have plenty of acreage – so we decided to really make a big deal of it with a distinctly Christian-themed atmosphere.

For years, this ministry continued to grow within our own church family. Others, who were friends with our members, began to bring their families and children as well. Then it hit us: Let's do this for the whole community. Why are we keeping this to ourselves? Let's look outside our own needs and offer this as a ministry to the entire community!

To make a long ministry story short, we now have several thousand people who show up every year for our Jesus Jamboree! They drive from many miles around, even from a neighboring state. We have to hire traffic control officers to direct and park the attendees. We utilize live Christian bands, car shows, and tons of food and drink and candy for the children. We offer scores and scores of game booths. We have hayrides, horse rides, a petting zoo, jumping tents, and so much more. And we offer it to the community absolutely free. Our church family foots the

bill for the whole event.

But here is the clincher: located right in the middle of the whole affair is what's called the Life Booth. There we minister the gospel to anyone who desires it. Every year we lead people to a saving relationship in the Lord; we also discover people without a church family who are looking for the love of God in their lives. Now we have other churches partnering with us in this ministry and helping us finance and work the whole affair. Still other churches are building similar ministries using ours as a model. A network is being born, and it continues to grow.

And we have discovered that one network usually leads to yet another ministry network. One of the churches with whom we partner in our region-wide Jesus Jamboree is actually from a neighboring state. They are located near a very big city and have a feeding and clothing ministry to the homeless in the inner city. But they needed help in their ministry endeavor. Guess who has partnered with *them* in their inner-city homeless ministry?

Yet another church that has assisted us with our Jesus Jamboree is now starting a similar ministry in their community several hours away. And on and on the ministry networking chain continues. And that is how it happens. This is just one example of several ministry networks in which our church is now involved. It has taken us years, but we are learning to be an active part of the ministry community of the living church of the body of Christ. And the Lord is richly blessing us for it.

Regardless of your particular denomination, there are so many ways your church can become a ministry networking church. The Salvation Army has a disaster relief program with which you can participate. The Southern Baptist Convention and the Assemblies of God each have some of the largest disaster relief programs in the world. Most of the major denominations and larger churches have something similar. I have discovered that they are usually more than glad to partner with other churches, even churches of other denominations, in order to minister to

the needs of the hurting world around us.

WHY CHURCHES SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN RELIEF AND OUTREACH MINISTRY NETWORKS

- It is the hallmark of the church's life, and has been since the earliest days of the New Testament era.
- It gives opportunity for more of your own members to be involved in meaningful, hands-on ministry.
- Many churches usually have adequate facilities and property to use for emergency and outreach programs.
- The church is generally a place the local community trusts, especially in times of desperate need.
- Churches can usually be depended upon to supply ministries of compassion. This is a major concern for people who are truly hurting.
- Churches can pool their resources very easily, from equipment to sheer manpower to finances. A network of cooperating churches can accomplish much when times get tough.
- Ministry networking produces a much deeper level of spiritual maturity in a body of believers as they learn to work side by side with one another as well as with other congregations and denominations.
- Gospel-ready, ministering churches are the best equipped to meet the total needs of a hurting person. We have the truth! We can offer people real and eternal hope and healing, as well as a new family in which they can grow and mature in their faith.

- Ministry networking with other churches keeps the focus off of *me* and instead directs it at *others*. This biblical spirit can spread throughout the entire church family, making for a healthier overall church family in the long run.
- Smaller churches can do bigger things for the kingdom by aggressively networking with each other or by networking with much larger churches. Large churches can greatly minister to smaller churches by purposely seeking to incorporate the smaller congregations into their missions and ministry work. Surely the Lord will bless a congregation that reaches out to other churches in this manner.
- The Lord has promised to bless those who look after the needs of others. We cannot do it all, and we cannot minister to everyone – but we can do something! And God will bless you when you are obedient to go through the doors He has opened for your church.

KOINONIA – WE DO NOT HAVE THE CHOICE OF ISOLATION

Koinonia is the Greek word translated in our English versions of the New Testament as *communion*, *fellowship*, *association*, *sharing*, *holding in common*, and even *partnership*. However, when the earliest Christians spoke of *koinonia*, they meant to express the richness of the relationship of godly intimacy and depth they had with one another in the body of Christ. The relationship of *koinonia*, as expressed by the early church, was so rich that it even became the predominant Greek expression for the marital relationship, the most intimate of all godly relationships between human beings.²

As one Christian author and biblical researcher puts it, “The meaning of ‘fellowship’ or ‘communion’ in the New Testament relates to sharing one common life within the body of Christ at all levels of existence and experience – spiritual, social, intellectual, economic. No area of life can

be excluded.”³

While I certainly hold to the clearly biblical concept of the individual responsibility we each have before the Lord, especially for our salvation experience, I am also concerned that the sense of community (*koinonia*) exemplified by the New Testament body of Christ is not what it could be. More than likely, the American culture of rugged individualism and the ability to make one’s own way in life has played into the deconstruction of the idea of biblical *koinonia* in today’s church.

For those of us who have been blessed enough to participate in international missions endeavors, especially in second and third world cultures, most of us have experienced a deep sense of community among believers in these cultures that has long been lost to most American churches. In fact, I often hear from missionaries returning from their first such trip, “We couldn’t believe how close the Christians were to each other and how they took care of each other’s needs and continually fellowshiped in each other’s homes and daily affairs.” Never have I heard a missionary declare that this experience was a *bad* thing. In fact, most of them expressed that it somehow showed them what was missing in their own lives, families, or church family experiences.

I am keenly aware that there is a cultural element involved in all of this. American culture, by and large, is distinctly different from most other cultures of the world in the matter of individualism. The idea of independence is woven deeply into our founding principles. It is in our “blood.” But I am afraid it has done some level of harm to our churches and our biblical responsibility to closely associate with other churches and ministries. The reality is, to be a pristinely biblical New Testament body of believers, we truly should be more engaged with one another in life and ministry, and certainly more engaged with fellow believers around the nation.

It has occurred to many that the reason so many second and third world church families appear to be more immersed in true *koinonia* is

because sometimes, as a matter of sheer survival, they have to be closely knitted together. So they have learned to be so. We can only pray that America's churches do not eventually have to learn to express more "community" because of hardships or persecution.

PART III

PREPARING FOR “SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

FOR THIS TIME AND FOR THIS PLACE

All of us might wish at times that we lived in a more tranquil world, but we don't. And if our times are difficult and perplexing, so are they challenging and filled with opportunity. – ROBERT KENNEDY, 1961

The throng of more than eleven thousand people tightly crowded the unimpressive podium and the makeshift stage on which it was situated. Many in attendance that day were there solely to catch their first glimpse of the now-famous and always-controversial man. The cool November air, empowered by a steady breeze, could chill a person to the bone.

The keynote speaker's gangly, six-foot-four frame was unmistakable, even in the huge crowd. His stovepipe hat added another ten inches to his height.

Edward Everett, one of the most famous orators of that time, took the podium first and delivered his well-prepared speech. Everett's rhetoric was exceptionally polished and flowed with oratorical intonations that resonated above the vast host. His speech lasted two full hours. The people politely listened ... and waited.

Mercifully, Everett's fanciful speech finally came to its long anticipated conclusion. To this day, few speak of his words when remembering the solemn dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery.

The crowd now filled with anticipation. What would the next speaker have to say?

It was Lincoln's turn to ascend to the podium, his hat now removed. He stumbled slightly from dizziness as he reached out to grip the dais. He

fumbled for his handkerchief and quickly wiped his forehead with it. His raging fever had sapped his strength. A slight twinge of nausea gripped him. He surveyed the crowd. A whispering hush fell over the audience.

He produced a single, small sheet of paper from his jacket pocket. He had scribbled the few paragraphs it bore while on the train ride to Gettysburg. The floor of that presidential railroad car had been briefly littered with wadded up balls of paper, each representing one more failed attempt to put words to paper that would finally please him.

Lincoln momentarily hung his head as he gripped the sides of his pulpit. He silently prayed for the strength to make it through the next few moments. It was, after all, his solemn duty, even if he had only been invited at the last minute. He opened his mouth to speak, paused for a moment, regained his composure, and began:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure ...

President Abraham Lincoln's entire speech consisted of a mere ten sentences. The communication of it lasted only a little over two minutes. When finished, the crowd politely applauded – but with mixed reaction.

After that November 19, 1863, speech, Lincoln boarded the 6:30 p.m. train for Washington, D.C. The president continued to complain of being feverish and weak. A protracted illness followed over the next couple of days. The president subsequently developed a rash. The White House physician finally diagnosed President Lincoln's illness. He had given his speech while suffering from a mild case of smallpox.¹

A SPIRITUAL CIVIL WAR

Eerily, that world-famous speech once again resonates with America. Lincoln began by declaring that our nation was engaged in a great civil war. He expressed his fear, and the deep concern of many other

Americans of the day, that the nation as they had once known it, might not survive. He declared that America was being tested. Many believe we are again, sadly, at the edge of a similar precipice today.

The civil war that rages in our day has, mercifully, not yet resulted in a battlefield upon which Americans are fighting Americans to the death. Historians still wonder how our nation could have survived such a savage war, a war that claimed more than half a million lives of our native sons. We can only pray that a dreadful day such as that never returns to our soil again.

Nonetheless, a deep civil uneasiness resides in our land. The civil war of today's America appears to many to be a deeply spiritual one, and some believe it is, once again, a test. The forces of light and darkness are clashing swords. The biblical virtues that once undergirded our nation's institutions are feverishly being torn down to the foundations, demolished right before our eyes.

How much longer can we endure? Will God continue to be patient with us? Will He continue to bless us and protect us, holding back the flood of evil that so desperately wants to sweep us away like a tidal wave? We see those forces of evil already at work in other lands. Will they soon come to our shores and to our neighborhoods? Those are the questions that are heavy on the hearts and souls of many of America's Christians.

Our nation has been through many calamities since its earliest days. It survived the horrendously bloody War of Independence. We slogged through and finally won the War of 1812. We barely survived the horrendous embarrassment of slavery, a devastating civil war, and the inglorious days of Reconstruction.

We desperately tried, to no avail, to stay out of the Great War – *the war to end all wars* – otherwise known as World War I. We endured a devastating depression that made multitudes victims of homelessness and starvation and caused bankers and investors to leap to their deaths

from tall buildings.

World War II brought us Pearl Harbor, the atomic bomb, astounding death tolls, and the beginning of a huge shift in America's collective values. The Korean War beckoned us, and America responded. The 1960s and 1970s swooped down upon us, bringing with them a presidential assassination, civil-rights riots, more assassinations, the Vietnam War, the drug revolution, the sexual revolution, and the legalization of the culture of death – *Roe v. Wade*.

Then came September 11, 2001. Some biblical scholars have claimed that the terror of that day marked the beginning of the end for America. Yet, here we are – still. How is that? Only by the grace of God.

THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE

In case you are wondering why I have only focused on the most horrendous days of America's history (and there are others not mentioned here), it is because I want to remind us all that the United States could not be here at all without the providential hand of God, guiding us and protecting us along the way

But also, I did it to point out that in spite of all of America's ills, we are still the world's only great light that yet shines among the nations.

Can you imagine a world without America, even with all of its faults and ills? Many a treatise has been written examining this frightening prospect. Almost all of them come to the same conclusion: if there were no United States of America, the world could be plunged into a kind of darkness it has never before seen.

We are a nation worth fighting for. God has blessed America richly. Sometimes it appears that we in America are the only ones in the world who do not realize the gravity of the blessing we possess. A vast number of the rest of the world's population is counting on America to remain strong and good ... somehow.

COMING TYRANNY

Many of America's Christians understand the fears of a coming potential tyranny such as that expressed by Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous nineteenth-century French political thinker and historian, widely recognized for his work *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville warned that modern democracy might prove to eventually invent new and terrible forms of tyranny that the world had never known. In fact, he claimed, the coming tyranny could be much more dangerous than the oppression suffered under the most ruthless of the Roman emperors. And we all know that with that ruthless Roman tyranny eventually came unthinkable persecution of Christians and Jews.

Tocqueville expressed his deep-seated fears that if despotism were actually to take hold in a modern democracy, a nation like America could eventually see "a multitude of men" "constantly circling for petty pleasures" and ultimately subjugated to the will of a powerful central government, which would wield an "immense protective power." He likened that potentially tyrannical government to a "protective parent" who wants to keep its citizens as "perpetual children."²

Those concerns were expressed more than 150 years ago. Yet many today would claim we are right at the edge of his dire predictions – now. And this fact especially rings true when one considers that Tocqueville, writing in the 1800s, also made the following eerie and futuristic prediction: "There are now two great nations in the world, which starting from different points, seem to be advancing toward the same goal: the Russians and the Anglo-Americans. Each seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world."³

Right out of today's headlines, wouldn't you say?

AMERICA'S SECRET

As insightful as Tocqueville's investigations were, there is a wildly

famous quote often attributed to him that probably was not his quote at all. At least there appears to be no known reliable reference crediting the words to any of Tocqueville's works. Dwight D. Eisenhower used the inspiring text on November 3, 1952, in his final campaign address in Boston, Massachusetts. He claimed the words were those of a "wise philosopher who came to this country."⁴

Wherever the words ultimately originated; *someone* penned them. And whoever that someone was, many would say *he got it right!* Consider the deep truths found in Toqueville's widely quoted prose:

I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors – in her fertile fields and boundless forests; in her rich mines and vast world commerce; in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

And that really is the crux of the matter. Government is not the answer to America's tribulations. It is not America's "hand of Providence." America's wealth, power, influence, and brilliance are not her salvation. Her only hope for survival and to turn back the tide of inevitable and horrible persecution, is for her pulpits to once again become aflame with calls to righteousness, and her people to turn back to God, earnestly desiring the good things that flow from His benevolent blessings of liberty. Can we really doubt that America's decline in greatness is not a direct result of America's rejection of the understanding and practice of what really is *good*?

"Righteousness exalteth a nation," wrote King Solomon, "but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34 KJV).

Let us also be reminded of another great biblical truth found in the book of Acts. The apostle Paul was speaking before a crowd in Athens, reminding them about God's ultimate hand of sovereignty and His eternal control of providence:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and *he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands*. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' (Acts 17:24–28; emphasis added)

NO ACCIDENT!

God has set the *times and the places* wherein the people will live. What an astounding truth! That means that you and I have not arrived at this point together by some trick of fate. It has not been an accident of history that we find ourselves living together in these prophetic times.

God has *placed* us here according to His sovereign purpose, and He has placed us here specifically for these times in which we live.

God is counting on us. We are His ambassadors. He has entrusted us with His Word, His prophetic words of warning, and the good news of Jesus Christ! What an unsearchable matter. What an amazing thought. What a high calling! I am honored to be living and ministering in these days with you.

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. (Ps. 139:17-18 KJV)

What Bible student does not remember the high calling to which God's servant Esther was summoned?

Esther lived in the days of the Persian Empire. Her people, the Jews, were on the verge of enduring massive persecution and ultimately total annihilation at the hands of the wicked man Haman, a high official of King Xerxes. Haman had devised a plot wherein the Jews of the kingdom

would be delivered unto their deaths by decree of the king. Haman relished the thought of carrying out the decree.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18 NKJV)

However, Esther was now the king's wife. Mordecai, her cousin, had discovered Haman's wicked plot and had reported the plan to Esther through her servant Hathak. Yet, Esther's first response to the shocking news was to shirk the issue in fear. She did not want to get involved. First and foremost, she feared for her own life and well-being. She sent word to Mordecai of her perplexity.

Then she instructed [Hathak] to say to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

When Mordecai got Esther's message, he immediately responded and put the matter in perspective for her:

Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. *And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*" (Esth. 4:9 – 11, 13, 14; emphasis added)

And this principle is to be our perspective as well. America's church is perhaps on the verge of experiencing massive persecution. The

possibility of it is unthinkable to most. A number of Christians have simply put it out of their minds and blindly go on with life as though everything will remain the same – *accidentally*. Others simply do not want to “get involved,” including a number of America’s pastors. But somebody must get involved; somebody had *better* get involved lest we all perish.

Who knows that you and I have not been raised up for *such a time as this*? I’ll tell you who knows – *God knows*! He has done the raising up!

Now we must do our part. Now we must dare to speak before the earthly kings. Is your church prepared? Is your family prepared? Are you prepared?

THE CROSS IS OUR LIFE!

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. – GALATIANS 6:14

“It’s a simple matter of building code violations,” the indifferent building inspector said. “We have explained to you over and over again that the cross does not meet proper code restrictions.”

“Nonsense!” the church member protested. “There’s nothing in the code prohibiting us from having this cross on our church building. This is *our* building, not the government’s! It’s a church! Our constitution says that we have freedom of religion in this country!”

Despite their protests, a wrecking crew hired by the government zoning authorities showed up at the little rural church soon thereafter. They had come to tear the heavy iron cross down from the roof. The placing of the cross at the pinnacle of the small-town church’s roof had been officially declared impermissible.

No government official had yet been able to point to a specific code, ordinance, or law of which the church was in violation – in spite of the many requests made by distraught church members. But the cross was targeted for removal anyway. Church members began to smell a ruse.

The very next day after the authorities took the cross down, an angry church member took it upon himself, using his own welding equipment, to reinstall the cross on its original location. In response to that blatant act of defiance, the rogue welder was arrested and ultimately held for ten hours. The charge this time was for “operating a welding business without a proper government license.”

“Typical government bureaucracy and strong-arm tactics at work,”

the people lamented.

“I won’t let them take down the cross even if it means they would shoot me dead,” said one seventy-three-year-old man, whose grandfather helped build the church in 1924.

But a week later, building code officials showed back up with another wrecking crew and took the cross down yet again. The next day, one more time, the irate church members reestablished the cross to its glorious position. The cross was now a little shorter and much worse for wear because of the tearing-down-and-replacing process it had endured.

What was the building code official’s response when the cross was re-erected for a second time? They cut off the power and water supply to the church and installed surveillance cameras to catch the building code violators.

“The cross is the glory of us Christians,” said another man, who left his cosmetics shop in the neighboring big city to travel to the church grounds to help protect his hometown, rural church.

A different church member said, “Jesus was nailed to the cross for us. My heart aches to learn that the government wants to remove the cross.”

But that was not where the story had begun. A year earlier, late in 2013, authorities had begun asking all the churches in the area not to light up their crosses every night. What was the reasoning behind the government request? It would help reduce carbon emissions. You know – global warming, climate change, and all that really important stuff.

Okay, you ask, in what American city did this ridiculous debacle occur? It did not happen in America. It happened in China. The church is in the eastern village of Wuxi, about three hundred miles south of Shanghai.¹

But you thought it was in America, didn’t you? Gee, why did you think that?

* * *

“The cross is our life, and there is no room for compromise,” said Pastor Xie Zuokua. “With no other means, we are resorting to our own abilities to defend the cross.... It’s the symbol of the death of Jesus and it’s the symbol that people can be saved.”²

Across the Zhejiang province alone, Chinese authorities have demolished or threatened to demolish crosses at more than 130 churches, the original AP report claimed. In a few cases, the government has even leveled the sanctuaries. In the name of climate change, carbon emissions, building codes, and zoning ordinances, the Chinese church is under persecution ... and the crosses are coming down.

However, Yang Fenggang, a Purdue University sociologist and leading expert on religious matters in China, said that the church in China is “resilient in resisting government pressures and persecutions.”³

THAT COULD NEVER HAPPEN TO US!

American Christians might offer the protest, “But in America, our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion! This could never happen to us! We have the First Amendment!”

Would it shock you to discover that the constitution of China also explicitly guarantees freedom of religion?

But a new regime assumed control.⁴ That regime is concerned that Christianity is growing too quickly and is spreading in an “unsustainable” manner, so the regime has largely ignored the constitution. Worse, few in China stood up to the new regime. Now the government strictly limits religious practice to only officially approved places of worship.

Several Chinese Christian leaders assert that the provincial Communist Party secretary objected to seeing so many large and bright crosses during a recent evening trip along a major highway. He was

“offended” by their presence, so he ordered the crosses to be removed.

In February 2014, a government campaign was instigated for the purpose of demolishing church buildings. They determined that the best way to do this was to use the subterfuge of building code violations and green regulations. Hmmm. “Couldn’t possibly happen in America,” you say?

Consequently, thousands upon thousands of China’s Christians – our brothers and sisters in Christ – are finding themselves camping out, for nights on end, around their church buildings in a sometimes futile attempt to prevent the government from bulldozing their churches.

While China’s Christians have struggled to protect their churches from further government defacing and even complete destruction, thousands of crosses have been systematically ripped from church roofs. At the same time that the crosses were coming down and more churches were being bulldozed, the Chinese State Administration of Religious Affairs developed a new “Chinese Christian Theology.” The director of that new government entity declared, “The construction of Chinese Christian Theology should adapt to China’s national condition and integrate with Chinese culture.” Now, it seems, the officially atheist state will control the beliefs and practices of the Chinese Christian church.⁵

Today, a Chinese church, in order to be formally recognized, must register to be a state-sanctioned operation, which includes censoring of certain religious materials. Often, the churches are even required to turn over membership rolls with the names and addresses of the congregants.⁶

Millions of China’s Christians have subsequently gone “underground,” refusing to obey the government’s encroachment upon their constitutional freedoms. Most of them declare they are willing to give their lives in order to worship in freedom from government “registration.”

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15)

Meanwhile, back in America, a large number of Christians simply do not want to “get involved,” as their own freedoms begin to erode. They do not want to be ridiculed. They desire to avoid being called names. They desperately do not want to be labeled as a “conspiracy theorist” or a “radical.” They are afraid that someone might not like them.

A large number of American pastors fear they may lose church members or that fellow pastors will think them odd. Some American churches and pastors have even voluntarily removed all the crosses from their church premises so as not to “offend.”⁷

So, across our land, many simply say nothing, and they do nothing, and they often malign those pastors and Christians who do get involved, and the floodwaters of persecution continue to rise.

Yet our brothers and sisters living in China (and in many other places around the globe) are prepared to go on record, even in the face of repressive communism and massive government encroachment, to declare that they are willing to die for the cross of Christ. And there is the ultimate truth; that is the final word. In the end, the cross of Jesus Christ prevails! It always has – and it always will.

The cross is our life, and there must be no room for compromise. We must not be ashamed; we must not shrink back in fear, lest we lose forever the gift God has given us.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16 KJV)

When Galatians 6:14 becomes the heartbeat of America’s churches,

America's pastors, and America's Christians, perhaps God will then cover us completely with His hand of divine protection: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

When this attitude of prayer is firmly entrenched in our hearts and openly displayed in the lives of our families and church communities, we will be covered in the promise and armor of God and then,

when the day of evil comes, we will be able to stand our ground; and

when the day of emergency conditions arrives, we will be powerfully mobilized to minister; and

when disaster strikes, we will be equipped to effectively provide our families' basic needs.

And as we see the needs of the world around us, we will be there with a cup of cold water, a meal, and warm clothing – held out in the name of Jesus *because we were prepared*.

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the dearest earthly gift bestowed upon me by the Lord – my wife, Pam – you are the epitome of the Proverbs 31 woman. You have been by my side since our youth. I cannot imagine having walked this journey thus far without you. The Lord, in His great wisdom and love, knew I had to have you with me. I love you and cherish you beyond words.

To the people of Hickory Hammock Baptist Church in Milton, Florida, you called me to be your pastor in 1987 and have not given up on me yet! May your witness of the Glory of the Lord continue to brightly shine until He returns.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to Joseph and Elizabeth Farah. You took a prayerful chance on me some years back and published my very first book. We have since published several books together, and I have never been disappointed with your professionalism, excellence, integrity, and especially your graciousness. I am indebted to the entire WND Books team. Thank you Geoffrey Stone, the editorial director, for your patience, skill, and invaluable advice. I also offer my heartfelt thanks to Renee Chavez and Kelsey Whited; you are absolutely remarkable manuscript editors. Thanks to Michael Thompson and Amanda Prevette, the marketing coordinators. I am deeply grateful for the tremendous work you do. And to Mark Karis, my “artsy side” is jealous of your gifts of layout and cover design. You never cease to astound me with your skills. I continually hear exclamations of “Wow!” from people who first see the covers and pages of my books. May the Lord richly bless each of you on the WND Team. You have great rewards waiting for you in Glory!

APPENDIX 1

CHURCH BENEVOLENCE REQUEST FORM

(PROTECTING THE CHURCH FROM CHARLATANS)

WHY THE NEED FOR BENEVOLENCE FORMS

Early on in my ministry, we were continually bombarded with people walking in off the street or driving to our church offices, requesting financial assistance. Seldom had we seen these people before – and often we had no way of discerning where they were from or what were their actual needs.

The problem eventually became so overwhelming that I was forced to give some serious thought to a solution to the obvious, chronic abuse of our church's goodwill.

Having been a law enforcement officer for many years before being in full-time ministry, I drew upon some of my knowledge about liabilities and legalities involved in perhaps unwittingly helping people who might be on the run from committing a heinous crime. I know this sounds like a long shot, but it does happen.

Another thing I discovered was that once we began to “help” (handing out money, paying bills, and so forth) the floodgates were opened! We were deluged with benevolence requests. Each person had a carefully crafted, heart-wrenching, and tear-jerking tale of woe. All the while they had their hand out, expecting an envelope of cash. Apparently our church's name was written on the side of a bridge embankment somewhere! We even discovered that several convenience stores in our area, once they discovered that we had a “helping heart,” were actually sending their “undesirables” to our front door, rather than

dealing with the benevolence needs themselves.

Needless to say, my *protection mode* way of thinking kicked in. I realized the potentially dangerous position in which we were placing the women who worked in our front offices and who were often the first to deal with people walking in the door with their hands out, wanting money.

I also observed that, after a while, some of the area's "church abusers" began to show up just as our Sunday morning services were beginning or ending. Sometimes they would come into a service and ingratiate themselves to church members and then ask for money, and at other times they would simply walk up to our members and confront them in the church parking lot after the services.

It became obvious I had to do something, and I would have to educate the entire church family in the matter. At the same time, I had a pastor's heart and did not want to miss an opportunity to help someone who had a legitimate need.

Then it hit me. If I were down-and-out and needed to go to a church for help with a legitimate need, would I be willing to cooperate with a few easily answered questions and requirements? Well, of course. If I were legitimately in need, surely I would be willing to do so. So I devised a "Benevolence Request Form" for our church.

Here is the philosophy behind this form: It is to be used only for walk-ins and unknown people. We handle matters differently among those in our congregation, or even in our local community about whom we know something. Also, if there is an emergency, such as a fire, flood, tornado, or hurricane, of course we do not require the benevolence form before helping someone.

If a person has a legitimate need, and he or she is not putting our church in a legal liability situation in meeting that need, we will make every effort to help where we can. If the person requesting assistance is willing to give us some names and phone numbers of people who can

verify something about him or her, we are off to a good start. If the individual refuses to do so, we simply tell the person that we are unable to help. If someone is willing to provide us with some identification that we might use to initiate a background check, then we are on even more solid ground in being prepared to offer assistance. Again, though, if the person refuses to help us know something about him or her, we usually say that we are unable to help.

It has been astounding the number of times a person has filled out the form and supplied names and phone numbers of people whom we called for verification, only to find that the person requesting our help was known among their own family members as a professional “moocher” and sometimes a substance abuser looking for a quick fix. We have also, happily, reunited loved ones who were searching for their wandering family member, after we made a few phone calls with numbers provided to us by the requester.

At any rate, the form works beautifully for us. We are able to weed out most of the abusers (and they are out there!), and we are able to truly help people who have legitimate needs. Funny thing, when we started using the form, word must have shot throughout the “handout community.” The lines got noticeably smaller, almost overnight.

Since we began using this procedure, several other churches in our area have adopted our form and tailored it to their own needs. Most have thanked us profusely as they report how wonderfully the process, or some edited form of it, works for them. I have included that benevolence request form in this appendix. Perhaps it will be of assistance to your church family as well.

BENEVOLENCE ASSISTANCE APPLICATION

PLEASE NOTE: The completing of this form does not guarantee you will receive benevolence assistance. The form is simply a tool for determining the legitimacy of the request. Any assistance given is on a case-by-case basis only and may not necessarily be repeated in the future.

All blanks must be filled in with legitimate information in order for your application to be given serious consideration. Failure or unwillingness to provide the requested information on any line or the inability to reach the applicant, or references, by the phone numbers provided will most likely result in a denial of the requested assistance. After a staff member reviews the application, you will be notified of the status of your request by means of the provided phone number. The word “spouse” means either a marriage partner or a live-in partner or a common-law partner.

What is the type of assistance that you are requesting?

Please attach a picture identification source (a copy can be made in the church office).

Your name:

Driver’s license number:

Social Security number or official State ID number:

Your current, or last, address, including city, state, zip:

Your phone number:

Do you attend a church locally? If yes, where?

If you do not attend a local church, are you a member of a church anywhere?

Name of spouse:

Spouse’s Social Security number or official State ID number:

List several references (other than family) who can verify your identification and your needs:

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Have you received benevolence assistance in the last six months from any other church or organization? If yes, what organization and what type of assistance?

Have you received assistance from this church at any time in the past? If yes, when and what type of assistance?

Family members’ names and phone numbers (list at least two). These names can include names of your spouse’s family members as well:

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Are you employed? If yes, please list the name and phone number of your workplace:

Is your spouse employed? If yes, please list the name and phone number of that workplace:

Would you be willing to submit to a routine background check?

Would your spouse be willing to submit to a routine background check?

How long have you been/lived in the local area?

Are you currently on probation or any other court-ordered arrangement? (House arrest, restraining order, etc.)

If yes, please list the name and contact method of your current caseworker:

Signature and date:

(I attest that the information given above is complete and accurate, under the possibility of forfeiting any possible assistance if the information is discovered to be misrepresented.)

APPENDIX 2

DISASTER RELIEF SKILLS SURVEY FOR VOLUNTEERS

These surveys can be made available to members of churches, other than your own, who want to be a part of your disaster relief ministry.

Name

Street Address

Home Phone

City/State/Zip

Work Phone

E-Mail

Cell Phone

Church

Phone

Address

Where would you be available in assisting with a disaster relief project by our church?

___ In this community ___ In this county ___ In this state

___ In the USA ___ In other countries

How much notice would you require in order to be ready to assist us in a relief project?

Interest/Experience/Training Survey

Check the types of disaster ministries that interest you. Place a check beside those areas in which you have prior experience.

Advisory/ Public Relations

Bulk distribution – labor or transportation

Chainsaw crew/tree removal

Child care

Cleanup crew

Communications (Ham radios)

Counseling

Crisis closet operation (clothes, food, water, equipment)

Elder care (or handicapped)

Evacuation of persons

Feeding

Interpreter

Language(s):

Legal assistance

Medical emergency team

Reconstruction team

Repair (emergency)

Salvage and haul-off

Sanitation

Security and Safety

Shelter management

Transportation

Heavy equipment operation

Heavy equipment procurement

Other

I Have Certification, Training, or Experience in:

American Red Cross

Introduction to Disaster Services

Mass Feeding Programs

Advanced first aid and CPR

Medical Services (pharmacy, nursing, doctor)

Other

Other disaster relief training

APPENDIX 3

A CHURCH SECURITY TEAM MINISTRY MANUAL

This appendix is a minimum start-up policy guide for a standard church security ministry team. See the Resource section for links to extensive manuals from larger churches and for comprehensive policy and procedure outlays. The following template can help almost any church get started in the right direction.

The _____ (*name of church*)

Church Security Ministry Team

LINE OF AUTHORITY:

The _____ (*name of church*) Security Ministry will operate under the authority of

The Security Ministry Team will operate on a day-to-day basis and under the immediate supervision of the authority of the _____ (*name of church*) Security Ministry Director.

CHURCH SECURITY TEAM MINISTRY DIRECTOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Known as _____ (*name of church*) Church Security Team Ministry Director:

Will provide for the volunteer staffing, screening, and training for the security team.

Will work with _____ (*name of committee or persons*) in ensuring that the workable security needs of the church are met.

Will secure any permits (traffic direction, control devices, etc.) required by law or regulation to effect specialized safety and security needs.

Will ensure that the day-to-day operations of this ministry area are being met.

Will ensure that liability and legal issues are properly addressed.

Will conduct public relations work with church members concerning the importance of the ministry and the need to provide assistance and general membership cooperation.

Will be responsible for securing all working materials for the ministry (i.e., security ID, specific garb, communication devices, paging devices, patrol vehicles, etc.).

Will provide for proper and legal security-assignment training and instruction (legal use of force, communication techniques, patrol areas and techniques, surveillance, etc.).

Will see that proper background-check procedures are followed when recruiting security team members who are in the application process.

BASIC CHURCH SECURITY TEAM MINISTRY RESPONSIBILITIES:

Canvas and patrol the parking areas, looking for any signs of trouble or people who need assistance.

Canvas and patrol the buildings and facilities, looking for any signs of trouble or people who need assistance. This would include secluded and out-of-the way areas as well as typically unused areas (closets, unused rooms, secluded bathroom areas, etc.), paying special attention to anything out of the ordinary or people who may be congregating in these areas.

Regularly and routinely canvas and patrol the preschool area, children's areas, and youth areas. These would be the most vulnerable to persons with harmful intentions.

Provide traffic direction at congested and dangerous areas.

_____ (name of church) security personnel will make every effort not to interrupt, disturb, or intervene in any ministry area in which they are patrolling except in cases where they are dealing with an immediate security issue. Simply canvas, observe, and pass through ... then, later, repeat the process.

APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS

Applicant must be at least 21 years old.

Applicant must be able to physically handle the requirements of this ministry. All _____ (name of church) Security Team Ministry Members must be able to independently handle routine security matters around the church and church property

All _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Ministry Members must be screened with the standard _____ (*name of church*) national background check.

All _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Ministry Members must be visibly mature in their faith and must have been a member of _____ (*name of church*) for at least 1 year and attend church regularly. (An exception to the time requirement may be made by the Director in cases of people who are active law enforcement officers or who have had prior experience in active law enforcement.)

LIABILITY ISSUES AND RESTRICTIONS

All _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Ministry members must sign a Liability Waiver, releasing _____ (*name of church*) from any civil damage lawsuits resulting from participation in this highly specialized ministry.

All _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Ministry members are expected to act in complete accordance with all laws of the State of _____ regarding private security issues and matters.

The only “use of force” that the _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Ministry member is to use is only that force which is completely necessary in order to effect a security need and that which is in total compliance with the laws of the State of _____.

No _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Ministry Member is expected or required to have a concealed or unconcealed weapon of any type. This would not preclude the carrying of a concealed weapon provided that the carrier has a Concealed Weapon Permit (or one that is reciprocated by the State of _____) and that team member abides by all concealed carry laws of the State of _____. At no time shall a Security Member exhibit or display a weapon, nor shall they inform people that they have a concealed weapon on their person unless it is necessary to effect a security need and it is done in accordance with concealed carry laws of the State of _____. Any member with a concealed weapon permit shall provide a copy of the permit to the Director.

_____ (*name of church*) will assume no liability as a result of the improper or illegal use of a concealed weapon by a weapons holder serving on this ministry team. Each team member is individually responsible for obeying the full scope and command of weapons-use laws of the State of _____.

No weapon shall be “openly” carried unless that person is a _____ (*name of*

state) law enforcement officer and in uniform, or some other type of official identification mode.

When working in the capacity of a _____ (*name of church*) Security Team Member, the official identification badge and specialized garb shall be worn and openly visible.

RESOURCES

O ORGANIZING YOUR CHURCH FOR DISASTER RELIEF

DISASTER RELIEF – PREPARATION FOR A DISASTER

The Tennessee Baptist Convention has a comprehensive site that extensively covers the following topics :

<http://www.tnbaptist.org/page.asp?page=135>

- How to Organize in Your Church for Disaster Relief
- Local Church Preparation
- Duties of Disaster Relief Directors
- Possible Church Opportunities and Action
- Family Preparedness for Disaster
- Developing a Family Disaster Plan
- Train Your Family
- Developing Your Family Disaster Supply Kit
- Practicing Your Family Disaster Plan
- Storage of Your Family Disaster Kit
- Shelter for Your Family
- Spiritual Preparation for Disaster
- Hope in Crisis

- Experiencing God
- When Disaster Strikes

CHURCH PREPAREDNESS FOR DISASTER RELIEF

The North American Mission Board provides a downloadable PDF document outlining a disaster relief ministry plan for the church.

<http://www.namb.net/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=8590000275>

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

First United Methodist Church of Hampstead, North Carolina, offers a good manual.

<http://shenpres.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SampleChurch.pdf>

PROTECTING YOUR CHURCH

SAFETY TOOLKIT

GuideStone Property and Casualty offers a comprehensive resource for churches and ministries.

<http://www.guidestonepropertycasualty.org/SafetyToolkit>

PROTECTING YOUR CHURCH

This article by David Roach in the Journal of the Southern Baptist Convention draws heavily upon the recommendations of church security expert Carl Chinn.

<http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2013/03/SLA17>

CHURCH SECURITY AND ARMED SECURITY GUARDS

Brotherhood Mutual, an insurance company specifically for churches

and ministries for ninety years, provides a comprehensive resource about security.

<http://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/index.cfm/resources/ministry-safety/article/should-churches-have-armed-security-guards/>

CHURCH SECURITY TRAINING

Comprehensive church security training is provided by Gideon Protective Services, Inc., and Mind Sight Training, LLC.

<http://www.churchsecurity-training.com/>

BACKGROUND-SCREENING SERVICES

Safe At Church, LLC, is a church security consultant company that provides background-screening services, among other services, for all fifty states.

<http://www.safeatchurch.com/consulting.asp>

HOW TO CONDUCT A BASIC CHURCH SECURITY SURVEY

The late Chester L. Quarles, coauthor of *Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship*, was professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi. He had more than forty years' experience in law enforcement and security administration.

<https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/faith-culture/13076-how-to-conduct-a-basic-church-security-survey>

CHURCH SAFETY-SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PLANNING MANUAL

Shelby Baptist Association of Shelby County, Kentucky, offers leadership and other resources to churches.

<http://kyshelbybaptist.org/clientimages/53357/kbc%20church%20safety.pdf>

SECURITY TEAM MANUAL

Gateway Community Church in Texas has a very good, generic security team manual available online.

[http://www.gateway-community.org/Websites/gcc123/Images/Connect/Generic%20Security%20Team%20Manu:](http://www.gateway-community.org/Websites/gcc123/Images/Connect/Generic%20Security%20Team%20Manual.pdf)

EMERGENCY PLAN TEMPLATE FOR FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Iredell County, North Carolina, makes available a very comprehensive, faith-based emergency plan template covering a wide range of emergency and disaster and church security issues.

[http://www.co.iredell.nc.us/Departments/health/EmP/forms/Faith_Based_Emergency_Plai](http://www.co.iredell.nc.us/Departments/health/EmP/forms/Faith_Based_Emergency_Plan_Template.pdf)

CHURCH SECURITY EXPERT

Carl Chinn is *the* church security expert. His site is chock-full of great resources.

<http://www.carlchinn.com/>

THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF CHURCH SECURITY AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT

NOCSSM is the oldest and most respected name in church security. They offer training and other services.

<http://www.nocssm.org/gatekeepers-security-services-llc>

CRIMINAL RECORD BACKGROUND SCREENING INFORMATION

PRIVACY RIGHT SCLEARING HOUSE

This website is an invaluable resource for information and guidance in dealing with the sometimes-controversial topic and procedure of criminal background screening. It provides information on how

volunteers are screened, commercial background screenings, and tips for volunteers, among other things.

<https://www.privacyrights.org/volunteer-background-checks-without-giving-up-privacy>

PRIMITIVE EMERGENCY SHELTER CONSTRUCTION

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL SHELTERS

This is a comprehensive collection (with illustrations) of various primitive survival shelter instructions.

<http://www.wilderness-survival.net/shelters-2.php>

SURVIVAL SHELTERS

Outdoor Life magazine gives readers the “15 Best Designs and How to Build Them.”

<http://www.outdoorlife.com/photos/gallery/hunting/2013/05/survival-shelters-15-best-designs-wilderness-shelters>

PRIMITIVE SURVIVAL SHELTERS THAT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

Field & Stream provides a gallery of seven life-saving shelters.

<http://www.fieldandstream.com/photos/gallery/survival/shelter/2006/10/seven-primitive-survival-shelters-could-save-your-life>

BUILDING A SURVIVAL SHELTER ERDEBRISHUT

This Nature Skills blog demonstrates how to build a debris hut out of downed wood and leaves and things.

<http://www.natureskills.com/survival/primitive-shelter/>

ACCLAIMED MINISTRY AND DISASTER RELIEF NETWORKING

ORGANIZATIONS

The following is a listing of large organizations through which you might form a ministry networking partnership, receive training, and participate in national and international relief efforts.

SAMARITAN'S PURSE – FRANKLIN GRAHAM MINISTRIES

<http://www.samaritanspurse.org/>

SOUTHERN BAPTIST NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD (SBC)

<http://www.namb.net/videos-disaster-relief/> – This page offers a myriad of opportunities to participate in disaster relief ministries or to receive disaster relief and preparedness training.

<http://www.namb.net/disaster-relief-preparedness/> – This is a page full of various downloadable manuals and PowerPoint presentations regarding disaster preparedness that can be customized to fit the needs of your church.

THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD (AG)

They not only have ways you can be involved in their disaster relief ministries, but they also have application processes so that you might assist others in receiving their ministry help.

<http://ag.org/disaster/>

UNITED METHODISTS COMMITTEE ON RELIEF (UM)

This group offers networking and training opportunities.

<http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Programs/Disaster-Response>

THE SALVATION ARMY AND THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

Both of these organizations offer a myriad of disaster relief networking opportunities as well as comprehensive training in relief ministries.

<http://disaster.salvationarmyusa.org/training/>

www.redcross.org

SAFE ROOM CONSTRUCTION AND CONSIDERATIONS

FEMA SAFE ROOMS

<https://www.fema.gov/safe-rooms>

HOUSELOGIC SAFE ROOMS

This site has amazing pictures, instructions, links, and suggestions for tornado-proof safe rooms.

<http://www.houselogic.com/photos/tornadoes-severe-storms/tornado-storm-shelters-safe-room-protection-when-it-counts/slide/still-standing/#safe-and-sweet>

THE CRIME DOCTOR PANIC ROOMS

This is the website of security expert Chris McGoey.

http://www.crimedoctor.com/panic_room_1.htm

DRILLING YOUR OWN WELL

“The Ins and Outs of Drilling Your Own Well” is a very good article from WikiHow.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Drill-a-Well>

“How to Drill Your Own Water Well” has 78 web pages and 49 videos entirely devoted to helping you drill your own well.

<http://www.drillyourownwell.com/>

“How to Drill Your Own Water Well” (YouTube video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJNyAMwrUBE>

There is an abundance of videos on YouTube showing how to drill your

own shallow water well with a minimum of equipment and expense. This one will get you started. Have a look at the related videos on this subject.

How to Drill Your Own Water Well (booklet)

This booklet shows readers how to use a mechanical Hydra-Drill system.

http://www.deeprock.com/pdf_docs/how%20to.pdf

MANUALS, SUPPLIES, AND INFORMATION

THE AMERICAN RED CROSS FAMILY PREPAREDNESS SITE

<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family>

WND.COM SUPERSTORE OF EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

<http://superstore.wnd.com/preparedness>

THE CRIME DOCTOR WEBSITE

Near the bottom of this page is a list of home security manuals as well as links to topical training information and emergency preparation procedure instructions.

http://www.crimedoctor.com/panic_room_1.htm

MAKE A PLAN: PLAN TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

<http://www.ready.gov/emergency-planning-checklists>

FEMA DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

FEMA presents considerations for fourteen different natural disasters occurring in the United States.

<http://www.ready.gov/natural-disasters>

EMERGENCY SEED PLAN

<http://www.underwoodgardens.com/local-food-growing-your-own/emergency-seeds-how-to-feed-your-family-in-a-crisis/>

RESOURCES REGARDING WORLDWIDE CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

OPEN DOORS

This is the world's largest outreach to persecuted Christians in the most high-risk places.

Learn about the struggle at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org>

Learn how your church can help provide Bibles to persecuted Christians around the world at <https://www.opendoors.org/>

VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

www.persecution.com

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY INTERNATIONAL “GENOCIDE ALERT”

http://csi-usa.org/persecution.html?gclid=Cj0KEQiAu_GmBRDhtKkzqKcuJwBEiQAJvB8n0Z2sHzxE60T8SPeye-1Jw6ipAn0s9rDu3s_7O9gQwoaAvLP8P8HAQ

CHRISTIAN FILM DATABASE, “FILMS/PERSECUTION ”

This is a huge listing of movies dealing with the topic of persecution – from historical times to the present.

<http://www.christianfilmdatabase.com/review-categories/persecution/>

NOTES

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