

**Main Idea:** God can do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.

**Skeptical arguments (from David Hume) against the possibility of modern miracles:**

- 1) “Wise men choose probabilities.”<sup>1</sup>
- 2) “That (a dead man should come to life/actual miracle occurring), has never been observed in any age or country.”<sup>2</sup>
- 3) “The most ignorant and barbarous of these barbarians carry the report (miracle accounts) abroad.”<sup>3</sup>

**Sound responses of evidenced cases of modern miracles:**

\*These accounts are *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. God is not a magician to be manipulated by special “prayer formulas.” Even when He chooses not to heal, He is still good and still God (‘Silence of God’ sermon on April 28, 2013). If we were honest, who would admit that many of our doubts about the supernatural stem from unanswered prayer. We may believe that God can do all things but we are a loss to explain why he didn't answer our prayers to heal a family member.

- 1) Evidence, not mere probability, is the choice of wise people – “The error is that this argument equates quantity of evidence and probability. It says, in effect, that we should always believe what is most probable (in the sense of “enjoying the highest odds”). But this is silly. On these grounds a dice player should not believe the dice show three sixes on the first roll, since the odds against it are 216 to 1. Or, we should never believe we have been dealt a perfect bridge hand (though this has happened) since the odds against it are 1,635,013,559,600 to 1! What Hume seems to overlook is that wise people base their beliefs on facts, not simply on odds...Hume’s argument confuses *quantity* of evidence with the *quality* of evidence. Evidence should be *weighed*, not *added*... The wise do not *legislate* in advance that miracles cannot be believed to have happened; rather, they *look* at the evidence to see if God has indeed acted in history”<sup>4</sup> – Norman L. Geisler

- This is a theistic universe. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
- God = Possibility of **miracles** (Ephesians 3:20-21).

\**Historical Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon Bonaparte*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, “Of Miracles,” R. Douglas Geivett & Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Miracles & the Modern Mind,” *In Defense of Miracles*, 79, 85.

<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Richard Whately writes a brilliant satire using the same criteria as ‘historians’ who deny the historicity of Jesus (and the resurrection), to facetiously deny the historicity of Napoleon Bonaparte. It is a brilliant apologetic

## 2) Evidenced cases of miracles being observed in many countries.

- Philippines: Some 83% of those who were prayed for by evangelical Christians reported dramatic healing in their bodies, “The complaints healed in their reports “ranged from cancer to tuberculosis, ulcers, heart trouble, tonsillitis, wounds and punctures and a dislocated shoulder.” (268).<sup>6</sup>

- Philippines: Manuel Gonzales’ funeral cancellation

“Other sources reveal that healing claims contributed to churches’ growth elsewhere in the Philippines as well. In 1951, Rev. Manuel Gonzales was very weak and appeared close to death; people prayed for hours for his restoration. He suddenly began to stir and soon jumped out of the bed, fully recovered; the funeral was canceled, word spread, and he eventually became a more prominent Christian leader” (268).

- Myanmar (Burma): Healing of Nung

“About two months after birth in Kalaymyo town, Nung began running a constant fever of 101 to 105 F; as it continued, doctors tried their best to treat him but finally reluctantly advised the mother to just entrust the child to God. Possibly the largest hospital in the capital could have helped him, but the family lacked the money to go there, and Nung was too weak from not eating to survive the trip. At the time, the doctors where he was lacked adequate medicines and could not even be certain what was causing the fever. Nung kept vomiting, and others also acknowledge that, barring a miracle, Nung would die. The mother refused to give up.

Funerals are family obligations in Myanmar, and the family had to travel to Tedim for the funeral of the mother’s brother or it would effectively break ties with the mother’s family. They could only pray; as they began climbing the mountain, Nung suddenly went from crying to laughing, and his temperature remained normal during their entire week to Tedim. This was the beginning of his unexpected recovery, and all the family members praised God. Nung is now about twenty-nine and has a degree in music from Samford University” (275).

- India: Hundreds of healings & thousands of conversions in a Presbyterian church

“The Evangelical Church of India in Tamil Nadu grew from several hundred to fifteen thousand in sixteen years, the growth driven partly through firsthand experiences of healings and exorcisms” (277-278)

- India: *Jesus Film* miracles

“Scholars today sometimes note that no ecumenical evangelistic resource has ever proliferated before on the scale of the *Jesus Film*; in India itself, more than 400,000 villages have reportedly

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against the self-defeating ‘logic’ of hyper-skeptics. It is a devastating rebuttal of Hume’s unwarranted metaphysical naturalism. For a free e-book, see:

[http://books.google.com/books?id=JLo9AAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=JLo9AAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>6</sup> Page numbers are from Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

been exposed to the film in fifty-one different languages. *Jesus Film* workers often report miracles; for example, when one mother refused to come to the showing because her daughter had been suffering on the ground for days from dysentery, the worker prayed for the daughter. The child was instantly healed, and thirty friends and relatives accompanied her to the film that night, most of them becoming believers” (279).

- India: Disappearance of large fibroid tumors; numerous exorcisms (284).

“Dr. Alex Abraham, a neurologist now leading a church planting ministry called Operation Agape . . . reported that miracles are common in India and that 80 to 85 percent of new churches in India are planted especially through healings and the like. In our brief time together, he randomly offered several examples that came to his mind. Among them, one Sikh woman was in terrible pain, and the ultrasound showed that she was bleeding from severe fibroid tumors. Both the doctors and her family insisted that she have surgery, but she was terrified and, despite the pain, refused to go. As she confided the situation to her Brahmin neighbor, the neighbor disclosed that she was a believer in Jesus and offered to pray for her. After the prayer, the Sikh woman’s pain left, and she returned home announcing happily that Jesus had healed her. Thinking that she was just seeking to avoid surgery, her husband did not believe her but finally proposed that she have another ultrasound to settle the matter. She was afraid, but the ultrasound showed that these large tumors had vanished. *The social price of conversion is very high, but the family was so convinced that a miracle had occurred that they all became followers of Jesus, and the son became a pastor*” (284).

- Africa (Nigeria): Continuous bleeding stopped; 15 yr old boy healed of deafness; fractured spine & shaking palsy healed (325-326).

“A midwife continuously bleeding since an operation on her womb was dying, and when he (Danny McCain, founder of the International Institute for Christian Studies and a lecturer at the University of Jos in Nigeria), prayed for her, she was healed and lived for fifteen more years, without this problem returning” (325-326).

“A boy who was born deaf was instantly healed at age fifteen” (325).

“Henderson Jumbo’s fractured spine was healed even without special prayer, during worship; documentation supports his claim” (325).

“The former chief judge of Rivers State, Justice Koripamo D. Ungbuku, “was healed of a shaking palsy of the right hand,” although he had previously suffered this affliction for three years” (325-326).

- Central America (Costa Rica): 1/3 of a child’s liver destroyed by a parasite totally restored  
“A parasite was destroying the liver of a third-grader in Costa Rica named Sara Rodriguez; when she finally went for testing, X-rays revealed that a third of the liver had been destroyed. Realizing that nothing more could be done for her medically, the doctor sent her home to die.

Christians began praying for Sara, however, and she became convinced that God would heal her. “Within days,” the interviewer notes, “the child improved. Her mother returned Sara for further medical examinations and X-rays. The X-rays, in contrast to those taken earlier, clearly indicated that Sara’s liver was completely normal.” She remained well and continued in school” (350).

- USA: Randolph Byrd, MD, ‘Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population’; Atrial septal defect healed (431); Deaf girl healed (434); Broken ankle healed (440).
- Randolph Byrd, MD, ‘Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population’ at the San Francisco General Medical Center, CA, in 1988. The abstract reads, “These data suggest that intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God has a beneficial therapeutic effect in patients admitted to a CCU.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Randolph Byrd, MD, ‘Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population.’ *Southern Medical Journal*. 1988 Jul; 81(7): 826-29. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3393937> Byrd’s abstract is as follows: The therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer (IP) to the Judeo-Christian God, one of the oldest forms of therapy, has had little attention in the medical literature. To evaluate the effects of IP in a coronary care unit (CCU) population, a prospective randomized double-blind protocol was followed. Over ten months, 393 patients admitted to the CCU were randomized, after signing informed consent, to an intercessory prayer group (192 patients) or to a control group (201 patients). While hospitalized, the first group received IP by participating Christians praying outside the hospital; the control group did not. At entry, chi-square and stepwise logistic analysis revealed no statistical difference between the groups. After entry, all patients had follow-up for the remainder of the admission. The IP group subsequently had a significantly lower severity score based on the hospital course after entry (P less than .01). Multivariate analysis separated the groups on the basis of the outcome variables (P less than .0001). The control patients required ventilatory assistance, antibiotics, and diuretics more frequently than patients in the IP group. These data suggest that intercessory prayer to the Judeo-Christian God has a beneficial therapeutic effect in patients admitted to a CCU.

using it as a neurosis to avoid dealing with reality.<sup>25</sup> Many years ago, however, his family faced a crisis in November 1984, when his eight-year-old son Brad was found to have atrial septal defect, with two holes in his heart. The condition impaired his lungs in addition to his heart. To allow time to convalesce without interrupting school, the visiting pediatric cardiologist scheduled surgery for June, warning that Brad could not play sports anymore in the meantime.

The months of waiting proved stressful. As June approached, Brad began giving away his toys, not expecting to survive. One day he asked his father, "Am I going to die?" Ed answered his son honestly: not everyone facing heart surgery dies, but during heart surgery that is always a possibility. "Can Jesus heal me?" the eight-year-old asked. Aware of how often faith had been abused, the father cringed. "I'll get back to you on that," he responded. A few days later, after some anguished prayer and engagement with Phil 4:13, he shared his resolution with his son. God does heal, but whether he would heal in Brad's case or not, they still had hope of eternal life in Jesus.

Galen, the pastor, informed Ed that someone was planning to conduct a healing service in their church in June. Ed felt that this was their only hope apart from the surgery that was scheduled the Sunday following the service. When the anticipated service concluded, however, the visiting minister, Wesley Steelberg Jr.,<sup>26</sup> initially was focusing primarily on praying for emotional healing, and Ed felt cheated. But then Steelberg called for those wanting prayer for physical healing, and Ed urged Brad to go forward. At first reluctant, Brad finally complied, explaining to this visiting minister what was wrong.<sup>27</sup> "Do you believe that Jesus can heal you?" Steelberg asked. Brad answered affirmatively, and Steelberg offered a simple prayer.

The following Sunday, the family traveled to the university hospital in Columbia, Missouri, for further tests; the tests merely confirmed that nothing had changed. The following morning, as Brad was taken for surgery, the doctor explained that Ed could follow Brad only as far as the yellow tape, and the team would be operating on Brad for four to six hours. At this point any hope of a miraculous healing had faded, so the family could only pray for surgical success.<sup>28</sup> Ed returned anxiously to the waiting area. After about an hour, the pediatric cardiac surgeon, the pulmonologist, and the risk management director for the hospital entered the waiting

25. Ed Wilkinson, phone interview, Feb. 22, 2009; with confirmation of some details in personal correspondence, March 11; April 3, 2009. Naturally Brad remembers fewer details, but he also shared with me the elements that he recalls (Brad Wilkinson, personal correspondence, May 17, 2009).

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26. Steelberg's own background may be significant for his interest in healing: he "had been healed of a critical heart condition and was given just hours to live" before being healed (Galen Hertweck, personal correspondence, May 17, 2009); his daughter confirms that he was healed (Candace Fisk, personal correspondence, May 20, 2009; see further discussion below). Likewise, Steelberg's father, Wesley Steelberg Sr., had been healed around age eight from "a debilitating condition due to brain fever and spinal meningitis" (Olena, *Horton*, 69–70).

27. One of Brad's clearest memories is his fear of going "down front and being prayed for" (Brad Wilkinson, personal correspondence, May 17, 2009).

28. Brad recounts that this was "the first time I can recall when I just had to trust God and let go," because there was nothing he could do (*ibid.*).

area and summoned Ed to accompany them. The surgery should have taken at least three more hours, so Ed was anxious. Because the surgery was obviously no longer occurring, Ed, his mind racing, could only fear the worst as he followed them obediently down a long corridor.

Ushering Ed into a room, they displayed films posted on the wall, taken the day before. "You see where the blood was leaking from one chamber to the next," the surgeon explained. Then the surgeon showed the film they had just taken as they were starting surgery, with a wall of some sort where the leak had been. Too anxious and traumatized to process immediately what the surgeon was saying, Ed finally interrupted. "What happened to my son?" "Brad is in the recovery room," the surgeon answered calmly. "I beg your pardon?" Ed demanded.

The surgeon explained that there was nothing wrong with Brad's heart—even though the holes were clearly there the day before. His lungs were also now normal. "I have not seen this very often," the surgeon explained. While this sort of spontaneous closure could happen in infants, it was not supposed to happen in an eight-year-old. "You can count this as a miracle." The pulmonologist added, "Somebody somewhere must have been praying." The hospital risk manager added firmly, "You can see from the films: this was *not* a misdiagnosis."<sup>29</sup>

Because they had done a cardiac catheterization, Brad would have to be kept overnight, but he was free to return home the next day, on Tuesday. Ed asked when Brad could start playing sports again. "When is his next game scheduled?" the surgeon inquired. "Thursday," Ed responded numbly. The doctor assured him that Brad could play on Thursday. That Thursday, as they arrived late for the baseball game, Brad's friend Paul spotted him. Knowing that Brad was supposed to be convalescing, but having prayed for him, he shouted, "Did God heal you?" "Yeah!" Brad shouted back, thrusting his fist into the air. Brad hurried to second base, where he soon caught a ball and tagged out the runner who had been on first base in a double play. A parent for the rival team complained about the catch, "That was a miracle." "You have no idea," Ed recalls muttering.

An agent from the insurance company later complained about the forms he received. “What is a ‘spontaneous closure?’” he demanded. “A miracle,” Ed tried to explain. Brad is now in his early thirties with a business and children of his own, and he has never had any heart problems since his healing. Although before his healing experience he had also had pulmonary hypertension, normally supposed to be irreversible, that problem was cured at the same time as his heart. Ed himself went through surgery for an unrelated issue last year and is well aware that miraculous healings do not always happen. He will never doubt, however, that at a time when he had virtually surrendered hope, God did a miracle for his eight-year-old son.

29. Anderson, *Miracles*, 96, notes another case of a hole in a child’s heart being healed, and that such recoveries when purely natural are rare and take years; another case appears in Schiappacasse, *Heals*, 30.

(431-432)

- Deaf girl healed

“In another case, a nine-year-old girl, deaf without her hearing aid but praying for healing, was instantly healed, to the audiologist’s amazement. The dumbfounded consultant responded, “I don’t believe you. It is not possible.” But the next day, the tests revealed that her hearing was normal. The doctor’s report admitted, “*Her hearing returned completely to normal...I was completely unable to explain this phenomenon...I can think of no rational explanation as to why her hearing returned to normal, there being a severe bilateral sensorineural loss.*” Even in the large world population such events are fairly rare” (434).

- Broken ankle healed

“An American Baptist pastor in Michigan who has long been an adjunct professor in Palmer Seminary’s DMin program, Dr. John Piippo, shared with me several reports from his church, including one of an instant and complete healing of a visitor to his church (before the healing, a non-Christian). He further referred me to another person from his church who claimed to have been healed, Carl Cocherell. In March 2006, after a spiritual retreat in Branson, Missouri, Carl was checking the oil in his car when he stepped down and felt a sharp crack. Although he was a Vietnam veteran, he says that he had never felt such pain, and he fainted. X-rays at the emergency room in the Branson hospital revealed such a serious break of the ankle that after setting the break the orthopedist ordered him to stay overnight. During that night, though, Carl recounts that he experienced a voice from the Lord assuring him that his foot was not broken. After putting Carl’s foot in a cast and warning that he would need months of therapy, the doctor referred him to his family physician.

Carl’s wife drove them back to Michigan, and the next day his family doctor sent him to the hospital for some more X-rays. After receiving the X-rays, his doctor called him into the office and explained that there were no breaks, or even tissue indicating where the break had been.

“You never had a broken ankle,” the doctor explained. Carl pointed out the X-rays from Missouri. “*That* is a broken ankle,” the doctor admitted. But now there was no sign that he had even had one, so the doctor removed the cast right away. Apart from the ankle being blue for a couple of days, Carl had no problem with it. At church that Sunday, where he used no crutches or other support, he testified how God healed him. Carl provided me with the radiology reports from before and after the healing supporting his claim” (440).

3) Hume’s claim is **racism/ethnocentrism** at its worst (‘poisoning the wells’ fallacy)

“That God does heal in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century should be accepted on the evidence of all these Case Records. If you do not accept those two statements, you may ask yourself what evidence you are prepared to accept.” – Dr. Rex Gardner (426).

Final question: What good would it be to have your body temporarily healed but your soul go to hell for eternity?

*Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*