

# ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS





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## Episode #104

## Survivalism

5th Nov, 2020

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Survivalism, or Prepping, the idea or [mindset](#)<sup>1</sup> that the world is unstable, unpredictable, and that we should all be prepared for what happens when things go wrong.

[00:00:40] It's actually a request from an awesome member of Leonardo English, a German lady living in Italy called Marlene, so thanks for the idea Marlene, I hope you enjoy it.

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<sup>1</sup> a way of thinking

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[00:00:51] Before we get right into the wonderful topic of survivalism though, if you're not yet a member of Leonardo English let me quickly remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus the subtitles, the transcript, and the key vocabulary for this episode and all of the other ones over on the website, which is [leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:12] Becoming a member of Leonardo English not only gives you access to all of the learning materials, but it means joining a community of curious minds from all over the world, doing meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally, improving their English in a more interesting way, and of course you can do stuff like request episodes, like Marlene did.

[00:01:34] So if that's of interest, and I certainly hope it is, then the place to go to is [leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:42] OK then, Survivalism, or Prepping.

[00:01:46] On an administrative note, I'll use these two words [interchangeably](#)<sup>2</sup> “Survivalism” and “Prepping” - they mean the same thing.

[00:01:55] What we're going to do in today's episode is first define exactly what it is, how it works, where this idea originated from, how the events of 2020 have changed public [perceptions](#)<sup>3</sup> towards it, and why it's the United States, instead of any other country, that is the Survivalism capital of the world..

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<sup>2</sup> things that are interchangeable can be used instead of each other

<sup>3</sup> beliefs or opinions

[00:02:19] So, what is survivalism?

[00:02:22] At its core it's the idea that the world we live in is unstable, that there is the probability that something will happen that will make our normal lives not [feasible](#)<sup>4</sup> anymore, and that we should prepare for this event in order to survive.

[00:02:40] The kind of events that might cause this vary greatly - from a collapse in the financial system to a global pandemic, from a nuclear war to a series of large earthquakes.

[00:02:55] The results of this potential event could be devastating: food and water [shortages](#)<sup>5</sup>, power [shortages](#), civil war, and anything in between. And survivalists want to be prepared for this situation far in advance.

[00:03:14] Now, the term survivalist, or prepper is generally used to group a very wide range of people together, and stick a label on them.

[00:03:25] But there is a huge variety, a huge difference in attitudes between different types of survivalists, and the line between who is a survivalist and who isn't is unclear.

[00:03:39] There are people who like to always have a few weeks or months extra food supplies in their cupboards 'just in case', and there are people who invest millions of

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<sup>4</sup> able to be done, possible

<sup>5</sup> situations where there isn't enough of something

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dollars in underground [bunkers](#)<sup>6</sup>, shelters under the ground, that are [kitted out](#)<sup>7</sup> with bullet-proof windows and assault weapons for when a civil war breaks out.

[00:04:02] Clearly it doesn't make a huge amount of sense to give these two people the same name, but this is just to illustrate that there's a big variety in the world of survivalists.

[00:04:15] While you could reasonably say that the idea of [stockpiling](#)<sup>8</sup> supplies, of building up reserves of supplies, in case it's not so easy to get them anymore is as old as humans are, the idea of survivalism, or prepping really comes down to the idea that the reason that it's going to be difficult to get these supplies is due to some large collapse in the way society works.

[00:04:44] Not just that your supermarket has run out of a particular kind of tomato sauce you like or that you don't like running out of sugar.

[00:04:53] The idea really started to emerge in the 1960s, in America.

[00:04:58] It was started during the Cold War, when there was the very real threat that the US and the Soviet Union might start firing nuclear weapons at each other, that there would be some kind of nuclear winter, food, water and power supplies would break down, and society as we knew it would collapse.

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<sup>6</sup> shelters, usually underground, to protect the people inside

<sup>7</sup> provided with the necessary equipment

<sup>8</sup> building a supply of goods (for future use)

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[00:05:21] People started to [stockpile](#) the supplies that they would need to survive in this new world, from food and water to weapons to defend their land, family and possessions from other people who weren't quite so prepared.

[00:05:37] Survivalism isn't just about having extra food and water though. It's also the idea that humans should be more prepared from the point of view of knowing how to survive than we currently are.

[00:05:54] From knowing how to do stuff like start a fire to build a shelter, from knowing how to grow [crops](#)<sup>9</sup> to how to treat common injuries, survivalism is this idea that we should be more [self-sufficient](#)<sup>10</sup>, because in the event of a collapse of society, there won't be anyone else to turn to to help you with this. You need to know how to do it yourself.

[00:06:22] Starting from the 1960s there was also an increasing lack of trust in the US government to keep society [ticking over](#)<sup>11</sup>, to keep it going.

[00:06:32] There were the oil crises in the 1970s, which made people realise that it wasn't [written in stone](#)<sup>12</sup> that Americans could have a constant flow of cheap fuel.

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<sup>9</sup> a plant grown for food

<sup>10</sup> able to provide for yourself without the help of others

<sup>11</sup> continues working without input

<sup>12</sup> if something is written in stone, it does not change

[00:06:44] Then in the 1980s, as inflation increased and hit almost 15% there was an increasing belief that the [monetary<sup>13</sup>](#) system, the financial system, could collapse and that all of the paper dollars that you had in the bank would become completely worthless.

[00:07:05] Just as a reminder, if inflation is at 15% every year this means that your money is worth 15% less every year, and if that continues, well there's soon going to be a collapse in trust in the financial system.

[00:07:21] Evidently, if you believed that this was a probable scenario, then it made sense to get prepared for it by getting your supplies ready, and doing stuff like buying gold, which isn't tied to the monetary system.

[00:07:37] And as the years went by, there were more and more events that made the already cautious even more likely to believe that they needed to get prepared.

[00:07:48] There was the millennium bug, the idea that when the clocks went from 23.59 on the 31st of December 1999 to midnight on the 1st of January 2000 there were going to be huge [apocalyptic<sup>14</sup>](#) events.

[00:08:03] Then the Twin Towers attack of 2001, the financial crisis of 2007, the Ebola outbreak of 2014, and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

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<sup>13</sup> related to the money in a country

<sup>14</sup> connected with the final destruction of the world

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[00:08:17] Until recently, survivalists, or preppers were a group that it was easy to [ridicule](#)<sup>15</sup>, and indeed there were lots of articles, documentaries and TV shows that followed survivalists around and generally [poked fun](#)<sup>16</sup> at them.

[00:08:34] There was a show called [Doomsday](#)<sup>17</sup> Preppers on National Geographic that went on for 4 seasons, from 2012 to 2014.

[00:08:44] It told the stories of people who had taken what seemed to most people then as incredibly extreme measures - from spending millions of dollars on creating [airtight](#)<sup>18</sup> [fortresses](#)<sup>19</sup> to live in to keeping bags full of gold in the event of a [meltdown](#)<sup>20</sup> of the global financial system.

[00:09:07] These kinds of shows [shone a light](#)<sup>21</sup> onto what a big business survivalism, or prepping, had become. In 2013 it's estimated that Americans spent \$400 million a year just on survival foods, and 20% of Americans had spent money on survival materials that year.

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<sup>15</sup> make fun of

<sup>16</sup> made fun of

<sup>17</sup> the end of the world

<sup>18</sup> completely closed so no air can come in

<sup>19</sup> large, strong, building

<sup>20</sup> complete collapse

<sup>21</sup> helped explain (something)



[00:09:31] Prepping was also for all levels of society. There was the firefighter from New York who kept a cupboard full of emergency gear for his family to the Silicon Valley billionaires who had bought up multi-million dollar apartments in a converted US [missile silo<sup>22</sup>](#) in Kansas.

[00:09:53] To a lot of people, though, it seemed ridiculous.

[00:09:57] This was the 21st century, in a world where you could order something on the internet and it would arrive on your doorstep half an hour later, where you could stream a video in milliseconds, of course you had running water and electricity.

[00:10:14] Wasn't it a bit mad to think that this could all collapse in an instant?

[00:10:20] Then, in March of 2020, after the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, and businesses, shops and offices in entire cities across large parts of the world closed, the fact that there could be an unexpected event that would [disrupt<sup>23</sup>](#) the [status quo<sup>24</sup>](#) suddenly didn't seem quite so mad.

[00:10:44] As supermarkets started to run out of things like toilet paper and pasta, the person who had been quietly buying toilet paper and food supplies for the past 5 years suddenly seemed quite smart.

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<sup>22</sup> a large structure under the ground from where missiles can be fired

<sup>23</sup> prevent from continuing as normal

<sup>24</sup> the present situation

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[00:10:59] Indeed, there's a scene in the documentary I mentioned earlier, [Doomsday Preppers](#), which focuses on an American mother who is talking about her fear of a huge pandemic, and talking about her supplies of protective equipment and N95 masks for her children.

[00:11:18] No doubt the objective of the documentary was to [paint](#)<sup>25</sup> her as a [madwoman](#)<sup>26</sup>, [overcome](#)<sup>27</sup> by fear of an event that could just never happen, and then less than 10 years later, I'm sure those N95 masks and protective equipment did come in quite [handy](#)<sup>28</sup>.

[00:11:39] Searches for 'preppers' on Google went up by 10 times in the week after the WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic, and suddenly everyone was a prepper.

[00:11:51] Or rather, they weren't really a prepper, because you can't really 'prepare' for something if it's already happening, but at least everyone was trying to do what these preppers, these survivalists, had been doing for years.

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<sup>25</sup> describe, portray

<sup>26</sup> a woman who is mad / crazy

<sup>27</sup> if you are overcome by a feeling, you can't continue your normal life without thinking about it

<sup>28</sup> useful

[00:12:06] The events of 2020 have certainly shown that there are things that come completely [out of the blue](#)<sup>29</sup>, and that being prepared, within reason of course, probably is no bad thing.

[00:12:21] This doesn't mean that everyone needs to have a bag prepared with emergencies and a special [bunker](#)<sup>30</sup> in the countryside, but it has certainly made a lot of people more aware of how fragile a lot of our supply networks are, and how interconnected everything is.

[00:12:40] One of the theories about why prepping, or survivalism, is particularly popular with the Silicon Valley [elite](#)<sup>31</sup> is that they have seen [firsthand](#)<sup>32</sup> quite how fragile a lot of these systems are, and how technology powers literally everything that we do.

[00:13:00] Whether it's [regulating](#)<sup>33</sup> the temperature of a truck containing milk, or directing someone carrying blood between hospitals, managing financial transactions across borders, or [regulating](#) the cooling of a nuclear reactor, just one thing going

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<sup>29</sup> completely unexpected

<sup>30</sup> a shelter, usually underground, to protect the people inside

<sup>31</sup> the richest, most powerful in society

<sup>32</sup> if you experience something firsthand, you experience it for yourself

<sup>33</sup> controlling

wrong can have disastrous consequences, and even though the risk of an event happening may be small, the impact is [disproportionately](#)<sup>34</sup> large.

[00:13:30] Peter Thiel, the secretive billionaire founder of Paypal, and another secretive company, Palantir, which we actually did an episode on back in February, is a famous prepper who owns a large amount of land in New Zealand, he once declared that freedom and democracy are no longer compatible.

[00:13:52] Indeed, while the original reasons to push people towards survivalism, towards prepping, were about more external threats - the threat of nuclear war or a financial meltdown - a lot of current thinking around prepping is more around the idea that society is going to destroy itself from within, that we will do this to ourselves.

[00:14:17] From inequality through to climate change, from deep [fractures](#)<sup>35</sup> in democracies through to the increasing automation of work that some people believe will cause society to split indefinitely into those that own the robots and those who have been replaced by robots, the reasons that people are turning to survivalism are very different to what they were 60 years ago.

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<sup>34</sup> in a way that is too large or too small when compared to something else

<sup>35</sup> breaks



## Survivalism

[00:14:44] Prepping, or Survivalism, is becoming more popular outside the States too.

The pandemic has, of course, affected almost every country in the world, and

underlined<sup>36</sup> the fragility of society.

[00:14:58] But America is still the true home of prepping, and where survivalism is most popular.

[00:15:05] It's interesting to think a little about why this is, and I think there are some unique aspects to the American story that have caused this idea to be so comparatively popular in America.

[00:15:19] Firstly, the United States is a relatively new country, especially compared to those of us in Europe.

[00:15:27] Although there has always been this idea of American superiority, that the United States was created to be a better version of Europe, there is this feeling that it could all come crumbling down<sup>37</sup> and that every American has a duty<sup>38</sup> to protect it.

[00:15:45] Secondly, the fact that America is just so much bigger in terms of geography than most other countries and much richer makes it a lot easier to be a survivalist.

Whether it's a question of buying some land and putting a bunker on it, or just having an extra cupboard to store your food in, that's a lot easier if you live in a country with 35

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<sup>36</sup> shown

<sup>37</sup> falling down

<sup>38</sup> something that you have to do

people per square kilometre than if you live in a country like I do, Malta, with a population density of 1,200 people per square kilometre.

[00:16:19] [It's all well and good](#)<sup>39</sup> saying that people should have a [spare](#)<sup>40</sup> cupboard with food and water for a few months, but try saying that to someone living in a flat in a European city. It's not quite so easy, even if they wanted to.

[00:16:34] And thirdly, trust in government is much lower in the US than in most countries. Just 33% of US citizens say that they have confidence in the national government vs 59% in Germany, 62% in Canada, and 82% in Switzerland.

[00:16:55] If you don't trust the government to provide for you in times of need, well a logical next step is to make sure that you can provide for yourself.

[00:17:05] So the United States remains the world capital of prepping. The numbers I gave earlier, that 20% of Americans had spent money on survival equipment and they spent \$400 million a year on survival food, they were from 2013, 7 years before COVID-19, so no doubt these will be much, much higher now.

[00:17:29] So that is it for the world of prepping, the world of survivalism.

[00:17:35] Luckily for everyone, at least in terms of our entire society collapsing, food, water and power supplies being exhausted and people fighting with their neighbours

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<sup>39</sup> used to say that something may be ok, but it has disadvantages

<sup>40</sup> extra

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over who gets to eat the last [sewer](#)<sup>41</sup> rat, COVID-19 hasn't been as bad as survivalists' worst fears, it hasn't been a complete global [apocalypse](#)<sup>42</sup>.

[00:17:57] But one thing that we can probably all take from the mentality of a prepper, from a survivalist, is that having some extra toilet paper 'just in case' is probably not a bad idea indeed.

[00:18:11] OK then, that is it for today's episode on Survivalism, on Prepping.

[00:18:17] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:18:21] It is a weird, mysterious world, but as always, it's quite interesting, and I think there's quite a bit that we can learn from it.

[00:18:30] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode. You can head right in to our community forum, which is at [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com) and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:18:42] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, and to unlock the transcripts, subtitles, and key vocabulary, and start requesting episodes like Marlene did, then the place to go to is [leonardoenglish.com](https://leonardoenglish.com)

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<sup>41</sup> a large pipe, normally underground, used to carry away waste water from buildings

<sup>42</sup> the end of the world

**English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #104**  
**Survivalism**

[00:19:03] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo  
English

[00:19:08] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

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## Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Mindset	a way of thinking
Interchangeably	things that are interchangeable can be used instead of each other
Perceptions	beliefs or opinions
Feasible	able to be done, possible
Shortages	situations where there isn't enough of something
Bunkers	shelters, usually underground, to protect the people inside
Kitted out	provided with the necessary equipment
Stockpiling	building a supply of goods (for future use)
Crops	a plant grown for food
Self-sufficient	able to provide for yourself without the help of others
Ticking over	continues working without input
Written in stone	if something is written in stone, it does not change
Monetary	related to the money in a country
Apocalyptic	connected with the final destruction of the world
Ridicule	make fun of

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<b>Poked fun</b>	made fun of
<b>Doomsday</b>	the end of the world
<b>Airtight</b>	completely closed so no air can come in
<b>Fortresses</b>	large, strong, building
<b>Meltdown</b>	complete collapse
<b>Shone a light</b>	helped explain (something)
<b>Missile silo</b>	a large structure under the ground from where missiles can be fired
<b>Disrupt</b>	prevent from continuing as normal
<b>Status quo</b>	the present situation
<b>Paint</b>	describe, portray
<b>Madwoman</b>	a woman who is mad / crazy
<b>Overcome</b>	if you are overcome by a feeling, you can't continue your normal life without thinking about it
<b>Handy</b>	useful
<b>Out of the blue</b>	completely unexpected
<b>Bunker</b>	a shelter, usually underground, to protect the people inside
<b>Elite</b>	the richest, most powerful in society
<b>Firsthand</b>	if you experience something firsthand, you experience it for yourself
<b>Regulating</b>	controlling

## Survivalism

**Disproportionately** in a way that is too large or too small when compared to something else

**Fractures** breaks

**Underlined** shown

**Crumbling down** falling down

**Duty** something that you have to do

**It's all well and good** used to say that something may be ok, but it has disadvantages

**Spare** extra

**Sewer** a large pipe, normally underground, used to carry away waste water from buildings

**Apocalypse** the end of the world

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*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com)*