

## Christian Herbalism for Building Family Health

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When I was asked as a young adult what I wanted to do with my life, I confidently replied, “I don’t know what I want to do, but I certainly know what I don’t want to do...be a teacher or go into the medical field!”

And here I sit, some 30 years later, a homeschooling mother and an herbalist. Sometimes the journey we are on takes an unexpected turn in the road and we find ourselves in a place we never dreamed of being. While I still wouldn’t want to teach in a public school or practice medicine in a hospital, the Lord has brought me on a path of both teaching and healing that could have only been found in Him.

When it comes to taking care of our health, there isn’t a one-size-fits-all method of healthcare that everyone should employ. Our approaches will be as individual as we are. However, there are some basic principles that we can all follow.

### Why “Christian” Herbalism?

1) God is creator of all, both man and plants – He has intricately designed and created our bodies and the plants

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.”

And it was so.

Genesis 1:11

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

2) Ultimate healing is only found in Him – He has given mankind plants as a means of grace to facilitate healing while we are on this earth

...their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing  
Ezekiel 47:12

3) All that we do should strive to bring glory to God – we should avoid practices that do not align with His word as we seek to live and promote obedience to Him.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.  
1 Corinthians 10:31

## What is herbal medicine?

I want to make sure that I define the term herbal medicine so that we are on the same page. When I use the term herbs, I am referring to plants and their constituents including roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds, and in the case of trees, bark. I would also include honey and bee products as well. Although they are not considered herbs by definition, honey, pollen, propolis, and beeswax are all created with the help of plant derivatives and have many healing properties.

There are many practices that are often lumped in together with herbalism, but I want to make a clear distinction here. Herbal medicine does not include homeopathy, iridology, acupuncture, reflexology, muscle testing, and many other alternative forms of medicine. I will not be covering these practices in this article.

To sum it up, herbal medicine is simply using plants as medicine.

## The Ladder Approach to Health

Just as a ladder has many rungs, the approach I take to building and maintaining health has several “levels”. Everyone starts at the foundational level, and depending on their needs, they move up the ladder for more specialized care. One thing to remember, when we move up the ladder as our needs for more intervention increase, we should continue utilizing the therapies from the previous level.

### **Foundational Level of Care**

When working to improve our health or the health of our loved ones, we must always consider the person as a whole. It is sometimes easy to focus on the physical aspects of health, but we should remember that mental and spiritual health affect physical well being.

The foundational level of our health should focus on four primary aspects:

1. **Nutrition** - I cannot overstate how important good nutrition is in building and maintaining health. Unless there are special needs in the diet, I always recommend a whole foods diet, full of organically grown fruits and vegetables; local farm-raised beef, lamb, and chicken; and other products including free range eggs, wild caught fish, fermented foods, bone broths, and whole grain sourdough breads.

It is also at this level of care that we determine if a person has food sensitivities or allergies. Many times food sensitivities can mimic chronic illnesses. Removing the culprits and healing the inflammation caused by their consumption can make a huge difference in a person's health.

2. **Sleep/Rest** - Research has shown that our bodies need adequate rest to function properly. Many essential functions are performed while we sleep including the regulation of hormone production, immune system activities, and metabolic processes. Historically, healthy adults have slept an average of 8-9 hours a night, with children and growing teenagers needing much more.
3. **Stress reduction** - The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for the relaxation response, otherwise known as "rest and digest". Ideally, we should spend the majority of our time engaging our parasympathetic nervous system, although very few of us are able to do so as often as we would like. Engaging the parasympathetic nervous system not only reduces anxiety, it reduces pain, stress, tension, slows our heart rate and breathing, and leaves us in a state of peace!

How do we engage our relaxation response? Simple. Anything that relaxes us will engage the response -- singing, laughing, massage, reading, resting, walking, talking with a friend, a nice bath, gardening, stretching, a long hug, a hot cup of tea. Find something that causes you to relax and take the time each day to engage the relaxation response.

4. **Prayer/Meditation on God's Word** - Although I have listed this as the last foundational item, it should actually be our number one priority each day.

Trusting in the Lord not only grows us spiritually, but it benefits our innermost physical wellbeing.

Proverbs 3:5-8

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

## Intermediate Level of Care

Once the foundation of good health has been laid, we can move on to an intermediate level of care. At this level, we are still focusing on building and maintaining health, but we are adding in extra measures of care. This is especially important as we begin to age and need extra support for our body systems.

At the intermediate level there are also four areas of focus:

1. **Supplementation** - While it is always beneficial to obtain our nutrients from our foods, there are times that supplementation is necessary. Sub-optimal nutrient levels will often manifest with the same symptom pictures as chronic disease.
2. **Preventative Care** - There are many types of preventative care such as chiropractic care, massage therapy, and exercise programs.
3. **Adaptogens** - According to David Winston in his book *Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina, and Stress Relief*, adaptogenic herbs “help the body adapt to stress, support normal metabolic function, and help restore systemic equilibrium.”

Adaptogens have been used for thousands of years in traditional systems of medicine, but it wasn't until more recently in the mid-1900's that scientists in the Soviet Union began to study adaptogens. Their hope was to increase stamina and endurance for the nation's top astronauts, ballet dancers, and athletes.

In order to be considered an adaptogen, the herb must meet three specific qualifications.

1. If given in a normal therapeutic dose, the herb must be non-toxic.

2. The herb must provide a “nonspecific state of resistance to stress” – building of reserve adaptive energy
3. The herb must have an amphoteric/normalizing effect on the body. Amphoterics normalize functions by up-regulating or down-regulating specific systems in the body.

Adaptogens can be taken in a variety of forms, but my favorite way to consume them is either as a daily tea or tincture. Because adaptogens work best when taken over a significant period of time, it is best to choose a method that will be most easily implemented into your daily routine.

4. **Trophorestorative Herbs** - Trophorestorative herbs are tonic herbs that strengthen and nourish the body and are tissue, organ, or system specific.

In all of the advances in modern medicine, scientists have never developed a trophorestorative medication. Trophorestorative herbs nourish and restore the body. The medications that are created generally kill a pathogen, attempt to prevent pain, or take over the controls and do a job that the body was designed to do. Absolutely none of them nourish and restore the body. Trophorestorative herbs are a gift from God that cannot be replicated by the hands of man.

Trophorestorative herbs are similar to food and nutrients, however they are much more specialized in their actions. These herbs are to be used long-term to restore the structure and the function of specific tissues, organs, or systems in the body and cause a lasting effect.

## **Advanced Level of Care**

Once we get to the advanced levels on the ladder, we begin to deal with problematic situations that require specific interventions.

1. **Acute care** - Acute care is focused on ailments and illnesses that occur for a short period of time and are usually non-life threatening first aid situations or common illnesses such as colds and the flu. Most acute care can be treated at home with the use of herbs. Educating yourself on basic herbal medicine practices and keeping herbs on hand at home are two of the best things you can do to be prepared for an acute situation.

2. **Chronic care** - Chronic care is focused on illnesses or diseases that last or reoccur over a longer period of time. They often involve several body systems and are more complex in nature. When dealing with chronic illnesses, it is often best to work with a qualified practitioner such as a clinical herbalist, a naturopath, or a functional medicine doctor who will develop a protocol to meet your specific needs. As I mentioned before, it is critical at this stage to maintain the health practices from the previous levels as these are the building blocks to good health.

This level is actually the level that most people first experience herbal medicine for the first time. And they usually come to it in one of two ways – either they dip their toes in the water with a simple remedy for an acute situation (maybe a salve or something for a cold or flu) or they are faced with a chronic illness and mainstream medicine has not been able to help them.

One question I want you to think about when working at this level is:

Why does it matter if I use conventional medicine or herbal medicine if I have been working on my health through the foundational and intermediate level of care?

The answer: many of the bandaid approaches conventional medicine uses actually make the problems worse.

Examples:

- Tylenol, ibuprofen – leaky gut
- Antibiotics – dysbiosis in the gut, leaky gut, chronic yeast infections
- Antacid medications – chronic low stomach acid, impaired digestion, rebound acid hypersecretion
- Birth control pills – hormonal dysregulation

The examples could go on and on. While I am not against utilizing conventional medicine when absolutely necessary, we need to develop the skills and the knowledge necessary to stay on a level of care where we don't need conventional medicine.

## Guiding Health

As you work to maintain your own health and the health of your family, knowing how to best guide the process can often be overwhelming. Sometimes we might get to a higher rung and feel like we are stuck there. Remember, start at the foundational level and work your way up. Even if you need help as you get higher on the ladder, the foundation you lay will go far in helping you move back down the ladder as you regain health and vitality.

### Specific Herbs – Adaptogens

#### **Holy Basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*)**

Also known as tulsi, this mint family plant is highly aromatic and displays beautiful dark green to purple leaves and flowers during the spring and summer months. It is easily grown in the garden as an annual flowering plant. In the traditional Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda, Holy basil is considered a rasayana and highly revered. A rasayana is an herb that promotes longevity and abundant health.

Holy basil has a warm, sweet, slightly pungent taste that makes an exceptional tea blend when combined with other herbs. A daily morning cup of holy basil tea is said to “lift one’s spirits and bring joy into your life”. It is an excellent herb choice for those struggling with brain fog or memory loss, as it is known to enhance cerebral (brain) circulation and function especially when combined with rosemary and gotu kola.

Holy basil has been shown to reduce the impact stress has on the body, including a reduction in cortisol levels. When combined with other health promoting strategies, Holy basil can be of benefit to those struggling with metabolic syndrome and an imbalance in blood sugar levels.

#### **Ashwagandha (*Withania Somnifera*)**

The Latin meaning of the species name somnifera is “sleep inducing”, indicating one of ashwagandha’s many uses. Many adaptogens are at least slightly stimulating, but ashwagandha is both a calming adaptogen and relaxing nervine. Along with promoting restful sleep and reducing fatigue, it has a relaxing effect on muscles and relieves minor aches and pains. Studies have shown that ashwagandha has a stimulating effect on the thyroid and nourishes overtaxed adrenal glands. Traditionally, ashwagandha has been used in supporting fertility in both men and women.

Ashwagandha can be grown as an annual in most climates and a perennial in warmer climates. While the root has traditionally been powdered and served by mixing with warm milk, many find the taste too bitter to consume on a consistent basis. Taking a daily dose of the tincture may prove to be easier to swallow.

### **American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*)**

Considered by many Southern folk herbalists to be the “King of the Herbs”, American ginseng has certainly proven to be an herbal staple both in the South and around the world. American ginseng is native to the Appalachian mountains and grows in heavily shaded forest from Canada to the Gulf Coast. Plants are propagated by seed or root cuttings and the medicinal roots are harvested after 8-10 years of growth.

American ginseng has traditionally been used as a digestive bitter to enhance digestive function, increase salivation and stomach acid, and facilitate better nutritional absorption. The famed Southern herbalist Tommie Bass used it as an alterative to enhance elimination and metabolic function. More recently, it has been found to be an adaptogenic herb, explaining the use for chronic fatigue and other stress related symptoms. The Eclectic herbalists of the late 1800’s prescribed American ginseng for deficient insomnia, a condition that develops when a person is too exhausted to sleep. American ginseng is considered an immunomodulator, balancing deficient or excessive immune system functions. Because of this, American ginseng is especially helpful in autoimmune diseases, specifically ones that present with dryness, fatigue, and deficiency.

## Specific Herbs – Trophorestoratives

### **Heart/Cardiovascular System**

#### **Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.)**

Parts used: leaves, flowers, berries

Properties: sour, sweet, cooling, astringent

Actions: cardiac trophorestorative, diuretic, relaxing nervine, antioxidant

Preparations: teas, tinctures, food

Different varieties of hawthorn grow around the world and are used interchangeably. Leaves, flowers, and the bright red berries are harvested in season, however the



flowers do not dry well. They are best preserved as a tincture or consumed as a tea right away. The berries make a lovely syrup and jam.

Much research has been done on the effects of hawthorn on the heart and the cardiovascular system. Hawthorne is a great nourisher and protector of the heart, improving function, lowering blood pressure, reducing edema (fluid retention), balancing cholesterol, increasing circulation, and reducing heart palpitations.

## **Lungs/Respiratory System**

### **Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)**

Parts used: leaves

Properties: salty (mineral taste), cooling, moistening, demulcent, relaxing

Actions: respiratory trophorestorative, anti-inflammatory, lymphatic, expectorant, antispasmodic

Preparations: tea, tincture, infused oil, poultice

Mullein grows throughout much of the world in gardens and as an invasive weed. Its glorious yellow stalk of flowers can be seen along roadsides, in fields and valleys, and wherever it can get full sunshine. It prefers poor soil and is an accumulator of heavy metals, so it is imperative to harvest from clean locations. Mullein is a biennial plant producing a rosette of fuzzy leaves the first year and then a large stalk with flowers the second year.

Mullein leaf has an affinity for the lungs and respiratory system. It is very soothing and relaxing, making it useful for dry, irritating coughs, especially ones that have lingered on for some time. Mullein helps to relax and open up tightness in the chest and throat. Mullein works exceptionally well as an anti-inflammatory herb to restore respiratory tissue that has been inflamed by allergens, smoke, chemical inhalation, or mold exposure.

## **Liver**

### **Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)**

Parts used: seeds

Properties: bitter, sweet, oily

Actions: liver trophorestorative, liver protective, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, stimulates the production and release of bile, blood sugar balancing

Preparations: tincture, freshly powdered

Milk thistle is another plant that grows wild throughout much of the world. Its large green leaves have milky white veins that create patterns in the leaves resembling the lobular shape of the liver. This was historically considered a “doctrine of signatures” or the belief that God gave us clues within the plants as to its use. The flowers are deep purple to pink and are surrounded by large spikes, as are the leaves. Because of this, harvesting the seeds can be quite difficult.

The medicinal compounds of milk thistle are found within the seed coating, which are not soluble in water. Therefore, the compounds should be extracted in a high-proof alcohol. The seeds can also be freshly powdered and consumed in a capsule or with food.

Our liver performs over 500 functions in the body. Milk thistle seed is used to support, protect, and restore the liver, promoting optimal function. Milk thistle increases glutathione production in the liver. Glutathione is a strong antioxidant which helps with liver detoxification processes. Milk thistle is an antidote for mushroom poisoning and also combats damage done to the liver by medications, drugs, and alcohol.

## **Nerves/Nervous system**

### **Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*)**

Parts used: unripe seed head

Properties: salty taste (mineral rich), moistening, relaxing

Actions: nervous system trophorestorative, nutritive

Preparations: tea, tincture

The herb known as milky oats refers to the unripe seed head of the oat plant when it is in its “milky” stage. Right before the seed begins to harden and form the grain we consume as oatmeal, the seed can be squeezed and a milky substance will exude. These seed heads can be harvested at this stage, carefully air dried, and then consumed as a tea or they can be extracted in alcohol immediately after harvest.

I like to think of milky oats as a soothing balm for frazzled nerves. Milky oats are beneficial for our physical nervous system (the actual nerves) and the functioning of the nervous system. They are specifically used for nervous exhaustion experienced after

high stress or traumatic seasons in life. Milky oats help to ease anxiety, reduce depression, and calm the nerves.

## **Kidneys/Adrenal Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)**

Parts used: young leaves, seeds

Properties: salty taste (mineral rich), drying, cooling, astringent

Actions: kidney and adrenal trophorestorative, nutritive, diuretic, alterative (supports metabolic processes)

Preparations: tea, tincture, food

Stinging nettle thrives in protein rich soil and can often be found growing wild near compost piles. It is a leafy green plant full of vitamins, minerals, and trace elements that can be enjoyed as a nutrient dense food as well as a restorative tonic herb. Dried nettle leaf makes a wonderful dark green tea that can be made in large amounts and kept in the refrigerator for a refreshing “green” drink throughout the day.

While the leaves offer tremendous benefits to many systems of the body, the restorative action on the kidneys and adrenal glands is most profound utilizing the seeds of the plant. Nettle seed is known to increase resistance to stress, boost energy and stamina, and restore function to depleted and compromised kidneys.

## **Other Trophorestorative Herbs**

Space doesn't permit me to cover all of the trophorestorative herbs in depth, but I did want to mention a few more herbs that are beneficial and have affinities for specific organs or systems in the body.

Skin - Burdock (*Arctium spp.*)

Mucous membranes - Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)

Immune system - Astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*)

Female reproductive system - False Unicorn (*Chamaelirium luteum*)

Endocrine system - American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*)

Connective tissue - Gotu Kola (*Centella asiatica*)

Brain - Bacopa (*Bacopa monnieri*)

*Jasmine Lucero is the publisher of the Christian Herbal Magazine. She first stepped into the world of natural health almost 20 years ago and is now a clinical herbalist working with others to help them find natural health solutions for their families utilizing herbal medicine and nutrition. Her heart's desire is to find ways to minister to others using the magnificent plants God has blessed us with. You can contact Jasmine at [jasmine@christianherbal.com](mailto:jasmine@christianherbal.com) for questions or consultations.*