

Classic/Basic Sharing Summary*

Member Households: 82,586

Bills: \$30,301,666

Shares: \$33,364,282

Both Samaritan™ Classic™ and Samaritan™ Basic™ enjoyed a decrease in the total amounts shareable in September, resulting in a monthly surplus. The surplus has once again allowed some Needs to be shared early which will help insulate both Samaritan Classic and Samaritan Basic from large spikes in bills similar to the one Samaritan Classic experienced last month.

Samaritan members and staff work hard to achieve medical savings on behalf of the membership. Since its inception two years ago, the Provider Relations team has saved Samaritan members over \$50 million through direct negotiations with providers.

The fair-price reward program and Bluebook CareConnectSM service continue to save almost \$550,000 per month. Check out Healthcare Bluebook™ via your Dash account to help you achieve a fair price as well. Using this tool assists the ministry in keeping Shares lower and qualifies you for the \$250 fair-price reward!

We will continue to work diligently on cost savings, monitor bill submission trends, and pray for God's provision and wisdom.

*The monthly sharing summary will now include figures from all three programs, as all active members who were former participants of Samaritan™ Given™ are now in Samaritan™ Classic or Samaritan™ Basic. Due to differences in sharing timelines, these numbers combine Given's sharing for August with Classic's and Basic's sharing for September. The Shares amount also includes managed sharing between programs.

Win tickets (or access) to a Christmas ballet!

White Thorn Events is giving away tickets and online streaming access to the ballet *Most Incredible Christmas* on December 6. Ten households will win two in-person tickets (or livestream access if desired) for the December 6 Ballet Magnificat! production in Lakeland, Florida.



To enter, go to bit.ly/incrediblechristmasballet or scan the QR code here. Entries must be made by noon CST Tuesday, November 15. All Samaritan members may use the coupon code SM20 for 20 percent off ticket prices.

Samaritan Ministries staff members and members of their households are not eligible to win.

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Take advantage of telehealth options in your Dash account

- **24/7 Nurse advice line:** Connect with nurses trained to evaluate health concerns and determine next steps at no cost.
- **Not urgent:** Use the free "Email a Medical Professional" feature to connect with doctors who will answer your medical questions.
- **Need a prescription:** Use the \$25 "Call a Doctor" resource to avoid a more costly trip back to the doctor's office.

We're giving away fine art to over 100 Samaritan Facebook Group members in December, so join now!

As a way to celebrate Christmas and our Samaritan Ministries Community Facebook Group, we are giving away pieces of fine art created by Samaritan staffer Thomas Stegall, available only to SMI members who have joined our official Facebook Group.



The grand prize will be a fine-art, woodturned, decorative vase. The runner-up will receive a modern woodcarved wall sculpture. We will also be giving away 100 woodcarved Christmas ornaments.

You can enter at bit.ly/woodcarved2022 by noon CST Wednesday, November 30, but you must be a member of the Samaritan Ministries Community Facebook Group to win. You may also go to the entry page by scanning the QR code at right.

To join Samaritan's Facebook Group, go to facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin and answer the questions for joining.

Inside this month's newsletter

Missional Medicine—Q&A with author Mark Blocher: Longtime Samaritan Ministries member and newsletter contributor Mark Blocher recently published *Missional Medicine: Restoring the Soul of Healthcare*, a call to Christians to reinvigorate health care with a focus on Christ. He answers our questions about how that looks in the world. Page 1.

Noteworthy: It's the month of Thanksgiving, but, as Christians, we are called to live in a constant state of thanksgiving. Page 2.

Member Spotlight: Dan Stayskal of White Thorn Events explains how his organization became involved in the December ballet *Most Incredible Christmas* and why it's important for Christians to be involved in the arts. Dan also explains that he and his wife, Sarah, joined Samaritan as a matter of conscience. Page 6.

The lost art of feasting: David Mathis of desiringGod.org encourages us to revive the Christ-honoring practice of feasting, such as at Thanksgiving, in celebration of God's good gifts. Page 9.

Body mechanics: Member and physical therapist Jonathan Hamm teaches proper posture and lifting technique as a way to prevent back injury. Page 12.

The Doorpost: Everyone worships something or someone. Who (or what) is your God? Page 16.

Use Healthcare Bluebook™ to steward Shares

It is important for members to be vigilant in looking for ways to save money on Needs by using Dash tools such as Healthcare Bluebook™ to select providers that offer competitive pricing. The most important thing members can do to help contain costs is to log in to Dash and access Healthcare Bluebook through our Health Center before seeing a provider.

Get God-honoring banking while advancing God's Kingdom!

At Christian Community Credit Union (CCCU), faith and finances go hand in hand. When you put your money at the CCCU, it helps provide affordable loans to churches, ministries, and their members. CCCU's goal is to help families save more and earn more so they can give more. Enjoy these CCCU special offers:

- Higher rates on savings
- Affordable loans (home, auto, personal)
- Free checking with \$\$ bonus
- Financial stewardship resources
- \$100 donation to Samaritan for qualifying accounts opened

Visit myCCCU.com/Samaritan or call 800.347.CCCU (2228), ext. 4375. Mention Group Code 1372.

November 2022 Save to Share™ Needs

- **Fred** is being treated for leiomyosarcoma, a rare form of cancer that affects smooth muscle tissue.

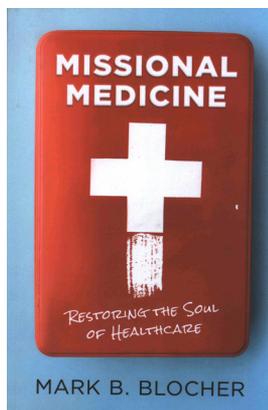
This Need was assigned to a member who participates in Save to Share™ for Needs greater than \$250,000. The Need has already been shared, so no additional giving is necessary. The Need is listed to encourage all members to pray.

NOVEMBER 2022

Christian Health Care Newsletter

Missional medicine: Samaritan member and bioethicist shares his vision for redeeming health care

Samaritan Ministries member and longtime newsletter contributor Mark Blocher recently published the book **Missional Medicine: Restoring the Soul of Healthcare**. Mark is co-founder and president/CEO of Christian Healthcare Centers (chcenters.org) in Michigan. We recently posed some questions to him as a way to better understand Mark's approach to redeeming health care.



Why did you write *Missional Medicine*?

As a Christian bioethicist since the early 1990s, I observed modern medicine becoming increasingly fragmented, expensive, and morally problematic, especially for Christian medical professionals and patients. Abortion has become institutionalized in medical training and practice to the point where, in some organizations, being a pro-life physician can be detrimental to one's career. Legal provisions to protect the rights of doctors and nurses to decline participation in procedures such as abortion have come under attack. More recently, we have seen a large number of medical professionals pushed out of their positions because they sought a religious exemption to COVID-19 vaccine mandates. In addition to what I perceive to be the moral "paganizing" of medicine, modern medicine prioritizes payments over patients. Medicine is too expensive, and the system that delivers health care is too bureaucratic and impersonal. As a Christian, I see modern medicine caring too much about my money and caring very little about my Christian beliefs and values. I wrote *Missional Medicine* to issue a call for the creation of a distinctively Christian health care system.

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Samaritan™
MINISTRIES

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Who (or what) is your God?

Member Letter:

NOTES, PRAYERS, GIFTS HAVE BEEN 'OVERWHELMING'

My wife and I have been paying insurance premiums for years and yet never used any of the proceeds, except maybe at the birth of our children. In the last few years, I transitioned out of a job with insurance to being self-employed, and we decided to join Samaritan Ministries. The monthly Share amounts have been amazing, and my wife has tried to give extra every month. I have had three Needs recently, two with my heart and one with a complete knee replacement. This has been a challenge since we have not experienced health issues over the years, but the notes and prayers from the members, the financial help, and the healing of our Lord has been overwhelming.



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COLORADO

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Noteworthy | From the Editors

November has arrived and with it comes Thanksgiving!

Whether or not you celebrate the holiday, as Christians, we are called to live in a constant attitude of thanksgiving. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Worshipping the Lord through thanksgiving—even when we are sad or scared—enables us to take the focus off our earthly circumstances and put it firmly on our Creator and Protector.

No matter the state of the world, the state of the government, or the state of our physical and emotional health, He is in control and will use all circumstances to further His Kingdom. Thank the Lord!



Julia Ekstrom
MANAGING EDITOR

Helpful Resources

► [Facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin](https://www.facebook.com/groups/samaritanmin)

Reach out to other members in our Facebook Group.

► **Important emails**

Medical Needs: needs@samaritanministries.org

Sending or receiving Shares: membership@samaritanministries.org

Your membership: membership@samaritanministries.org

► **Health Resources App | [Dash.SamaritanMinistries.org](https://dash.samaritanministries.org)**

- 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.
- 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.

► **Writers guidelines: samaritanministries.org/writers-guidelines**

► **State disclosures: samaritanministries.org/statedisclosures**

What are the key things Christians in health care can do to help redeem health care?

First, Christians can, to the extent possible, transfer their care to physicians and organizations that share their Christian beliefs and values. For example, why continue financially supporting and participating in a health system that uses your money to fund things you do not support and works against those values you do support? Samaritan Ministries is a good example of a different way to address health care.

Second, Christian doctors will find in *Missional Medicine* a workable blueprint to launch a direct primary care practice where they have the freedom to practice medicine as a missional Christian doctor. Now that Christian Health-care Centers has been in operation for over five years with two offices and a small outpatient surgery center, we have a proven practice template that other doctors can utilize to open more missional medical offices and serve more patients. The silver lining in the COVID pandemic is how it awakened both doctors and patients to the need for a health care system that uses a different delivery model, but that system will fail if patients do not embrace it.

Third, Christians can become more proactive in managing their own health and health care. American medicine is too expensive because Americans expect to live however they please, and if something goes wrong as a result of their lifestyle choices, modern medicine will fix it, and someone else will pay the bill. Christians

As a Christian, I see modern medicine caring too much about my money and caring very little about my Christian beliefs and values. I wrote *Missional Medicine* to issue a call for the creation of a distinctively Christian health care system.

who read their Bibles should know better. Life itself, and the resources God provides to sustain it, are stewardships entrusted to us by our Creator. My doctor is not responsible to steward my well-being; I am, and sometimes my doctor helps. One of the best ways to reduce health care costs is to not need health care services.

Why is the parable of the Good Samaritan so key to the missional medicine concept?

The significance of this parable for health care can be seen in how many health care organizations have the words "Good Samaritan" or "Samaritan" in their name. The parable expanded on the Old Testament ethic expressed in Leviticus 19:18, "Love your

neighbor as yourself." This ethic obligated the Israelites to care for strangers, widows, and orphans. At its core, the parable expresses the core ethic of health care, which is caring for sick and hurting "strangers." This was an ethic unheard of in Roman culture, but it was the ethic God used to grow the Church and transform pagan Roman society. It is also the ethic that God can use to transform paganized American health care.

How do you understand the process of "redemption" when it comes to health care? In other words, how will we know when health care has been redeemed?

To redeem something is to restore or "buy back" something that has been either damaged or lost. Biblically, ever since the Fall (Genesis 3), humans enter the world damaged and lost. God has graciously "redeemed" us through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been made new creations in Christ, and God has placed us into His own household as joint heirs with Christ.

Medicine is redemptive in the sense that it "pushes back" against the effects of the Fall, bending what has been damaged by the Fall back closer to its original created goodness. Redemptive medicine not only is modestly reparative, but it highlights that Christ is the Great Physician who heals, and He is the one who redeems. Ultimately, redemptive health care provides patients with a "taste" of what the believer's full redemption through Christ will be in the

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New Heaven/New Earth (Revelation 21). A redeemed health care system recognizes Christ as the one who heals, acknowledges His presence in the exam room, seeks His wisdom in providing care for patients, and is humble enough to recognize its limitations.

Modern medicine overall does not do this.

Can you summarize the role of the local church in missional medicine?

When we reflect on the earthly ministry of Jesus, we find that wherever He went, He taught, and wherever He taught, He healed. Teaching and caring for the sick were hallmarks of His ministry.

The early Church continued this pattern of teaching and healing, first through healing miracles, and later through organized medical ministries. This pattern has been characterized by every generation of Christians since. Wherever the Gospel has gone in the world, medical ministry has been part of it. The Church has always been on the forefront of health care—until now.

The American hospital system was largely built by Christian medical philanthropy, with many U.S. hospitals still bearing church denominational names—Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, etc., although the type of medicine practiced in many of these institutions is not missional.

Since the mid-20th century, American churches have largely relegated medical ministry to foreign medical missions and, in the U.S., community clinics were mostly organized to care for the poor.



Mark Blocher

I am not criticizing these noble ministries. However, why has the Church allowed itself to be marginalized by big-box health care systems? As representatives of the Great Physician, should we not take a more prominent place in the mainstream of health care? After all, Christianity has a lot to say about how to take care of the sick, diseased, and injured. Chapter nine in *Missional Medicine* lays out a very practical way for local churches to carry out the Biblical mandate to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).

I find it interesting that most of the prayer requests shared each Sunday in local churches have something to do with people’s medical needs, yet few ever think of how their church can be a place to which they would turn for medical care. Why not? Local churches have the space to house a medical clinic, they are already in a community with medical needs, there are Christian medical professionals who would welcome the opportunity to practice missional medicine, and there are few opportunities for more community impact than health care.

I believe we are living at a time when communities throughout America are ripe for local, church-based missional medicine.

What is the biggest hindrance to putting missional medicine into practice?

Ironically, the biggest hindrance to the practice of missional medicine is believers who have become what I call “medical cynics,” people who do not believe health care can be delivered better than the current system delivers it. They have become addicted to the idea that some form of insurance should pay for their care, even a \$2 prescription. The most frequent comment I hear from prospective members at our office is, “This just sounds too good to be true.” That’s medical cynicism.

Over time, as more missional medicine practices open their doors to serve more patients, the cynicism will dissipate.

Another hindrance is government overreach. Christian Healthcare Centers recently filed suit against the state of Michigan in federal court to protect its First Amendment rights to operate as a Christian medical ministry. This litigation is still in process. Basically, Michigan threatens CHC with fines and possibly jail if the organization continues to hire only Christians and if its doctors will not provide things like cross-sex hormones for patients who want to transition from one sex to another.

How does Christian Healthcare Centers carry out missional medicine?

Most important is hiring medical professionals and support staff

who wholeheartedly support its mission of providing exceptional medical services to the Body of Christ and the community, guided by Biblical values.

Second is prioritizing the central role of prayer and worship together as a team of medical caregivers and with our patients. Spiritual wellness is foundational to all other forms of wellness. Therefore, integrating spiritual care into everything we do with and for patients is essential. All of our staff are equipped to do that.

Third is focusing on patients, not payments. We devote a lot of time to our patients to build that close doctor-patient trusted relationship. Our appointment times of 30, 60, or 90 minutes help this. We use a membership model for payment rather than insurance contracts. Members pay a small monthly fee to gain unlimited access to all the services we provide, which include all child and adult office and telehealth visits, X-rays, blood draws for labs, many acute care medications, procedures such as EKGs, wart removal, stitches, and more.

We respect medical freedom, which became a significant issue because of COVID-19. We also recently opened a small outpatient procedure and minor surgery center that provides discounted general surgery services such as colonoscopies, endoscopies, lesion repair, small hernia repairs, and orthopedic services such as carpal tunnel release, trigger finger release, fractures, and more.

In addition, CHC maintains a large referral network whereby our members gain access to discounted specialty services. Our vision is to, with God's enablement and

Redemptive medicine not only is modestly reparative, but it highlights that Christ is the Great Physician who heals, and He is the one who redeems.

provision, create a comprehensive health care system that is guided by a Biblical worldview. This includes a vision to create birthing centers, outpatient surgery centers, imaging services such as MRIs/CTs, and even inpatient tertiary care.

What role do members of health care sharing ministries play in missional medicine?

We see a lot of health care sharing ministry members in our two offices now. These members already made a significant shift in their thinking about health care by leaving health insurance for health care sharing. Overall, they are among the healthiest patients we see.

Ironically, health care sharing members typically do not join our practice until someone in the family gets sick. I think this is largely due to their being acclimated to the current health care system, which is oriented toward disease-management rather than sustaining wellness. Cost certainly is a factor, but when you remove co-pays, deductibles, and other barriers to accessing care, and

you focus on creating a system that prioritizes patient convenience—for example, telehealth without additional cost—people come to see the value and savings of belonging to a practice like CHC. One visit to the emergency department for an X-ray and treatment of a broken limb costs more than the annual membership for an entire family at CHC. Furthermore, many health care sharing members do not like to negotiate reduced fees for specialty care, surgery, or imaging. Our members get the benefit of the negotiating we have already done, which not only saves them time but saves the sharing community a lot of money.

What challenges does Christian Health Centers face to maintain missional medicine?

In addition to the pending litigation mentioned earlier, CHC still faces the challenge of scale, that is, we only have two offices in Michigan. Many churches, schools or Christian-owned businesses, would utilize practices like CHC if there were more offices closer to them. CHC would like to have affiliates in every state—perhaps in every community. However, that takes a lot of money and personnel. We are not looking to own a nationwide network of offices, but we are open to partnering with groups who want to bring the CHC model to their community. I believe there is growing awareness and momentum building that could result in fulfillment of this broad, ambitious vision. ♦♦♦

To buy a copy of *Missional Medicine*, send \$20 plus \$3 for shipping to Mark Blocher, 1579 Spencer Ave., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

Member Spotlight

Dan Stayskal: White Thorn Events

by Kathryn Nielson



Member Dan Stayskal

WhiteThornEvents.com

[Facebook @whitethornevents](https://www.facebook.com/whitethornevents)

[YouTube bit.ly/whitethornYT](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbit.ly/whitethornYT)

DAN STAYSKAL OF White Thorn Events continues to show that there is no limit to creative ways of spreading the Gospel.

One of those ways will grace stage and screen as White Thorn and Ballet Magnificat present *Most Incredible Christmas*, a "Broadway-style event inspired by extraordinary and familiar Christmas traditions from around the world" (WhiteThornEvents.com/most-incredible-christmas).

Taking place at 7 p.m. December 6 at the RP Funding Center in Lakeland, Florida, with in-person access as well as through livestream and on-demand viewing, *Most Incredible Christmas* tells "the story of a town's contest to find the most extraordinary and incredible thing about the Christmas season." (Go to bit.ly/incrediblechristmasballet for an opportunity to win in-person or online tickets.)

The production is right in line with White Thorn's goal.

Gospel vision: "Our vision is to impact as many as possible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the arts," says Dan, who owns White Thorn.

One way the company does



Sarah and Dan Stayskal (supplied photo)

this is by partnering with such groups as Ballet Magnificat, a premiere Christian ballet company in America. Founded in 1986 by Keith and Kathy Thibodeaux, Ballet Magnificat has the vision of reaching the nations with the Gospel of

Christ through original works. The company performs in theaters, opera houses, concert halls, performing arts centers, church auditoriums, and civic arenas.

Finding Magnificat: An information technology guy by trade, Dan

is the father of seven children, five of whom are girls. At one point, all his daughters were involved in ballet, but his oldest, Elizabeth, has taken it the most seriously. She spent years studying with the Florida Dance Theatre and eventually became a student trainee with a professional company while still in high school.

In 2016, Dan started looking for a place for Elizabeth to use her ballet talent for the Lord. He discovered Ballet Magnificat. Dan told her about it around the same time she had been praying and asking the Lord if she should continue with her ballet company to be a “light in our local arts community.”

Elizabeth fell in love with Ballet Magnificat and participated in their summer intensive. The program draws several hundred dancers from all over the world. She decided to audition with them and secured a spot in the trainee program. Since being with Ballet Magnificat, she has been promoted to the level that tours with the company.

When he first discovered them in 2016, Dan decided to bring the company to Florida and see how it would do. When he approached the local theater about bringing the company in, they laughed and said no one would come. That didn’t stop him. He rented the theater and told them this show would be different. The performance brought in more than 900 people, some of whom had traveled over 100 miles to get there, and Dan was asked when he would like to have them again.

“I fell in love with it,” Dan says. “The idea of what we were trying to



A scene from *Most Incredible Christmas*. (supplied photo)

do, presenting the Gospel through the arts—it just resonated.”

Christmas gift: A few years ago, Ballet Magnificat decided to make a Christmas production that would combine traditional Christmas favorites with the true meaning of the season. *Most Incredible Christmas* came from “the need for a piece that all ages will love with all the nostalgia of the Christmas season, but with a message that truly transforms and changes us,” Dan says.

In 2021, Ballet Magnificat wanted to get back on the road following COVID-19. White Thorn Events wanted to help but knew that selling tickets to see the show in person would be hard. They settled on a livestream production. Since they had never promoted an event nationally, the two entities partnered with Classical Conversations, a leading homeschool organization with over 50,000 members throughout all 50 states. They promoted White Thorn Events, which promoted Classical Conversations

as part of the livestream pre-show and intermission.

“My expectations were that a handful of households would purchase a ticket, but we were shocked when over 700 households from all 50 states and five nations tuned in for the event,” Dan says.

“With that success, we learned that by partnering with several national nonprofit organizations, we could reach exponentially more households with our events, and ultimately with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

This year Samaritan Ministries will be one of the nonprofit organizations promoted during the livestream of Ballet Magnificat’s production of *Most Incredible Christmas*.

Using gifts: Despite his own artistic abilities and interest in the arts, Dan didn’t know how those could be used to advance the Gospel until now.

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"I love the idea that God's gifts to his children can be utilized to create spectacular presentations that point individuals to Him," Dan says. "At the end of an event, when individuals come forward to pray with the Ballet Magnificat performers, with some of them giving their lives to Christ, I realize that it was worth every hour, every minute, every sleepless night of planning and preparing for that event!"

Ballet Magnificat is different

in two ways from other ballet companies. Their ballets are atypical. They tell stories like *The Hiding Place* (the story of Corrie ten Boom), *Stratagem* (adapted from C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*), *Deliver Us* (the story of Moses), *Scarlet Cord* (the story of the persecuted church under Communist Russia), and *Light Has Come* (the story of Jesus from the perspective of the angels). All of these performances have been

promoted by White Thorn Events.

The other difference is in the dancers themselves. For one thing, they do not have a prima ballerina.

"These dancers are not dancing for their own fame or fortune," Dan says. "They are all dancing to bring glory and honor to Christ, and that is why I believe so many people attend their events."

Besides Ballet Magnificat, White Thorn Events has promoted multiple Christian productions such as *The Thorn*, a theatrical portrayal of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; *Petra*; and *David and the Giants*.

The future: Dan has big dreams for White Thorn Events, such as increasing the number of live-streamed events. He'd also like to see White Thorn get more involved with new and original stage productions.

"Another dream I have is to launch a missions organization that will take small groups of ballet dancers around the world so that they can use their talents to portray the love of Jesus beautifully and powerfully to those who are in desperate need of His love," Dan says.

Prayer request:

- "As a family that we will continue to seek the Lord and obey His direction for our lives."
- "For White Thorn Events that God will continue to use our ministry to reach the lost for Christ!" ♦♦♦

To purchase in-person or online tickets for *Most Incredible Christmas*, go to WhiteThornEvents.com/most-incredible-christmas. Samaritan Ministries members can use the code SM20 for 20 percent off tickets.

Why Samaritan Ministries?

Dan Stayskal of White Thorn Events and his wife, Sarah, joined Samaritan Ministries for the same reason many others have: conscience.

Besides spreading the Gospel through White Thorn Events, Dan works in information technology at a company that provides health insurance. That insurance was starting to cover things that he and his wife don't agree with, so he began investigating other options.

He wasn't the only one. Several of his co-workers were doing the same thing for the same reasons, and one of them mentioned that he was testing Samaritan Ministries by switching one family member over. When Dan checked back with him a year later, his co-worker's whole family had joined Samaritan and were loving it.

That was enough for the Stayskals.

Within the family's first year of membership, one of his daughters developed temporomandibular disorder, also known as TMJ.

"I learned that I had picked the right organization, because some (other health care sharing organizations) do not share TMJ treatment," Dan says.

The treatment cost was over \$6,000.

"Financially, it's really saved us," Dan says.

Despite the recent Share increase, Dan says Samaritan Share amounts are still more reasonable than the health insurance premium he was paying through his job. ♦♦♦

This Thanksgiving, practice the lost art of feasting

Yes, fasting is overlooked in our culture, but feasting with Christ-honoring intentionality also needs to be revived



by David Mathis,
desiringGod.org

WE MIGHT SUPPOSE that overstuffed American bellies would hardly need any instruction on feasting. So many of us have grown so accustomed to having so much to eat. Then here comes Thanksgiving. Just put it on autopilot. Fasting is the discipline today that

is grossly under-served; no need to consider feasting.

Not so fast. It's true that fasting is sadly overlooked, and too often forgotten. And yet, perhaps counterintuitively, true feasting is also in decline through familiarity and lack of spiritual purpose. Most of us have never given any serious thought to what it might mean to feast with Christ-honoring intentionality.

We've grown dull to the wonder

of ample food and drink through constant use, and overuse. When every day is a virtual feast, we lose the blessing of a real one. When every meal is a pathway to indulgence, not only is fasting lost, but true feasting is as well.

Feasting as a spiritual joy

The Bible is replete with the goodness of food and the holiness of feasting. God in His goodness

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(iStock)

made His creation edible. He made trees “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:9), and created us to eat His world: “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food” (Genesis 1:29). Then after the flood, He extended the gift to eating animals: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything” (Genesis 9:3). But distinct from the kindness of God in everyday food is the special grace of a feast.

In the Old Testament, God structured the seasons and years of His chosen people with fast days and feast days. Then He sent His Son as the great culmination of His nation’s feasts. Now, those who make up God’s multinational people through Christ are no longer under obligation to practice Israel’s ancient feasts and rituals (Colossians 2:16). They were “a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:17). Christians are free to feast—or not to feast:

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Romans 14:5-6)

But what we’re not free to do is

What makes feasting a means of God’s grace for nourishing our souls is explicitly celebrating Christ together in faith.

feast in a way that dishonors God. And forgetting Him altogether is profoundly dishonoring. As Christians, we want to learn to feast in such a way that we’re tasting God’s supernatural goodness as we enjoy natural tastes.

Not the same as indulging

Feasting is not first about the food. It is foremost about the Godward celebration of some specific occasion together. Good food and drink, in abundance, come in alongside our corporate focus to accentuate the appreciation and enjoyment of God and His kindness. The heart of feasting is not the food itself, but the heart of the feasters. A true feast is bigger than the food—infinitely bigger. The center is God and His greatness and grace toward us in Christ.

For Christians, feasting is not the same as mere indulgence. There is nothing particularly Christian about eating and drinking more than usual. What makes feasting a means of God’s grace for nourishing our souls is explicitly celebrating Christ together in faith. Whether it’s Thanksgiving or Easter, a birthday or anniversary, when we feast as Christians, we celebrate the bounty and kindness of our Creator and Redeemer.

Feasting in Christ is no mere physical event, but deeply spiritual.

Prepare the way for feasting

Good preparation for a good feast typically begins before the feast day—not only in our planning, but in our pattern of eating. When our normal daily consumption is characterized by sufficient restraint, then feasting is something we can rise to on special occasions, by faith and in good conscience, rather than being the baseline of everyday eating. If you’ve so over-indulged leading up to the feast that you feel a need to count calories at the feast, something is not right. Daily restraint both keeps our stomachs primed for times of fasting (so we’re not miserably famished) and makes possible a kind of special indulgence on feast days.

But exercising self-control in eating and drinking as a habit of life is only a prerequisite to good feasting. For a big Thanksgiving dinner to honor God—and feed not only our stomachs, but our souls—we need a few simple, but significant, steps to make it holy.

How to make a feast holy

As we finish our preparations for Thanksgiving dinner and come to the table together, how can we treat this shared meal as a means of God’s grace for our souls and not simply an exercise in eating? How is a Christian feast distinct from any old American Thanksgiving?

1. Plan with Christ at the center.

Important as it is to make careful arrangements for the entrées, sides, appetizers, and desserts,

we don't just plan for the food and drink, but to make much of Jesus at the culminating point. The night before, or morning of, perhaps the man of the house gives a few moments reflection to what "words of institution" will be spoken before the prayer of blessing.

Also planning with Christ at the center may mean having an open door, and extending invitations, to uncomfortable people. True feasting is not about being socially comfortable, but having the heart of Jesus to ask, "Who should we invite to dinner?"

"When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13).

2. Speak a Godward word.

With invitations in place and preparations made, it's time to gather around the table. Have someone lead by expressing the purpose of the feast, whether it's to express universal gratitude to God (Thanksgiving), or celebrate God's sending His Son to save us (Christmas), or His resurrection from the dead (Easter), or thanking God for someone's life (birthday) or marriage or labors (anniversaries). This should be fittingly formal or informal, depending on the context, the size of the gathering, and the culture of the family or group.

And it does not need to be a sermon. Keep it short, but clear. Perhaps a text of Scripture read or recited to join hearts and hungry tummies together, accompanied by



(iStock)

a heartfelt word about this occasion and its spiritual purpose.

This is the moment when the grace of Christ is made most explicit. This word (along with the prayer) moves the feast from mere eating and drinking to doing so "to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31) and for the strengthening of our souls, not just feeding of our stomachs.

3. Thank God together.

Then the prayer. Feasts are made holy "by the Word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4–5). First we hear a Godward word; then we speak back to Him to express our collective gratitude—not just for the food, but in particular for the stated focus of our celebration.

When the Godward word has been well-planned and plain (even in its terseness), then the prayer need not drag on and on to feign holiness. Feasting is made holy by a Godward word and earnest prayer. Again, as with the word, earnestness does not entail length, espe-

cially when stomachs are growling and the hot food is cooling.

4. Enjoy the food, drink, and company.

Then we eat, receiving the food, and fellowship, with thanksgiving. Don't feel the burden to keep Christ ceaselessly in your consciousness, such that you don't enjoy the tastes and engage with the company.

God made us finite, for rhythms of life, for moments when we intently focus on God (in the Word and prayer), and other moments where our conscious focus is eating, drinking, and other people, even as God remains in our field of vision and is the explicit recipient of our thanksgiving. ◆◆◆

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Knowing more about body mechanics may prevent injury



by Jonathan Hamm,
MOOSE Physical
Therapy

KNOWING MORE ABOUT your posture, body mechanics, and ergonomics can help you prevent injury.

For instance, did you know that lifting a 10-pound object with improper technique actually puts 100 pounds of pressure on your lower back? That means that when you add in the 105 pounds of the average human upper torso, lifting a 10-pound object with the wrong technique actually results in the total load on the lower back being 205 pounds. It is no wonder, then, that the No. 1 musculoskeletal injury people need treatment for is low-back pain.

As a physical therapist, I see back, neck, hip, and knee injuries related to posture problems. In at least 80 percent of these cases, the mechanism of injury is unknown or was something so slight, such as bending over to tie one's shoes, that the patient wants to know, "How can I be fine one day and then, all of a sudden, in pain the next day?"

How injuries happen

Traumatic injuries happen every day. They can occur when someone sustains a fracture from falling or lifts an object that is too heavy.

The most common musculoskeletal injuries, however, occur because of poor posture over a prolonged period of time, straining muscles and joints, eventually leading to overstressed tissue, which results in too much inflammation, which produces pain.

When, for example, you bend over to pick up an object and you use your back instead of your legs, you may feel just fine after one or two of the motions, depending on the strength of your back. But when repeatedly lifting in this manner, you are asking the muscle in your back and the discs and joints of the spine to handle a load they were not meant to handle multiple times, and that often leads to injury.

Let's take bungee jumping as an example of how the spine works.

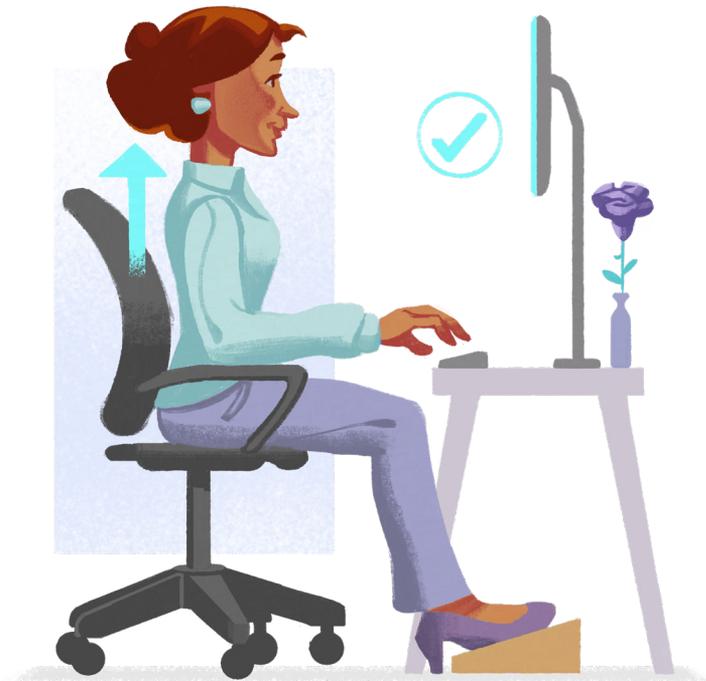
The bungee cord is meant to take a certain known load. However, the cord will not hold the person jumping without either partially or fully tearing if the strength of that cord is not at least as strong as the person's body-weight combined with the force of gravity and acceleration.

The same can be said with how our joints deal with the forces we place on them. This is where posture and proper body mechanics come into play. Many of you know what it means to stand up straight or lift with your legs, but what are proper body mechanics?



SUGGESTED POSTURES

Follow these suggestions, along with guidance from the accompanying illustrations:

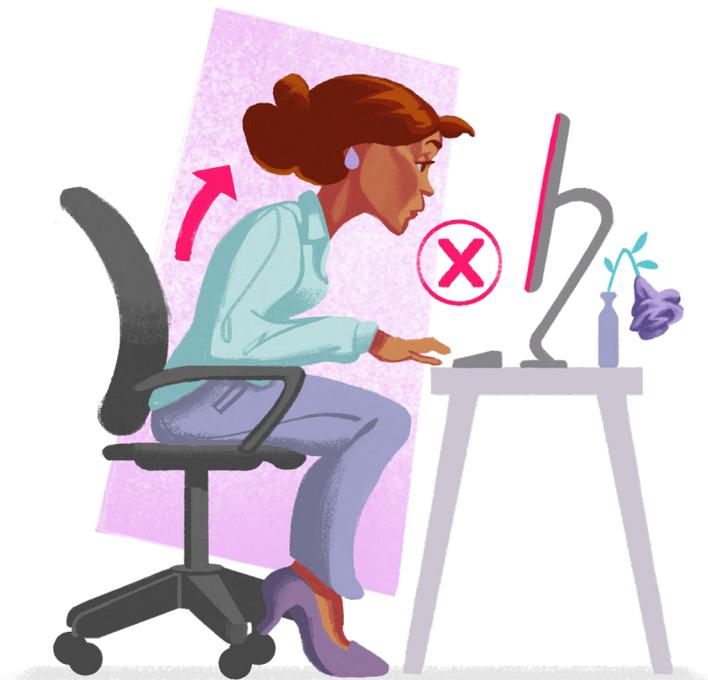


◀ Sitting

The same plumbline should line up with the ear, shoulder, and hip as in standing, while the feet should be flat on the floor (or footstool, if sitting on an elevated surface) and there should be 2 to 3 inches of space between the back of the knees and edge of the seat (see illustration at left). Should the legs be crossed? The answer is officially “no.”

◀ Standing

A plumbline should be able to be drawn from the ear to the side of the shoulder to the lateral hip bone to the lateral ankle bone (see illustration on page 12). This is proper standing posture. Now, this isn't always easy to attain or maintain, but one should try to get as close as possible to this posture.



Continued on page 14



◀ Lifting

The keys to lifting an object off the floor properly are to

1. Keep your back straight.
2. Keep the load close to your body.
3. Don't lift too heavy of a load.
4. Squat rather than bend over.

A quick tip is that if you can't keep your shoulders pulled back and your face looking straight ahead, you are probably not using correct form.



Now that you have the basics, let me give you a few additional posture tips:

- You should try sitting on the edge of a sitting surface to avoid slouching.
- A good daily practice to track your progress toward good posture is to stand with your heels, buttocks, shoulder blades, and back of head against a door-frame, without tilting your head back.
- Stand and walk tall! Act like there is a string attached from the ceiling to the top of your head that is pulling you up.

You know an object is too heavy for you to lift if you can't keep your head and eyes facing forward and your back straight. Injury is always possible.

At this point, some of you may be thinking that since your posture has been bad for years, you're probably close to the point of injury. Others may be thinking "Hey, if I haven't had a pain or injury so far from bad posture, maybe it will never happen to me."

However, injury can happen at any point, and anything from low immunity to a long car ride could be the last straw, so please be aware. Start thinking about your posture. If you have never had back pain

before, praise the LORD, you are blessed! But over 80 percent of the population will experience back pain at some point.

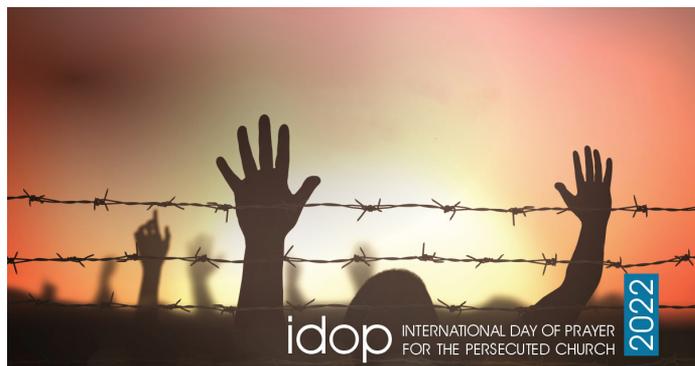
Improving your posture and body mechanics is the first step to achieving a healthy spine. ♦♦♦

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The information provided in this article is for educational purposes and is not meant as medical advice. It is the opinion of the writer. The information is not meant to replace a one-on-one relationship with a qualified health professional.

Illustrations by David Nielsen

Prayer for the Persecuted Church



Day of prayer for persecuted church November 6

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church will be November 6. Churches and other groups are encouraged to download presentation resources and to include prayers for persecuted Christians in their services and meetings. Resources can be found at such websites as SpiritOfMartyrdom.com, IMB.org/persecuted, and Persecution.com/idop.

Young Christian in Libya sentenced to death

A young Libyan Christian has been sentenced to death for his conversion, Voice of the Martyrs-Canada reports. The sentence was handed down despite lack of an official apostasy law in the nation. The court apparently reverted to a law that had been abolished years ago. *Pray for the young man's sentence to be vacated and for protection for other Christians in the predominantly Muslim nation.*

Chinese police raiding churches

Several unregistered house churches have been raided in China over the past several weeks, Mission News Network says. Zion Church in Beijing was raided on August 14. House of Light Church was banned on September 7, and authorities liquidated a house church in Xi'an. *Pray for Christians throughout China who are suffering for the faith. Pray also that they will be able to spread the Gospel in spite of persecution.*

Apostasy charges against Sudan believers dropped

Praise God that apostasy charges against four Christians in Sudan have been rescinded, according to Voice of the Martyrs-Canada. The four men had been charged under an obsolete law after a raid on their church in June. ♦♦♦



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

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 and action.

Each month, we will provide updates and offer prayer points gleaned from a variety of sources. Please use them in your prayer time and possibly to seek other ways, small or large, to supplement our prayers with action.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:

International Christian Concern
persecution.org
800-422-5441

World Watch Monitor
worldwatchmonitor.org

O God, You are my God ...

Psalm 63:1a

THE DOORPOST

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



O God, You are my God; earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh faints for You; as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

PSALM 63:1

Everyone worships someone or something, but not everyone worships the One True God. Who (or what) is your God?

Do you seek God more than anything else? Does your soul crave Him above all else? Does your flesh faint for Him?

Psalm 63 gives some indicators:

Do you earnestly seek Him in worship, beholding His power and glory?

Do your lips praise Him, blessing Him and lifting up your hands to Him?

Do you meditate on Him, praising Him daily and all through the night?

Do you cling to Him, depending on Him above all to protect and uphold you?

Do you find Him as satisfying as the best of food?

Do you value God's steadfast love more than life itself?

Who (or what) do you worship?

Who is your God?



For The Kingdom,
Ray King

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Ray King".