

## **Cholly's Miracle**

Yesterday morning I was walking through the small town in which I live. As I walked, I remembered a time in May over 15 years ago when I walked that same street, only much slower.

I believe it was late March 15 years ago as I lay stretched out on an operating table where they would begin a 7 hour surgery to remove my left kidney and place it in Cholly. Cholly's real name was Charles, but everybody just called him Cholly. At the time, he was my father-in-law, and by my estimation, a very quiet and intelligent man. Life had been hard to him, losing his career in a company downsizing, succumbing to the addiction of alcohol and now a rare and deadly kidney disease.

He was on a Kidney Dialysis machine three days a week for 8 hours at a time. It caused severe cramping leaving him weak and depressed. The doctor's held little hope, and informed him that without a transplant he would die. Cholly was not what you would call a religious man, never attending church and no spiritual life to mention, but we were asked to pray for a donor. After waiting months on a cadaver list, he was failing fast and a plea was put out for a live donor from the family, as blood relatives are the best match. One after another they were tested and not one was a suitable donor.

I had been praying for Cholly, not just for his physical well being, but his spiritual one. God spoke to my heart and said "Give him yours". It wasn't an audible voice, just a persistent impression that I began to realize was God's will. I went to the doctor and asked to be tested. At first they did not want to waste their time and money testing me because I was not a blood relative. I insisted they try, so they did.

They tell me that for a transplant donation to be successful, certain antigens in the blood must match. One doctor informed me that they were looking at 7 different antigens and if a donor matched even one, they were viable. I matched 5 out of 7, the doctors were shocked. I knew it was God. In all fairness when I heard that bit of news I was scared. Not of the surgery, but of the fact that a divine and holy God was using me to answer the prayer for a miracle. Now I had to obey, no matter what the cost.

On Father's day that year Cholly came to church where I preached for the very first time. Following my message I felt impressed to extend an invitation to anyone who would like to receive Christ. With tears in his eyes Cholly gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ that day. He once told me, "*You saved my physical life and my spiritual life.*" I replied, "*No. Jesus did it all.*"

Thirteen years after I gave my kidney to Cholly I heard he was again in the hospital. The precious gift I had given him had finally given up. They had

estimated it would last about 10 years, he beat the odds. My son and I made the trip down to see him.

For the past 8 years I had been through my own valleys in life and had left the preaching ministry. I was working for a Christian social agency, still involved in ministry, but not in the pulpit. I was deeply depressed and felt useless to both my family and the Lord. As we drove down I could not help but let my mind drift back over the years to that time we shared together, just as I am now.

Cholly was emaciated and his skin was mottled and black from the dialysis and other organ failures, yet when he saw us he smiled and shook our hands warmly. He wept as he thanked me for the years he had because of the transplant, as did I. As we visited I noticed his pain and weakening condition and decided we should let him rest. After praying with him, I asked him if there was anything I could do? His reply would stay with me to this very day. He said, "*Howard, God has given you a gift to preach and teach and I want you go back to what you do best, telling people about Jesus.*"

I did not know what to say, so I feebly thanked him and said that "*the Lord would have to work that out*". He replied, "*He will.*" That day Cholly planted a seed of hope again in my life, just as I had given him 13 years earlier. He went home to be with the Lord not long after that, but his spirit and words live on in my heart. While we were not very close on this earth, we shared a rare event in life, a miracle.

The miracle was not that I matched Cholly for the transplant, but that God loved us both enough to divinely use us to give each other hope. God told the prophet Jeremiah, "***I know the plans I have for you. They are for good and not for evil. That you might have a future and a hope.***" How little did Cholly and I know how God would use us in each other's lives. God is so good.

Someone in your life needs hope, just like we did. If you look and listen you just might find yourself in the middle of a miracle . . . if you're willing to take the risk!