

Christian HealthCare

NEWSLETTER

MEMBER LETTERS:

**I can feel the prayers
and see God working**

I'm so grateful for Samaritan members who are committed to pray for me. I can feel the prayers and see God working in my healing journey as I continue to get better every day.

I'm also working on improving my diet and lifestyle patterns, and I see God working in every area of my life.

With everything going on in the world right now with the coronavirus, it is sometimes difficult to see how things will work out, but we should continue to hope in Him Who has the power to provide for every need.

Thank you to the Samaritan staff for making this health care option possible and supporting me in my efforts to get to the bottom of my health care issue. God bless you.

He is risen!

*Julia
Iowa*

Corona cannot prevail against Her

by David Mathis

These may be unprecedented days in our lifetimes, but they are not unprecedented in the life of the Church.

The Church has endured such suffering and uncertainty before, and much worse, just by way of pandemic, not to mention persecution. In days like these, and in every season of our lives, we do well to remember the certainty and centrality of the Church in the care of the living Christ.

To be clear, this is not a word about being the Church in the coronavirus age. This is the Church's age, not a virus's. The Church will not pass. Coronavirus will.

And this is our Father's world. This is Christ's world. And as his Bride, this is indeed, in real measure, the Church's world. Not the news media's. Not the epidemiologists' and statisticians'. Not the economists' and politicians'. The Church will endure these days, and outlive this trial, and be stronger because of the footnote that is our present distress.

Main story in the world today

The main news happening in the world right now does not concern data about the spread, or the economy and the stimulus and the free money coming your way. The main news is the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—and the Church is the bearer of that Good News to the world. Jesus Christ, with all authority in heaven and on

earth, is building His Church (Matthew 16:18). Not even the gates of hell hold back the final advance of His Church, much less temporary panic and financial freefall.

Not that Christians won't get sick, and some die. Some already have. And not that particular local Churches won't go belly up. Some will. Some are. Some local Churches have closed doors that will not open again. But the global Church stands unassailable, under no genuine threat, and will be stronger than before.

The story of the global Church, as seemingly isolated Christians text and call and video chat and learn anew how to care for each other, and for our towns and cities, is the main thing happening in the world right now. Neither

Continued on page 12

In This Issue...

- 3 **Coronavirus is deregulating health care**
- 4 **Board Member Spotlight:** Jim Taggart
- 6 **Missing the ordinary means of grace**
- 7 **Trusting in the Lord during uncertainty**
- 8 **Book Excerpt:** *How God has protected our freedom to share*
- 10 **7 ways to boost immune your system**
- 14 **Prayer for the Persecuted Church**
- 16 **The Doorpost:** Digging for the truth

CONTENTS

- 1 **Corona cannot prevail against Her**
by David Mathis
- 3 **Coronavirus is deregulating health care**
by Sally Pipes
- 4 **Board Member Spotlight**
Jim & Kelli Taggart
by Michael Miller
- 6 **Missing the ordinary means of grace during coronavirus**
by Tim Challies
- 7 **Trusting in the Lord during times of uncertainty**
by Dan Wilton and Rob Waldo
- 8 **Sharing the Burden Book Excerpt**
Stones of remembrance: How God has protected our freedom to share
by Michael Miller
- 10 **7 strategies to boost your immune system**
by member Dr. David Jockers
- 14 **Prayer for the Persecuted Church**
- 16 **The Doorpost**
Digging for the truth
by Ray King

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The *Christian Health Care Newsletter* is published monthly by Samaritan Ministries International, a 501(c)(3) charity. Subscriptions to the *Christian Health Care Newsletter* are available to non-members for a suggested donation of \$12 per year. The information provided is for educational purposes and is not meant as medical advice.

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Sharing Summary from April

Shares:	\$30,079,595	Personalized prayer requests of the members with Needs are in the Prayer Guide. Please use your version of the Prayer Guide to support the members assigned to you.
Needs:	\$30,069,271	
In Negotiation:	\$8,579,309	
New Needs:	4,553	
Total Needs:	9,466	
New Rewards:	271	Member Households: 82,508 (as of 3/24/20)
Miscarriages:	19	
Final Rewards:	17	

Contact Us: 877-764-2426 **Dash.SamaritanMinistries.org**

Questions about?

- Your medical need
- Shares you are sending or receiving
- Your membership

Email

- needs@samaritanministries.org
- membership@samaritanministries.org
- membership@samaritanministries.org

Phone Menu

- 1 - 1
- 1 - 3
- 1 - 4



Health Resources

Have a Need? Use the Health Resources app on Dash.

- Compare quality and cost of health care services in your area using Healthcare Bluebook.
- Use MediBid to receive bids from doctors for tests or treatments you are seeking.
- Email a medical professional or call a nurse (free), or call a doctor who can write a prescription (\$25).
- Access discount tools for prescriptions and lab tests.

Remember:



SEND A NOTE—
Burdens can be lightened emotionally as we encourage one another in the Lord.



PAY YOUR SHARE—
Burdens can be lightened physically as we do our part to financially meet others' needs as they would in our time of need.



ALWAYS STAY ALERT IN PRAYER—
Burdens can be lightened spiritually as we unite to call upon the God of the impossible.

Coronavirus is deregulating health care: That's a good trend that should continue

by Sally Pipes

In response to the coronavirus outbreak, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has rolled back regulations on hospitals and health care providers.

Hospitals are no longer barred from treating COVID-19 patients in outpatient facilities. The feds are also freeing nurse practitioners, physician assistants and medical residents to provide more care on their own. CMS is even issuing waivers that allow hospitals to provide meals, laundry service and child care while health care personnel are working.

Apparently, it takes a pandemic for policymakers to acknowledge that so many of the rules they've put in place serve little purpose. This crisis-driven effort to slash government red tape not only will help our nation defeat COVID-19—it will yield a more efficient, higher-quality health care system post-pandemic.

CMS is only the latest government entity to go on a deregulatory kick. Earlier in March, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order that unwound years of health care labor market restrictions. It allows doctors educated at foreign medical schools to provide care without needing a license from the state. It permits respiratory therapists, physician assistants and nurses licensed in any state to practice in New York.

And it enables nurse practitioners and physician assistants “to provide medical services appropriate to their education, training and experience” without a doctor's supervision. New York is one of several states with “scope-of-practice” laws that prohib-

it nurse practitioners and physician assistants from writing prescriptions, diagnosing patients and more without approval from a physician.

Rules like these have long made little sense. Both nurse practitioners and physician assistants hold graduate degrees and advanced medical training. There are currently 290,000 nurse practitioners in the United States, nearly 90 percent of whom specialize in primary care. Physician assistants often serve as the primary provider at clinics in rural or underserved areas.

Scope-of-practice rules also limit the supply of care available to patients. That's problematic, given that the U.S. health care system was short on qualified personnel before the coronavirus hit. The federal government has designated nearly 7,600 Health Professional Shortage Areas across the country; the collective population of these areas is more than 77 million.

These shortages have been growing worse each year. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects that the United States will be short 122,000 doctors by 2032. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says the country needs over 200,000 additional nurses every year through 2026.

Empowering our existing crop of nurse practitioners, physician assistants and others can help narrow that shortage—and relieve the pressure the pandemic is putting on the health care system—in the short term. But, in the long term, policymakers must make it easier for people to enter the medical profession.

It takes longer to become a doctor in the United States than almost anywhere else in the world. After completing a four-year undergraduate degree, students must endure four years of medical school before embarking on residencies and fellowships. All told, this process can cost close to \$400,000. This long and expensive process discourages many promising young people from entering the medical profession altogether.

It doesn't need to be this way. Students in many European countries can earn a medical degree in a single, six-year program. Austrians and Swedes can complete their medical training even faster. Perhaps that's why Sweden and Austria each boast more than five physicians per 1,000 people, compared to just over two per 1,000 in the United States.

In response to COVID-19, Harvard Medical School and New York University's Grossman School of Medicine have both given fourth-year students the option to graduate early. If America's top medical schools can truncate their programs in times of crisis, they should also be able to do so when things return to normal.

Not much good can come from a pandemic. A less regulated, more effective health care workforce may be one of the few positives. ♦

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Sally Pipes is the President of the Pacific Research Institute. Her latest book is False Premise, False Promise: The Disastrous Reality of Medicare for All. Follow her on Twitter @sallypipes.

Jim & Kelli Taggart: Board Developer & Gaderian Coffee

by Michael Miller

Jim Taggart is primed for serving on the Samaritan Ministries Board of Directors, because boards are where God has landed him for the past several years.

The most recently elected Director not only serves on or advises other boards, but one of the 54-year-old Phoenix resident's jobs is as chief operating officer of the company Board Developer.

"We do exactly what our name says—we create, develop, sustain, and grow advisory boards for companies, nonprofit or for-profit," Jim says.

That will help in his service to the SMI Board, he believes.

"I think seeing, participating, and

developing many boards and seeing those regularly gives me some of that outside input as I serve on the Samaritan Board," Jim says. "Once I am around here for a while and I see how our Board operates, there may be things from my everyday job that are applicable for the Samaritan Board."

The Samaritan experience will also allow Jim to serve the Body of Christ in yet another way, which has been one of his focuses for the past several years.

Although Jim had walked with the Lord for more than 25 years, it wasn't until 2000 that he felt the call to dive in for the Lord through missions. At a missions weekend at his church, a pastor asked how many there felt they were being called to long-term missions or to pray regularly for a missionary. Jim didn't raise his hand for either. But, when the pastor asked how many felt God leading them to go on a short-term missions trip, "I didn't raise my hand, but God sure did," Jim says.

"I mean, my hand just went straight up," he says. "I was like, 'Oh, my, what did I just commit to?'"

Jim ended up volunteering for a



men's ministry construction trip to Malaga, Spain.

"At that point was when God really developed a heart for missions in both Kelli and me," Jim says.

He led a mission trip for the church's choir and orchestra to Argentina and then a larger trip to Romania.

"I was the project manager for both of those trips, and, since that time, I've probably been on 20 other mission trips," he says, adding that Kelli has been on more than half a dozen as well.

One of the places they have frequently visited on mission trips has been Guatemala. Kelli connected with a family there, Nathan and Claudia Hardeman, who run Engadi Ministries (engadiministries.org). Jim has since become an advisor to Engadi's board of directors. The organization's mission "is to take the broken lives of kids in Guatemala City and help them reach their full potential in Christ and teach them



that there are other ways to be accepted besides in a gang.”

When plans by a U.S.-based business to help fund Engadi through the purchase of Guatemalan green coffee beans had to be put on hold, Jim and Kelli prayed about how they might be able to further help Engadi and other ministries. As a result, they felt led to start Gaderian Coffee (gaderiancoffee.com).

“The first reaction from Kelli was, ‘Neither of us drink coffee;’” Jim recalls. “I said, ‘I know, but that doesn’t mean God doesn’t want us to start a coffee business.’”

“We spent the next seven months or so learning the industry and, in July of 2019, sold our first bag of coffee. We sell specialty beans and grounds and single-serve pods, and we give the profits to ministries and missionaries that we personally know and support.”

One of Jim’s tasks in another business he’s a part of is advising startups, another experience that

dovetails nicely with the former startup he’s now a part of called Samaritan Ministries. He noted how he learned in the book *Sharing the*

I always look forward to meeting friends in new ministries and gleaning from their spiritual experience and business acumen.

Burden: The Samaritan Ministries Story (bit.ly/sharingburden) that SMI President and Founder Ted Pittenger was aware of the high failure rate of startups when he began Samaritan

in the early 1990s, understanding that with few families signed up the potential for failure was high with a large need.

“But he knew he had a differentiating product or service that he was offering and he believed that he was called by God to do it,” Jim says. “He was the wearer of a lot of hats initially and then somebody else would share a hat with him and that happened more and more, but over 25 years, you’ve seen the ministry grow from a fledgling startup with the possibility for failure to an established enterprise ... still with things out there that you have to navigate, but it matured.

“I always look forward to meeting and becoming colleagues and friends and brothers in new ministries and new organizations and truly gleaning from their spiritual and business influence or acumen or experiences,” he says. ♦

Why SMI?

Jim and Kelli Taggart first heard about Samaritan Ministries health care sharing the way so many others do: from friends at church who are members and had been helped with Shares after a Need.

“We were looking for a cost savings compared to what we were paying for health insurance along with an upcoming rate increase, crazy high deductibles, and out-of-pocket expenses,” says Jim, a newly elected member of the Samaritan Board of Directors.

“We were not familiar with need-sharing ministries. We researched several organizations and decided to join Samaritan Ministries because of their beliefs, the need-sharing concept, membership process, solid reference from our friends, and cost savings.”

The friends’ son had been in a bicycling accident

that led to \$45,000 in bills before negotiations and discounts, and Samaritan members met the Need completely.

After joining, Jim himself had a road bicycle accident and saw the same response that his friends had. That has helped the Taggarts spread the Samaritan word themselves.

“Those two events and responses by the members of Samaritan Ministries have provided great references to the friends we’ve told about Samaritan,” Jim says.

“On the giving/sharing side, seeing a Need come across our computer every month keeps our eyes open that there are needs literally every day in our Christian community. And, we can help meet those Needs.” ♦

Missing the ordinary means of grace during coronavirus

by Tim Challies

Recent conversations with other Christians have shown that I'm not alone in carrying an unusual level of stress, fear, and anxiety. These are uncertain days and many of us are struggling through them in various ways. Some are feeling this struggle as a heavy emotional weight, some are feeling it as despondency or listlessness, some are feeling it physically as cold sweats or a tightening of the chest. And no wonder! We are quarantined within our homes, we are adapting to unwelcome new realities, we are setting new patterns, we are facing a future that is uncertain, we have no idea when or if we'll return to some semblance of normalcy. In the face of all this, perhaps it would be a surprise if we did not experience some anxiety and feel some measure of stress.

Thankfully, God knows this life will often be difficult, and in His grace He has provided what we need to endure all our trials. God sanctifies, strengthens, and sustains His people through means, through disciplines or habits. But which means? Christians have long referred to "the ordinary means of grace" and defined them as Word, prayer, and sacraments. Though God may extend His grace through other means, He promises He will extend it through these ones. It is as we

commit to these habits and practice these disciplines that God equips, strengthens, and assures His people.

A unique element of this pandemic is that it has forced Christians to stop meeting together. Consequently, some of the very means God has provided for our support and strengthening in dif-

As we feel the lack of corporate worship and the sacraments, I pray that this experience will provoke a longing within me and deep within the Church.

ficult times have been denied to us. It's not just our ordinary lives that have been disrupted, but also these ordinary means. And I can't help but wonder whether some of our anxiety, some of our stress and fear, is not because of what has been added to family, vocation, and life, but what has been taken away from fellowship. Never have these ordinary means of grace seemed so important; never have I missed them so much.

Here is how Ligon Duncan explains them and tells how they are tied to the local church. "These are the ordinances given by God with which spiritual life is nurtured. By ordinances we mean spiritual instruments of grace and growth in grace appointed by God in the Bible. So,

when we say ordinary means of grace-based ministry, we mean a ministry that focuses on doing the things God says are central to the spiritual health and growth of His people. Hence, the key things that the Church can do in order to help people know God and grow in their knowledge of God are: (1) emphasize the public reading and preaching of the Word; (2) emphasize the confirming efficacy of the sacraments; and (3) emphasize a life of prayer, especially expressed corporately in

the church."

While we are still able to participate in some of the means of grace individually and as households, it has been weeks since we have been able to enjoy all of them in the context of the local church gathering. Yet we know that we best grow in godliness in community, not in isolation. This is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (10:24-25). It is in Christian community that we read the Word and hear it preached (2 Timothy 4:2),

Continued on page 15

Trusting in the Lord during times of uncertainty

by Dan Wilton and Rob Waldo

Amidst the uncertainty of our world, the Scriptures remain a faithful and unchanging witness to the trustworthiness of God. We can have peace and hope as we heed God's wisdom and guidance through Scripture during these trying times:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths ...

Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

Proverbs 3:5-6, 25-26, ESV

It has been said that you can get good at whatever you practice—and so we all practice those things we desire to excel in. In Proverbs 3, Solomon desired for his son to get better at trusting in the LORD. To get better day by day in trusting in the LORD. He wanted his son to experience the abundant rewards of rightly-placed confidence.

Rightly placed confidence is placed in God, not in ourselves. That confidence can be nurtured and developed through disciplined practice—looking to and placing our hope and trust in God in whatever we may face each day. Our hearts learn to practice the melodies of trusting in God, and our ability to express that melody continues to become more beautiful and strong.

However, the opposite can also happen.

Interestingly, in Proverbs 3:26, the Hebrew word for confidence can also be translated as folly. Context is what determines which meaning is appropriate. From this context, we know the proper translation in this verse is “confidence.” Why? The LORD is where we set our trust, and as we trust Him—in the midst of quite troubling circumstances—we experience security in Him (“will keep your foot from being caught”).

Being ensnared, or having one's foot “caught,” is a way to describe unexpected calamity or hindrances that thwart God's purposes in our lives. This verse isn't stating that those who trust in God won't suffer or face the troubles of this life. Rather, this verse is a reminder that there is no trouble, no calamity, no terror, that can thwart God's purposes for us. With our confidence in God, our hearts can be at rest in Him in the midst of turmoil.

But trusting in ourselves is folly and can't and won't provide us that same peace. In fact, self-trust brings its own troubles. That same Hebrew word translated “confidence” in Proverbs 3:26 is used to describe the foolishness and shame of trusting in one's own wisdom (for example, Proverbs 3:35; 10:1, 26:5). As trusting in the LORD deepens our confidence in Him, conversely, trusting in ourselves grows our folly and multiplies our troubles.

COVID-19 is providing a kind of recital, where we and others are able to see and hear the melodies of what our hearts have been practicing. The notes will faithfully ring true to the reality of our confidence—

whether rightly placed in God or foolishly placed in ourselves.

While we all would likely wish we have practiced and developed a soaring melody of confidence in God, the truth is that we all have days, or weeks, or months where our melodies falter. Our practice is imperfect. We feel the shame and disappointment of misplaced confidence. If this recital has left you with those feelings, know there is mercy and hope in Christ! We practice this melody of trust every day, not just one time! This recital isn't your last chance to sit at the proverbial piano bench and honor God with your trust. And the beauty of the cross is that Jesus Christ takes our faltering melodies and transposes them into a glorious symphony that will resound through eternity. We were never meant to trust in our own abilities to practice these melodies in the first place.

If your melody has faltered, lift your eyes and heart to Jesus Christ once more. Place your confidence not in what you can do, but in what He has already done. Listen for the melody He's been singing. And join that.

May your confidence in our crucified and risen LORD abound, even as you suffer through this difficult season. May we all take the time to lift our voices and practice that beautiful melody of the Gospel in our worship and trust in Jesus Christ. ♦

Dan Wilton is Staff Support Manager at Samaritan Ministries and Chaplain with the Illinois Air National Guard.

Rob Waldo is Vice President of Member Services at Samaritan Ministries.

Stones of remembrance: How God protected our freedom to share

by Michael Miller

God's hand has been evident in preserving freedom for members of health care sharing ministries. This excerpt from Sharing the Burden: The Samaritan Ministries Story tells how the version of the Affordable Care Act that eventually become law had an exemption for health care sharing ministries, and how God watched over Samaritan Ministries during a crisis in Washington state.

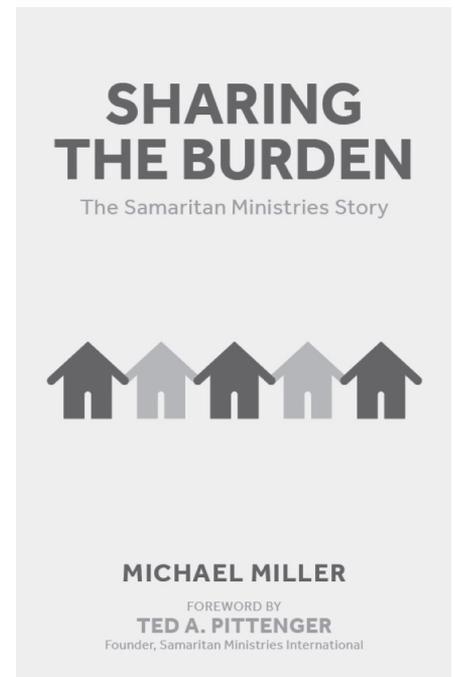
The House of Representatives outcome of November 7, 2009 (approving the health care bill) represented only half the battle. Action remained on the Senate bill, which included HCSCM exemption language. SMI staff and members continued fasting and praying the language would survive. God answered those prayers. On Christmas Eve 2009, the Senate bill passed 60–39 on a straight party-line vote. Even then, the battle continued. Success would come only if the bill that emerged from a conference committee retained the exemption language—far from a sure thing. It appeared intense negotiations lay ahead; among other things, the Senate bill lacked a “public option”—in essence, a government-run health insurance agency that would compete with privately owned agencies. Senator Joe Lieberman, an independent from Connecticut, had threatened to block a vote on any health care bill that contained a public option. The House bill included this option, a long-standing dream of liberal backers of health care reform.

Reconciling the two bills lay in murky, uncertain waters.

The question became moot on January 19, 2010, when Massachusetts voters surprised the nation. Despite their liberal bent, voters chose Republican Scott Brown to fill the Senate seat left vacant the previous August by Senator Ted Kennedy's death. While leaning left on certain social issues, Brown had vowed to oppose the health care bill, which in some ways was to serve as the crowning achievement of Kennedy's career. The Senate bill had come out of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, which Kennedy had chaired for many years. Not surprisingly, the bill contained language favored by Kennedy. But with Brown's upset election over Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley, the Democrats lost the 60 sure votes they needed to end filibusters.

That meant Democrats who backed one of the differing bills passed by the House and Senate had to find another way to get a bill to President Obama's desk. They managed through a parliamentary maneuver. After abandoning a “deem-and-pass” strategy, in which House majority leadership would have “deemed” the Senate bill to have passed without an actual vote, Democrats settled on a “reconciliation” approach.

On March 21, 2010, the House voted 220–211 to pass, in essence, the Senate bill. The legislation survived only after liberal Democrats gave up their insistence on a government-funded public option,



and after pro-life Democrats, led by Representative Bart Stupak of Michigan, gained President Obama's assurances that the health care bill would not provide government funding of abortions. Pro-lifers called Obama's executive order to implement that promise “useless,” because executive orders cannot override a law, and any president can change an executive order at any time.

So, two days later, Barack Obama signed a form of the law he had sought for a year, albeit a flawed version. The results were bittersweet for Samaritan, too. The exemption from the individual insurance mandate stayed alive thanks to much prayer, fasting, and effort. It also survived thanks to the parliamentary maneuvering that prohibited House members from offering amendments to the Senate bill. That meant the

exemption—buried deep inside the 2,400-page legislation—couldn't get stripped away. Although Christians could continue to share each other's health care burdens, Congress had passed a law that would make obtaining quality, reasonably priced health care more difficult for most Americans.

Another memorial stone put in place

The inclusion of an exemption for HCSM members in the Affordable Care Act isn't the only example of God reminding Samaritan Ministries of His involvement in the ministry's efforts.

Samaritan attorney Brian Heller calls God's intervention in these situations, each of which could have sunk or seriously harmed Samaritan, "memorial stones." Such markers reflect God's command to each leader of the tribes of Israel to place a stone from the Jordan at the lodging place near where God stopped the waters for Israel to cross the river (Joshua 4:1-7).

One stone, Brian believes, was the avoidance of any over-whelming needs in SMI's early days. Another was securing for HCSM members an exemption from Massachusetts' health care mandate, followed by the federal exemption.

A fourth stone started rolling on April Fool's Day 2011. The state of Washington suddenly imposed a cease-and-desist order (CDO) on Samaritan Ministries, demanding a halt to any needs-sharing activities involving their residents. The state's Insurance Commission took the action after hearing about Samaritan from a television news crew. Ironically, not one Washingtonian had

ever filed a complaint about SMI.

"It so came out of the blue," Ted Pittenger said. "When other states would ask us, 'What are you guys doing?' we'd send them information about the ministry and never hear from them again. Washington didn't even call us.

Three days later, the ministry emailed all members living in Washington to inform them about the order, ask for prayer, and appeal for any information that would help SMI respond effectively.

A reaction came quickly.

The next morning's responses from members included one from Jeff Baxter, who had been appointed as a state senator just four weeks before Washington issued its CDO. Another came from a longtime political strategist and lobbyist named Doug Simpson. "By coincidence," Simpson would be at the Washington State Capitol in Olympia that month to lobby for an unrelated bill. Both Baxter and Simpson helped with the goal of a legislative solution to avoid expensive litigation.

As Ray King wrote in the June 2011 newsletter, "God's timing is perfect." Further evidence of that came in the form of a bill backed by the state's insurance commissioner—whose office had issued the CDO—to coordinate Washington's health care laws with new federal bills. The state's upper chamber had already passed the bill, and the lower chamber had undertaken amendments to the proposal. That same week in April, the Washington House passed an amendment to that health care bill, to which the insurance commissioner did not object. That amendment stated that health

care sharing ministries are not insurance, thereby exempting them from Insurance Commission regulations. The House returned the legislation to the Senate, which also passed it. Governor Chris Gregoire signed the bill into law on May 11, just 40 days after regulators issued the CDO. Thanks to this divine timing, Samaritan members in Washington didn't miss a beat in sharing Needs for April or May.

"In the end it is amazing to us that an effort to restrict health care sharing actually resulted in greater protection for the ministry in a state where we were not seeking such protection," Ray wrote.

Fascinated with the process taking exactly 40 days, Ted Pittenger couldn't help thinking of a saying he heard several years earlier: "Forty, but 41's coming." Forty, of course, is a common Biblical number: The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness; Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai when receiving the Torah; Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days at the beginning of His ministry. Thus, the idea that 40 symbolizes a time of preparation, "but 41's coming." Ted even applied that to the timing of Samaritan's blossoming as a ministry. He reached 40 years of age in 1995, when Samaritan's future was in doubt, but after turning 41 the next year, membership rose, and the future looked bright. ♦

Look for more from Sharing the Burden: The Samaritan Ministries Story in coming months. Get your copy at bit.ly/sharingtheburden.

7 strategies to boost your immune system

by member Dr. David Jockers

Immune system health is extraordinarily important for all of us. We are surrounded by opportunistic organisms whose main responsibility is to break down decaying matter. If we don't take care of our body, we become that decaying matter and develop infection or chronic disease.

In this article, I will discuss how the immune system works and the most important strategies you can apply today to boost your immune system naturally.

Building your immune system

The immune system functions like a muscle. When our muscles are challenged with exercise, they adapt and grow stronger. When our immune system is challenged through mild levels of toxic and microorganism exposure, it gets stronger and more resilient:

- Example: Two people get exposed to the same virus; one person develops the flu while the other doesn't. What is the difference? The strength and maturity of the immune system.
- Hormesis:¹ Exposure to toxic substances and environmental challenges in small amounts is beneficial for the body. The basic biological trait is the organism's ability to resist and adapt appropriately to both internal and external stresses. The hallmark of aging is the organism's inability to withstand stress.
- Exercise allows us to better withstand physical and emotional stress so long as we allow proper recovery steps to rehydrate and refuel our bodies afterwards.²

- Meditation and prayer allows us to better withstand mental/emotional/spiritual stress.³
- Virulent exposure to challenges allows our immune system to mature and gain strength as long as we provide the necessary modulators for it to adapt appropriately.

Critical immune system modulators

There are certain things we all need to have good immune coordination. These nutrients are critical to overall health. You have heard of many of them, but the question is ... how is your body coordinating its immune function?

The key modulators include healthy gut flora, vitamin D, omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants and trace minerals, medium-chain fatty acids, a healthy nervous system, and good sleeping habits. As you read through these, decide which of these you may need to support more effectively.

Balanced gut flora

Our intestinal system and mucosal membranes (sinuses, respiratory tract, genitalia, etc.) are lined with billions of different bacterial colonies (we are a living bacterial hotel). Progenic bacteria work in symbiosis with us (help promote life), whereas pathogenic bacteria create toxic waste and promote disease in our body. These two forms of microorganisms compete for nutrients and thus work against each other.

A healthy ratio is 85 percent progenic, 15 percent pathogenic. When this ratio is skewed, it is called dys-

biosis, a condition that is extremely hazardous to our health and vastly impairs immune function.⁴ A high quality probiotic that contains soil-based organisms is a great addition to a natural health plan. One of the most clinically studied broad spectrum probiotics is SBO Probiotics, which is what I use and recommend.

Balanced fatty acid ratios

Several critical fatty acids (Omega 3: ALA, EPA, and DHA and Omega 6: LA and GLA) cannot be synthesized in normal human metabolism and thus must be derived through diet. These fats play an important role in the cell membrane and the receptor sites that bind hormones and neurotransmitters. They also form prostaglandins (intracellular hormones which play a role in cellular inflammation cycles).

The ideal ratio is 1:1 (Omega 6:3), however, the typical American diet is loaded with the Omega 6 variety due to the large impact of grains and vegetable oils, and therefore, most people are around a 16:1 ratio. This imbalance causes improper immune signaling, inflammation, and decreased immunological strength.⁵

Supplementing with EPA and DHA, provides the body with incredible neurological and immunological support.⁶ These powerful long-chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids balance the Omega 6:3 ratio and create an anti-inflammatory reaction in the body. This reaction helps to calm the immune system and keep it firing with the balance, synchrony and precision necessary for long-term health.

Vitamin D levels

Vitamin D has been shown to suppress most elements of the adaptive (inflammatory mediated) immune system while inducing most elements of the innate immune system.⁷

Thus, D3 prevents and effectively treats autoimmune diseases by suppressing adaptive immunity while enhancing the first line of defense against invading microorganisms by strengthening innate immunity.⁸ This same mechanism makes it a critical player in the battle to “never get sick again.”

Antioxidants & trace minerals

Foods rich in major antioxidants and trace minerals are key to healthy immune function.⁹ For super doses of the highest quality, choose fresh organic fruits and vegetables, grass-fed meats, and cage-free eggs.

Eat lots of green leafy veggies and those rich in color like red cabbage, red onions, peppers, etc. Be sure to use pink salts and lots of water as well for trace minerals and effective hydration. Add in a lot of herbs such as oregano, basil, thyme, ginger, cinnamon, and turmeric.

Herbs are super rich in antioxidants and have the highest Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC), which is a measure of antioxidant activity. These will support your immune system, help to fend off infections, and assist your body's self-regenerative abilities.

MCTs

Medium-chain triglycerides such as caprylic, myristic, and lauric acid are powerful immune stimulators.¹⁰ Lauric acid, which is found in abun-

dance within coconut oil, converts into “monolaurin,” which has powerful antiviral, antibacterial, and antifungal properties. Research has shown it has the ability to destroy lipid-coated viruses such as HIV, herpes, cytomegalovirus, influenza (flu), and various pathogenic bacteria.

In addition, these fatty acids do not circulate in the bloodstream like other fats, but are sent directly to the liver, where they are immediately converted into energy, just like carbohydrates. So the body uses the fat in coconut oil to produce energy rather than be stored as body fat. Three to 4 tablespoons of pure extra virgin coconut oil daily will rev up immunity and metabolism, allowing you to prevent illness and lose weight.

Healthy nervous system

Damage to the top of the neck (atlas/occiput junction) causes pressure on the brain stem, switching the body into a chronic sympathetic overdrive. This heightened fight/flight system causes a disruption in blood supply to the brain; trouble relaxing, concentrating, and sleeping; and decreased immune function.

Chronically, this condition can lead to inflammatory disorders such as asthma, allergies, sinus issues, headaches/migraines, frequent colds/flu, and cancer cell formation. Chiropractic adjustments take pressure off this region, allowing the power of life to recharge the body. Several studies have shown a 200 percent increase in circulating immunoglobulin levels over the following 24-36 hours after an adjustment.^{11, 12}

Balanced sleep cycles

With the absence of light, the body produces melatonin, which induces sleep. This hormone, made by the pineal gland, is also an instrumental player in modulating the immune system. Poor sleeping habits lead to immune malfunction, inflammatory disorders, frequent colds/flu, and other problems.¹³

The best sleeping habits—seven to eight hours a day, going to bed between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m.—brings about large growth hormone secretions and stimulates liver/gallbladder cleansing mechanisms. Getting to sleep by 11 p.m. during this critical time frame is a key to long-term health. ♦

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The information provided in this article is for educational purposes and is not meant as medical advice.

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CNN nor Fox is following the story. But God's work through Christ and now His Church is the first and greatest headline. In Christ, we are living the story that will be told, more than any other, for ages to come.

We are not only the audience and eyewitnesses, but also the participants. As we gather in living rooms to worship as families. As pastors and elders assemble over Zoom to take counsel and care for their scattered and physically dispersed flocks. As we open our Bibles with a hunger and thirst for substance and guidance like some haven't felt in a long time, or ever. As we bow our knees in our room, and bow our heads with the family. Our churches are being sifted, and some are being found wanting. But the Church is alive and well. Not just holding on, but growing in strength. Christ's Bride will be better for having endured these days.

Through the Church

Not only is the future of the global Church certain in the sovereign power of God through Christ, but His sovereign purposes in the world center, we might say, on His Church. The picture the apostle Paul paints in Ephesians 3 of the centrality of the Church in God's work in the world is nothing less than stunning: Christ channels His global glory uniquely through His Church.

God made him a minister of the Gospel, Paul writes, "to preach

to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" and "to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 3:8–10)

Neither CNN nor Fox is following the story. But God's work through Christ and now His Church is the first and greatest headline.

Did you catch that? God is making known His manifold wisdom, not just in the physical realm but also in the spiritual one—for all the universe to see. And how? Through the Church. Wherever else human heads may be turning, the angelic and demonic hosts are watching the Church. God is channeling His work in the world through His Church.

And not just one channel among others. The Church is the only channel mentioned here. Epidemiologists and economists have their part to play, but the main thing happening in the world right now, and at all times, is what Jesus Christ is doing in and through His Church.

In the Church

As God's people, united in Christ, we are part of that collective lens through which God is focusing his work in the world and for the very glory of His Son. Paul doesn't just

say it once. He comes back to it a few sentences later. He was not speaking imprecisely in verse 10. Don't try to explain it away. The point is just as plain, and striking, in one of the great blessings in all the Bible:

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20–21)

How is God—the One able to do far more than we can even dream—being glorified in our world today, and at this time? Stand in awe: in the Church and in Christ Jesus. Through Christ, seated in heaven, and through His Church, displaying Him around the world in every major city and advancing on every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. The Husband, who is the very image of God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4) and the focal point of God's glory in history, gave us, His Bride, His own Spirit that we might collectively image Him, and our Father, in this age.

This is the Church age

We are not the Church in the coronavirus age. We may be enduring a global pandemic, but we do so as the Church in the Church age. We are not now living in a pandemic age, or a digital age, or a pragmatic

age, or a whatever-new-thing-you-want-to-emphasize age. This is the Church age.

And Church is not simply another reality among others to swap in and out as an adjective for our times. Church is the adjective. This is what this age is. And in Christ, let's not let the mainstream media, or social streams, or our own forgetfulness lead us to think any differently.

As days disrupted turn to weeks, and weeks to months, let's be the Church to each other, as promised, in these precious days. And let's represent Christ, as the Church, to our neighbors. There's no Plan B. Christ doesn't need a Plan B. Quarantined hours invested in what it means to be the Church in such unusual days won't be in vain. Jesus will build His Church, however many congregations do not survive. The Church, every faithful member, will endure—and forever enjoy a new world without virus, disease, or any other ailment. The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's advancing Church.

Let's be the Church

As odd as it may seem, days like these, when we cannot gather in large numbers, are precisely why we don't simply attend but make promises to each other in the local Church.

This is why we have membership covenants. Not for the easy and comfortable seasons. Anyone can do convenient. But for the hardest and most challenging days. For the threatening times. For the uncertain and (seemingly) unprecedented seasons. For the times when shallow people curve inward, concerned only for their own safety and protection and remote productivity, instead of reaching out diligently

(and digitally) across the social distance to check in on others, get updates and pray, and, if needed, help with medications and supplies and groceries.

In marriage, we pledge ourselves for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in good times and in bad because those are the times when the objectivity of the covenant spreads its wings, gives life to our lives, and provides clear direction in our disoriented, confused, and subjective uncertainty. Objective covenants are for seasons of subjective confusion. This is one of those times.

The wind of these days may carry away much chaff. The tides are going out on the shallows. But Christ's Church will endure. And shine out all the clearer. Hard times are good days to be Christian. ♦

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*David Mathis is executive editor for desiringGod.org and pastor at Cities Church in Minneapolis/St. Paul. He is the author of *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*.*

I feel so very fortunate. I had two shoulder surgeries within 5 months, each for different reasons, and recovery has been trying most days. The prayers and blessings we receive from members of Samaritan Ministries everyday gives me new hope.

I can't begin to tell how many times my husband and I remind each other of how blessed we are to be part of Samaritan Ministries. We are so thankful for God's financial provision, especially during this time of crisis from the coronavirus.

*Chris & Brenda
Montana*

To God be the Glory! There's no other way to look at what is going on through Samaritan! He is doing marvelous things! I love sending my Shares! And I love to write notes to my brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage them! And what a privilege to pray and trust our good, good Father in all things! Thank you, Father, for Samaritan!

*Tammi
Iowa*

Initially my trust in the Christian community's ability to share each other's health care expenses was small, I hate to say. What a blessing it has been to have two of our Needs met, one for me and one for my husband. It is especially encouraging during this time of crisis, and my personal faith that God can provide however He chooses has grown.

Thank you, Samaritan Ministries staff, for all your work in making this possible.

*William & Karen
South Carolina*

Prayer for the Persecuted Church

Hebrews 13:3 tells us to “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” Our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. We need to remember them in prayer. Each month, we will provide updates and offer prayer points gleaned from a variety of sources. Please use them in your personal or group prayer time.

Christians accused of spreading COVID-19

Christians are being accused of bringing COVID-19 to Burkina Faso after a pastor and his wife returned from a conference in France and developed symptoms of the virus, VOM-Canada reports. This has resulted in an increase of persecution against Christians in the country. *Pray for healing for Christians around the world and all others who have contracted the virus, and that no group would be accused of spreading it.*

Indonesian church closed

A church in Central Java, Indonesia, was forced to close in February after objections to the building being used for worship, Voice of the Martyrs-Canada reports. The New Testament Christian Church was meeting on February 16 when protesters entered the building, demanding that services stop. After police arrived, the pastor was given permission to finish the service and meet with protesters later. After the meeting, the church was forced to close. *Pray for the faith*

of the members of New Testament Christian Church, for its leadership as they carry out their responsibilities, and for the spread of the Gospel in that area.

Pastor in India beaten

A pastor in southern India was badly injured March 1 when more than 150 radical Hindu nationalists broke into his church's worship service, verbally and physically assaulted worshippers, and destroyed instruments and furniture, International Christian Concern says. After punching and kicking Pastor Manju Keralli, the mob dragged him out of the meeting hall, tied him to a tree, and beat him further. The beatings continued for three hours, he said, before he was taken to a police station and verbally assaulted by officers for being Christian. The pastor was then charged under India's blasphemy law. He is now in hiding. *Pray for spiritual and physical healing for Pastor Keralli, especially in his back; for his attackers to know Jesus; and for charges against him to be dropped.*

Nepal pastor arrested

A pastor in Nepal was arrested March 23 after a video of him praying against the COVID-19 virus circulated on social media, ICC reports. Pastor Keshab Acharya was arrested after being lured to the house of an unknown man seeking prayer for his wife. Police officials told another pastor that Pastor Acharya was only taken into custody “for an inquiry.” *Pray for Pastor Acharya to be absolved of all charges and that his ministry will have a profound impact on those who encounter him.*

Christian convert sentenced

A 65-year-old Christian convert in Iran has been given an addi-

tional, two-year prison sentence for “membership of a group hostile to the regime,” ICC says. Ismaeil Maghrebinejad had earlier been sentenced to three years for “insulting Islamic sacred beliefs.” *Pray that Ismaeil will be freed from prison, especially during the spread of COVID-19 in Iranian prisons. Pray also that his faith in Christ will be strengthened because of his trials.*

10 Chinese churches closed

Ten Catholic churches in the diocese of Mindong in China were closed by the government in January for refusing to register with the state-sanctioned Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, ICC says. The official reason given for five of the closures was “substandard fire control measures.” Others had water and power supplies cut off to force closure. *Pray for freedom for all Chinese citizens to be able to worship in the way they choose and for churches that refuse to bow to the government to be blessed.*

India pastor attacked

A church leader in India was beaten and then run over by motorcycles on March 4, VOM-Canada reports. The attackers accused Pastor Isaac Paulose of Sehore of converting people to Christianity and threatened to kill him if he continued his ministry. *Pray for complete healing for Pastor Paulose and for the Lord to change the hearts of the attackers. Pray also for Pastor Paulose's outreach ministry.* ♦

For more on the persecuted church, contact International Christian Concern (persecution.org, 800-422-5441) or World Watch Monitor (worldwatchmonitor.org)

Missing the ordinary means of grace during coronavirus*Continued from page 6*

that we join our voices together in prayer (Acts 4:24), that we sing praises to God (Colossians 3:16), that we bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), speak truth to one another (Ephesians 4:25), and encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). It is here that we celebrate the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism, and here that we experience the blessings of church membership and the redemptive love of church discipline. Local church fellowship provides the context in which God pours out His sanctifying grace upon us and through us. It is a context which, for now, has been denied to us.

The Bible knows nothing of Christians who willfully separate themselves from Christian fellowship. Why? Because such people will inevitably wilt and perish. They cannot thrive or survive when they cut themselves off from the means God has appointed for His people. Yet at this strange moment in time, masses of Christians have been unwillingly separated from Christian fellowship. While we can be sure that God will not punish us for what is not our fault, we can also expect that we will begin to feel the lack of it. We will begin to feel the distance from the Body we have been joined to and the means we have been given. We were not meant to live out the Christian life alone and without hearing the Word read to us, without joining together in prayer, without teaching and admonishing one another by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, without watching baptisms, and without celebrating the Lord's Supper. The very means meant to sustain us in times like this are the means we cannot have.

So as I consider the stress and anxiety I feel deep within, and as I speak to others, I have been encouraging them as I've been encouraging myself, to understand that some of this must stem directly from what, in the providence of God, has been denied to us in this time. We should not expect to be without struggles when such important elements of our faith have been taken away by circumstances. I pray that this will provoke a longing within me and deep within the Church to return to fellowship so we can once again return to those precious means. I pray that when we can finally meet together again, and when we can once again pray and preach and sing and baptize and break bread, we will not fail to treasure these precious means which are so ordinary, so beautiful, and so necessary. ♦

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*Tim Challies is an elder at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, Ontario. He is the author of several books, including *The Disciplines of Spiritual Discernment* and *Epic: An Around the World Journey through Christian History*.*

COVID-19 has really made it tough for my wife, Kyle, as she continues to suffer from the effects of aneurysms and seizures. She cannot take pain medications and the social distancing has made it difficult for her to receive therapies.

We have had many members and family and friends praying for us, and God has provided two very special friends to give Kyle extra care. We don't know where we would be without them. Praise the Lord!

*Ed & Kyle
New Hampshire*

To have the bills shared for my ER visit for heart problems gives me great peace of mind at this time. Our God is so good. And it's wonderful to "meet" other Christians who are so encouraging through this ministry. In this crazy time of COVID-19 it helps me remember that God's got this!

*Debi
Colorado*

Receiving the cards, Shares, and especially the prayer has been a huge blessing in my life as I deal with skin cancer. I am very thankful that members were able to send their Shares even during this time of economic uncertainty. May the Lord bless them for their faithfulness. And bless you Samaritan staff for all that you are doing to facilitate this ministry during these trying times.

*Christine
Maine*

The one who
states his case first
seems right, until
the other comes and
examines him.

Proverbs 18:17

We should not automatically believe the first thing we are told, no matter how convincing it may seem. We should scrutinize what we are hearing to be sure it is accurate and complete.

Someone may tell us some facts, but leave out other facts, so the facts we are told do not lead us to the truth. Or it could even turn out that all their “facts” are not true.

Our adversary, the devil, is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). When someone lies to accomplish something, they are unknowingly or even knowingly carrying out the devil’s work, not God’s, no matter how noble their cause may seem. Some may even be deceived themselves and not realize that what they saying is a lie.

Those purposely trying to deceive us can be cunning and even very attractive (Genesis 3:1; II Corinthians 11:14-15). They will usually pretend that what they are saying or doing is right. They may even lie about their opponents.

Getting all sides of a story isn’t always easy, but it is necessary if we don’t want to be fooled into doing wrong. If we want to practice righteousness and bring glory to God, we need to ask God for wisdom and discernment and carefully examine what we hear.

For the Kingdom,



Ray King