

A Church Prepared

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*“Men of Isaachar, who understood the times
and knew what Israel should do.” (1 Chronicles 12:32)*

We live in uncertain and precipitous times. With the war in Iraq and unrest in the Middle East, there is an uncertainty of the consequences we might experience here at home. Although the wars are being fought overseas, we also understand our vulnerability within our own homeland borders. New terrorism alerts are issued frequently, and our nation stands on guard.

We need to ask, *is the Church prepared?* We are watching our nation divide over its views on war. Our economy is arguably on shaky ground, which has an impact on people’s feelings of financial, employment, and family security. There are threats to our national security. What is the Church’s place in all of this?

A national AOL survey showed that 60% of Americans have not taken any precautions or measures in case of disaster. Thirty-three percent say they are concerned but took minimal precautions, and only seven percent have taken any kind of precautions. Yet 80% believe there will be another attack.

A *USA Today* poll done on March 3, 2003, showed that if people asked if they or their family have a disaster plan in place, 72% said no, 27% said yes, and 1% were unsure.

Who Is Prepared for a Disaster?	
Percentage of people who say they or their families have a disaster plan in place:	
Yes	27%
No	72%
Not sure	1%
—Source: Harris Interactive for Duracell: telephone survey of 1,021 households, Dec. 19-22, 2002	

A Wake-up Call

The lessons from the 9/11 attack on our nation should have taught us the importance of being prepared. Such precautions are not to be used as scare tactics, but simply the understanding of the times in which we live.

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus stated: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” Peter stated in I Peter 3:14: “Always **be prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

Rather than the Church of Jesus Christ taking a stance of ignoring the times or giving in to the fears of the world, we, the *salt of the earth* and those who have an eternal hope, need to recognize

these times as divine opportunities from the Lord. We can minister hope to those around us by being prepared to “give an answer” if or when something catastrophic should occur in our community or nation. We should be prepared whether a catastrophic event is a consequence of war or of a natural disaster of some kind.

Why a Church Prepared?

Look at the following questions and see how prepared you and your church are:

- Have the staff of your church discussed disaster preparedness for your church and its people?
- Does your church know how to mobilize volunteers for disaster relief should they be needed?
- Does your church have a plan to be a “safe haven” in the community for shelter and prayer in case of an emergency?
- Do families in your church have a plan on how to help and be a witness to their neighbors in case of an emergency?
- Do you as a church have resources on hand and ready to use—such as Bibles, gospel tracts, and basic supplies and shelter information?
- Does your pastoral staff know how to counsel people in disaster trauma?

These few questions can help you think about how prepared you as a local church are, or should be, if some emergency situation should arise. This is not to be alarmists, but rather to alert us as the Church to the tremendous needs and opportunities before us.

*We encourage you to carefully consider whether you truly are **A Church Prepared.***

A Church Prepared **Ideas for Advance Preparation**

Prepare your congregation members to be voices of hope in times of tragedy and disaster.

- Incorporating the Advance Prayer Points on page 5, begin now to mobilize your congregation in prayer. Use these prayer points in worship services, small groups, and various ministry areas (adult education, student ministries, children's ministries, etc.).
- Encourage your pastor to speak to the congregation during worship services or large-group gatherings.
- Equip your students and children ministry leaders to encourage and counsel with students and children, helping to dispel fear and offer hope. Use age-appropriate discussions with parental involvement.
- Hold "town meetings" with your congregation to discuss advance preparations.

Prepare your church facility as an emergency prayer shelter.

- Recruit prayer team members, pastors, and counselors to be on site in your church in the immediate hours following a disaster. Train and equip them in advance to pray and give spiritual encouragement to both believers and the unchurched.
- Gather spiritual resources to be given out (Bibles, tracts, etc.).
- Let other churches in your community know that your church will be open for prayer and other spiritual counseling.
- Be prepared to host a community-wide prayer service at short notice following a disaster (see sample prayer service on page 6).

Prepare your congregation members to minister in their own communities, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

- Encourage congregation members to be praying for personal contacts. Now is the time for launching "Lighthouses of Prayer" in neighborhoods and workplaces. For more resources, go to www.missionamerica.org.
- Encourage congregation members to organize "preparedness meetings" in their neighborhoods. These can be social gatherings designed to connect with neighbors in advance. Websites such as www.ready.gov can be a resource in hosting a neighborhood discussion time.
- Encourage congregation members to have their own family advance preparation in place so they can focus on helping others. If they are gathering food staples or water, encourage them to stock additional supplies.

Recruit volunteers to meet the needs of your community.

- Contact your city offices to find out what volunteer opportunities they might have.
- Offer your church facilities to the Red Cross or other organizations as an emergency shelter.
- Use volunteers to gather basic necessities that your church can distribute in the surrounding neighborhood (canned goods, clothes, blankets, etc.).
- Assess the professional backgrounds and areas of expertise in your congregation (doctors, nurses, construction, counselors, intercessors, etc.) and develop a plan to mobilize them to help in the event of a disaster.

Helpful Websites and Contact Information:

Christian Emergency Network (CEN). Established after 9/11 by The Mission American Coalition, CEN is designed to help Christians respond effectively in a national crisis with relief mobilization, information and training, uplifting messages from well-known national ministry leaders, timely on-line resources, and current television/radio programming giving the hope of Jesus Christ and 24-hour spiritual response counseling. Go to www.christianemergencynetwork.com.

American Red Cross. Website is www.redcross.org. Site lists ideas for emergency preparation, as well as local Red Cross chapters. Donating blood and volunteer opportunities are listed.

Salvation Army: Website is www.salvationarmy.org. Find an organization in your region, along with ways to volunteer.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Government Guide. Website is www.ready.gov. Contains helpful information in making preparations according to government guidelines.

Emergency Preparedness Center. Website is www.areyouprepared.com. Site has emergency preparedness information and survival products.

Gospel Communications. Website is www.gospelcom.net. Site has a variety of Christian resources and an extensive listing of Christian ministries.

World Prayer Team. Website is www.worldprayerteam.org. The official site of the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs, CO. Offers a different prayer focus each week, along with special Iraq prayer alerts. You can submit prayer requests or join in a global prayer effort.

VOAD: Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. This organization helps coordinate relief efforts in various states. Go to www.nvoad.org and click on state members to find the volunteer coordinator in your area. There are also links to many other disaster-related organizations.

A Church Prepared **Advance Prayer Points**

Now is the time to prepare your church through prayer. A church that is praying in advance will be a church prepared.

You can use these prayer points with your intercessors, church staff, small groups, home gatherings, or any other prayer opportunities. Ongoing prayer will help you hear and discern the Lord's direction for your church.

Prayer Points:

- Worship God as the One who holds the oceans in His hands, measures off the heavens with His fingers, and is sovereign over all the nations of the world (Isaiah 40).
- Pray for our national leaders, including the President of the United States and his advisors. Pray that they would humbly seek to do the right thing, and that they would inquire of God about military intervention or action. Pray for leaders of other nations.
- What are issues that hold your church back from being prepared? Are your congregation members fearful or apathetic? Pray that your church will have the mind of Christ in all things—that includes walking in godly confidence and having a heart for the lost.
- Are there ways your church can prepare in advance for ministry opportunities? Pray that the Lord would reveal specific steps to be taken.
- Pray that this will be a time when God raises up a powerful prayer movement in your church. Pray that your church will become alert and sensitive to spiritual things—and will understand the times.
- Pray that your church will have wonderful opportunities to minister in your community—and be the voice of hope in troubling times.
- Pray that your congregation members will have hearts for their neighbors, co-workers, and family members. Pray for evangelistic opportunities to pray and share Christ.
- Pray for students and children—that God will prepare their hearts to not be fearful, and that parents, pastors, and leaders will be sensitive in ministering to younger generations.
- Pray that you would have the heart of God in all things. Pray for compassion, confidence, hope, spiritual sensitivity, and a spirit of power, love and self-discipline—without fear (2 Timothy 1:7).

A Church Prepared Community Prayer Service

You may want to designate your church as a place where people can come to pray and seek hope in the event of a disaster. Here is a sample prayer service that can be adapted to fit the needs of your congregation and community.

Welcome and Scripture reading from Psalm 91 or Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 93

Opening Worship—Focusing on the majesty and power of God (about 10-15 minutes)

Prayers of Affirmation and Thanks—Affirming who God is—the God who is greater than all the circumstances around us (Isaiah 40:12-15).

Break people into groups of six to pray together affirming who God is despite the circumstances surrounding us.

Worship Song – Expressing trust in the Lord

Prayers of Trust – Habakkuk 3: 17-19—Pray expressing our trust in the Lord and re-affirming our trust in Him.

*Have people pray in smaller groups of 3-4 and **express their trust in the Lord, their need for trust, or the desire to learn how to trust in the Lord in these circumstances.** (Give people the liberty to express themselves to the Lord with whatever is on their hearts at the time, knowing that there may be those in the midst who do not know the Lord yet. Affirm that they can express all their fears, anger, hurt or other emotions to God.)*

Worship Song—Focusing on personal reflection/repentance

Prayer of Repentance—Psalm 51—Pray with a focus on our own need to make sure our lives are right before God who is so Holy:

- *Give time for personal reflection.*
- *Give time for small group prayers of repentance on behalf of our society, church, etc.*

Worship Song—Focusing on personal reflection/ repentance

Prayers of Intercession—Praying to the Lord for the immediate needs that we face (depending on the circumstances):

- **Prayers for leadership** – Wisdom for the President and his advisors
- **Prayers for protection for our armed forces**
- **Prayers for the Church (your church) to respond in love and mercy to those in need**

Closing Song of Proclamation (of confidence in the Lord, not of triumph)

A Church Prepared Prayer Counseling for Crisis Praying

In a time of crisis, you will need to mobilize many people quickly to pray with seeking and hurting individuals, using great sensitivity and confidence in the Lord.

When ministering, ask the individual why he/she is seeking prayer. This is not a time for counseling as much as a time for bringing that person before the Lord. Keep in mind that the Lord does the healing work, not you. Base your prayers in Scripture, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you to pray with humility and insight. Trust God to minister His healing and grace as you pray.

Here are passages of Scripture to read and pray:

For people needing to understand God’s power and love for them:

...call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me (Psalm 50:15).

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:12-13).

Come near to God and he will come near to you (James 4:8).

This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you" (2 Kings 20:5).

For people struggling to understand why God would allow tragedy. These verses will not explain the specific “whys” (because we cannot answer that), but they will remind people that God is sovereign and in still in control of their lives:

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:6-9).

For people struggling with fear:

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 2:7).

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:28-32).

For people concerned about safety of loved ones in military or other cities:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge--then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation" (Psalm 91:1-16).

For people needing a sense of peace:

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

For people who need assurance that God will walk with them through all future situations:

This is what the Lord says: He who created you, He who formed you,

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you; when you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.

For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, Your Savior; You are precious and honored in my sight, and I love you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you (Isaiah 43:1-5).

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Proverbs 18:10).

A Church Prepared Encouraging Children Through Prayer

In these uncertain times of war with Iraq and threats of terrorism, we need to be prepared to help children find hope and trust in God. This will be especially important if our nation experiences another catastrophic event such as 9/11. As a part of being *A Church Prepared*, please also consider the children in your congregation.

Talking with Children:

Parents need to be open and interactive with their children, but should also take care in talking about a crisis situation. Here are some suggestions:

- Children will need to know some things about current events, but be careful not to emphasize the details. Children should not be frightened unnecessarily. Affirm for the children often that you are trusting God to help your family.
- Do not watch TV news continuously. Younger children may not understand they are seeing reruns of news events (such as clips of the World Trade Center Towers falling). They may be misunderstanding that these events are continuing to happen. Assure them that this is not the case.
- Give your children frequent opportunities to express how they feel. Be open to listening as they share what they are thinking, and then offer them a hopeful perspective.
- Watch for a change in physical or emotional behavior. Changes in sleep patterns, nightmares, bed-wetting, emotional outbursts, repetitive behaviors, etc. can be an indication of increased anxiety, fear, or insecurity. Ask questions sensitively and talk about how they might be feeling. If behavior changes continue, you might consider pastoral or professional help for your child.
- Keep up your routines as much as possible. By keeping daily activities somewhat stable, children will feel a greater sense of security.
- Create hands-on activities for your children as a response to a crisis situation. Walk through some family preparations together, such as stocking some water, additional food, etc. You can do this sensitively by making it a fun family activity. For suggestions of simple preparations, go to www.ready.gov.
- Think of ways to help others in a time of crisis. Connect with local or national relief organizations for ideas of how to collect and contribute helpful items.
- Cook Communications is offering a downloadable lesson, “God’s Peace, My Peace” on their website at www.cookministries.com. The teaching is designed to help children deal with the stress and anxiety of war.

Praying with Children:

This is a time when parents need to be pointing children toward God's peace.

- Make it a point to pray with your children often (morning, meal-time, and bedtime). Pray prayers of comfort about how God loves them, hears them, sees them, and is protecting them.
- Play praise and worship music in your home and car throughout the day, and avoid listening to television or radio reports when children are present.
- Adopt a military person to pray for on a daily basis. If possible, pray for someone that the children know.
- Talk with your children about how they can pray for others, including friends, neighbors, teachers, relatives, etc. Help them learn that they can pray with their friends if they sense fear in them. At any age, they can be a voice of hope if they have been prepared.
- Walk through prayers of forgiveness with them. Matthew 5:44 says, "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Help them pray for forgiveness of those who have hurt other people.

Prayer and Worship Gathering for Children:

The prayer time on page 11 is designed to bring parents and children together in a time of worshipping God and seeking His comfort. This prayer time can be implemented by churches in preparation for uncertain times, or can be organized quickly in response to a fearful event in our nation.

We encourage the children's ministries leadership in your church to be thinking and praying about this in advance so that they are prepared to respond at the right time. A prayer and worship time such as the one suggested here can be of help to guide both parents and children in seeking God for peace and comfort.

A Church Prepared Children's Prayer and Worship Gathering

Certainty in Uncertain Times

Opening Worship

Tell the children that God is mighty and awesome, and in spite of everything going on around us—God is still in charge! He sits on His throne in heaven and the world and everything in it belongs to Him.

Read Psalm 93:1-2:

The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.

Read Psalm 47:7-9:

For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

Lead the children in **worship songs** that focus on God's majesty and power.

Suggestions: Awesome God; Shout to the Lord; I Love You Lord

Prayers of Trusting God:

Tell the children that if they feel fearful, they can know that God sees them and loves them. Just as God cares about the birds, He cares even more about them. God even sends angels to protect us.

Read Matthew 10:29-31:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Read Psalm 91:11:

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Small Group Prayer Time:

In small groups of four children (with parents participating), encourage the children to pray one-sentence prayers of things that might frighten them. Tell them it is good to tell God about those things. After each child prays, encourage a parent to pray a simple pray, such as, "God, I ask you to help Michael with his fear of _____."

Prayers for Other People:

Perhaps other people in our city or other cities have been hurt in some way. Give a brief explanation of what has happened, without going into frightening details. Ask the children to express how other people might be feeling right now, and how we can pray for them.

Jesus says that we should forgive others, even when they hurt us. *Read Matthew 5:44: "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* We also want to pray for forgiveness for those who hurt other people.

Small Group Prayer Time:

In small groups of four children (with parents participating), encourage the children to pray that God will help people who are hurting or frightened. Ask God to bring healing and comfort to them.

- Invite children to pray for others in their schools or neighborhoods who might be fearful. Let them pray for people by name as God brings names to the children's hearts.
- Invite children to ask God to forgive those who have hurt other people.

Time of Worship:

Lead the children in several worship songs that focus on Jesus being their friend, or on God's love for them.

Suggestions: Everlasting Love; I Could Sing of Your Love Forever

Prayers for Our Nation, President, and Military:

These are hard days for our President and other leaders as they make decisions that they believe are best for our safety. There are many ways we can pray for our President. Ask the children to suggest ways. If possible, invite children to come forward and pray one- or two-sentence prayers for our leaders.

- Pray the President and his family will be kept safe.
- Pray that the President and other leaders will pray and ask God for direction as to what they should do.
- Pray that the President and other leaders will make good decisions.
- Pray that our leaders will know how to help people in frightening times.
- Pray that everyone in our nation will help each other and support each other during these times.

We also want to pray for all the men and women in the military (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, National Guard, etc.) These are hard times when they are away from their families as they protect our nation. Pray also for police, firefighters, and others who protect us.

Small Group Prayer Time:

In small groups of four children (with parents participating), invite the children to think of someone who is serving in the military, and have that child pray for protection for that person. If the children do not know anyone in the military, then move on to praying in general ways—using these requests:

- Pray for soldiers and other military people to be kept safe. Pray that no one else will be hurt in the war.
- Pray that leaders will know what military people should do.
- Pray that families of the military people will feel God's peace and comfort.
- Pray that children will not be hurt.

Closing Worship:

Lead the children in fun, upbeat songs that speak of God's power and faithfulness.

Suggestions: Lord, I Lift Your Name on High; Hail Jesus, You're My King

A Church Prepared Discussion Questions and Prayer

Small Group Discussion Time:

What is your sense about the general attitudes or beliefs of your congregation?

- Apathy (not aware of potential crisis, or don't believe it will affect them)
- Fear (unable to minister to others because people are fighting their own fears)
- Cavalier ("I'm a believer, ready to go to heaven—so I'm not concerned about anything.")

How aware is your church about the need to discuss these issues? What are your thoughts on how to begin that discussion?

Given the growing sense of urgency to be *The Church Prepared*, what do you think can be accomplished realistically in your church in the next several days and weeks? Share ideas and make a list.

How do you handle the potential of divisiveness in your church over whether war is justified or not? Think through and discuss what position you might take as a ministry leader or lay person.

Small Group Prayer:

- Based on your answers about where your church may be in this discussion process, pray for your leaders—for guidance, direction, sensitivity to God's leading, etc.
- Pray for your congregation members to be open to prayer and dialog on these issues. Pray for an appropriate and biblical response from both leaders and lay people.
- Pray for growth of the prayer movement. Pray for great favor from the Lord in leading these discussion and prayer opportunities within your church.