

RICHIE'S STORY

Praying for Good's Will, Listening as He Speaks

1988 was a very dark time. After struggling with heart defects his entire life, my son, Richie, was losing his battle. After 11 surgeries, only one hope remained...a heart transplant. The transplant team insisted that Richie be the one to make the decision. After all, he would have to commit to a lifetime regiment of taking drugs, watching his diet, and having biopsies, heart catheterizations, and lab tests. Richie had grown tired of fighting for his life, and his first reaction to the idea was, "NO"! I couldn't blame him. I had seen enough to know that I, too, would have preferred death to more surgery. Imagine a fourteen years old who weighs only fifty-eight pounds and you may have some idea of how sick he was.

It's hard enough to truly put normal, every-day problems in God's hands, but by this time I had already given Richie's care over to the Lord. The weight of it all had become too much for me. During those days as Richie struggled with his decision, I was struggling with one of my own. What would I say if he asked

for my opinion? I'd seen him suffer for so many years and didn't feel I could ask him to fight any longer. But as his mother, I didn't want to tell him to give up when there was still a chance. I also needed to know for certain that transplants were really OK with God. So, in all the confusion and doubt, I prayed--without ceasing--and my answer came in a miraculous way.

One afternoon I was alone with Richie in his hospital room, and we started talking about the possibility of a transplant. Then I calmly said, "You could go ahead and let them list you for a donor organ, then we'll pray and ask God to help them find the right heart for you if this is the right thing to do. Then we can also ask God to keep them from finding a heart if it's not His Will for you."

The real miracle here is that I didn't think of those words before I said them. I knew right then it was the Holy Spirit answering my prayers, reminding me that my son was in God's hands. Two days later, Richie made his decision to be listed for a donor organ not because of what I had said, but because a doctor had told him he would never play outside again. It was Richie's decision, but God's leading for him and me! Those "Words of wisdom" the indwelling Spirit provided to me were the answer to my own prayers. I could never describe the relief and "peace that passes understanding" I received from the experience of hearing myself say words I knew were not my own, but came

directly from my Creator.

Remembering this encounter with the Lord always brings tears to my eyes, but I love to share this story of how powerful prayer can be. Richie received his new heart on December 7, 1988, the third pediatric patient to receive a heart transplant at Children's Hospital at Egleston in Atlanta. This year, I attended their 16th annual "Heart to Heart" party with my son! That first year was rocky, but he's lived a nearly normal life since. Richie will be thirty in August, 2004, works everyday managing a concrete plant, and appreciates life more than most of us ever will.

This is copied with permission from Kay Britt the mother of Richie Patterson. I am honored Nick and I both can call them friends.

Amen, Kaye, Amen.

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