

Should a Christian be a “Prepper?”

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Brian R. Wipf

Should a Christian be a “Prepper?” If you are wondering what a prepper is, listen to this a description from a prepping website.

A prepper is a person who is preparing for a very bad time to come in America...The prepper sees the imminent collapse of the American dollar, hyperinflation, breakdown of society and the [disintegration] of the city infrastructure such as roads, transportation, telecommunication, water supply, electricity, gas, etc. They start storing food, water, batteries for survival, and even guns and ammunition for protection of their hoardings...

... Most preppers are mainly concerned about their physical wellbeing during bad times and disasters, so they focus on stocking up food, drinks, batteries and other items that are required for survival. Some are buying gold, silver and other precious metals as hedges against the U.S. Dollar and economic collapse. Others go further by looking for farmlands and equipment for renewable energy such as solar and wind powered generators.

So, that’s what a prepper is. Now, here’s my guess: some of you hear that and think, “What?! There are people who think disaster in our country is imminent? There are people hoarding food, water and everything else under the sun because they think the world is coming to an end? Are you kidding?” And others of you are thinking, “Well, of course! Only a fool wouldn’t prepare for the coming crisis. Anyone in their right mind would be storing up essentials for the coming bleak day!” Yes, that’s how diverse the church of Jesus Christ is. Some of you haven’t given a moment’s consideration to stockpiling food, ammo or precious metals ever since Y2K didn’t happen. But others of you have stockpiling in your monthly budget and your stockrooms and cellars are full when (not if... when) disaster strikes. And I’m here to make some sense of it all and make sure we stay united in Christ.

Should a Christian be preparing for the worst like this? Should a Christian be spending time and money making preparations for potential seasons of lack? Or, should they trust God with the unknowns of the future and if that day comes believe God will provide? Here’s an example of a question or issue that I can support and defend if I only use parts of the Bible. Do you know what I mean by that? If I only use some of the scriptures (that parts that I like or the parts that I believe the most), I could support either position. Let me show you. First, listen to some Pro-prepping verses.

- Prov. 6:6-11 - Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.
- Prov. 27:12 - The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

- The stories of Noah and Joseph support prepping. Noah was saved from the flood because he prepared like God told him to. Joseph, likewise, was told about years of famine on the horizon so he was instructed by God to store up during the years of plenty so they'd have food in the years of lack.

See, you should be a prepper; the Bible says so!

Not so fast, others will say. Look at these verses.

- Matthew 6:19-21 - Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- Matthew 19:21 - Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."
- Luke 9:58 - And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

See, look what the Bible says! You should not stock and store goods. You should give and live by faith. Follow Jesus who didn't even have a pillow to lay his head; God will provide for you.

So, which is it? What verses should we apply and which ones should we ignore? I hope you don't like those simple options. You should apply all of them and ignore non of them. Here's a great example of the importance of knowing all of the scriptures; when you consider the theme and movement of all the scriptures and of God's entire story you're not stuck with having to pick between these two sets of verses promoting one position against the other. Instead, you can bring them together in harmony. So, that's what I want to try to do. So, let me do that by stating some biblical principles with appropriate qualifications.

First, **wisdom prepares**. In one sense, the question, "Should Christians be Preppers?" is easy if you mean "Should Christians prepare at all?" The verses we saw earlier, the one's from Proverbs in particular, demonstrate that it is good and wise to foresee and discern potential trouble and prepare accordingly. God tells us to do that. A few weeks ago we heard Paul tell Timothy to work hard with his hands so that he's dependent on no one. That's God's command for us. To the degree we are able and not sacrificing God's other commands, we absolutely should be wise in our preparations for seasons of potential lack.

But the more thorny questions are one's like this: "To what extent should Christians be preppers?" And "What should a Christian sacrifice to prepare for the worst?" These questions are much more difficult. Let's look at some of those key words. First, *extent*. To what *extent* should I prepare? I read one prepping article that encouraged storing up prescription drugs so that you'll have medication if you get cancer, MS, diabetes or name the malady. Can you actually do that? Do you know how many meds you would have to store up to cover all the bases? That's almost impossible to do. It's one thing to prepare necessities for a season if something bad happens; it's another thing

to hoard as many creature comforts as possible so that life can be as easy as possible if the apocalypse happens... kind of the Great Tribulation Light, if you will. How can I generate enough electricity so I can live as comfortably as possible while the world is burning down all around me? There's absolutely a limit to how much we *ought* to prepare; there's also a limit as to how much we can prepare, but Christ demands are greater; how much *ought* we prepare? We'll talk more about that question.

Here's another important word. *Sacrifice*. What sacrifices should you make today so you can prepare for tomorrow? Should you sacrifice kindness towards others? Generosity in giving? Should you sacrifice hospitality towards neighbors because you already are practicing the bunker mentality? I have 3 years of food supplies in my basement and my neighborhood food pantry keeps sending me fliers because they need more donations. But I can't spare any of my supply because I need to get 5 years of supplies and I only have 3.

So, yes, wisdom prepares for seasons of lack. And this absolutely applies to insurance plans and retirement accounts that many of us wisely have. But there's a limit. There absolutely should be a limit to our savings, to our insurance and to our prepping. If the extent of our preparing is me-centered, focused primarily on securing a life-long duration of creature comforts when our neighbors are struggling with the basics, and where I don't have to live with a daily dependence on the Lord then it seems to me we are not in balance.

Secondly, **preparing is not (necessarily) lack of faith**. Sometimes we define faith as this reckless, throw-caution-to-the-wind kind of life. So, the person taking the biggest risks is living the most faith-filled life. But the Bible doesn't define faith in that way. Do you know how that Bible defines faith? Fearing and obeying God's word. I remember studying Exodus years ago in preparation for that sermon series and coming across these verses (READ Ex. 9:20-21), "Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the house [for fear of the coming hailstones], but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field." Do you see that? Faith in God was fearing and obeying (or paying attention to the point of action) the words of God.

And what does God's word say about preparing? It's wise. It's good to do. Foolish people don't see and prepare for the coming seasons of lack; wise people do. And here's how it's a matter of faith: since God told me to do it and that it's wise, I'll do it. I'm doing it because God told me to do it; I believe in him. That's faith.

But, point two says preparing is not *necessarily* lack of faith; it might be. How might it be? It might lack of faith if your preparations are motivated in a lack of confidence in God's promise of provision. And let's be honest; this is something we struggle believing. Most Americans are not forced to see if God will provide; if we were Syrian or Iraqi refugees, our faith would most certainly be tested right now; seek first the kingdom of heaven and all the things you need will be added to you. We just go to the grocery store and it's taken care of you. Most of us are not forced to trust God for our daily bread. You can't guarantee your personal well-being through prepping. Listen, you can't. At

some point in time, we all have to come to grips that we are not in control and I must trust in the sovereign and good hand of my Heavenly Father to provide for me because I can't do it for myself. But the more you try to hedge your own bets, the further away you move from trusting God to trusting yourself. There absolutely is a way in which prepping is a lack of faith in God. I can't trust God with any unknowns in my life; therefore, I must take every precaution I can imagine to take care of myself.

This leads to our third point: **The abundance of things is a serious threat to faith.** I must admit I was surprised this clear and obvious biblical warning was not mentioned at all in most of the Christian prepping material I found. Time and again, in the NT and OT, the Bible warns about how the abundance of earthly things threatens faith. Abundance is simply more than I need; having more than we need does something to our hearts and souls. It tempts us to relax our faith. It tempts us to think we don't really need God. That's bad.

I spent some time reading Deut 28-30 again, the passage I brought up in our Pro-Life sermon. This warning is in there; notice the words in Dt. 28:47-48a, "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of things, therefore you shall serve your enemies...." Do you see it? Do you see how Moses says the abundance of things is what will tempt the people from serving the Lord with joyfulness and gladness? That's what Jesus was getting at in the Matthew passage about storing up treasures on earth. Don't do it; don't store treasures on earth. Why? Well, not only will moths and rust destroy it, but (vs. 21) "for where your treasure is there your heart will be also." Your heart goes to your treasure and the more you seek and accumulate and store treasure on earth your heart will more and more love and depend on those things rather than God.

And when that happens, you automatically start caring less for your fellow man. "How so?" you might wonder. Just listen to Jesus' words next (vs. 24), "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (meaning, possessions, money)." But that's what happens when you give yourself to the abundance of things. You serve it and by serving it you fail to serve God and other people.

That leads to the fourth point we need to consider when we think about being a prepper: **hoarding keeps you from generosity.** In my research I found a prepper who gave his top 10 mistakes for prepping; the cardinal sins of prepping, if you will. Here's #6: Loose lips sinks ships. Here's the money-quote from this so-called mistake: "The more people who know you prepare and who also know the level to which you prepare, the more people you will either be forced to turn away or share your preparations with."

Well, we wouldn't want that to happen, now would we? Heaven forbid some poor beggar actually coming to my doorstep asking for food!? Friends, do you see how out of step that is to the way of Christ? I get it logically; I get it when you apply worldly wisdom. I only can store so much and

if I feed every fool who didn't prepare like me my stash won't last very long. I get that. But do you see how that's not the Spirit of Christ?

If the only thing that matters is faith working itself out through love, then true authentic faith is always looking out for the good of others. I said this a few weeks ago: you can not be committed to your own personal safety and comfort and serve others like Jesus served you. Let God take care of you; yes, indeed, prepare some like we're told wise people do, but always keep the goal in mind: serving and loving others. And if in my preparing I can actually serve more people than I could if I hadn't prepared at all, then praise God, my prepping has paid off better than I ever dreamed! Not because I won't or don't share, but because I have more to share!

I want to give you a third option; an option that would include appropriate and measured preparations, but also trust in God's provision so that you continue to live a generous lifestyle today. I want to share with you a picture of how the early church lived with one another and how they took care of needs (READ Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-35). Look how God provided for his people through the commitment the church had for one another. I firmly believe that if our country experiences the disasters that some fear may happen, by following our forefathers' and foremothers' example in Acts 2 & 4, we'll be able to take care of one another. Not counting personal possessions as "mine", but by being ready and willing to share with whoever has needs. With godly leaders, we can balance needs and resources well as we keep looking to make an impact in our community for the cause of Christ. I really believe this is a better, a more godly plan than hoarding possessions for yourself. I'd rather be in a community of brothers and sisters where we all bring what we have to the table (both earthly possessions as well as skills and abilities) so that everyone is taken care of. To me, this communal life of believers coming together is a more biblical picture than an individual family hoarding as much as possible and hunkering down in isolation from others.

Friends, God has already prepared us well for what might be coming. Yes, of course, with such heavy reliance on "the grid" (let's say) a major disaster would prove to be quite an anxious time. But, when I consider the diversity of talents, expertise and skills in our faith community, I'm seeing God already providing for us. We'd need a grunt crew; that's probably where I belong, just do the grunt work so our MacGyver's can keep MacGyvering. We have farmers, machinists, administrators, cooks and bakers and carpenters and so much more. And yes, being in the North Woods, I know we'll have an arsenal of weapons... for hunting... not to shoot our hungry neighbors if they come looking for food. Maybe zombies; if there are zombies in the apocalypse you can shoot them.

So, as you prepare for seasons of lack, don't forget the design of Christ's church. God intends to take care of us through one another and as we do we still can bear witness to the glories of Jesus to a world needing to hear good news.

Key verse: Acts 2:45 - And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Questions for the week

- What's the difference between storing up for seasons of lack and storing up treasures on earth?
- What was most impactful for you from God's word?
- What do you think: should Christians be preppers? What kind of preppers should we be if we are one?