The power of prayer

Her hair. That's what stood out when I first saw her picture on Facebook. Her long, dark, thick hair. And the smile on her parents' faces that said without words that mother and baby were doing OK. A healthy 7 pounds, 12 ounces, most of which seemed to reside in her cheeks. She was named after her great-grandmother.

It was late in the afternoon the following day when my wife called to tell me that my nephew's day-old daughter was fighting for her life. That she had stopped breathing multiple times. That she was having seizures. That she was unable to regulate her body temperature. That they didn't know if she was going to make it.

And I sat at my desk and cried for a beautiful girl that I had never met. That I feared I would never get to meet. I cried for her mom and dad – first-time parents who, back-to-back, experienced the best day of their lives and the worst day of their lives. I was crying out of fear and of feeling heartbroken. I was crying because I knew the sadness and worry I was feeling wasn't a fraction of what her parents felt.

And I did what I don't do enough – I bowed my head and started praying. If I'm being honest, I did it not necessarily out of devoutness, though that played a role – I'm still striving; I did it more out of helplessness. We all did, I think.

Word spread quickly. My beautiful, devout wife is the youngest of 10 children and the aunt of nearly 40. While I've gotten used to the chaos and the noise and the fighting that surrounds her family, when somebody needs help, they pull it together like nobody else.

With everybody pitching in and taking half-hour shifts, we held 24 hours of continuous prayer. Nobody complained about taking the 2:30 a.m. shift.

And throughout the day, as the prayers were ongoing, we were getting short updates. They oxygen they were pumping into her was decreased to the minimum. She was off her feeding tube and her proud, scared dad was able to give her a bottle. The seizures were being controlled. She was, in no uncertain terms, improving.

Several days later, still less than a week old, her father posted the following message on Facebook: “Passing tests with her eyes closed! They’re running out of things to check on her. Might get her home soon!”

And they did. Ten days after she was born – and nine days after fighting for her life – she came home.

Only God knows the reason behind his plan for us, for Baby Lou – why at a day old she had to stop breathing, to have seizures, to make her parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins wonder if she was going to make it through.

Some would say it’s pointless to speculate about God’s motivation – his grand plan – but I disagree. I think we’re missing the point if we don’t stop to think about what it all means.

All I can come up with is this: God needed me to see the importance of prayer, the importance of getting on my knees and genuinely bringing my pain and sorrow and frustration and joy and gratitude to him – and to mean it, not just mindlessly recite the same prayer night after night while I’m either half asleep or fighting with my kids to go to bed.

That amazing little girl with the full head of hair and pudgy cheeks, now 3 weeks old, has taught me a lesson I hope to never forget about the power of prayer. I will continue to pray for her. We all will.

But I’ll never forget the phone call. I sat at my desk, praying, and fought back tears. I lost. At the same time, she

was in the hospital and fought for her life. And she won.

By Catholic dad Scott Warden