

Our Miracle Baby

One month before their second son was born, healthcare personnel James and Mavis Leong discovered that the baby had a rare structural birth defect, and might have to stay in the intensive care unit for months. The news threw them into a tailspin .



The day our hearts sank

It was just a routine visit to the gynaecologist – or so we thought. But the check-up turned out longer than expected. We sensed that something was amiss. The ultrasound showed that our second son Damien had a proportionately smaller body and there was too much fluid in the womb. It was the start of many tests and checks.

The diagnosis: esophageal atresia, a gap between the mouth and stomach. It was a very rare and serious structural defect. So rare, in fact, he became a discussion case at KK Hospital. The doctor said that there was only one such case in Singapore every few years.

The defect meant that Damien could not be fed through his mouth. More detailed scans suggested that the gap might be too big even to be corrected by surgery. All the doctors said he would be in the Intensive Care Unit for months, and that we would have to feed our baby through a pouch attached to an opening in his stomach. Moreover, there might be defects in his other organs too. **We were told to be prepared for a six-digit medical bill** unless we downgraded to a C-class ward.

The news left us bewildered and lost. Like all parents, we had been looking forward to his birth with joy and anticipation. Now each day was a constant battle. Our fears and anxieties grew as we were informed of the possible complications. We kept

countering our fears with faith, and battling constant doubts. Our pastors, carecell and church friends rallied around us with concern and prayers.

Two weekends later, when we attended Trinity's worship service, we heard a testimony about a Thai boy who was unable to swallow anything without vomiting. Unable to consume anything by mouth, he had a tube inserted into his stomach for liquid food. But after Trinity's Missions Impact Team prayed for him, he was able to drink a full bottle through the mouth without throwing up. As we heard the amazing testimony and saw the actual photos of this boy successfully sucking from the bottle, we were encouraged. This testimony could not have been more timely.

But subsequent visits to the gynaecologist did not bear good news. Our faith was constantly challenged. We clung on tightly to God's promise: *"Therefore I tell you, whatever you asked for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours"* (Mark 11:24).

A difficult birth

When I arrived at the hospital to give birth, a panel of specialists was on hand, waiting to whisk our baby away the moment he was born. That's how serious his condition was.

The labour lasted more than 12 hours. The labour was progressing too slowly, and Damien's heart rate frequently dropped. **The umbilical cord was also**

coiled around his neck. An urgent Caesarean was planned. Knowing the consequences of a Caesarean delivery, we prayed for a natural birth. God answered our prayers! Within the next hour Damien was born by normal delivery. Damien arrived safely, and bigger than expected.

However, the diagnosis was confirmed by the doctors. His esophagus, the food pipe, was indeed not connected to the stomach. **We were greatly dismayed. After much fasting and prayer, we had not received our miracle.** We were so tempted to give up and leave the matter in the hands of the experienced doctors. But we clung on to God's promises.

The following 24 hours were intense. We were called to meet up with the surgeons regarding the proposed surgery. Investigations showed that the gap between the stomach and the esophagus was big, and may not be repairable by surgery at this point in time.

More bad news

There was more bad news. This was not the only defect Damien was born with. In the words of the specialists, "Defects don't come alone." They knew

that one defect indicated the presence of other defects, and so they scanned him from head to toe.

There was also a defect in his lungs – a connection between the air pipe and the esophagus that should not have been there. This meant more complications.

The surgeons planned to quickly close the connection that afternoon by open chest surgery, and to make an opening into the stomach for feeding, since they did not foresee a surgical repair of the gap in the near future. With a heavy heart, we signed the consent form for the procedure that would create an opening in the stomach, and attach the pouch to it. Our faith was slipping away fast. We could only manage another prayer with tears.

Less than 24 hours after his birth, the doctors operated on him. The surgery took longer than the expected 3 hours, after which we received an urgent call asking us to proceed to the operating theatre. It was a tense moment. We braced ourselves for the worst.

Had our baby died during the surgery?

A surprise discovery

But we were in for a surprise. It was good news!

The surgeons were stunned to find that the gap was smaller (only 1.5cm), and could be repaired very easily. There was no need to attach a pouch to the stomach at all. We don't know what happened,



but it was totally unexpected! We believe it was a miracle of God.

In fact, there was a twist to the whole saga. The other defect (in the lungs) aided the closing of the gap between the food pipe and the stomach! The doctors were amazed because what they saw before their very eyes defied all the established facts of the case. God had answered our prayers! *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1)*

Instead of months, Damien was discharged in less than two weeks and his medical bill came up to \$24,000. It was not a small sum, but much less than what it could have been, if his stay had been prolonged. In fact, after the medical subsidy and Medisave, we did not have to foot any cash. We were completely stunned.

A third miracle

Bringing Damien home had its own challenges. Since Damien had not eaten since birth, he had "forgotten" how to suck and swallow. He had his first taste of milk 10 days after birth. We had to feed him through a tube that went through the nose and into the stomach. It was painfully difficult to drip milk through the tube. It took half an hour for just a small amount of milk to go down.

The doctors were amazed because what they saw before their very eyes defied all the established facts of the case.

The therapist told us that Damien might take many weeks to learn to eat. We asked the doctors how long we would have to do it, but they could not tell us. It could be weeks, or even months.

After a week of dripping milk down the tube, we desperately prayed that God would do something.

Again, God answered our prayers!

In less than two weeks, Damien could drink and swallow normally! Damien's progress was so remarkable that his tube was removed in less than two weeks. He was feeding well and began to gain

weight. This was the third miracle we experienced, after the natural birth and the closing of the gap.

That was not all. In the subsequent months, God healed Damien of a hole in his heart, and also of a wry neck (torticollis). It was the fulfilment of God's promise to us: *"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"*

(Jeremiah 32:27)





A source of support

Throughout this ordeal, we received tremendous support and encouragement

from Trinity – our pastors, our carecell and our friends. **They prayed for us when we could not even pray for ourselves.** In fact, our carecell leader would encourage us through phone calls, emails and SMS every other day. **We really cannot imagine what would have happened to us if we were not part of a carecell.** Where else would we get such support and encouragement to go through this trial?

In retrospect, God had put all the people in place even before the crisis happened. When Damien was conceived in October 2005, we had not yet joined a carecell. We opened our home to host a carecell in January 2006. **By the time we discovered his condition in June 2006, God had already surrounded us with people who would pray with us for our breakthrough.** We felt this was God orchestrating behind the scenes, taking care of us long before we even knew we had a problem.

This crisis has changed our lives. **The greatest trial of our lives also turned out to be the most amazing testimony of our lives.** For sure, it was truly the most “happening” time of our lives! God works in wondrous ways. As a couple, we grew closer and bonded like never before as we weathered this crisis together.

We experienced what it really means to pray in faith. We realised that **faith is not the absence of fear or doubt, but clinging on to God’s promises in the midst of bad news and crisis.** Throughout the crisis, fear and doubt threatened to overwhelm us, but we fought them off with God’s promises. The verses you read in this testimony are the exact weapons we used in this fight of faith.

Our miracle baby

Today, Damien is a healthy one-year-old. In fact, we just celebrated his first birthday on 21 July. It was a milestone event that reminded us all over again of God’s goodness and grace. When you look at Damien today, you can’t tell that he was ever diagnosed with a serious and rare birth defect. He is our miracle baby, and Jesus is our miracle-working God!

*“May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word”
(2 Thessalonians 2:17).*

