

## Equipped for the bad times

What do you think these people have in common?

- Janice had enjoyed several days of uninterrupted sunshine so didn't pack an umbrella when she went away for the weekend - and it rained all the time.
- Healthy Pete didn't bother to take out medical cover for his recent trip abroad and, when he took ill on his travels, he found himself uninsured.
- Andy didn't get the chip in his car windscreen repaired at the time of impact and, as the crack extended, ended up having to pay the full price for a replacement windscreen.

None of these people was prepared for a change in their circumstances. Each assumed that, because things were going well for them at one particular time, they would continue to go well. These are silly examples, I know, but they kind of illustrate the point that being prepared against trouble gives us an advantage when it suddenly comes upon us. We need to increase our spiritual strength in the good times so we don't falter in times of trouble. If we don't build up our spiritual strength when life is good, we're not going to have the resources to do so when life takes a downturn. Here are some practical suggestions you might find helpful.

**Read and apply biblical truth.** It's so easy to just read our Bibles, even on a daily basis, and instantly forget what we've just read. But if we move from reading to studying and from studying to applying the material to our own personal situation, we're much more likely to benefit from what the Bible has to offer. As you study a passage by reading it carefully and thinking over what you've just read, you might find it helpful to make a note of verses that point to God's character or those that talk about certain issues, for example, money, self-control, anxiety, etc. By doing this regularly you'll soon have your own personal reference section to turn to when you need to put biblical principles into practice.

**Develop a consistent prayer time.** Praying doesn't come naturally to us. It's something that we have to learn. That's why Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray. If you're currently struggling in this area, why not use the prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples in response to their request? See Matthew 6:9-13, for instance. Take this as a model for your own prayers. Or why not pray some of the other prayers in the Bible, too? Some examples are many of the Psalms as well as some of the Apostle Paul's prayers in the New Testament. Don't wait till bad times come before you learn to pray well. If you're not in the habit of praying when things are going well, you'll find it that much harder to pray effectively when life goes bad.

**Build trusted friendships.** Isn't it great to have friends, real friends, people whom you can trust? Some people find it difficult to make friends and they can end up being quite lonely, with no-one to turn to when things get rough. Others have been let down by their so-called friends and are reluctant to get closely involved with people again. But good friendships are so replenishing. Not only can we learn from others, we can have such great fun with them - if we allow ourselves to! Consider what you could do to build up your circle of friends. Not only will you have them to help you in bad times, they'll also have you!

**Become part of a church community.** At one time, it was expected that followers of Jesus Christ would regularly attend church. In recent times, however, there is a growing number of Christians who want to 'go it alone' and are rejecting the practice of church attendance. Many of these have been 'burned by the church' in the past, and don't want to put themselves in a position where they could get hurt again. But, despite the hurts that can sometimes be inflicted by people in the church, being part of a community of people who gather to worship God in praising and learning together is God's idea and not something to be lightly dismissed.

Are you taking steps to increase your spiritual strength in the good times?