Medicine and Miracles: Cancer and Cures
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Among the complicated interfaces of science and faith is the question of the relationship between human medical practice and transcendent actions of God in the treatment of disease and injury. As Christians, we pray in faith to our Creator and Lord for his providential intervention to bring about healing. At the same time, we generally trust that there can be benefit from efforts to heal by physicians, and that investment in research might usefully develop improved methods for medical practice. While there need not be conflict between these two approaches, their relationship often is not considered explicitly. Our article here offers some basic thoughts about how prayer and medicine can be concomitant partners in a Christian’s perspective on one of the central health problems in contemporary society, that of cancer and its treatment. (Note: This article has its origins in a lecture given by one of the authors at the Faraday Institute [Cambridge, UK] in November 2014.)

Albert Einstein offered an insightful metaphor to describe his view of the relationship between science and religion: “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.” While this metaphor does not resolve all the difficulties of integrating science and religion, it nevertheless affirms a cooperative relationship between these realms of approach to understanding our world and our lives. In the long-standing dialogue between science and religion, an abundance of attention has been devoted to topics in which historical and philosophical realms of approach to understanding our world and our lives meet. Among popular examples can be found the origin of the universe, the emergence of human-kind, the source of knowledge, and the nature of free will.

In our own work and conversations, we two authors—one a pastor and one an academic biomedical researcher/teacher—have frequently landed on a more contemporary topic of mutual interest as scientifically interested believers of the Christian faith: the relationship between the human science endeavor of medicine and the human faith endeavor of prayer. There seems to be a much thinner body of literature delving into this area of dialogue. Our hope here is to offer several ideas from our personal viewpoints, especially as refined by valuable discussion. We will focus on a limited sector of human disease, that of cancer, for contemplating how Christians might usefully consider the integrated roles of medicine and prayer in the hope of overcoming this oft-tragic malady.

Receiving the diagnosis of cancer is a common experience for vast numbers of us. Almost everyone has a loved one who has suffered, or is suffering from, cancer of one kind or another. And we all trust in modern medical practice for the most effective possible treatment, yet at the
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