

In need of prayer

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [November 22, 2000](#) issue

One of the theological puzzles with which I have struggled over the years is what the Puritans called “special providence”—that is, God’s miraculous intercession in human affairs in response to prayer. Every pastor knows the dilemma. We stand by the bedside of a child suffering with leukemia, holding as tightly as we can to her parents, who look to us not only for some answer to their understandable question, “Why is this happening to our child?” but also for prayers of intercession, prayers for healing.

We know the biblical mandate, “Ask and it will be given to you,” and the biblical promise, “Nothing in all creation will separate us from God’s love in Jesus Christ.” And so we pray for healing and wholeness, covering ourselves theologically with the phrase, “if it be your will,” as if the healing of a little girl could possibly not be God’s will. For me the puzzle has always been complicated by the reality that there are so many children for whom no one is praying specifically.

The theological dilemma came into focus for me in a personal way recently. I was a hospital patient and people told me they were praying for me. The surgery was major but not life-threatening. My worn-out left hip was successfully replaced and I am well on the way to full recovery. My friends and colleagues told me in advance that they would pray for me and they did. Some came to the hospital and prayed. The staff of my church prayed. Members of the congregation sent me get-well cards, every single one of which announced, “We’re praying for you.” One of our wonderful secretaries made an appointment to see me in my office and when she arrived and sat down, told me she wanted to pray for me, which she did. The locker room attendant in the health club I frequent stunned me by looking me in the eye and saying, “God will be with you and I’ll pray for you every day.”

This experience doesn’t solve the theological puzzle. I still can’t believe that my new hip is mending more quickly because a hundred people prayed for me, while my buddy across the hall is proceeding with more difficulty because just two people are praying for him. But I do know this, in a new and profound way: strength and courage and hope and wholeness are imparted in the knowledge that others are

holding you up to God in prayer. And I do know that God's healing love somehow uses the love and concern and prayers of others in the work of restoring, comforting, and creating wholeness.

And I am ready, once again, simply to be silent in the face of the mysterious goodness of God, and to resume my own pastoral ministry of praying for those whose needs are real and urgent.