

Chapel Talk
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Unanswered Prayers

Have you ever prayed, or wished, or hoped for something to happen in your life, but it never came true? We all have prayed for something miraculous to happen to us at one time or another ranging from something big like winning the lottery to something small like doing well on a test or in an athletic event. I would guess that at some point in time, we have all been disappointed when a prayer didn't come true. Sometimes an unanswered prayer can leave us with the feeling that God isn't listening, or that he doesn't have time for our prayers, or that he doesn't even exist at all. Tonight I would like to talk to you about answered and unanswered prayers and how they relate to the story of my wife's pregnancy with our triplets, Caden, Bryer, and Tyler.

In late May of last year I was sitting alone in the training room when the phone rang. It was my wife telling me she had received word from the doctor's office that her pregnancy test had come back positive. We were going to be parents! We had been trying to conceive since the beginning of the year and were being closely monitored by Shara's doctor. When we got the news, Shara was only 3 weeks pregnant. For various medical reasons, my wife's early pregnancy was scheduled to be very closely monitored with ultrasounds and blood tests. Her first ultrasound and our first glimpse at our child was scheduled for 2 weeks later.

The 2 weeks following the news of our impending parenthood were very exciting. We wondered if we would be blessed with a boy or a girl. We discussed names, parenting philosophies, and what baby supplies we would need. We were organized and on top of things. At this early stage, my thoughts were less of my unborn child and more of how I would maintain my hobbies and free time after the child arrived. I liked my routine and was not ready to give it up just because I was becoming a parent. Sure, I had heard all of the comments of how a newborn changes everything, but I've always lived life my own way and I was confident that I would figure out something.

Finally the day of the first ultrasound arrived. At the last minute, I was required to be here at St. Andrew's to meet with a summer camp director. Shara was told by her doctor that this first ultrasound would reveal very little, just a quick check to rule out anything that would be a problem in the future and take a look at the embryo. Shara let me off the hook without giving me too much of a hard time because we were scheduled to have ultrasounds done every other week for her first trimester. So again, I'm in the training room and the phone rings. It's Shara, but this time she is crying. My heart dropped. My initial thoughts were that we lost the baby. I asked Shara what was wrong. She told me she was calling from the doctor's office. Then she paused for what seemed like an eternity. Between the sobs she mustered two words, "There's three." My response: "Three what?" Before the words finished coming out of my mouth, I knew what she meant. A burning sensation began in the pit of my stomach. My wife was pregnant with triplets.

The next 2 weeks were not nearly as enjoyable as the previous two. Shara and I seemed to argue over anything and everything. Tension in our house was high. We argued over how we were going to pay for three kids, three sets of clothes, three times the food, three college tuitions. The finances weren't adding up. I was told that every hobby and free time activity requiring so much as a dime would have to be sacrificed for the good of these triplets. The door was closing on my life as I envisioned it. I would have to live a life of meager means, never having the funding to build my dream home, restore my classic car, or buy myself impulse gifts just for fun. The only statement that seemed to diffuse our arguments came from our doctor. He said that at only five weeks of pregnancy with multiple embryos that it is very common for one or more of the embryos to be absorbed by the woman's body. There was a high percentage that this pregnancy would still just result in a single child. I felt very strongly that this would be the "best case scenario" but I still couldn't help but feel like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. I pray often. It is a part of my daily routine. One hot June afternoon I sat in my car at a red light. I still had that burning sensation in my stomach and thought the best thing to do was to take my concerns to God in the form of prayer. There I prayed to God that if there was any way to relieve me of this great burden, if there was any way to take away the mounting pressure in my life associated with this pregnancy, to please give me that relief. To make this perfectly clear, I was asking God to have two of the three embryos conveniently absorb into my wife's body as our doctor had described and give us only a single child.

Over the following 15 weeks a number of extreme changes occurred. Shara's belly began to grow quickly, very quickly. Many women are barely showing by the end of their first trimester, but Shara's belly had grown to the size of a woman 6 months pregnant in a very short period of time. She was a trooper though. I really began to notice her inner strength at this time. This was also the time of numerous doctor's visits and countless ultrasounds. There was more detail revealed with each passing week. It began by seeing small gray blips on a screen that represented the heartbeats of the triplets. Then we began to see definition of the arms, legs, spines, and heads. The more time passed, the more we realized that there would be no natural reduction of these embryos from three to two or one. But strangely enough, each week I began to root more and more for these little guys. Instead of becoming inconveniences, they were becoming my children and I was beginning the process of becoming a parent. I was falling in love with my children.

By 21 weeks of pregnancy, the babies were beginning to kick. A level 2 ultrasound had revealed that we were having two boys and one girl. We even knew where they were positioned in Shara's belly. This allowed us to name them and talk to them individually. My daughter, Bryer, would kick feverishly when I would talk to her through the upper left area of Shara's belly. It was the highlight of my day. She wasn't even born yet, but she was already Daddy's little girl. The exponential growth of our triplets was taking its toll on Shara's body, however. Her body was having trouble getting used to the extreme changes of carrying three babies at once. At 21 weeks she was told by her doctor she would remain on bed rest for the remainder of the pregnancy to alleviate some of the stress on her body. A full term pregnancy is 40 weeks.

At 22 weeks, even with the realization of parenting triplets and Shara on bed rest, the pregnancy up to this point had been relatively straightforward and everything we expected. The next 6 weeks would prove to be, emotionally and spiritually, the most difficult 6 weeks of my entire life. It began when we were at the hospital having a level 2 ultrasound and noticed that the doctor was spending significantly more time examining Bryer than he had the two boys. Then, the doctor said the words that turned our world upside down: "Your daughter is suffering from a condition called low placental blood flow." We were told that our daughter wasn't growing as fast as her brothers and it was due to a lack of oxygen and nutrient-rich blood into her placenta. We were told that there was

nothing we could do to alleviate this condition, just wait it out and see what happens. The doctor would take more detailed measurements in a couple of weeks. We left the hospital, arrived home and held each other as we cried and prayed for our daughter's health.

After a very long and emotional 2 weeks, we had the follow-up ultrasound to determine the health status of our daughter. Her condition had worsened. Our doctor sat down with us to give us some facts and his prognosis for our daughter. Low placental blood flow is a chronic condition. Its cause is unknown, but its effects can range from physical and mental birth defects to death. We were devastated. We asked if there was anything we could do to help improve Bryer's chances. The doctor said that there was a little research that said 24 hour a day IV fluid and oxygen administration to the mother for the remainder of the pregnancy might help increase the blood circulation to our daughter, but the chances were slim. It would mean that Shara would spend the next 7 – 10 weeks living in a hospital bed. Shara made the decision in the blink of an eye to do whatever was necessary for the health of our daughter. As she was being checked into a room in the hospital, I went home to collect clothes and magazines for her stay. I arrived back at Shara's room and got her settled in and comfortable. I remember it was a Tuesday. As I left for work, I told Shara that I would be back that evening to see how she was doing. She gave me a very confused look, which prompted me to ask, "Is something wrong?" Shara said, "Don't you have your leg workout tonight?" I smiled, thinking, this is definitely the perfect woman for me. There's my wife, lying in a hospital bed with oxygen tubes in her nose and an IV in her arm, and she's concerned about me getting a good leg workout. I told her, "I think I can skip the gym tonight honey, this is more important."

A few days after Shara was admitted to the hospital, we had a meeting with a neonatologist. He would be the expert and advise us on the health of the triplets. Once he updated himself on Bryer's latest ultrasound, he told us that she would probably live no longer than three more weeks. The womb was not a healthy environment for her because of her faulty placenta. I could tell my wife's heart was breaking. Then he gave us what he thought would be our only two outcomes. He told us that we could deliver all three of the babies so that we may save the life of our daughter, but we would be risking mentally or physically handicapping all three by delivering at close to 3 months premature. Delivering only our daughter was not an option because of her placement in Shara's

belly. Our second option was to let nature take its course and let our boys stay in the womb as long as possible to ensure their health, but it was very likely that Bryer would not last such a long time and would die. After talking to our doctor and many long, emotional discussions, we decided that we couldn't risk handicapping all three of our children. Our daughter's health would be in God's hands now.

One night I left St. Andrew's and went home to eat before driving to Christiana hospital to visit Shara. The emotional stress of having my wife in the hospital was getting to me. The house felt particularly cold, dark, and empty that night. I wanted to do something to occupy my thoughts for a while, so I decided to find some busy work around the house. I noticed a pile of baby clothes that we had received as gifts and decided that I would fold them and put them away in the babies' room. As I folded the pile of clothes, I came across a newborn outfit for a little girl. It was white pajamas with little pink pigs on it. I remember laying the outfit on my leg and imagining that my daughter was there. I pictured her looking up at me and smiling. She would be happy, knowing she was safe and protected. Those happy thoughts were brief as I realized that one day soon I might have to take all of those little girl outfits and box them away for good. I realized that one day I might go to put my hand on Shara's belly and the furious little kicks that made me so happy would be absent. The thought of losing my daughter while I stood by powerless to help her had overwhelmed me. I crumbled into a ball on the couch and cried harder than I've ever cried in my entire life. My mind was racing with thoughts of helplessness and confusion. Why was this happening? Then, I remembered my earlier prayer asking God for relief. I remember telling God that three babies at once would be too difficult. Was this God's way of answering my prayer? I pleaded to God to, "ignore that prayer, it isn't what I want now. I don't care how hard it's going to be, just give me my children, safe and healthy." I called Shara in the middle of my emotional breakdown and she comforted me. I apologized for not being stronger for her. She told me that everything would be fine. She said that God had a plan and no matter what that plan was, that it would be for the best because God knew what was best for us. Shara's faith and strength of character continued to amaze me. There I decided to let all of my anxiety and feelings of helplessness go and follow my wife's lead and have faith in God's plan.

At the beginning of every week, we prayed that the babies would last another week. Every week in the womb would let the babies develop more and decrease their risk of health problems. At week 28, it seemed as though our prayers had finally been answered. A level 2 ultrasound revealed that Bryer's blood flow was showing a small improvement. If she could just hold on for a few more weeks, the percentage of health risks would significantly decrease. Shara's body was feeling the effects of having three children growing rapidly inside of her. Even at this early stage, she was beginning to have intermittent contractions.

By week 31 the contractions had grown stronger. The doctors gave Shara strong medications to stop the contractions. The medications made her feel very uncomfortable and sick. One evening after arriving home from the hospital I received a phone call from Shara informing me that the medications weren't stopping the contractions and that her water had just broke. She told me not to come to the hospital and just to wait at home until the following morning when a scheduled C-section would deliver our triplets. That was not one of my best nights of sleep.

The next morning I rushed to the hospital. Our delivery room had approximately 20 doctors in it. There were 5 doctors for my wife and 5 for each child. The C-section began at about 9:15 AM and the triplets were born by 9:30. As each child was taken to its own team of doctors, I waited nervously hoping that everything would be OK. One by one Caden, Bryer, and then Tyler were examined by the doctors and although they were hooked up to monitors and oxygen and were very small, our prayers had come true. Our babies were healthy, including our 2 lb. 6 ounce daughter. The triplets would stay at the hospital for another 5 weeks until they developed and matured enough to breathe and eat on their own.

My wife's pregnancy and the difficulties we faced together were overwhelming at times. That experience is not one I would wish upon anyone, but at the same time, I would not give it up for the world. Those challenges taught me many things. They taught me that sometimes God may not give me exactly what I ask him for because he has something much more extraordinary in store for my life. They taught me that even though I already knew my wife was intelligent and beautiful, that I had no idea of the depth of her faith and emotional and physical strength. They taught me that

St. Andrew's is more than just a nice place to work, that it is a caring and loving community that comforted my wife and me and helped us in our time of need.

My life is much different now. I can now proudly say that I've taken part in one day that contained 24 diaper changes, 18 bottle feedings, and one half hour of sleep. I've been spit up on, peed on, and pooped on . . . times three. I've fallen asleep on the couch with three babies in my arms and awoke with all three screaming at the top of their lungs. And to be perfectly honest with you, I've loved every minute of it.

One morning, shortly after the triplets came home from the hospital, I awoke to the sound of my clock radio. I was extremely tired and turned off the alarm and turned and looked across the bed at a sea of three children that lay between my wife and me. As I mustered up the energy to get out of bed, I looked down at my son, Tyler, who was sleeping nestled into my chest. He had one hand resting under his cheek and the other firmly grasping the front of my t-shirt. As I leaned down to kiss his cheek goodbye, I could almost hear him say, "Don't go just yet, Daddy. Stay a little while longer." So I laid down my head and as I fell back asleep I realized that even though last year at this time, I never would have asked God to give me this life, this life is exactly what I've always wanted . . . and God knew that all along. So today I thank God for answered AND unanswered prayers.