

DECEMBER 2020

Christian Health Care Newsletter



David Nielsen

A Christmas message to the lonely and left-out

by Rob Waldo

LUKE 2:8 is an important passage of Scripture that mentions a group of shepherds who were dutifully caring for their flock. As shepherds, their life was simple, ordinary, mundane. They were tending their sheep at night, which meant that it was likely a warmer month since the sheep would bed down at night in the cooler months.

Picture the scene: the beautiful Judean countryside, countless stars, a warm stillness over the land, and the lights of Jerusalem within view. What a beautiful city at night! What a magnificent, awe-inspiring Temple they could see from the field!

In one sense, life was good. They had a simple life among God's chosen people. But I imagine life felt somewhat bittersweet, too.

Their proximity to Jerusalem meant that they may have been tending the Temple flocks raised for sacrifice. This is where it gets complicated.

Their work with sheep meant that they were outsiders to the religious

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Samaritan™
MINISTRIES

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What's on your bucket list?

Member Letters:

We are thankful for Samaritan in so many ways!

We feel that God truly gives us the feel of family—connecting us to one another as we send out Shares as well as receive Shares. The notes are such a blessing.

We are also thankful to be able to use doctors we choose and who aren't chosen for us. We like the option of being able to use a nutritionist and chiropractor for some situations and are so thankful for their deeper knowledge.

God has been with us and we truly feel Him leading us in this area.



Scott & Carol
PENNSYLVANIA



Sharing Summary | November 2020

NEEDS	MEMBER HOUSEHOLDS
\$26,218,385	80,843
SHARES	
\$29,199,791*	

*Due to the Lord providing more Shares than Needs, we were also able to share some December bills ahead of schedule.

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.
membership@samaritanministries.

PHONE MENU

1-1
1-2
1-3

Have a Need? Use the Health Resources App on Dash



- Compare quality and cost of health care services in your area using Healthcare Bluebook. Receive a \$250 reward when you submit a screenshot showing you chose a green fair-price provider.
- 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.

Send a note. Pay your share. Always stay alert in prayer.

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Win an original piece of fine art

As a way to do something special for our Samaritan Ministries community to celebrate Christmas, we're giving away over 100 pieces of handcrafted fine art by staffer Thomas Stegall.

To enter, *you need to be a member of our Facebook Group, Samaritan Ministries Community* (facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin).

For more details and the entry form, go to bit.ly/woodcarved and submit your information by noon CST December 8.



Member Spotlight

Eric Elder | Author, pianist, pastor

by Brittany Klaus

Member Eric Elder

TheRanch.org

[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/eric.elder.73) eric.elder.73

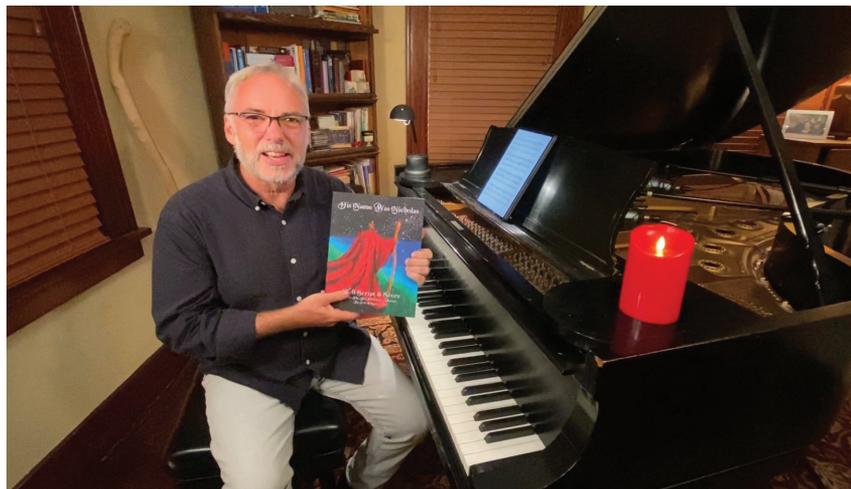
[YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/ericelder.com) ericelder.com

ERIC ELDER, THE AUTHOR of over 25 books as well as a pianist, speaker, and ordained pastor, is bringing the real-life story of St. Nicholas, the precursor of the modern-day Santa Claus, to the screen.

Eric and his late wife, Lana, spent several years researching St. Nicholas with the end goal of "pointing people to Jesus and giving families a new Christmas tradition."

First, their book *St. Nicholas: The Believer—A New Story for Christmas Based on the Old Story of St. Nicholas* was published in 2013. Five years later, a Christian dance company asked Eric's permission to turn the book into a ballet production. It turned out so well that Eric began planning to film the production, and *One Life: The Movie* was born. The hour-and-15-minute movie was released privately in November and will be available for public viewing through OneLifeBallet.com starting December 18. Finally, Eric recently published the musical *His Name Was Nicholas*, which is based on the life of St. Nicholas and includes the full script and score.

Eric also runs TheRanch.org, an online spiritual retreat center that he launched in the mid-1990s. The website offers daily devotionals,



Eric Elder with the script and score of *His Name Was Nicholas*

soothing music, Scripture readings, and a quiet place to pray. In addition, Eric is a tech expert, having worked for a Fortune 10 company for nine years before God called him into full-time ministry.

The Elders wanted to establish Christmas traditions that point to Jesus.

Twenty-five years ago, Eric and Lana were debating which Christmas traditions their young family should have. "We both became Christians just before we got engaged and married, and we were trying to decide whether we were going to include the Santa aspect and the gift-giving in it," Eric says. "We were pretty torn because we didn't want it to be materialistic, and we didn't want it to be secular, because we so much wanted to focus on Christ."

Lana knew the story of the real St. Nicholas, who lived in the fourth

century A.D., and, in the end, Eric says they chose to focus on the elements that were a celebration of Jesus, the greatest person ever born. "We did decide to go with the gift-giving and talking about St. Nicholas, why we give gifts, why he was important in the story, and his love for Jesus," Eric says.

Why St. Nicholas?

"St. Nicholas loved Jesus with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. And, when people know that, it changes their view of incorporating his story into the Christmas story," Eric says. "You don't have to choose between Santa or Jesus."

Lana wanted to share St. Nicholas' story with other families to help them "recapture the true spirit of Christmas and to focus on Jesus, as well as the celebration of it all," Eric says.

First, a book ...

Eric and Lana started researching St. Nicholas in depth, including traveling to the Holy Land to where St. Nicholas lived not far from Bethlehem. Eric also traveled to Turkey to St. Nicholas' birthplace and to London to speak with a preeminent scholar on St. Nicholas.

Their initial desire was to make a movie to share the story, Eric says, but eventually he and Lana took their research and began writing

a book as the "first step toward a movie to flesh out the story and make it compelling, made up of these individual stories that we do know about Nicholas."

In 2012, Lana finished her final edits on the book two weeks before she passed away after a nine-month battle with cancer. A year later, Eric published the book on Amazon and shared it with his online subscribers in a six-week series.

... then a ballet ...

In 2018, while Eric was working on turning the book into a musical that could be filmed, he was contacted by the South Carolina Christian Dance Theater. The director, Cynthia Dewar, had come across *St. Nicholas: The Believer* while searching online for "a new Christmas story," and she, along with the assistant director, Erin-Elizabeth Morton, wanted to adapt the book to stage a performance with over

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Why Samaritan Ministries?

ERIC ELDER, CREATOR of *His Name Was Nicholas*, and his family were familiar with health care sharing before they joined Samaritan Ministries.

The hook? Sending Shares directly.

The Elders had been members of another health care sharing ministry, but it became unavailable in Illinois for a while. In the meantime, Eric checked out Samaritan and remembers being sold on the concept of sending his Share directly to a person in need along with his prayers.

"I have found that to be the most joyful part of the whole process," he says. "I think that was the hook for me—helping people directly. It was also going to be cost-effective, and I felt like I could trust the organization and its values."

With faith, the Elders climbed a mountain of bills.

The Elder family has had several Needs shared by Samaritan. The biggest one

was about a year and a half ago, when Eric suffered a heart attack that led to major heart surgery and was followed by a substantial recovery period.

"It was a mountain," Eric says of the resulting medical bills.

However, as a self-pay patient, he was able to get the bills reduced to about \$100,000 below the insurance rate. Eric also notes that with health insurance his monthly payments would have been much higher.

"Samaritan is more economical for me," he says. "It was more cost-effective getting industry-standard discounts, and it was just a super help to have Samaritan walk me through the health care complexities.

"It really is a step of faith to trust that members are going to send their Shares when the Needs come in, whether they're small or large. And I put that trust in God," says Eric. "But I also really believed in Samaritan over the number of years that I've used them for smaller things, so I had confidence in them for the larger things as well." ♦♦♦

'Santa Claus' provides the chance to talk about the real Nicholas

by Mike O'Connor

AS A BOY, I believed in Santa Claus. On Christmas Eve, my brothers and I left cookies and milk out for him so he could snack a little as he assembled the Mouse Trap game for us. On Christmas morning, the cookies and milk were gone, and the Mouse Trap game was done! Certainly, Santa had been there! There was no white beard hair in the milk cup, nor reindeer hoof prints on the roof. But who cared? Rather than pull a *CSI* to disprove his existence, it was easier to believe that he was really there. So was the Easter Bunny! And the Tooth Fairy! All those eggs and coins proved it!

"Santa Claus" comes from the Dutch "Sinterklaas," which means "Saint Nicholas." And there was a real Bishop Nicholas, a church leader who ministered in the late 200s and early 300s A.D. He was not a writer, so what we know of him derives from historical records and, later, legends.

Some legends are more fanciful than factual. What does appear to be historical is his service to Christians in the southwest of what is today Turkey, his imprisonment during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, his release under Constantine (the emperor who converted to Christianity), and his attendance at the church council of Nicaea, where

one of the great creeds was formulated. So, the real Santa Claus is about as far removed from the North Pole, elves, and reindeer as I am from Michael the Archangel.

What of this Nicholas? It is clear that he suffered for his faith. The emperor who imprisoned him also destroyed church buildings, burned Scriptures, demoted Christians from places of honor, and offered release from jail to those Christians who sacrificed to the Roman gods. Given the fact that he remained in prison until the tolerant Constantine came to power, it is clear that his Lord was Christ and that he did not waver in that allegiance.

So who did "Santa Claus" believe in? The Lord Jesus Christ.

Did Nicholas suffer with the intent of drawing attention to himself? Not at all! He bore testimony of his Lord and Savior. If Nicholas were alive today, would he desire the adoration and attention that Santa Claus receives? Not only does the Santa Claus phenomenon put forth inaccurate information, it also obscures the faith of Nicholas. Where is the second Person of the Trinity, humbling Himself to take upon Himself real humanity, so that He could die a real human death to pay for the sins of people? Nicholas himself would preach that.

This message is not preached as children hear of sleigh rides, rein-

deer, going down a chimney, and "Ho, ho, ho." Santa didn't die for anyone's sins. Is he really worthy of the attention some people give to him? He was a sinner, in need of a Savior. Just like me. Just like you.

So, how do I answer the question, "Do you believe in Santa Claus?"

I don't dodge the question. It provides the chance to tell of Nicholas, the real Santa Claus, and his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. As you meet the jolly, red-suited man at the shopping mall, please remember the real Santa Claus. Please remember that he was a follower of the Savior, who died on a cross so that those who submit to Him as their personal King might enjoy the blessings that come from the forgiveness of sins. Nicholas wouldn't want you to miss that.

God knows about gift-giving at Christmas and at any time. The gift of a Savior is not earned but given by God to all who will receive Him. If He is not now your King, then please submit to Him that you may receive God's Christmas gift to you. Not delivered through a chimney, but through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. ♦♦♦

Samaritan Ministries member Mike O'Connor has pastored a small Baptist church in Henry, Illinois, and continues to substitute-preach and substitute-teach in central Illinois. This article was part of a series that he contributed to a local newspaper while in Henry.

Member Letters

Dottie
TEXAS



Through Samaritan Ministries I was able to have surgery on my little finger to repair a severed nerve along with physical therapy. I am so grateful for the Shares we received! Every expense was shared—what a blessing!

Along with our Needs being met financially, every single check came with encouraging words, Scripture, and/or prayers, which means so very much.

My finger is still healing. Nerve damage takes a long time to heal. But I am so grateful for the surgery and P.T. I received. Trusting the Lord for continued healing and restoration of my finger.

Bob
ALASKA



We joined Samaritan Ministries in January 2015. In August of 2015, after a very stressful, fast-paced fundraising trip to the lower 48, I suffered a cardiac arrest and, thanks to God's providing an alert son, a great EMT team, and excellent doctors and His sovereign protection over my life, I recovered with no side effects. Samaritan members shared all the medical expenses after self-pay discounts. The notes most sent were so encouraging and strengthened our faith during my recovery. Thank you to all who prayed for my recovery. God answered.

In 2019, a severe respiratory infection similar to COVID-19 sent my body into congestive heart failure. Thanks to God's working through the prayers of His people and aggressive treatment by a heart failure clinic and 2 ablations to stop atrial fibrillation, I am well on the way to another full recovery. Thanks again to Samaritan members' prayers and sharing in the medical bills, I am able to continue caring for others' sons and daughters through His ministry at "The Homestead" through Cadence International. You all have contributed through your prayers and Shares to our being able to help young military members come to know Jesus Christ and walk closely with Him while dealing with the difficulties of military life.

Thank you for allowing us to serve Jesus Christ in this way without the pressure of hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills. This is truly a gift of God's evident grace to us through you! We are praising Him for His undeserved lovingkindness exhibited through you.

Fear not: God has given our bodies weapons for overcoming disease

by Dr. Eric Potter

Our fallen world abounds in deadly enemies like COVID-19, but the Lord has provided us with a dynamic and complex defense called the immune system that fights these invaders..



Dr. Eric Potter
IFM-Certified MD,
Board-Certified Internal
Medicine and Pediatrician

First in a series of articles
on the immune system.

THE PREVAILING TONE of modern society is anxiety.

An infatuation with youth and vitality has resulted in the expectation that medical science will preserve our youth and prevent even the semblance of decline, even as we have forgotten the virtues of age, of experience, and of wisdom. Beyond the struggle with degenerative diseases such as heart attacks and Alzheimer's, a massive amount of effort is put into "anti-aging" products and therapies designed to preserve all possible athletic and mental productivity.

Yet, despite our best efforts, medicine ultimately fails. In the end, people age and die. The pandemic of 2020 has forced us to confront that fact. A previously unknown disease was thrust into our lives, affecting us physically, emotionally, spiritually, and societally.

In response to the challenges to our physical health and emotional equilibrium, to our bonds of trust and our ways of relating to each other, we must rely upon God-given principles to guide us. Because we can trust God's provision and providence, we can rely upon the immune system designed by God to protect us. We can then defend ourselves and help others do so as well, ensuring no more fear for us or them.

We can begin with the knowledge that, because we live in a fallen world, God designed us with an immune system prepared to respond to such infectious threats.

Our fallen world abounds in microbial enemies, results of the Fall and sin that lead to death. Body systems are disrupted, leading to morbidity and mortality. Already, COVID-19 has killed around 1.2 million humans in the world and caused suffering in millions of others, and this number is just another statistic in the annals of disease and death alongside heart disease, malaria, and the annual flu.

People we know die. People we know suffer. Reality is painful after the Fall. Fear seems appropriate.

As a counter to this outworking of the Fall in our health, we see God's design for our immune system. He placed in our bodies processes and constituents to delay eventual death. These constituents, these cells and substances, are our soldiers and weapons of war in overcoming disease. As with all the systems of our body, God gave us a dynamic

We can have confidence in God's daily bread, including an immune system designed to protect us from the effects of the Fall.

and complex defense with multiple layers, many subsystems, and a multiplicity of ways to communicate. Yet viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites still challenge us daily, across territory throughout

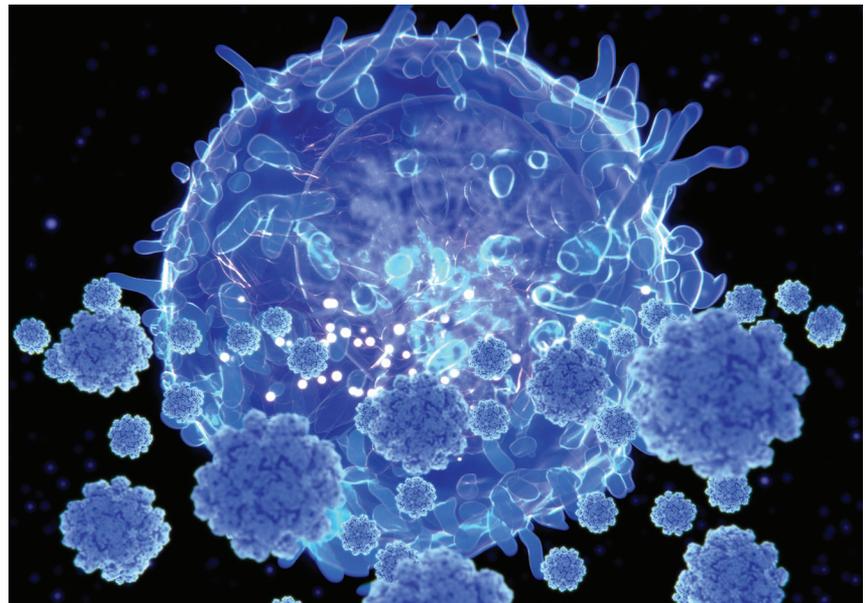
our body, from our skin to our brain, from our sinuses to our gastrointestinal tract. God knew our need and provided a wonderful, complex system of which we're still finding new facets every year.

You, as the steward of your body, can augment your defenses and direct them towards success. Furthermore, your understanding, discernment, wisdom, and experience can help others overcome the paralyzing fear which such a disease can engender.

In order to be a good steward of your body, you need to understand how God designed your immune system. You need to understand how God designed the microbial world and how it affects you. You need to understand how it helps or hinders your immune system's effectiveness. You must begin to understand how to apply this knowledge and wisdom to protect yourself and others.

Begin by looking at God's gift of an immune system. This system was designed to defend against the effects of the Fall and restore us when our bodies are affected. The parts and processes, including a number of specialized cells, work together to keep microbial enemies out, to limit their spread if they do get in, and to heal our body both during the struggle and after an infection is overcome. Knowing the basics of how the parts and processes of your immune system operate will equip and empower you to equip and empower your immune system while overcoming fear.

Knowing more about the immune system that God has given us should encourage us as we realize that God has provided a strong



defense against the danger of these microbes. We were designed with specialized immune cells which answer different threats with different countermeasures, and that activate in different ways under different circumstances.

The immune system can be divided into two major subsystems: the innate and the adaptive systems. The innate system is the first responder in a microbial invasion, identifying microbes by chemical patterns on their surfaces and responding to foreign bodies with speed. The innate system is quick to act, but lacks precision, and comprises a wide variety of cell types including dendritic cells and natural killer cells. These cells patrol the borders between the body and the environment, identifying and responding to invaders and alerting the rest of the immune system if necessary.

The adaptive arm of the immune system is a bit slower to respond but much more precise and works to finish the battle when the innate system is insufficient. T and B

cells make up the majority of this system's arsenal. B cells originate in the bone marrow and generally live in the vascular system and lymph nodes, making proteins called antibodies. These proteins target specific invaders to either damage them or mark them out for destruction. When they are stimulated by other immune cells, the B cells step up production of that microbe's correspondent antibody. T cells likewise originate in bone marrow but pass through the thymus gland in the chest as they mature, thus getting their name. The two main variants of the T cells are T Helper cells, which focus the defenses of the local cells on a specific microbial enemy, and Killer T cells, which attack invaders directly. After the infection is defeated, both types of cells remain, in reduced quantities, providing a faster, more effective response against any second invasion by the same type of microbe.

These two parts of the immune

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Thermography a growing alternative in early detection of breast cancer

Veteran in the field explains the procedure's limitations, strengths

by Kathryn Nielson

Breast Thermography: What Every Woman Must Know Before Having a Breast Thermogram

by Michael Wedge

(2014, available on Kindle).

THERE IS A NEW WARRIOR joining the fight against breast cancer.

For years, mammography has been touted as the one and only standard for breast cancer screening. These days, thermography is proving itself a valuable adjunctive tool, one author argues.

In his book *Breast Thermography: What Every Woman Must Know Before Having a Breast Thermogram*, author Michael Wedge, board-certified clinical thermographer and 12-year veteran in the field, simply and clearly states the case for thermography, its limitations and strengths, and where it fits in the current landscape of breast cancer screening.

Thermography comes from the words "thermos," referring to heat and "gram," which refers to recording. It is "a recording of heat being emitted from an object," according to Wedge. A thermogram is looking for changes in temperature that are indicative of a problem, whether it's cancer or other abnormalities that could eventually lead to cancer. These images are produced by a

thermal imaging camera that picks up and records heat in the infrared spectrum, a spectrum not seen by the naked eye.

A thermogram is performed by a thermography technician and interpreted by an "interp doctor" trained in reading the thermogram. It is important to note that one does not have to be a doctor to interpret a thermogram, Wedge says. However, reading a thermogram requires training not unlike that needed to read a mammogram or any other medical image.

When interpreting a thermogram, the interp doctor is looking for abnormal or atypical blood vessels, temperature deltas (the difference in temp between two measured areas), changes in breast shape/contour and areas of inflammation, changes in vessel patterns and deltas over time, and symmetry or lack of symmetry of blood vessels and heat patterns.

Because thermography is most accurate by measuring changes over time, Wedge recommends women get a baseline thermogram starting at age 20. His experience has shown that most women have abnormal thermograms, but most do not have cancer. Thermography is not just about answering the question of whether cancer is

present. It is also used as a screening for abnormalities that could later lead to cancer with the hope of reversing the abnormalities before they turn into cancer or finding the disease early enough to cure it.

In recent years, the medical community has experienced a bit of conflict in regard to breast cancer screening and has created a mammography vs. thermography scenario. The beauty of Wedge's book is in his objective approach at explaining each test, their differences, and how they enhance the other.

"These two technologies are different in just about every way, other than the fact that they are being used to assess the breast for evidence of disease," Wedge writes.

Mammography, like ultrasound and MRI, is a structural imaging test that looks for structural changes such as calcification and masses. Thermography monitors physiologic changes such as increased blood vessel growth, hormone imbalance, increased temperatures, and temperature patterns that show up as heat patterns on the breast.

So how accurate is thermography? Wedge quotes one study in which the authors tried to determine whether a thermogram could accurately predict if a mass found

by a mammogram was indeed cancer. Incidentally, 85 percent of mammographically identified masses that have been biopsied turn out to be noncancerous. The study “Efficacy of Computerized Infrared Imaging Analysis to Evaluate Mammographically-Suspicious Lesions” found that thermography has an excellent negative predictive value, meaning that when a mammogram finds a mass and a thermogram indicates it is not cancerous, 95 percent of the time it is indeed noncancerous.

In contrast, the positive predictive value of a thermograph—that is, how often a thermographic abnormality was predictive of cancer—is less impressive. But then, mammography’s positive predictive value is equally unimpressive, writes Wedge. That alone is reason enough not to rely on just mammography for breast cancer screening.

Perhaps the strongest argument Wedge gives for thermography, however, is its ability to detect what no other test can—inflammation. Wedge argues that a patient can have a normal mammogram, normal clinical breast exam, and no complaints otherwise and still have inflammation lurking in the breast that will never be seen without a thermogram. Inflammation is easily treated but only if the patient knows it’s there. Left untreated, chronic inflammation is a risk factor in developing breast cancer.

Wedge emphasizes the importance of understanding that thermography does not diagnose anything but rather is used as a tool to monitor changes that could lead to disease. In fact, at the

beginning of his book he states that, despite all of the breast cancer tools at our disposal, only a biopsy has the final say in actually diagnosing breast cancer.

Despite all of the research and testing at our disposal, the incidence of breast cancer has risen to almost 1 in 7 women, according to Wedge. Still, the author is hopeful that someday a breast cancer diagnosis will be treated as simply

Perhaps the strongest argument for thermography the author gives is its ability to detect what no other test can— inflammation. ... Left untreated, chronic inflammation is a risk factor for developing breast cancer.

as other diseases, like leprosy, that once meant a death sentence.

To get there, Wedge believes a change in mindset is in order. Rather than looking at breast health as being either no disease, a benign disease, or a malignant disease (cancer), he argues that breast health needs to be seen as being on a continuum. At one end is a “healthy breast free of pain, significant hormonally-mediated tenderness, fibrocystic changes,

fibroadenomas, and other non-cancerous changes,” writes Wedge. At the other end is cancer.

Wedge spends a great deal of time defining everything in between and how benign conditions can lead to disease.

“The changes which are identified in the breast as benign, may in fact not increase cancer risk directly, but the environment within the body and within the breast that allows these changes to develop, can increase cancer incidence,” writes Wedge. “Therefore it is during this phase we should intervene, rather than simply label something as benign and wait until a cancer develops.”

While he admits that most women with benign breast changes never develop cancer, he is quick to point out that those who are diagnosed with breast cancer have a history of benign changes that preceded the diagnosis. Further, he argues that because these benign changes are uncomfortable for the patient and easily treated, why not do so?

Thermography is another player on the team working to detect breast cancer as early as possible, a sort of first step on the road to maintaining breast health. It cannot do what mammography can, nor can mammography do what thermography can. Moreover, neither of them can do what a clinical examination can do. Each is designed for a different purpose and to be used as a complement to the other measures. ♦♦♦

Kathryn Nielson is a Member Communications Specialist for Samaritan Ministries.

200 dancers.

Eric joyfully granted his permission, and the adaptation, entitled *One Life*, has been performed two years in a row. He is excited for it to become a new annual tradition. "People love to go see *The Nutcracker* ballet at Christmas every year, and we thought *One Life* would be a good alternative to *The Nutcracker* or in addition to it, as *The Nutcracker* doesn't really point people to Jesus," Eric says.

... then a film ...

"Already people are reading the St. Nicholas story every year with their kids, which is really exciting to hear," Eric says. "It's becoming a tradition already just in book form."

But Eric wanted to take things one step further.

When he saw the finished ballet production and how the directors had done such an excellent job pointing people to Jesus while utilizing beautiful choreography and imagery, he knew he had to film it and share the hope it portrays with a much larger audience. He says the dance company did all the "heavy lifting" with the choreography, lights, costumes, and set, but he was happy to further contribute by composing and orchestrating two songs that are featured in the production as well as in the musical he later completed.

Eric hopes *One Life: A Christmas Story Ballet* will become another new annual tradition for families.

... and now a musical available for churches and theaters to stage.

Eric published *His Name Was Nicholas: Full Script & Score for the Hit Christmas Musical* in June of

this year. It's his latest step toward the dream he and Lana shared of making a movie about St. Nicholas's story, as he hopes to film the production of the musical in the coming years.

"I'm in contact with some people on Broadway and in Hollywood and others, but I would love to have it produced locally at any level by any age group or talent group," Eric says. "I think it's something that communities all over the world would like to do and use to point people to Jesus."

The musical will be more accessible for people and communities than replicating and staging the ballet because it's a more "traditional Broadway style" in which people of all ages can dance, sing, and act, he adds. "And I think it's an interesting hook to draw people into the Christmas story by using the real-life story of St. Nicholas, and then his love for Jesus just shines through," he says.

Eric is currently working on completing the accompanying album to *His Name Was Nicholas*, which will be fully orchestrated to be used to perform the musical or enjoy on its own.

Here's how you can pray for Eric Elder Ministries:

- That the right people, churches, and communities would be introduced to His Name Was Nicholas and want to perform it. Eric is specifically praying that two or three different organizations will perform the musical by December 2021 and for hundreds to do it in the coming years. Filming a production of the musical is his

"endgame." He says, "I just want to reach as many people as I can with the Gospel, and the Gospel is clearly portrayed in the story of St. Nicholas."

- That many will watch *One Life: A Christmas Story Ballet* and be pointed to Jesus.
- For Eric's continued health. In 2019, he had a heart attack and required quadruple bypass surgery. Praise God that he recently was given a clean bill of health. ♦♦♦

Does your church or community theater group need a Christian-themed production?

Visit HisNameWasNicholas.com or Amazon to purchase the full script and score for Eric Elder's Christmas musical *His Name Was Nicholas*.

Brittany Klaus is a Member Communications Specialist for Samaritan Ministries.

system. They couldn't participate in the worship services to which their work most likely contributed because they were perpetually ceremonially unclean due to the circumstances of that work. How would it have felt to be one of those who made the worship of God possible and yet was excluded from participating in that worship?

In the first-century Jewish mindset, there were concentric circles of holiness and distinct levels of God's presence and activity—from the earth to Israel to Jerusalem to the Temple Mount to the court of the gentiles to the inner court to the Holy of Holies. You would want to get as close to that physical place as possible. The closer you got to the Holy of Holies, the closer you got to God's presence. That's where He was at work. That's where the good stuff was happening.

So, that beautiful city at night, that magnificent Temple, were constant reminders that the shepherds were missing out on what God was doing.

Don't we all have a shepherd part of our lives? A place where we feel very ... ordinary? Mundane? Lonely? Left out?

We, too, see our "lights of Jerusalem." Maybe they're on Facebook or Instagram. At our workplace. At church. That's where "it's" happening. Worse? That's where it all looks like God is at work ... and we're not there. So does that mean God isn't at work here? It can feel like it.

Even more crushing: What about when our faithfulness to God in the life situation He has placed us means we're excluded from stuff we really want to be a part of,

even in our service to God? The shepherds' work to supply sheep for the Temple services meant they couldn't participate in those services. Their faithfulness meant they were missing out.

What about you when your faithfulness in daily pouring out your energy at work, with your spouse, or with your kids means you have a list of things you have to say "no" to? Really good things, things that you do for God. And you see the lights of your Jerusalem and simply sigh.

The shepherds' faithfulness meant they were missing out. Don't we all have a shepherd part of our lives?

The Temple is where it's going on. And the flicker of those lights in Jerusalem reminds us that we're way over here, not there.

Did you know that Caesar Augustus had choirs? Yeah, earthly choirs were used in the worship of the emperor. Augustus was particularly praised for having inaugurated a peace "for the whole world"! What would it be like to be near Caesar at that center of earthly power and authority, to see the famed buildings of the empire, to walk among the throngs of the populace as they devoted themselves to the welfare of a worldwide empire, and to hear the choirs

lift their voices to honor the one, Augustus, who was hailed "lord" and "savior"?

Political power and privilege is where life is truly happening, right? We know that, like most of the world, we could spend our lives and energy pursuing that type of power and influence. But our faithfulness can mean we're out here in the Judean countryside with stinky sheep and nothing to show for it.

Luke 2:8-11 says:

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ..."

You know the story, right? This was the single most important announcement up to that point in human history. We would reasonably assume such an announcement would have been made in the halls of power in Rome! Or, since this was a monumental religious event, it would have been made in the center of God's presence, power, and holiness, made in the Temple among the esteemed religious leaders!

Not at all.

The greatest event in human history to that point happened in obscurity, out in a field, to cultural

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nobodies. The mighty and privileged are actually the outsiders; the down and out are the insiders (Luke 1:51). God, in His infinite wisdom, thought the best way to announce the coming of the Son of God that would bring salvation to the world was to draw near to those that the political and religious rulers of the day dismissed. To draw near to the overlooked and the left-out, who are toiling in obscure faithfulness.

It's as if God is saying to the despised shepherds, "Don't ever think that your faithfulness means you're left out of the worship of God. No! You will be the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Don't look at the shining lights of Jerusalem. Don't listen to the choirs of Rome. I am inviting you into something far better than this world offers."

Every person has fundamental questions they must have

answered. Am I loved? Does God see me? Does God care about me? Do I matter?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

It's no coincidence that Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. Like those shepherds in Luke 2, Jesus also was a nobody. An outcast. Overlooked. He gets it. Deeply. Truly.

Just like with the shepherds, Jesus also understands what you're going through. He sees you. You are not forgotten, even if so many days it feels like you're faithfully toiling in obscurity.

This Christmas we all have various things we celebrate and enjoy and other things that weigh down our hearts. So I imagine it was for the shepherds 2,000 years ago, and so it will continue to be for all of us on this side of eternity.

There is so much that shines like Jerusalem at night and makes

melody like Rome's choirs. But those things are not what the human heart is truly looking for. And those places are not where we will find it. There are times our faithfulness leads us to lonely places, but we can be assured that, like the shepherds, we'll find Jesus there.

This Christmas we join the shepherds, celebrating the world-transforming Good News of Emmanuel, God with us. This Christmas we fix our hearts and eyes upon that beautiful babe in a manger, surrounded by nobodies just like us.

While we may indeed be nobodies, Emmanuel is with us. And we will raise our voices with that multitude of the heavenly host, joyfully declaring "Glory to God in the highest!"

Merry Christmas, everyone! ♦♦♦

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

system coordinate through both direct interaction and a complex messaging system. This communication system allows our immune system to activate each part only when it is needed, to finetune the location and timing of its attack, and to stand down while remaining ready for future attacks. All this occurs through messengers and receptors. Messengers, a variety of proteins and other chemicals, are produced by immune cells and released into its surroundings. Once released by one immune cell, these chemicals connect with receptors on other immune cells, triggering a response in the receiving cell,

which responds to the original cell to coordinate the defense. Sometimes these messages cause cells to migrate toward the infection; sometimes they cause cells to produce more immune messengers to amplify the response. Regardless, this communication produces a dynamic, effective, proportional response to each infection.

Knowing even the rudiments of the system that God provided should provoke us to an emotional and spiritual response. We can have confidence in God's daily bread, including an immune system designed to protect us from the effects of the Fall. Some would

counter this joy by arguing that a virus is killing people. Where does our responsibility lie in these circumstances? We must be aware and prepared. We must, therefore, acknowledge that we live in a fallen world and take the talent God has given in order to nurture and steward our immune system. Discern the state of your defenses and apply wisdom to strengthen them; be proactive, not passive. ♦♦♦

Dr. Eric Potter, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, founder of Sanctuary Functional Medicine DBA (SanctuaryFunctionalMedicine.com), offers functional medicine care to patients and the public in his Franklin, Tennessee, office and online with SFMEmpower.com.

Prayer for the Persecuted Church



(Photo courtesy of Article18)

Daughter removed from Christian couple's home

The adopted daughter of an Iranian Christian couple has been removed from her home because a court in Iran ruled that Sam Khosravi and Maryam Falahi, above, with Lydia, were "not fit" to be her parents, several persecuted church ministries report. The court also said that, since Lydia's parentage is unknown, she is considered to be Muslim and must be raised by Muslim parents. *Pray that the couple's appeal will be successful and that Lydia will be reunited with her parents. Pray also for the family's emotional and spiritual well-being during the separation.*

Church torched in India by suspected religious extremists

A church in India's Andhra Pradesh state was burned down in September, International Christian Concern reports. Extremists had issued threats against the church if it remained open. *Pray for restoration of church property lost in the attack, for the conversion of the attackers, and for the congregation's well-being.*

Christians jailed in Laos for attending funeral

Four Lao Christians have been jailed for over three months for planning and attending a Christian funeral contrary to local customs, ICC says. Village authorities decided that the Christians "divided community solidarity." *Pray that the Christians will be released soon, for the ability of Christians in Laos to hold funerals and other gatherings without interference, and for the loved ones who are grieving their loss.* ♦♦♦



Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

HEBREWS 13:3

Many of 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:

International Christian Concern
persecution.org
800-422-5441

World Watch Monitor
worldwatchmonitor.org

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. **Philippians 1:23b-24**

✂ Detach and use as bookmark on your refrigerator

THE DOORPOST

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9; 11:18-21



For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-24

WHAT'S ON YOUR BUCKET list?

We sometimes say, "Before I die, I'd like to ..."

But what is there here on earth that would be more important or more enjoyable than being in heaven with Christ? What would be worth the delay? Traveling? Recreation? Leisure? Accumulating possessions? Christmas presents? Good things in life can distract us from focusing on the best.

Even though the Apostle Paul was in prison, he said that remaining here on Earth allowed him to have fruitful labor in serving others. Similarly, God calls us to manage His creation and participate in filling it with people, caring for, helping, and serving them. He "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), and He gives us an important part in building His Kingdom by making disciples of Jesus Christ and bearing one another's burdens.



For the Kingdom,
Ray King