

Learning a lesson from my daughter.

As many of you know, my daughter was diagnosed with severe heart failure in late 2015. She was hospitalized for over 3 months in the cardio intensive care unit in Philadelphia, PA. I spent a lot of that time driving back and forth between CT and PA and living in the hospital with her. I cried a lot, I prayed even more. I have to say St. Francis was a huge source of my strength then and now. I prayed, I prayed a lot. I prayed when I woke up, I prayed throughout the day – when I was driving, sitting at my desk at work, in the hospital with my daughter, at night before I tried to sleep. One of the things I constantly prayed for was God give me Heather's issue and give my daughter my health; a normal prayer for any mother, or any parent actually, in a situation like this. She had two teams of doctors working on her during this time, a cardio team and an OB team. She was pregnant with her second son when she was diagnosed with heart failure. Her OB team encouraged her to give birth a few days after she'd been in the cardio unit. She was about 22 weeks pregnant. She refused. The doctors said, you may not make it, she refused. Her protective motherly instincts came out in full force. She knew that a 22 week old baby had less chance of survival. The teams came by every day she was in the hospital and every day they encouraged her to give birth. Daily, she refused. Her goal was to get the baby as close to 40 weeks as she could even though it was dangerous to

her life. Finally, when she was about 28 weeks pregnant, the doctors said, you won't make it, we need to get this baby out of you. I had been begging her all along to please let them take the baby out. Her father had been begging her. Her husband didn't beg her verbally, he knew better and stood by her side supporting her, crying when he wasn't with her. She turned a deaf ear to all of us. Stubborn child! At almost 30 weeks, she finally went in for a c-section. It was the scariest time of my life. I was so afraid for her life. I prayed, cried, prayed, cried, prayed. God answered my prayers. My daughter came through the c-section, very weak, but alive and very happy. She had a new son!

About a month after the birth, she was finally allowed to leave the hospital. She left afraid and depressed. She was so afraid of dying and leaving her small children without a mother. She didn't want to die. Really, who does?! But as time goes on, my daughter's strength amazes me. She started researching ways to get stronger, started working out, pushing her limits. I was cautious and kept telling her to make sure everything she did was ok with her cardiologist. When she thought of it, she would clear it with her doctor. I go with her to all her cardiologist appointments because I want to make sure to ask questions Heather doesn't think of or doesn't think she needs

an answer too. She's funny, this little girl of mine. During one visit, she asked the doctor, "do you think I could get pregnant again?" Both the cardiologist and I looked at her, aghast. He said, 'Heather, if someone had a 50% ejection fraction' I would say NO WAY!!! You have an ejection fraction of less than 14%, you won't make it past the first trimester!' She shrugged and said, 'okay, it was worth asking. I really want a daughter.' She's also asked the doctor if she could run a marathon, something that's been on her bucket list for years. He asked her how she felt when she jogged. She said she got tired and really out of breath after a few minutes. He said, 'stop when you get out of breath. If you can build up your stamina to the point where you're comfortable at the pace you're going, and feel you can do it, then do it. But, you need to wear a heart monitor at all times and make sure to pay attention to any symptoms you feel (she had a defibrillator implant done in April last year, as she's at high risk for cardiac arrest).'. She still hasn't run the marathon, she still gets tired and out of breath after a few minutes of jogging. But not to be defeated, this past summer, she tried biking to and from work. She did it a few times and was completely exhausted each time she did, but proud of herself. It's a 38 mile round trip ride.

A few months ago, I told her my prayer during the time she was in the hospital, that her issue become mine. She looked at me and said, "God knew what he was doing mom. He knows I'm strong enough to handle this." She's determined to live as long as God will let her. It's been two years this November and every day I thank God she is still alive. For as long as God allows her to grace this earth, I know she will fight to live for her children and for life itself. She's an inspiration to me.