

Family Preparedness for Disaster - Florida Baptist Witness

Goal: To help families prepare for disaster by discovering the disaster hazards in their communities, developing plans to survive and minister before and following a disaster.

There is a discussion about whether we are experiencing more disasters in the United States today or if the news media is doing a better job of reporting the disasters that do occur. One school of thought is the news coverage makes us think there are more disasters. However statistics from the American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and disaster relief organizations reveal that there are more disasters occurring today, and that they are more expensive in terms of damage.

Today, more people live in disaster prone areas. The population of the coastal United States prone to hurricanes has continued to increase in recent years. One way of looking at the increase in disasters is to examine the presidential declared disasters and their cost. The years 1986-1990 and 1991-1995 show an increase of 40 percent in the number of disasters and 244 percent increase in the cost of those disasters. In the same period of time, an emphasis on mitigation developed. (Mitigation is to lessen the severity or gravity of a disaster).

Disaster relief organizations and local, state, and federal governments all ask families to be prepared to survive for three days on their own. In many cases it takes three days or longer for the development and institution of a coordinated response from outside the community. Families are encouraged to develop plans and assemble supply kits to insure their survival until help can arrive.

In this material we will look at:

1. Developing a family disaster plan
2. Developing a family disaster supply kit
3. Ministering during a disaster or crisis

Developing a Family Disaster Plan

The first step in developing your family's disaster plan is to identify the disaster hazards in your community. Take time with your family members to identify disasters that can happen in your community or to your family. Examples are: tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, transportation accidents, chemical spills, snow/ice, power failure, and so forth. Your community may have the possibility of some or all of these events listed above occurring. The point is for you to identify and educate your family about those disasters common to your community. The purpose is not to frighten family members but to help them identify the possibilities and develop the appropriate response.

List the disaster hazards that can happen in your community:

After identifying the disaster hazards, your family should determine their needs in case such an event occurs.

Examples are: water, food, tools, shelter, equipment, transportation, communications, et cetera. Your family should identify what supplies they would need. A list should be created "by" your family "for" your family. The special needs and wants of your family should be considered.

List those items your family will need to survive three days in the event of a disaster:

Time should be given to writing your family's disaster plan. Putting your plan on paper helps if your family members forget all of your plan's details.

Share your family disaster plan with your friends and neighbors. It may challenge them to develop a family disaster plan of their own. Sharing your family's disaster plan will also give you and your friends or neighbors an opportunity to develop plans together. The plans can support each other, share equipment or supplies, et cetera. Sharing family disaster plans will also present you an opportunity to develop pre-event relationships. Those relationships will provide opportunities for you to share a witness of Jesus Christ.

An important ingredient for overcoming a crisis is hope. Hope that comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Believers look for opportunities to share the hope that is in them, Jesus Christ. By looking for opportunities to discuss disaster plans, believers will discover opportunities to share their faith. Your family will also discover opportunities to share their faith after disaster events by giving leadership and sharing supplies or skills, as well as bringing stability and hope to the circumstances.

Train Your Family

Training is an important part of your family disaster plan. Training gives family members confidence and experience. The stress of a disaster situation is not the time to try to figure out how to do something or use a piece of equipment from your family disaster supply kit. The nonthreatening atmosphere of pre-event training is a better time for familiarizing your family with your disaster plans and equipment.

Invest time in discussing your family disaster plan and supply kit. Seek opportunities to have your family trained in disaster relief by organizations that perform disaster relief. Contact your state Baptist convention disaster relief director for more information about Southern Baptist Disaster Relief.

Southern Baptists have a rich heritage in disaster relief. When Hurricane Carla ravaged Texas in 1961, Baptist relief efforts were sporadic and unorganized. A group of Texas Baptist Men who volunteered to help the storm's victims experienced the confusion and disorganization in Carla's wake. They decided Baptists needed organization and cooperation to better minister in the face of disasters like Carla.

From that beginning, cooperation among Baptists in times of disaster has blossomed into a well-organized, highly cooperative effort.

The state Baptist conventions and the Adult Volunteer Mobilization Unit of the North American Mission Board, are taking the lead in organizing Southern Baptists to respond with manpower, ministry and financial help during floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, and other disasters.

Texas Baptist Men were the first to construct a large mobile disaster unit to provide mass feeding, emergency repair, and childcare.

Soon after Texas Baptists built their mobile disaster unit, Oklahoma Baptist Men realized that they could provide the same service in their state and built a unit using the guidance of Texas. Today, Southern Baptists have more than 200 mobile units owned and operated by the Southern Baptist state conventions, associations, and churches.

Disaster Relief teams respond to natural disasters - including tornadoes, floods and fires - in their own states. They also cooperate and respond to calls from other states. Teams are available for help overseas when the International Mission Board requests aid.

Southern Baptist efforts are correlated with other private agencies through National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), the American Red Cross, and many other church groups.

This interest in helping people in times of sorrow not only involves using mobile units but states have Baptist disaster relief volunteers on standby to assist in any part of the world.

The American Red Cross, in most areas of each state, has local chapters responsible for disaster relief and first aid training. Your local American Red Cross chapter will provide information about training events. Churches can also seek local American Red Cross personnel to provide training in their church facilities. Most American Red Cross training events can be held away from American Red Cross chapter buildings when a minimum number of people will participate.

The American Red Cross provides training in the following areas: disaster services, first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), mass care, and sheltering. Each American Red Cross course offers knowledge and a means to handle disastrous situations. You will also be made aware of what services and support will be provided by the American Red Cross.

Many local, city, county, or state emergency management agencies, can provide training for disasters common to their area. Using emergency management will provide knowledge for your family's expectations about local or state government during disasters.

Your family disaster plan training should also include how to use the equipment in your family disaster supply kit.

The task of turning off the gas and electricity to help prevent fires is very important. The use of a wrench and how to turn off the gas should be a training event for your family.

Knowing where to find the gas turn off valve and the main breaker in the electrical switch box is a basic task during an emergency. Other equipment should be examined and explained during training times. How to place batteries in a radio or flashlight; how to light a lantern, candles, or camp stove; and how to read a map or compass should be covered during family training times.

Planning for a rendezvous site for your family in the event of an emergency should also be part of your family's disaster plan. Should your family need to evacuate your home during an emergency, where would you meet? Discussion before a crisis occurs will aid your family in moving quickly to a place where all will be safe. Meeting in a neighbor's yard or on the street corner could save the lives of family members.

In the event your neighborhood is destroyed or restricted, where can your family safely meet? A local store, a church, or a friend's home could become a rendezvous site outside your neighborhood. Your family should know where they are to meet outside your neighborhood.

Should a catastrophic event occur in your community, city, or even county, your family members may not be able to communicate with each other. Often, during large crisis, the public is not able to place telephone calls outside the affected area.

Your family should identify an out-of-state contact person. A family member or friend identified as a contact person may become the one person who can provide information about your family. The out-of-state contact person can also help address the overload that occurs on the telephone system following a crisis. Family and friends can contact your designated out-of-state contact person instead of trying to reach your family during the time that phones are needed for emergencies.

Someone in your family, church, or neighborhood should consider becoming a ham radio operator. With a small investment of time and the passing of a simple test, a person can operate a ham radio station. During a crisis a ham radio can become the only means by which your family or neighborhood can communicate with the outside world. Contact your local electronic equipment dealer for information about ham radios.

Developing Your Family Disaster Supply Kit

Water. Your family disaster supply kit should include one gallon of water a day for each person for at least three days. If your community is prone to large disasters your family should store enough water for seven days. Special needs should be considered and additional water supply may need to be placed in your family disaster supply kit.

Canned foods. Your family disaster supply kit should include canned foods for three to seven days. Canned meats, fruits, vegetables, juices, soup, and milk are examples of the type of canned foods to be included in your disaster supply kit. Staples such as salt, pepper, and sugar, as well as high-energy - items such as peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars, and trail mix - should be included. These will help sustain your family during an emergency.

Comfort foods. You should include foods like cookies, hard candy, sweetened cereals, lollipops, instant coffee, and tea bags. This will help your family deal with the emergency as well as sustain them.

Vitamins - Your family should prepare to use vitamins during the crisis. Loss of sleep and rest, greater-than-normal work loads, and unusual stress can be addressed with the use of vitamins.

First-aid kit. A first-aid kit with proper supplies should be included in your family's disaster kit. There is a possibility of injuries and burns to you and/or the members of your family caused by the collapse of buildings. Your family's first aid kit should also include any prescription medication your family is taking on an ongoing basis. Aspirin or nonaspirin pain relievers, antacids, antidiarrhea medication, laxatives, and other items should also be included in your first aid kit.

Tools and equipment. Your family disaster supply kit should include a gas cooker, gas, pots, and pans. Eating utensils (forks, spoons, and knives) with a hand-operated can opener should be included. Matches, signal flares and a fire extinguisher (ABC) will be important items in your family's disaster kits. A radio and flashlight with extra batteries will provide security and knowledge for your family until help can arrive.

Pliers, wrenches, tape, rope, plastic sheets, sewing kits, and tent are items to be included in your disaster kit. Toilet paper, towelettes, personal hygiene items, plastic bags, and a plastic bucket with lid will also be useful during an emergency. Household chlorine bleach and disinfectant should also be included to help sanitize and disinfect family member's hands and items they handle.

Other items. Paper, pencils, whistle, compass, and a map should be included in your family disaster kit. Keeping a list, writing directions, leaving notes, and finding your way could help sustain your family during an emergency.

Clothing and bedding. Your family disaster kit should include items of clothing and bedding. These include but are not limited to: sturdy shoes, work boots, rain gear, hat, gloves, blankets, sleeping bags, thermal underwear, and coats.

Special Items. Your family disaster kit should also include any special items your family could need, such as: baby items, dentures, eyeglasses, contact lenses, and so forth. Important family documents, entertainment items (games, books), cash and other items needed by your family should be included.

Gasoline for the automobile. Family policy should be not to allow the automobile's gasoline to go below half a tank.

Practicing Your Family Disaster Plan

Invested time in practicing of your family disaster plan with each family member. Having a good plan on paper will not protect your family. Each family member should be familiar with every component of the family plan. How to use the tools and equipment, where the kit is stored, how to retrieve the kit, how to prepare the food, et cetera are important lessons for family members.

Share your family disaster plan. Your willingness to talk with friends and neighbors will help other families discover how important it is for families to be prepared for disasters.

Sharing your family's plan will also help you prepare to work with friends or neighbors. Teaming with other families will provide opportunities to take advantage of their expertise or equipment following a disaster in your community. This will also aid your family in building relationships pre-event and provide ministry opportunities post-event.

Do not forget to update your family disaster plan to reflect changes within your family, home, work, schools, et cetera.

Storage of Your Family Disaster Kit

There is a strong possibility that your family disaster kit will be stored for a long period of time. Care should be taken to provide adequate and safe storage.

Keep your disaster supply kit in a dry, cool place. Caution should be taken to prevent the kit from freezing or becoming very hot. The kit should be covered to protect the supplies and foods from being damaged. When the supply kit is in use store items that have been opened in sealable bags, or containers designed to protect the contents.

Be sure to inspect the items in your disaster supply kit for spoilage or becoming out-of-date. Develop a plan to inspect and rotate your food regularly. One suggestion is with the time changes each spring and fall, change the batteries in your smoke detector and rotate foods in your disaster supply kit. The foods in your kit should be changed and used in your family's daily meals. When you purchase groceries for your family, replace the used items in your supply kit.

Shelter for Your Family

When a crisis occurs in your community, careful consideration must be given to sheltering your family. Depending on the size and nature of the crisis, where you shelter your family will be guided by a number of factors. Is your home damaged? To what extent is the home damaged? Do you need to evacuate the neighborhood? Can you travel outside of the area? Do you have utilities?

Sheltering in your home could be a viable option for your family. Following damage from events like an earthquake, tornado, or hurricane, inspect your home for damage. Check for fires and other hazards. Use a flashlight; do not light matches, candles, or turn on electrical switches. Sniff for gas leaks. If you smell gas or suspect a gas leak turn off the gas at the main valve. Open the windows and get everyone out of the house.

Always seek professional (utility company) assistance to turn on the utilities again should you turn them off because of damage or a suspected leak.

Shut off other damaged utilities. Clean up any spills of medications, bleach, flammable liquids, and so forth. If your house has sustained major damage, get out immediately and seek professional help to inspect your house.

You may be able to stay in your home but not use the utilities.

Should you need to evacuate the area, use routes that you have identified in your disaster plan. Your family disaster plan should also include a place for your family to evacuate to. Other family members, friends, or the motel your family will use should be predetermined.

Other options for your family are public shelters sponsored by the American Red Cross or your church. Be prepared to take clothes, medications, blankets or sleeping bags, and items to entertain family members.

If your family owns a camper or tent, you can use them to shelter your family until evacuation is possible or until outside help arrives. If necessary, your family can use a van or automobile for shelter until better accommodations are available. Do not run the engine or radio in the vehicle. The dangers of causing the battery to die or carbon monoxide poisoning are too great to allow the vehicle to run with your family inside.

Spiritual Preparation for Disaster

The psalmist wrote, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). The word "refuge" means a safe hiding place; thus, we can find in the midst of our disaster a safe place by resting in our Lord. Remember that our Lord promised to be with us no matter the situation and this includes a disaster. God is also our strength, meaning that we may be weak but in Christ we will become strong in the midst of the disaster. His promise to us is that He will be very present in times of trouble. While He could have prevented the Hebrew children from being thrown into the fiery furnace, He chose to be with them and see them through the trial. Likewise, in disaster, our Lord will be with us and see us through the actual trial of the disaster.

When disaster strikes, our first response should be to cry out to God for help. Many times in the midst of disaster we depend on our own resources and neglect to ask God for help and strength. Do not neglect your prayer life during a disaster, if there was a time you need to have constant communication with the Heavenly Father it is during a disaster. During the disaster be sure to read your Bible, especially the psalms. It is in reading the precious promises of God that we gain strength, comfort, and assurance that we need to carry on during a disaster.

Once you have determined that you and your family are safe (as discussed above), use the disaster as an opportunity to minister to your neighbors. Remember that our Lord would meet people at their point of need, and we should do likewise to our neighbors. Perhaps, out of the ashes of the disaster, God can bring eternal results because of your willingness to minister to the needs of your neighbors in the midst of the disaster.

Hope in Crisis

The disaster relief ministry of the North American Mission Board has published an excellent witnessing booklet to be used in a disaster called Hope in Crisis. This witnessing booklet examines the life of Job and leads a disaster victim to examine their personal relationship with God. This witnessing booklet is specifically designed to be used during a disaster and should be part of every family's disaster kit. The witnessing booklet is simple to use and is effective as an evangelism tool in a disaster. The tract can be ordered by calling 1 866 407-6262 or order online at www.namb.net/catalog.

Experiencing God

If you have had the course Experiencing God, a disaster is a very good opportunity to apply the precepts and principles that you have learned.

Remember the seven steps of Experiencing God:

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
5. God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.

The disaster could lead you to a crisis of belief, where you would need to apply the principle of adjusting, obeying, and putting your faith into action. Allow God to use you in the disaster as His arms of love that He can wrap around your neighbors

Using God's Promises New Testament. Often during a disaster you will find that the crisis that you are in will make you emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted. You will sit down to read your Bible and you may find that passages that you knew will not come to mind. The God's Promises New Testament is a New Testament set up topically, which could be helpful as you minister during the disaster. The God's Promises New Testament should be a part of your family disaster kit.

Using The Golden Rule, Matthew 7:12. Jesus said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). The "Golden Rule" should especially be used during a disaster. By showing your neighbors acts of kindness and love you demonstrate to them the love of Christ. Share what you can with your neighbors. Help them get that tree

down, or help them cover the roof. Kindness goes a long way in the midst of a disaster and as Christians we should be able to show an extra measure of kindness in difficulty because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Allow Him to work through you as you apply the "Golden Rule" to those around you, and look for the opportunity to share the gospel in a verbal way.

When Disaster Strikes

No one knows when a disaster will strike; however, we need to be prepared for the disaster. This course has been designed to help your family prepare for a disaster. This course has given you checklists and practical suggestions on preparing your family to survive in a disaster. This section suggests ways to help you minister to your neighbors during a disaster. As opportunity presents itself to minister remember our Lord told us that, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."(Matt. 25:40)

When a disaster strikes stay calm. Keep your family members calm. Institute your family disaster plan. The degree of confidence you exhibit will aid those around you to remain calm.

Inspect your house and turn off the utilities that are damaged or those you suspect are damaged. Know where the turn-off valves and switches are located and how to move the valves or switches to the off position.

Help others in your neighborhood. Family members and neighbors may need aid in freeing themselves from buildings. They may need first aid. Provide leadership and organization to helping others and establishing a system of information and support. Your family plan may place you in the position of knowing "what to do and how to do it."

Begin immediately to seek information. The local television and radio stations that are part of the emergency broadcast system will be back on the air as soon as possible. Look for the local police, fire, and emergency management agencies to begin moving through the area doing damage assessment and emergency calls. Provide information about your family and neighborhood to the local government officials. Share with them needs or concerns but be prepared for them to handle life-threatening emergencies first.

Secure your shelter or evacuate the area. If you are not able to evacuate the area, establish your family's shelter. The use of an American Red Cross or a church operated shelter, your home, camper or tent, or even the automobile as a shelter should be established quickly during cold weather conditions.

In short, be prepared by developing a family disaster plan and when a disaster occurs, work your plan. Be prepared to make changes as necessary to provide protection and care for your family.

Communicate with those who are part of your plan. Seek information from local officials. Seek opportunities to share your faith with those around you. You will provide hope.

May God bless your family and their plans, disaster kit, and witness.