

11-23-2020

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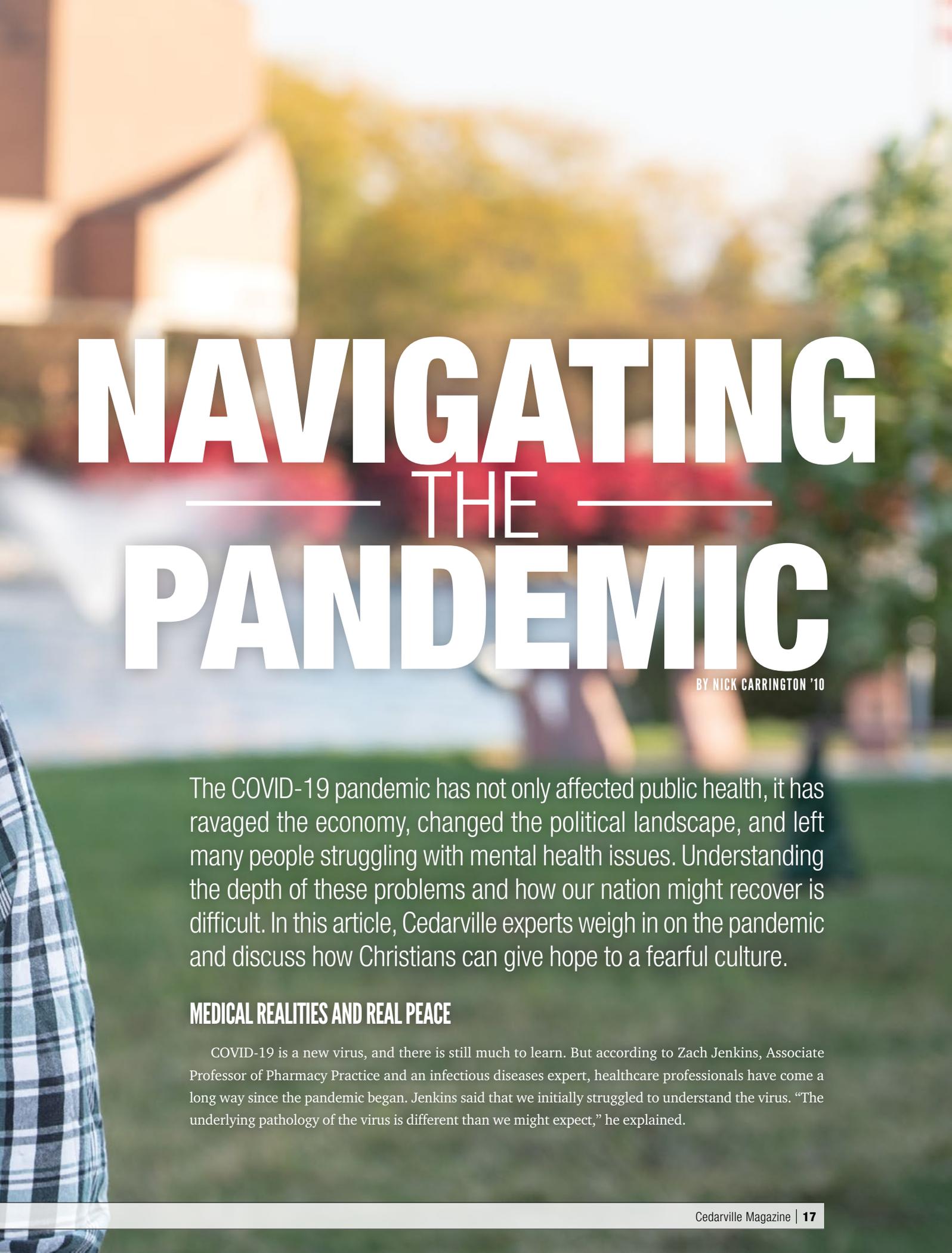


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# NAVIGATING — THE — PANDEMIC

BY NICK CARRINGTON '10

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected public health, it has ravaged the economy, changed the political landscape, and left many people struggling with mental health issues. Understanding the depth of these problems and how our nation might recover is difficult. In this article, Cedarville experts weigh in on the pandemic and discuss how Christians can give hope to a fearful culture.

## **MEDICAL REALITIES AND REAL PEACE**

COVID-19 is a new virus, and there is still much to learn. But according to Zach Jenkins, Associate Professor of Pharmacy Practice and an infectious diseases expert, healthcare professionals have come a long way since the pandemic began. Jenkins said that we initially struggled to understand the virus. “The underlying pathology of the virus is different than we might expect,” he explained.

That reality made it hard to treat patients effectively, but as doctors learned more, they have had some success in the inpatient setting. “We still don’t know the best treatment protocols,” Jenkins said, “but the combination of plasma, steroids, Remdesivir, and proning (turning a patient on their stomach with their chest and face down) seems to help.”

Jenkins notes that even after a late start, identifying a useful treatment regimen has helped the United States maintain a lower death per capita than many places in the world.

Many public figures see a vaccine as the ultimate solution, but Jenkins warns that there are risks involved. “Historically, the fastest we’ve seen a vaccine go to market is five years,” he said. “We are trying to do this one in a few months. Even though the FDA says they won’t lower their safety standards, there is some question as to whether it will be 100% safe.”

Depending on how long it takes to scale up manufacturing, a vaccine may not be available to the general public until next summer or fall.

When President Trump contracted the coronavirus, he received an antibody cocktail, Regeneron, which was not widely known. What are the implications of such treatments for the general public?

“There are still lots of experimental therapies with limited data,” Jenkins said. “Regeneron is something that is hard to access without an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) or approved indication from the FDA.”

The President also was treated with zinc, vitamin D, and famotidine, “all of which currently lack well-designed studies to back any perceived efficacy behind their use,” said Jenkins. “The President was able to receive all sorts of experimental and theoretical products because of his position.”

Whatever may happen in terms of treatment or vaccines, Jenkins encourages Christians to love their neighbors by sacrificing comfort for the safety of others. “I believe the evidence currently supports masks and distancing,” Jenkins said. “Even if you aren’t on board with these sorts of things, we need to make sure that we are treating others with love and respect. People are paying close attention to how we, as Christians, are responding to these events.”

## ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY AND GENUINE JOY

Economically, the recovery will likely extend long past the virus. When state governments effectively shut down most businesses in March and April, a healthcare crisis turned into an economic crisis with millions losing their jobs. Jeff Haymond, Dean of the School of Business Administration and Professor of Economics, said that the solution is easy to understand but hard to implement.

“If the problem is that we stopped producing, the solution is to start producing,” he said. “But how do you balance production and safety? There are costs and benefits to whatever we do. We need to weigh the costs and benefits of different approaches.”

Haymond explained that government interventions like the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES)

Act have helped some businesses, but these interventions focus on increasing demand when the real problem is supply. Until the economy starts producing in larger capacities,

it will struggle to recover.

Even when the economy starts producing at full capacity again, it will still face long-term issues, some new and some that the pandemic has exacerbated. “We’ve added \$3 trillion to our national debt in a few months, and we might add \$1-3 trillion more,” Haymond said. “We were going to have to deal with the consequences of the debt within the next 10–15 years or so, but that timeline has now been crunched.”

How quickly will the economy rebound? Experts are unsure. But in a time of extreme uncertainty, Christians have something to offer that others do not, something not based on financial security. “We need joy. There’s not a lot of hope out there, but before anything else, people need the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we show joy during the crisis, people will wonder what’s different about us,” Haymond said.

## EXTREME ANXIETY AND THE TRUE ANCHOR

Our culture’s lack of hope means more people are experiencing mental health issues as well. Betsy Linnell ’00, Assistant Professor of Psychology and a Licensed Professional

Before anything else, people need the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Jeff Haymond*

Clinical Counselor, said the pandemic has intensified the anxiety of those who already suffer from it, and individuals who have not struggled with anxiety before are now displaying it.

“This kind of problem can put people over the edge, especially those who need to know the future or have control over everything,” Linnell said.

Linnell believes that the nature of the pandemic makes addressing the issue harder. “A lot of times we can deal with trauma because there are people to support us who are outside of that trauma. But in this situation, everybody is affected,” she said.

To improve our mental health, Linnell suggested having a routine and regularly doing things that bring comfort, but she emphasized a deeper need: “Christ must be our anchor. We all look to things to rescue us, but what we really need is Christ.”

It is that message of hope that Christians can proclaim to their loved ones struggling with anxiety.

## POLITICAL POWER AND COUNTER-CULTURAL LOVE

The chaos of the pandemic affected this year’s November elections. Mark Caleb Smith, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Political Studies, said the pandemic hurt President Trump and the Republicans. “The virus reshuffled the political deck,” said Smith. “It transformed the President into an underdog and put the GOP in a more vulnerable position.”

Polls in the months before November suggested that Republican voters were more concerned about the economic crisis while Democratic voters worried more about the public health consequences of the virus. That discrepancy led to heated debate about how the government should address the pandemic. “Conservatives tend to value freedom and are more likely to oppose government guidelines when they feel it infringes on their freedom,” Smith said.

Democratic voters view government intervention differently. “Progressives see government intervening in the economy and private sector as generally positive. For them, when they see problems, they see government intervention as a solution,” Smith said.

Some government restrictions have affected where and how Christians can worship. Smith concedes that “there are a few instances where the government has overstepped on this,” but he does not see a threat to religious liberty post-pandemic. “There’s very little evidence that restricting gatherings are related to animosity toward religion,” Smith said.

And then, just a month before the November general election, President Trump contracted COVID-19. He was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, on October 2 and released October 5. The President’s response to the virus generated further headlines on the newswires.

“The President contracted a virus that has itself been the defining political issue of the year and, perhaps, his presidency,” Smith said. “The symbolism is difficult to escape for Donald Trump. Regardless of what happens, COVID-19 continues to be treated in almost purely political terms by many leaders across the country. Not even a global pandemic could pierce the overwhelming division and polarization within the American electorate.”

Because Christians are citizens of Heaven before they are citizens of the United States, they have an opportunity to love others even when they do not see eye to eye. “We need to love those who disagree with us politically by treating them well, respecting them, and living up to the standards that we are called to,” Smith said. “Right now, that’s very countercultural.”

As the culture continues to struggle in multiple ways through a pandemic, Christians have the only lasting hope: a sovereign God who never changes, even in the midst of a healthcare crisis, economic difficulties, mental and emotional struggles, or political strife. Through loving Him and others, Christians can point family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and the culture at large to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what people need most.

We need to love those who disagree with us ... by treating them well.

Mark Caleb Smith

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