



The Question Not to be Asked

After nothing worse than an ear infection with my first baby, I was a bit overwhelmed when my three-month-old son was hospitalized with pneumonia. Yet there we were - little man and I camping out in our local hospital. There seemed to be a lot of nurses going in and out of the room which confused me at first. Then his regular floor nurse explained that the others were coming from their areas to get a Little Rod smile. Couldn't blame them for that. It melted my heart too.

Several days later, it was time to take follow-up x-rays to make sure the pneumonia was gone. His pediatrician persuaded me to allow her to get a skull x-ray as well. He had a large head (believe me), and she'd always worried about hydrocephalus.

As I sat rocking him later that day, Dr. Murphy came in the room. "We have a problem, Mrs. Smith."

Note: that was the first of many. To this day if someone uses that phrase with me, I break out in a sweat and my blood pressure goes up.

The lung x-ray showed "something" behind the pneumonia cloud. It could be tumors, she said. Plural. We would need to consult an expert, she said. Then she left. I held him a little tighter as I rocked.

In less than two hours, she was back in the room. The skull x-ray had come back. "We have a problem, Mrs. Smith." There was "something" in the skull x-ray. It looked like a mass of some kind. Then this unprecedented question: "Do you know any pediatric neurosurgeons?"

Well gee, let me consult my address book.

I was cool and collected while she was in the room, really I was. She left to set up our stay in Ochsner's Hospital in nearby New Orleans. Alone finally, I laid my baby on the bed and leaned over him. He gave me one of his famous smiles. That's when I started to cry.

And that's when I asked the Question Not to be Asked.

"Why?" I said to God. "Why him?"

Then I wiped those tears, and picked up the phone to call my husband.

It was probably a full calendar year later that my pastor husband came home for lunch and mentioned that one of my church friends just had to admit her baby to the hospital for pneumonia. I asked if he could keep the children for a couple hours that afternoon. He agreed, and I got busy.

I walked the house and gathered fun magazines - nothing too serious, lots of pictures and silly articles, and some books - mostly devotional type, with short, positive stories in them. I knew she wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything too detailed or long. I scraped up all the change I could find for vending machines and dropped it in a Ziploc bag. I would offer to hold the baby and let her get out

of the room for a moment. In the midst of all this hunting, gathering, and planning, I heard The Voice and it stopped me dead in my tracks.

“That’s why.”

And I flashed instantly back to that moment, bent over my baby on that hospital bed. And I knew.

Had we not been through that, I would have had no idea how to minister to my friend in her moment of need. This story came crashing back to me in Sunday School when we read from 2 Corinthians (verses 3,4): “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we are comforted by God.”

Did God make my baby sick so I would be a better pastor’s wife? Good grief, no. But God USED what happened to make me a better comforter.

Sisters, it's okay to ask God “Why?” I think it’s probably just not okay to demand to know why. I asked, but then just tried to walk in faith. He doesn’t have to answer us, ever. But, blessed be His mercy and love, sometimes He does.

That’s why.

P.S. “Little Rod” is now taller than his Dad, and is a husband and father of three precious smilers of his own. The head spot was blood seepage from a birth skull fracture (that big head of his) and was gone six months later. The lung problem was a benign congenital cystic condition which never caused any issues and had “somehow” disappeared by the time he had a chest x-ray for a required physical in high school. His smile still melts my heart.

Linda Smith

