

Scott James has a hands-on, deeply philosophical, understanding of the world we live in and of the need to address the issues that will impact his children and mine -- all the children of our planet. This book guides us along a pathway to truly understand the nature of our collective futures. It is a brilliant tapestry that interweaves the emergency preparedness and sustainability movements.

John Perkins
New York Times bestselling author

Prepared Neighborhoods is a powerful resource for both small communities and individual households. Scott James clearly lays out the "What If's" many of us harbor in the backs of our minds and proposes sustainable and resilient ways to address them. Best of all, this book is written for real neighborhoods, using the language they speak in and clear examples.

Caitria O'Neill
Founder, Recovers

Scott James has filled a missing link in the transition to a new economy. The neighborhood unit – bigger than a household and smaller than a city – is the essential human scale for building community resilience and preparedness. Get your neighbors together to read Prepared Neighborhoods and act!

Chuck Collins
Senior Scholar, Institute for Policy Studies
Co-Founder, Resilience Circles Network

Books like Scott's are resilience stabilizers, helping us navigate the circuitous path of change. Communities come together for solutions. Going it alone is a myth; the more we embrace our collective wisdom and skills, the stronger and more resilient our communities become. Oh, and make sure that those communities are building fun into the mix – no one wants a future unless it is going to be fun!

David Johnson
Advisor, Transition Towns US

PREPARED NEIGHBORHOODS

*Creating Resilience One
Street at a Time*

*by
Scott James*

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DEDICATION

To Justice and Mercy, our hope for the future.

Scott James

To the thousands of neighborhoods, it has been my pleasure, personally, to help prepare. I thank you. You have taught me that prepared individuals, families, and neighborhoods are the foundation of resilient communities. Your willing support to one another as neighbors, especially during a time of actual disasters, gives me great hope for our collective future.

LuAn K. Johnson, PhD

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BUILDING SOCIAL RESILIENCE

“We must rebuild functioning communities with closer ties to the land not just in nostalgic fantasy, not just in token preservation, but in substantial daily practice. We must reclaim the commons.”

Brian Donohue
Associate Professor at Brandeis
University and author

Resiliency is a worthwhile pursuit, both for individuals and communities. But how do we build strength into our lives as citizens and into our towns? The answer lies within our neighborhoods. The neighborhood is where sustainability meets preparedness. It is one step beyond caring for your own loved ones, and one step back from where emergency professionals serve at the county, state, and national levels.

Our focus for this book is one of mutual aid among citizens, not disaster relief provided by a government agency. However, we are not talking about going solo here. Self-sufficiency for every citizen is not only unattainable, it is also undesirable. Group resilience - neighbors taking care of neighbors - is a much more attractive state of being.

Building Social Resilience

As we learn from the Stoics, when viewing disasters, or the anticipation of one, rationally, we can see the opportunities contained within. Opportunities for the greater community, deeper relationships, and corrected priorities. We each decide what story to tell ourselves and others: one based on love, or one based on fear. Let's pursue the story of love, strength, and group resilience!

Imagine with me a group of neighbors—just like you might have—with whom we'll check in at the beginning of each chapter...

The house had been dark and cold for four days. No electricity, no heat, no running water, and, now, no food.

Ross watched as his children ate through the last of their “Three Days, Three Ways” emergency kit rations, belatedly realizing this emergency was going to last much longer than just a weekend. He began to feel panic edging into his normally clear-thinking mind. It bothered him that his children were drinking stale Coca-Colas found in the back of their garage for breakfast. But they had no drinking water and had already emptied the refrigerator and pantry.

No one was sure how long the power would be out. No one knew when the grocery stores would be restocked. No one knew when the gas stations would receive more fuel. No one knew when the bridge would be repaired nor when the roads would have their rubble, downed trees, and power lines removed. And with both cell phones and landlines not working, communication was at a standstill.

Lisa came downstairs and went straight to the front door.

“Where are you going?” Ross asked his spouse, an edge in his voice. He realized he was sweating, despite the chill.

“To the neighbors,” Lisa calmly replied as she added an outer layer to her sweater, long-sleeved shirt, and flannel-lined Carhartts. “The stores are empty and so is our pantry. If we’re going to get through this, we’ll need their help.”

Our Journey

In our neighborhoods, we can focus on what is changeable but significant to surviving and recovering quickly from a wide scale event, whether it is a short-term natural disaster or a long-term economically induced emergency. The quest for community has never been stronger. The recognition that all is not well is becoming universal. We need a way to take action; actions that can move us from a paralyzing fear to an activating hope. And those actions can begin in our own homes, streets, and neighborhoods.

Neighbors taking care of neighbors with a bit of positive-focused foresight and planning can move us further along the sustainability continuum, toward a more resilient and bright future. The resilience we so desperately need in our lives is best built within, and also from relationships. It is time to get to know our neighbors again, as those are the relationships we'll depend on most heavily during an emergency.

As Jay Walljasper proposes in his essay *Changing the World One Block at a Time* “the neighborhood is basic building block of human society, and practical efforts to save the planet start right there. Whether a rural village in India, a suburban subdivision in California, or a bohemian quarter in Berlin, neighborhoods shape people’s lives in powerful and surprising ways.” Walljasper’s essay is just one of many excellent pieces in the excellent “Less is More” book by Cecile Andrews and Wanda Urbanska. Pick up a copy to read Walljasper’s full essay as well as Dave Wann’s piece about the “real wealth of neighborhoods.”

Watching the great natural and economic emergencies of our time impacting our country over the last few decades, my family has journeyed from a “blissfully-clueless” state through an “informed-enough-to-be-worried” state to finally arrive at the “act-now” state.

During our journey, we began to blog about it at OptOutEnMasse.com (borrowing a phrase from Joel Salatin) about our successes and failures with exurban homesteading experiments (exurban is the zoning classification between suburban and rural). Over the years, it became clear that true self-sufficiency was not only unattainable but also undesirable. In addition to opting out of the negative aspects of the American system as we know it, we also needed to opt in to something new, something positive, something local, and something community-building.

We began to talk to others about emergencies beyond our own country as well. The Japanese tsunami. The Christchurch earthquake. The financial woes of the European Union. Brexit! Within our country, we looked at both Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the 2016 Louisiana flooding. The list goes on and on.

This emerging worldwide crisis presents an opportunity for us to look at who we are. Who we are as a species living on a fragile space station. Who we are as caring neighbors. Who we are as citizens. It’s a conversation that is increasingly finding a wider and more mainstream audience.

Learning from Our Elders

My grandfather maintained a significant victory garden until his death and had a wide variety of practical homesteading skills. Despite my father's Ph.D. and years of experience running organizations (quite successfully), my grandfather's hands-on knowledge simply did not transfer down to him. I notice many folks of his generation lack the practical experience to grow their own food or weather a two-week winter storm without electricity.

These are skills I learned myself only in the last ten years from books, blogs, and buddies (plus a fair amount of trial and error... mostly error!). More than once, my father has remarked to me with a bit of humorous wonder in his voice how proud my grandfather would be of my efforts to develop self-reliance. And good news! We don't have to learn the practical skills (e.g. farming) of a previous generation by ourselves, but can learn collectively, in conjunction with our neighbors. In our journey, we've discovered individual self-reliance to not be a worthwhile goal... community-reliance is much more attractive!

At the other end of the spectrum from individual/family preparedness, there is a huge amount of literature, only some of which is helpful to citizens like us. It is full of technical jargon - it assumes the audience is solely national/international emergency professionals - and primarily useful for large groups of people (like mass exoduses of refugees). It is difficult to scale down their concepts to the neighborhood level.

The Neighborhood is the Key

And yet the neighborhood level is exactly where we find the sweet spot for resilience, which consists of small groups of citizens bound by their geographic neighborhoods who are able to care for themselves during an emergency, whether it is a short-term natural disaster or a long-term economically induced emergency.

We must be able to care for ourselves without the aid of professionals during a short-term emergency because they are simply not coming (as they will also tell you). After a natural disaster, the fire and police departments are required to do drive-by assessments of the entire damaged area before even beginning to respond to the first house fire or victim. And in a wide scale emergency like an earthquake, our professionals will be overwhelmed with acute situations.

In our country's economic reality, these professionals find themselves underfunded, understaffed, and simply stretched too thin to provide care for citizens street by street. It's up to us, citizens, to create more resilient neighborhoods, before the emergency hits. And we can!

By going one step beyond the individual and family level planning, and one step back from city, state and federal planning, we arrive at the neighborhood, where preparedness meets the sustainability movement.

Preparedness, Please Meet Sustainability

Emergency preparedness and sustainability are best interconnected at the neighborhood level. By beginning the conversation with emergency preparedness, positive social and environmental change is created for millions of Americans who normally shy away from any conversation about “the green movement.”

Neighbors who would not normally engage in a conversation about the environment become deeply involved in local emergency preparedness projects because they see the direct benefits for themselves. When you and your neighbors agree to check on each other after a natural disaster, you set the stage for future sustainability projects to succeed.

The ongoing experiment in our town connects official disaster relief initiatives (often driven by city and county professionals) to the sustainability movement (often driven by citizen activists) with the support of the civic service sector (e.g. service organizations like Rotary International). It contributes to the conversation already happening in individual homesteads and at the federal level by adding community organizing around sustainability. These projects range from group purchases of emergency water supplies to pea patch gardens, all of which equip our neighborhoods to better survive and recover from future emergencies, be they short or long.

These interpersonal connections will be crucial to thriving in the coming “long emergency”, as author and social critic,

James Kunstler, has aptly named our current economic reality. We've entered an interesting period of the American story, marked by the decline of cheap energy and the rise of do-it-yourself victory gardens.

We're seeing a groundswell of activity among civic and government groups in towns across North America – from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine – which are building resilience into our systems. And there are countless families that have begun shelter-in-place preparations for weathering a natural disaster in their homes; just do a quick online search for “urban homesteads.” What is missing in many of those locations is the bridge between these two efforts, which is the neighborhood. And yet that is the point in scale at which we can see rapid progress being made. This is not a new concept; you can read about hundreds of years of group resilience in communities like the Amish, marveling at their ability to quickly rally around a single family or project and push it to completion. In recent decades, we've also seen how citizens dig in after a natural disaster to begin life again after the first responders (e.g. firefighters, police, EMTs) leave.

How to Rebuild a City by Gisleson, Thompson, & Burke is an excellent short book that provides insights into how individual citizens, streets, and then entire neighborhoods in New Orleans took on the task of rebuilding their city after Hurricane Katrina when aid from state and federal sources was nonexistent. Rather than a coordinated state or federal government effort, it was a patchwork of smaller but significant

efforts by a wide variety of individuals and small groups rallying Amish-style around specific projects.

Many of the projects became sustainable in nature. In the wake of the New Orleans tragedy, the authors document the natural progression of emergency preparedness (and direct response, in this case) to sustainable engagement and reconstruction. As the citizens rebuilt their city, they found an opportunity to rework civic systems into versions that better matched their ideals of social justice and environmental stewardship.

Much of the work was citizen-led, street by street, one neighborhood at a time. For instance, the volunteer-run New Orleans Food & Farm Network organized teams of citizens immediately after Katrina, to create localized food maps so citizens could locate sources of food within walking distance, one street at a time.

In the years after the disaster, the organization grew rapidly, spurring other food-related organizations of citizens that have been reclaiming abandoned lots for community food gardens. These are everyday citizens working to increase their city's food security, one urban lot at a time. Via broad public interest, the city is also learning about healthy eating, sustainability practices, and group resilience.

Responsible Citizens

During a wide-scale incident like an earthquake, fire and police departments and county emergency planning departments will be focused on primary infrastructure, not individual citizens. Our professionals will eventually restore our basic infrastructure, but in the short term, they will focus only on the most acute needs of our community.

In the meantime, citizens can take responsibility for the majority of our population's welfare at the level of their individual neighborhoods. Citizens acting in small teams can help a neighborhood recover quickly from an incident. Food can be shared. Fires can be avoided by turning off a neighbor's natural gas.

I am lucky enough to live on Bainbridge Island near Seattle, home to several leading organizations in the sustainability community such as YES! Magazine and natural-based education pioneer Islandwood. The island contains a larger-than-normal percentage of deep thinkers and writers on the topic of resilience, such as David Korten and John Perkins. And we have a citizen-led organization called 'Sustainable Bainbridge' that shepherds activist groups working on issues ranging from clean watersheds to local food to alternative transportation.

It was within Sustainable Bainbridge that I first launched the idea of a citizen-led preparedness organization, recognizing that the combination of emergency preparedness with the sustainability movement can build some much-needed resilience into our lives. Many towns both large and small have similar

organizations, usually with either “Transition” or “Sustainable” in their names. These groups are citizen-led, affinity-based, and community-focused, making them natural funnels for the introduction of neighborhood emergency preparation strategies.

One of the best is Dr. LuAn Johnson’s Map Your Neighborhood (MYN), available from the Washington State Emergency Management website as well as through many local fire departments. The MYN process prepares your small group of immediate neighbors to move through nine steps together in the case of an emergency. Even with the slow and inadequate response from state and federal teams during Hurricane Katrina, if groups of citizens in neighborhoods across Louisiana and the surrounding states had organized around a program like MYN, they could have mitigated much of the tragedy we witnessed.

The success of MYN lies in its recognition of the importance of relationships. Creating a prepared neighborhood is more than remembering that “Stephen has a chainsaw I can borrow should that large tree fall across our driveway.” And it’s more than a casual conversation with a neighbor about when to evacuate for the latest hurricane bearing down on your town.

A prepared neighborhood is an interconnected set of relationships that you can depend on during immediate crisis and “Long Emergency.”

Those relationships will produce more well-being for you and your loved ones than any amount of supplies you have in storage and have many positive side benefits during non-emergency times as well.

While older texts recommend three days' worth of emergency food and water to be kept on hand, many federal and state emergency planning departments now recommend at least 14 days. Several excellent books offer practical steps that can be taken to gather and store these recommended supplies to prepare your home and your family for emergencies.

But the one year's worth of food these books encourage you to store will dwindle to a few weeks' worth when the rest of your neighborhood arrives at your doorstep in need. And the water your family has stored properly will be exhausted in a matter of days when sharing with friends and extended family.

Is the answer to hoard your supplies and force your neighbors away at gunpoint? Of course not! The most patriotic and loving response we can have in a time of crisis is generosity. And that starts with your immediate neighbors.

In a prepared neighborhood, your resources won't be exhausted by your generosity to your neighbors. That's because, in a prepared neighborhood, the resilience created by following principles of sustainability will ensure that systems and stores for everyone will last much longer than three days, two weeks, or even a year.

Mapping Your Neighborhood

Due to the transitory nature of American urban and suburban areas, few citizens have strong direct neighbor connections. But direct connections are still possible in this age of social media.

Whether you begin by “friending” your neighbor online or simply by using the old-fashioned method of knocking on their front door, introducing yourself to just one other neighbor is the best way to start.

Find someone close enough that you could run to their place to borrow a cup of honey; that is the same distance you’ll go in an emergency to ask for help. Then repeat the process a few more times, encouraging that first connection to do the same, and in no time you’ll at least have a friendly “wave to each other” relationship with your immediate neighbors.

These face-to-face relationships help to re-localize our communities. “Re-localization” means bringing back much of what was outsourced, especially relationships. Facebook friends will not be there physically in a crisis to help you, but technology can still play a supporting role. An encouraging new wave of smartphone applications and websites are focused on creating and connecting neighbors at the hyper-local level.

Once you’ve initiated contact with at least one neighbor, you are ready to pursue the Map Your Neighborhood program (MYN). The name may be slightly misleading for citizens in larger neighborhoods as they will really be mapping only their two to twenty most immediate neighbors (a range of one to three streets) rather than an entire neighborhood.

Dr. Johnson’s nine-step program is a straightforward and friendly way to gain neighbor commitment for mutual care, from watching over children and the elderly to preventing fires by

shutting off gas tanks to staying comfortable in the seasonal elements.

I've added a "Step 10" to Dr. Johnson's list to bridge the gap from a single street to the larger community and region. Step 10 centers on a hub location staffed by trained volunteers under the guidance of emergency professionals that is within walking distance of your neighborhood; it is a natural gathering point where folks would go for news, medical supplies, emotional relief, food, water, and weather relief. We'll talk more about this hub concept in the shelter chapter, but Step 10 goes beyond just this physical location.

Step 10 is sharing your unique skills and expertise with others, via that neighborhood shelter or elsewhere in your community, after a wide-scale disaster. For clarity, we use the term 'neighborhood' to define a collection of up to 20 families (on a street or in an apartment building) and 'community' for anything larger than that.

Here's an example of the benefits of Dr. Johnson's program: One MYN street may have three medically trained citizens living on it and another MYN street may have two structural engineers. When an emergency such as earthquake strikes, after each MYN street has ensured its initial stability, residents can begin to communicate with other nearby streets to assess their needs. Being able to swap a nurse for a structural engineer greatly benefits both locations.

A silver lining to the dramatic increase in the number of recent natural disasters is the opportunity to talk about

preparedness with our neighbors. These MYN conversations—while serious and based on real, dire emergencies—can also be made fun and interesting.

We've found a seasonal party (for instance, celebrating winter holidays) to be a great mechanism for gathering neighbors to discuss MYN principles. They form the basis for deeper relationships, community-enhancing group projects, and more resilient homes and neighborhoods.

One of Dr. Johnson's steps in the MYN process is to list the tools and equipment you have that may be useful in an emergency. But there is no need for that list to be reserved only for times of emergencies.

Those tools can be used on a regular basis to create a more beautiful and attractive place to live; turning the vacant lot on your street into an urban vegetable garden; building an Amish-style barn-raising project for the widow in the condo unit next door; completing an earthquake-proofing weekend for your apartment complex; sweeping through homes in a conversation-filled party to bolt all heavy furniture to the walls; creating that shared rainwater harvesting system for your apartment building's rooftop garden.

Now imagine that you have an entire community organized under the MYN principles and the sustainability-related projects have begun. Neighbors are talking to neighbors more than they're talking to Facebook friends. Mobile apps on our smartphones are encouraging the gifting and barter of services and foodstuffs within our "walksheds" (the area within walking

distance of our home). More time is being spent in our specific neighborhoods with less time spent running errands in our cars. We're well on our way to creating a more livable and vibrant town!

First Steps

The neighborhood is where we can build lasting resilience and will be the focus of this conversation to help North American citizens move further along the sustainability continuum together, toward a more resilient (and bright!) future. At some point in the reading of these chapters, you may feel a sense of despair or find yourself feeling a bit overwhelmed. That would mean you are 100% normal!

Most of the projects we'll cover are simply a series of small, doable step. Completing this quick action will help you avoid or shed any feelings of guilt that may arise of not having tackled the larger topic of preparedness earlier. The fact that you are reading this book now is a significant first step towards becoming more prepared!

Moving your reality from Point A (where you are today) to Point B (where you want yourself, your neighborhood, and your community to be) can be a multi-year process that may seem daunting at first glance. But you've already taken the first step (reading this book) and are likely further down the preparedness road than you realize. It is important to recognize that it is never too late to start the preparedness projects that you'll read about

in the coming chapters. Starting with small projects from each chapter is a proven method to build quick successes that “snowball” into a significant positive change in your life as well as those around you.

To get started, consider beginning with this three-step process before you jump into the next chapter:

1. Set an intention to live a resilient life in a prepared neighborhood, making the creation of this life and neighborhood a priority in your life.

2. Carve out time in your busy schedule to begin daily/weekly work on this intention, starting with the completion of this book.

3. Make a public commitment to begin (or continue with renewed vigor) on this path. Studies show that a commitment made known to others—through email, social media, or verbally—has a significantly higher probability of being reached. When you reach that milestone, be sure to circle back with those same folks to whom you made the public commitment and celebrate it together! As you can see, we’ve got a lot of fun work to do with friends and neighbors. So let’s get going!
