

A guide to preparedness

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By AC, a man who strives to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Life was going on like normal and people felt like everything was OK, but one day they woke up to a nightmare when everything in sight was torn down by wind, lightning and rain. In 2017 I went through the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, enduring 3 weeks without running water, a 2-month interruption in mobile telephony, a 3-month electricity blackout, and a 4-month Internet blackout. Fortunately, we as a family had been wise to enter into a preparedness mindset in advance of hurricane season, and earlier in 2017 we started making preparations that later on paid off very highly; in fact, I now believe that our disposition to prepare was sparked by divine inspiration. Not only did we all survive, but our property was spared from damage, and we even managed to enjoy a minimum of comfort following the disaster.

Contents

Introduction

- A. Psychological preparedness
- B. Physical preparedness
- C. Material preparedness: the basics
 - 1. Water
 - 2. Food
 - 3. Hygiene supplies
 - 4. Medicine
 - 5. A note on medicine
 - 6. Energy
 - 7. Technology
 - 8. Shelter and clothing
 - 9. Bug-out bag
- D. Material preparedness: a recap
- E. Logistics
- F. Finances
- Final considerations

Introduction

Lately in 2023 I have been feeling a distinct urge to share my experience. I reside in the Caribbean, an area prone to hurricanes and earthquakes, and became involved in preparedness out of necessity. This is a topic that has been gaining much attention in the Internet, and prepping guides have now sprung up everywhere, but what makes this account different is that I write from experience. I saw first-hand what a real disaster looks like, lived through the ensuing societal collapse, and survived to tell it.

You prepare in advance, when things are calm, because when a disaster strikes it is too late. Let me first emphasize that one should prioritize spiritual preparation above anything else. When things get ugly, no amount of material preparation alone will suffice, but in faith you can ask God to provide. Your priority should be *to change your life, repent and seek God; and to love and respect God above everything else.*

But I also have to remind you that God Himself has been encouraging us, through visionaries and prophets, to start putting time and resources into material preparation, and I get the impression that many have been slumbering on this matter. Please, obey God and prepare, but if unsure—because He may have other plans for you—then ask Him in prayer. Now is the time to wake up and start preparing.

Regardless of whether you believe we are now living in the end times, prepping can still save your life. In a YouTube video by The Prepared Homestead on April 20, 2023, Travis explained: "Prepping is not just for the apocalypse; it is also for everyday occurrences that happen, and extreme weather is certainly one of those. I can guarantee you, in your lifetime, you will experience more everyday occurrences like weather or getting injured ... than the world coming to an end. So, be ready for that, folks."

Please note that, while I have attempted to cover the basics, this is not an exhaustive account. The most notable omission here would be a section on firearms, because where I live, it is almost impossible to legally obtain and carry a gun, and I have no relevant experience to share. I also wish to state that I have no commercial relationship with the persons or products endorsed here, and any recommendation springs up from the sole fact that I find them useful or instructive. I am not providing financial or medical advice of any kind, and if you require consultation in these areas, seek a qualified professional. I am not responsible for damages resulting from the use of this information. Use at your own risk. I am just sharing what has worked for me so far, and this guide is for educational purposes only.

A. Psychological preparedness

More than possessing the coolest equipment, what really counts in survival is the right mindset. The survival mentality is best exemplified by the Andes flight disaster of 1972, perhaps the greatest survival event ever. If you have not already read the 1974 book *Alive*, by Piers Paul Read, please get it now and read it in its entirety, from cover to cover, absorbing everything the text has to offer. Pay particular attention to chapter 10, which narrates the arduous, week-long descent by foot across glaciated mountains in Chile, that Fernando Parrado and Roberto Canessa undertook. The story of the Andes disaster has also been told by movies and documentaries, but the book delves deeper into the mind of the survivors, and the wisdom that the text provides is invaluable for developing an attitude of survival.

One takeaway from the story is that the survivors spent 72 days in a remote mountain glacier without any substantial food, water or warm clothing, yet the number one rule they issued for themselves was: *Do not complain!* When all hell breaks loose and you are tested to your limits, make this rule your own. Whatever happens, stay positive and engaged, because the right mindset is what really matters.

Improving your physical condition [read section B, below] can also enhance your psychological well-being, and the results can be impressive. Remember the old saying: *A healthy mind in a healthy body.*

B. Physical preparedness

The best piece of advice that I can give concerning physical preparation is this: Get moving, work out, and strive to achieve the best physical shape you possibly can. Start now, because when disaster strikes you will need to do a lot of physical work, and transportation will be mainly by foot. Ask yourself if you would be able to easily lift a 20-kilogram (44-pound) object, unassisted? Can you carry a heavy backpack, say one-fourth of your body weight? Are you comfortable walking 10 kilometers (6 miles) in less than 2 hours? If you are 60 years of age or younger, you should be able to successfully complete all three tasks above, and at 52 years of age I attest my accomplishment of all three. The bottom line is: Develop a regular exercising schedule that includes stretching, cardio training and strength training.

Improve those aspects of your health that you can control. If you have any addictions, get rid of them now; reduce sugar, coffee and alcohol intake to a minimum; start exercising; shed any unnecessary weight; eat healthier; expose yourself regularly to half-an-hour of midday sunshine, but never stare directly into the sun; improve your sleep hygiene; optimize your immune system via natural means.

The best way to fine-tune your immunity against viral diseases is the protocol by the late Dr. Vladimir Zelenko, which I have successfully used myself for over a year now. The Zelenko protocol is effective for both prevention and treatment, and it works not only with influenza-like viruses, but also against most RNA viruses. Look it up in the Internet (<http://vladimirzelenkomd.com/>); print it into paper; read it; memorize it; and above all, put it into daily practice. Obtain the ingredients for the protocol (most are over-the-counter) and stock up on them for at least a 3-month period, but ideally 12 months.

If you require prescription lenses, obtain a duplicate pair as a backup. Instead of contact lenses, eyeglasses are preferable in a grid-down scenario, but include a repair kit. Reading glasses are easy to get, and generally available without a prescription. Over time, I pieced together a set from +0.5 to +3.5 in half-diopter increments, with duplicates for +1.5 and +2.5 which are the ones I need the most.

C. Material preparedness: the basics

Material preparedness, or prepping, involves becoming as independent as you can from the global supply chain, and as self-sufficient as possible, in order to survive a disaster originating either from natural or social causes. Communication, transportation and trade are always cut off in a disaster, hence the need to become independent and to provide for yourself. Generally during times of unrest, living in a rural area away from the chaos of the cities is preferable; but city-dwellers can do a lot to prepare, and a well-prepared urbanite might be in a better position than an unprepared person in the wilderness.

Important items should be obtained in duplicate, because in prepping, *two is one, and one is zero*. This is the reason why you should get additional can openers as a backup, even if you already own one. Another popular saying in the preparedness community reminds us that *it is better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it*. This is why you should stock up on essential items. In prepping, there is also the "rule of three", which states that in a challenging situation, you can survive 3 minutes without oxygen, 3 days without water, and 3 weeks without food. Use this rule to prioritize your needs.

I will now share my suggestions for material preparedness, based primarily on my own experience with natural disasters. In order of priority, you need to stock up on water, food, hygiene supplies and medicine. Potable water is always the main asset when disaster strikes, so take this into consideration.

1. Water. If possible, install a rainwater collecting system, or at least a water cistern. In the Caribbean, where I live, it is not unusual to see 2,000-liter (550-gallon) cisterns everywhere around residential areas. Alternatively, for water storage you can acquire a 200-liter (55-gallon) blue drum, or a batch of 20-liter (5-gallon) buckets; these buckets save a lot of space because, even in large numbers, when empty they always fit one inside the other. Budget at least 8 liters (2 gallons) of water daily for each member of the household. Know that an air-conditioning system, or even a dehumidifier, can provide water right out of the air, although only in small amounts and at an immense energy expense.

Because you cannot live without water for more than 2 or 3 days, water should always be the priority in a disaster situation. I know that storing water is difficult and takes up a lot of space, but I insist that you take heed of my advice. Plan to store more water than what you believe you will actually need. Even

when I own a 2,000-liter (550-gallon) cistern, we ended up storing an additional 1,200 liters (320 gallons) using smaller containers, in anticipation of Hurricane Maria. I am glad we did that, because we ended up losing about 15% of our total water reserves, but the extra amount made up for this loss.

Boiling water for one minute is always the safest method of disinfection, but at a huge energy cost. Pasteurizing water at 72 °C (162 °F) during 4 minutes might be a more economical option. Alternatively, it is possible to use a combination of two systems, ideally a biological filter, plus chemical disinfection using either chlorine or iodine. Filters get rid of the larger microbes (i.e., parasites and bacteria), while chemicals work with the smaller microbes (i.e., bacteria and viruses). Only the most expensive ultrafiltration devices are able to remove viruses, hence the need for a dual system. Use chemicals this way: On one liter (¼ gallon) of water put 2 drops of chlorine-based bleach, or 5 drops of povidone-iodine, and let stand for 30 minutes at room temperature; cold water may require 60 minutes.

Obtain tools like funnels and eyedroppers, for use while treating water with filters and chemicals. Never collect water that has become mixed with fuel or oil. Boiling does not work to clean up chemicals in water, but advanced filters can sometimes utilize activated carbon to remove most of the impurities.

2. Food. Stock up on canned food for each member of the household, ideally for 3 months. Build up gradually, and if you just bought two cans from the grocery store, next time get three. Choose what you and your family eat, making a balance between carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats. Canned food lasts at least 5 years, regardless of expiration dates, but use common sense. Watch for dented or broken cans, swelling or outgassing, and discard food with an unpleasant odor or appearance. Rice and beans are the most cost-effective foods available, but you will need to store them inside sealed Mylar bags containing oxygen absorbers, to create an oxygen-free environment that discourages pests.

Keep an inventory of everything that you acquire, particularly food, hygiene supplies and medicine. Get organized with your equipment and supplies, but the priority is to first obtain what you need. Do not forget about can openers, and if you already own one, buy at least one more as a back up.

Build up steadily and plan your food stockpile into multiples of 4, aiming first at a modest 3-week supply, which already puts you ahead of 90% of the population; then, think about building up toward a 3-month supply, the classic standard for prepping. Later on you might even plan for one year, if you have the resources; but most people who I know in the preparedness community aim for 3 months, like I myself do and recommend. Do not feel intimidated by accusations of hoarding, because you are not a hoarder, but a prepper. Preppers build up slowly over the years, and in a collapse you rarely see them going out to get stuff because they already have at hand what is needed. On the contrary, the hoarders are the unprepared masses, who storm out the stores in chaos when disaster unexpectedly strikes.

Bear in mind that canned foods are lacking in vitamin C, because most of the vitamin is lost in the canning process, and plan beforehand on storing vitamin C supplements in sufficient amount to compensate for this. Vitamin D, on the other hand, comes primarily from exposure to sunlight—and seldom from food sources—meaning that in a pandemic lockdown or a nuclear winter, a stockpile of vitamin D₃ could become valuable. A multivitamin supplement might work, but it is better to get the individual vitamins, because they are offered in higher doses that can also be used therapeutically.

In the months following Hurricane Maria I lost a total of 5 kilograms (11 pounds), despite a normal calorie intake. I am unsure about the exact cause, but I think that the increased level of stress and physical demands played a role. I also believe that the decreased nutritional value in processed foods could account, in part. Take all this into consideration when making estimations of food requirements.

The best solution to ensure a long-term supply of food would be planting a garden, but concentrate in crops that provide a high nutrient density. Potatoes, for example, are so nutritious that you could live on them alone for months; the same goes for sweet potatoes and the cassava root, two food staples in the Caribbean. These all can be planted into containers, and I have successfully done all three using 40-liter (10-gallon) containers. Potatoes grow in a 3½-month cycle, sweet potatoes in 5 months, and cassava in 9 months. Choose crops that can be processed for preservation without the need of freezing or refrigeration. Potatoes and sweet potatoes can both be "cured", and bitter cassava can be processed into "casabe", a preparation similar to a flatbread than can be stored for a year without refrigeration.

Growing your own food and learning to cook a meal from scratch are both essential skills for survival. In July 2020, a friend told me that "now is the time to get started with planting, and to fall into all those mistakes that beginners make, because by the time when famine strikes, you better be proficient at growing your own food." If you will be needing seeds, buy them now while they are still available; you will want to obtain organic-grade seeds that are free of genetic modification (non-GMOs), and those are exactly the ones that could soon become hard to come by. If you are able to raise animals, absolutely go for it, but I would still put planting first. Chicken and rabbits are the easiest choices for meat, and a fish pond might be a solution for some people. Know that hens can lay eggs without the need of a rooster.

A small garden with a dozen pots might never yield enough for even a single person, and feeding a family of five necessitates the planting of huge gardens. However, a minimal yield is better than nothing, and even if your crops end up ruined because of pests or bad weather, you still benefit from the experience gained by putting your hands in the soil. Start now, and be assured that not all is lost.

3. Hygiene supplies. Poor hygiene after a disaster makes the perfect recipe for the spread of infectious disease. Stock up on soap bars, or learn to make your own. Alternatively, seek a local soapmaker who you can patronize; for example, I am acquainted with an expert soapmaker that I regularly purchase from, who lives and works within walking distance from home. If unable to stock up, at least seek to procure your supplies locally and not globally; this will make you less vulnerable in an emergency.

Get ethyl alcohol and povidone-iodine for disinfection of wounds, but people who are allergic to iodine or who have thyroid conditions should avoid any use of iodine unless directed by a doctor. Chlorine-based bleach can be a good anti-microbial for household use, but is not amenable to long-term storage due to its short expiration of 6 to 12 months. Stock up on toilet paper and thrash bags of all sizes. Think in advance about the logistics of waste management. Learn to use lime, the most cost-effective treatment for organic waste of every kind, and make sure it never—ever—gets into your eyes.

When prepping for hygiene, there is much opportunity for versatility. For example, a 6-kilogram (13-pound) bag of baking soda can still be obtained for less than US\$10—from a wholesaler that you all know—and it will double up as toothpaste, deodorant, laundry detergent and even as antacid medicine; try getting an equivalent amount of each of these items for the same money! Also, alcohol can double up as fuel. Iodine doubles up for water disinfection, for use as a mouthwash or in a nasal rinse (both diluted to a 1% solution), and applied topically for prophylaxis against radioactive iodine-131.

In a long-term collapse, other items to consider would be a hand-powered washing machine, a 20-liter (5-gallon) solar shower, personal grooming equipment and a mosquito net. Remember, however, that the essential supplies to get are the following four: soap, baking soda, ethyl alcohol and povidone-iodine. As explained before, the first two have numerous uses that make other supplies redundant.

4. Medicine. The ideas that I will share below could at first seem far-fetched, but read on to understand why. Right after Maria, I witnessed a near-total collapse of healthcare where thousands died, due in good measure to a lack of doctors, hospitals and medicine. During the 3-month-long hurricane aftermath, if you needed any kind of medical attention, you would be in a predicament. In a YouTube video by the Patriot Nurse on December 29, 2022, she suggested the following: "I would recommend that you decrease your dependency upon the medical-industrial complex. You need to be preparing yourself to be your own doctor. I would recommend that you store up your own medical supplies."

I strongly suggest reading and studying the book by Dr. Joseph Alton and his wife Amy, now in its 4th edition from 2021, *The Survival Medicine Handbook: The Essential Guide for When Help Is Not on the Way* (<http://www.doomandbloom.net/>). Purchase a first-aid kit that includes bandages, gauze, cloth tape and antiseptic wipes, or get these items separately. Think also about dental health and first aid. Obtain basic diagnostic tools like a thermometer, a pulse oximeter, a blood-pressure monitor and a stethoscope; but more importantly, learn to use each of these instruments to the best of your ability.

The essential over-the-counter (OTC) medications to seek in advance are aspirin, acetaminophen, loperamide and diphenhydramine, but make a list of others that you could require in the future, and get them, too. Read extensively about each medication that you obtain, and learn how they work.

Put together an assortment of at least three different antibiotics, if available, to ensure a wide spectrum of action; a set of three could include amoxicillin (or cefalexin), ciprofloxacin and metronidazole. Antibiotics are essential for preparedness, but most jurisdictions only allow their sale via medical prescription; nonetheless, there are workarounds to obtain them legally, without a prescription, and the best exposition of this topic is contained in a 2018 book by Dr. Alton and his wife, namely *Alton's Antibiotics and infectious Diseases: The Layman's Guide to Available Antibacterials in Austere Settings*. But move fast, because regulations are coming that could eliminate the current workarounds.

Most infectious diseases at present are of viral origin, and I cannot stress enough the benefits of the Zelenko protocol which goes beyond respiratory infections, potentially working against dangerous viruses like Ebola and Marburg. Another option could be a pharmaceutical called ivermectin, a safe and inexpensive remedy that has been proven effective against viral diseases like influenza A, yellow fever, West Nile fever, Hendra, dengue, zika, chikungunya and more. While ivermectin generally requires a prescription, there are alternative channels to obtain it legally without medical intervention; for example, the state of Tennessee now allows OTC sales of ivermectin. But whatever you do, stay legal.

A number of natural supplements are known to possess specific antiviral properties. In addition to a combination of zinc and quercetin (as proposed by Dr. Zelenko), the following can all be obtained OTC: resveratrol (from the Japanese knotweed, *Polygonum cuspidatum*), black seed oil (from the black cumin, *Nigella sativa*), as well as tinctures made from the Chinese skullcap (*Scutellaria baicalensis*). Vitamin C is a systemic immune booster which works in synergy with other natural antivirals, quercetin in particular. These are just a few examples, but there are others. Start doing your own research.

In a disaster, medicinal plants could become easier to obtain than regular pharmaceuticals. For treating minor burns, I have successfully used the leaves from an *Aloe vera* plant that we have in our backyard.

5. A note on medicine. Beware of malicious obfuscation by politicians and powerful interests in medicine. I know the problem because I worked in the healthcare industry for over 10 years, and the best example right now concerns the efficacy of ivermectin. Ivermectin works for me, and I have used it twice as part of the Zelenko protocol, for emergency prophylaxis after viral exposure from infected

individuals. As Dr. Paul Marik of the FLCCC Alliance (<http://covid19criticalcare.com/>) and author of *The War on Ivermectin* aptly puts it, "if you do not wish to believe the 98 controlled trials showing the efficacy of ivermectin in COVID, that's your right ... Never before has any repurposed drug held a larger threat to the profits of the pharmaceutical industry than ivermectin. It was a massive threat."

Along the same lines, the claim by "experts" that evidence is lacking to the efficacy of supplements, is nonsense. Supplements save lives, but the industry dislikes them because they are not profitable. I suggest that you start reading the abstracts in the biomedical literature via Internet, like I regularly do, learning to sift real science from the ever-increasing bane of pharmaceutical propaganda.

6. Energy. Fire is the easiest way for obtaining light and heat, and control of fire is perhaps the greatest technological advance ever in history; but learn to use it, and exercise extreme caution at all times to avoid burns. In addition, use fire only in well-ventilated locations, because an open flame will always result in fumes of some kind. Know that ethyl alcohol undergoes near-complete combustion, giving off a clean flame that is almost emission-free. A simple alcohol lamp—which you can actually make yourself—could be useful in less ventilated places, but limit its use to only short periods of time.

Starting and controlling a fire is an essential survival skill, and one should learn at least two different methods for starting a fire. A ferrocium rod (also called a ferro rod, or less precisely, a flint) can last for years without wearing off, but only gives off a spark and not a flame. Get started by obtaining matches, lighters, candles, a portable gas stove—together with a generous supply of the appropriate fuel, usually propane or butane—and maybe a kerosene lamp, and you will have the essentials covered.

Appliances such as flashlights, lanterns, portable radios and electric insect killers can be useful in a disaster, but they all require access to electricity. In most cases, however, these can be powered by a small quantity of direct current (DC) that is provided by primary batteries. I would encourage you to get each of the aforementioned items—in duplicate or multiples, like everything in prepping—but make sure that you invest into stockpiling a decent amount of the appropriate batteries.

Electrical power is always a luxury in a disaster situation. Still, for as little as US\$400 you can get a portable gasoline-based generator that will provide the alternating current (AC) that most household appliances require, but you better learn to use it well in advance. Bear in mind that a gasoline generator requires all sorts of maintenance like oil changes, filters, spark plugs, and many etceteras, so think ahead and make sure you can commit to the time, effort and mental focus that this requires.

Take into account that most fossil fuels are not stable enough for long-term storage, and a gasoline-powered generator will periodically need to be refueled. Gasoline and diesel last only for about 6 months, but when a stabilizer is added the lifetime of these fuels can be extended to one year. Kerosene is better, lasting for about 5 years, and liquefied propane gas will last about 30 years. Ethyl alcohol lasts indefinitely as long as its container remains sealed, but starts to evaporate upon opening.

The biggest investment for preparedness we ever made is a 14 kilowatt-hour residential generator, which runs on liquefied propane gas feeding from a 175-kilogram (420-pound) steel tank. This allowed us to power the entire house for 12 hours each day following the hurricane, bringing about an improvement in our quality of life during the ensuing 3-month blackout. However, systems like these are limited by the availability of fuel. While we then received regular supplies of liquefied propane gas every week, never missing one, I am uncertain that supply chains in the future could retain this same level of reliability.

Solar panels are viable for locations with abundant sunlight, but they do not work alone, requiring

additional items such as a charge controller, a deep-cycle battery and a power inverter. A so-called solar generator is a complete, pre-assembled system, that is convenient but expensive. In the last couple of years I have pieced together a basic 12-volt kit for about US\$400, which not only saved me money, but also taught me a lot about electricity. Small windmills are another option, and I have seen videos where people in rural areas use creeks passing through their land to assemble hydroelectric mini-generators.

7. Technology. Print any information that you deem to be essential, because in a disaster you could lose Internet connectivity for months. Put up a bookshelf and build a library containing both reference and classics. If you listen to music, cut your dependency from streaming services and start purchasing in physical formats that you can hold. In an electromagnetic pulse (EMP), your data could be irrevocably lost unless stored in optical media like recordable CDs and DVDs. I myself use a variety of formats for backing-up, but for 25 years I have been saving essential data primarily into optical discs. You might also make a Faraday cage, which can reduce the risk to electronic devices and digital storage media.

A shortwave radio is essential for a grid-down scenario. Because shortwave broadcasts travel over thousands of kilometers, this might be the only way to stay informed of world events. The trick with shortwave is getting a unit with single-sideband (SSB) modulation and a good antenna, but start learning well in advance of an emergency because there is a steep learning curve. Back in 2017 I was unaware of SSB modulation, unfortunately, and for weeks in a row I was left cut off from the outside world.

Two-way radios are the preferred means of communication in a disaster, and units using the Family Radio Service (FRS) can be operated without a license if they do not exceed 2 watts in power. Satellite telephones are the ultimate in emergency communications. I have been trained on how to use them, but they remain too costly for regular people like you and me, and could be vulnerable to an EMP.

Technology can be convenient, but when prepping seek to go as low-tech as possible; older, analog equipment is preferable to the latest electronic gadgets. Remember that, in a disaster, electricity is a luxury. For example, while an electric washing machine would be useless in a power outage, a manual washer—or even a washing board—will get the job done. Likewise, in an extended collapse, older cars with fewer electronic components could become preferable to newer cars; and if fuel were to get scarce, transportation by horse or bicycle will become more desirable than driving a car. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and for 3 months in a row, I vividly recall seeing lots of people traveling by foot.

8. Shelter and clothing. Assess the risk for natural disasters in your area to anticipate damage to property, because you can mitigate a lot if you plan in advance. In my location, for example, the main threat comes from tropical cyclones whose frequency and intensity peak around September each year. Put together a household repair kit containing basic tools and supplies, such as duct tape and penetrating oil; these last two are prepping essentials, and a multi-tool is always a favorite item in the preparedness community. An assortment of tarps in different sizes (e.g., 6' × 8' and 12' × 16') is vital for prepping.

In a disaster, resist the urge to evacuate your home unless life is in imminent danger, because this would mean abandoning both your shelter and preparations. While it is generally better to bug-in than to bug-out, a catastrophic event might still force you out, at least temporarily. Do the following, in advance: Prepare a 3-day evacuation kit, called a "bug-out bag" [read item 9, below], and learn how to build an outdoor shelter using parachute cord 550, anchoring stakes, and a polyethylene tarp in 10-mil thickness or better. Use a large tarp on top, and a smaller one to cover the ground. Tarps are always waterproof, and many are ultraviolet (UV) resistant; read the specifications and seek the best UV rating available.

To learn specific survival skills like using a tarp to erect a shelter, or starting a controlled fire, videos are

always the way to go, and my top recommendation would be Survival Lilly's channel on YouTube.

Think about winter clothing, if your climate requires it. Military-grade wool blankets (with at least 75% real wool) are a must, and there is now wide availability of thick thermal blankets that work by placing the reflective surface toward your body. A modest sleeping bag rated at 0 °C (32 °F) can be improved by adding inside a warming liner, and then placing outside a wool blanket, in turn followed by a thermal blanket; an inflatable pad on bottom adds further warmth and comfort. If assembled correctly, in this specific order, such a system could offer protection down to -20 °C (-4 °F). Of course, you can just buy a winterized sleeping bag rated -20 °C or -40 °C, but they are not cheap. For the record, my knowledge of extreme cold weather comes, in part, from experience gained in both the Arctic and Antarctica.

Even in the tropics, do not disregard the possibility of cold temperatures. The tropics are consistently warm at sea level, but at 1,000 meters (3,300 feet) and above the nights start getting chilly. I still keep all my winter gear from trips to Alaska in 2014 and 2017, including hand warmers! It seems unlikely that I will ever need any of that here in the Caribbean, but one never knows. In fact, with the drums of war getting louder every day, the possibility of nuclear warfare cannot be dismissed; and while current predictions for a nuclear winter are uncertain, we cannot rule out a drop in global temperatures.

Extended cold weather in a global scale can also result from a strong volcanic winter. Mild volcanic winters occurred on earth in the years 42 BC, 536, 1258, 1453 and 1816, bringing cool summers that caused crop failures—and sometimes plagues—around the globe. The 1816 event, known as the *Year Without a Summer*, is well-documented in history, and it might be instructive if you read about it.

In a disaster there will be much manual work to do, and transportation will be mostly by foot, meaning you will need gloves and shoes that withstand heavy use. Reflect upon this, and prepare accordingly.

9. Bug-out bag. If you ever need to leave your area you will require a bug-out bag, which must include a field knife, the number one tool to survive in the wilderness. Quality knives always have a fixed blade with a full-tang, measuring between 12 and 18 centimeters (5 to 7 inches). Do not skimp on this critical item, and expect to pay at least US\$100. You are not going to believe this, but there are a lot of fake survival knives out there, so beware. Also, make sure you have paper maps covering the area where you plan to bug out, in case the Global Positioning System (GPS) ever becomes unreliable or inaccessible.

In addition to a knife, a minimal bug-out bag should also include the following: a tarp with cordage and anchorage, a headlamp, a whistle, a small mirror, a nail clipper, an eating utensil called a "spork", two methods for starting a fire, two systems for water disinfection, plastic bags, soap and toilet paper, and a 3-day supply of water and canned food (with pull ring). This is the bare minimum, but if possible try to add a first-aid kit, a multi-tool, a camping tent, and a 3-season sleeping bag (with liner and pad). Think also about eyeglasses, money and essential documents, but these might go in a separate fanny pack.

The items for your bug-out bag should be separate from other prepping equipment or supplies that you own. A bug-out bag must be assembled for each member of the household, and each bag should be inspected once every year to verify for expiration of food, medicine, fuel and batteries. The idea behind a bug-out bag is to have a 3-day survival kit ready at all times, in case you need to evacuate quickly.

D. Material preparedness: a recap

Remember that, in prepping, *two is one, and one is zero*. Do not forget that *it is better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it*. In addition, learn and understand the "rule of three". And please,

memorize this: In order of priority, you need to stock up on water, food, hygiene supplies and medicine. Remember that potable water is always the main asset when disaster strikes.

D. Logistics

In addition to drawing closer to your family, get to know your neighbors and start connecting with like-minded people, but make a balance between the need to network and letting other individuals know about your prepping. Befriending the right people can take time, and you must start now because these connections need to be established well in advance of a disaster. For those who are single or live alone, in particular, cultivating this kind of fellowship could prove life-saving in a catastrophic event.

Stay informed about current events, but draw a line and do not get overly obsessed. Seek independent news coverage, both domestic and foreign. Foreign media outlets can sometimes provide details or perspectives on world events that you are unlikely to hear at home. But beware, because lies and deception are more prevalent today than at any other time in history. The bottom line is: Strive to discern the truth from disinformation, and learn to piece together the truth from multiple sources.

Focus on becoming resilient, seeking to thrive both in normal life and in a disaster scenario. Pursuing a profession can be profitable when the economy is afloat, but in a collapse the safer bet could be a trade. Teach yourself practical skills that could increase in demand when the grid goes down. Instead of depending on one single job, develop multiple streams of income; diversification brings resiliency.

E. Finances

Getting out of debt is the best strategy to achieve financial health. I live frugally and stay debt-free, like most people in the preparedness community. I advise you to reduce spending and simplify your life now, step-by-step and in your own terms, before disaster strikes. Use cash to avoid overspending. Resist the temptation to incur debt in order to prepare, and do not procrastinate in paying off your debts.

If you invest, put your money into physical (or tangible) assets, like water, non-perishable food, seeds, arable land, livestock, medicine, tools, fuel, batteries, silver, gold, etc. Think about things that you can hold or touch. Five thousand years of history have shown that, in an economic collapse, these assets retain their value well. Steer away from the stock market, because sooner or later it will crash again, like in 1929. Avoid sovereign bonds, because governments around the world are heavily indebted and at risk of defaulting. I personally know people suffering major losses because of defaulted bonds.

In a disaster situation, *cash is king*. An extended blackout implies a collapse in communications which would make electronic transactions impossible. This is exactly what I witnessed during Maria's aftermath, where credit cards, direct deposits, wire transfers, cryptocurrency—and everything else that required a live connection to the grid—were all rendered useless in the blink of an eye, not to return in full until weeks or months later. You simply had to have cash in hand, not in the bank or inside an automated teller machine (ATM), but from your own pocket or piggy bank. However, in a long-term collapse, I can anticipate currency in gold and silver retaining its value better than paper money.

Final considerations

The purpose of prepping is that, following a breakdown in the supply chain, you remain self-sufficient and capable of providing yourself with the essentials to survive. Do you have the ability to collect your own water, to grow food, and to furnish your own medicine and energy? If not, can you at least try to

barter these goods locally from someone you know and trust? I know this is a lot to assimilate, but do not panic. Prioritize, securing first a modest supply of water and food. Then, start building up.

After what happened with Hurricane Katrina back in 2005, and more recently with Hurricane Maria in 2017, we cannot expect that emergency and relief agencies will jump in to assist. The horrific death toll during Maria's aftermath tells me that saving lives is not a government priority. As much as we would like to believe that the politicians have our best interests at heart, the facts prove otherwise. Stop delegating your personal safety, and start taking responsibility for your own survival.

Start preparing right away, if only modestly. We are now going through a bad inflationary episode, and the goods that you can acquire today for 5 dollars will soon cost you 10 or 20 dollars. Perhaps some of you have the means to offset the loss by increasing your income at an equivalent rate, but for me—and for most of you—this is an unrealistic scenario, and I am hopeful that you are getting the point here.

Finally, understand that you cannot prepare for everything. Even if you knew exactly what the future holds for the world—which you do not—you would never have the ability or the resources to cover for every possible incidence in a disaster. We prepare to be less vulnerable, not to become invulnerable.

Prepping is not a hobby, but a lifestyle, and I hope that this information will get you started on your journey to prepare. My guide to preparedness concludes here, but remember to put spiritual preparation on top of your list. *Seek first the Kingdom of God.* This is the best advice that I can offer.

Preparedness checklist

By AC, to accompany *A guide to preparedness*.

A. Psychological preparedness

- Read and learn about past survival events.
- Develop the right mindset and stay positive.

B. Physical preparedness

- Get rid of any addictions.
- Start exercising; get moving; work out.
- Eat healthier.
- Improve your sleep hygiene.
- Reduce sugar, coffee and alcohol.
- Shed any unnecessary weight.
- Expose yourself regularly to moderate sunshine.
- Optimize your immune system naturally.

C. Material preparedness

- A rainwater collecting system; or—
- A 200-liter blue drum; or—
- Chlorine or iodine for water disinfection.
- A biological filter, ideally with ultrafiltration.
- Alternatively, a 2,000-liter water cistern.
- Alternatively, a batch of 20-liter buckets.
- Funnel, eyedropper and pasteurization indicator.
- Optionally, a separate filter with activated carbon.
- Canned food for 3 months.
- Rice and beans, repackaged into sealed Mylar.
- Can opener and utensils.
- 40-liter containers for planting.
- Vitamin C and vitamin D₃ supplements.
- Oxygen absorbers for repackaging into Mylar.
- Organic-grade seeds.
- Basic gardening tools.

- Soap.
- Toilet paper.
- Baking soda (i.e., sodium bicarbonate).
- Optionally, a hand-powered washing machine.
- A first-aid kit.
- OTC analgesics: aspirin and acetaminophen.
- Ingredients for the Zelenko protocol.
- Natural antivirals (at least 3).
- Matches and lighters.
- An alcohol lamp.
- Candles, and perhaps a kerosene lamp.
- Optionally, a portable gas-based generator.
- Essential information should be printed.
- Faraday cage for EMP protection.
- Shortwave radio with SSB modulation.
- Seek low-tech alternatives to electronics.
- A household repair kit containing basic tools.
- Tarps in different sizes.
- Military-grade wool blankets.
- A 3-season sleeping bag with liner and pad.
- Prepare a 3-day evacuation kit (bug-out bag).
- Ethyl alcohol and povidone-iodine.
- Thrash bags in every size.
- Lime (i.e., calcium oxide).
- Optionally, a 20-liter solar shower.
- Basic diagnostic tools.
- Other OTC: loperamide and diphenhydramine.
- Ivermectin, if available.
- Antibiotics, if available (at least 3).
- A ferrocerium rod for fire starting.
- A portable gas stove with the appropriate fuel.
- Flashlights, lanterns, and a supply of batteries.
- Optionally, a simple 12-volt solar energy kit.
- Optical media for data backups.
- Two-way radio using FRS.
- Antenna for shortwave radio.
- Seek alternatives to fuel-based transportation.
- Duct tape and penetrating oil.
- Cordage and anchorage for tarps.
- Thick thermal blankets with a reflective surface.
- Work gloves and safety boots.
- Inspect your evacuation kit every year.

D. Logistics

- Draw closer to family and neighbors.
- Stay informed via independent news outlets.
- Assess the current state of your career.
- Learn a trade.
- Seek like-minded people.
- Piece together the truth from multiple sources.
- Develop multiple streams of income.
- Teach yourself practical skills.

E. Finances

- Get out of debt now.
- Reduce spending and live frugally.
- Invest in physical assets.
- Have extra cash for emergencies.
- Do not incur debt in order to prepare.
- Use cash to avoid overspending.
- Steer away from the stock and bond market.
- Optionally, gold and silver for value preservation.

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