



Season 3 | Episode 28

## Tested By Fire

Vicki Zoradi

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating, and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts or find us at [joniandfriends.org/podcast](http://joniandfriends.org/podcast).

On her 60th birthday, just after receiving Teacher of the Year Award at the elementary school where she taught, Vicki Zoradi was diagnosed with a large kidney stone lodged between her bladder and kidney. Less than 36 hours later, she was rushed to the hospital in septic shock as all her major organs began to shut down. Vicki's blood pressure dropped significantly with very little blood supply to her hands and feet. And she was given virtually no chance to live by the medical professionals caring for her. But God had a different plan for her life. And she is joining us on the podcast today to share her story. Welcome to the podcast, Vicki. I'm so glad to have this conversation with you.

Vicki Zoradi:

Thanks for having me. I'm so excited to share my story, our story, God's story with your listeners today and Crystal with you.

Crystal Keating:

So Vicki, as we begin this conversation, can you take us back to that week in 2018, when you were first diagnosed with a kidney stone?

Vicki Zoradi:

I call it our predicament. It was July 4th, 2018, and Mike and I were at a family cabin up in Kyburz, California, about a half hour south of South Lake Tahoe. My daughter was there with us, Tiffani and her husband, Mike. So it was the four of us and we were just enjoying the holiday, barbecuing. We had walked to the river that's right below the cabin. And I was sitting in a beach chair during most of the day. So when I came back up, I felt this back pain on my right side lower part of my back. And I just chalked it up to sitting in the beach chair awkwardly talking most of the day. But as the day progressed, it seemed to get worse and worse. And Tiffani and Mike would trade off massaging my back. And I probably took a Tylenol or two, but as the day got further along and it became time for fireworks that night, Tiffani had asked if we wanted to join them. And I just did not feel up to it. I said, "No, thank you. I'm just going to stay here."

We went to bed. The kids came home. I could hear them coming in well after midnight, but about 1:30 at night on my actual birthday, I started getting excruciating pain. And the pain started to radiate to the front side of my right side. And I thought, "Oh, no." Mike even said,



"Maybe it's your appendix. We'd better go." So he drove me to Placerville, which is about 30 miles away to a community hospital called Marshall. And the CT scan showed that I had a kidney stone that was passing from my kidney, and it was almost through my ureter. And I remember the doctor coming in saying, "Oh good news, it's not appendicitis. It's just a kidney stone. And all you have to do is go home, pass the kidney stone, and you should be fine. Here's some medication. Go home and pass it." And I knew that they were painful. And so I expected quite a bit of pain. But what was happening to my body, I didn't know, was that it had lodged and stuck.

Now it was my birthday dinner and everything and I seemed fine. My real party wasn't going to be until Friday with extended family. I was not up for it by the time the family started to arrive to the family cabin. I just laid around all day. But when Mike got concerned was after dinner on the 6th, I just wasn't acting myself he said. He'd ask me questions and I was kind of lethargic. He called Tiffani and Mike over to come talk to me. And to me, he said, "Mama, look at me." And my eyes were glassy. Mike knew instantly, "Okay, we're taking you back." So they all piled in the car and rushed me down back to Marshall Hospital. And that's what our predicament was.

Crystal Keating:

How quickly did your prognosis change? I mean, Mike obviously saw there was something very distressing going on. He took you to the hospital. What did the doctors do at that point?

Vicki Zoradi:

Here I'm hours from death, maybe moments from death. I don't even realize it. I have no idea. I remember signing back in. They had me in a wheelchair. They took me to the admitting nurse again. And that's all I remember. Next thing I know I was comatose. What Mike and Tiffani saw were doctors surrounding my body on a gurney with multiple nurses trying to get double IVs in. The stone had blocked and E. coli tainted urine was flushing back into my kidneys, and the kidneys are the second largest blood supply after the heart. My kidneys were shut down because of the toxicity. And within seconds, they were doing all this fluid resuscitation. So the results were considered severe septic shock. And with severe septic shock, you have moments to live.

I had 20% cardio output. I had complete kidney failure. I had IVs of 18 liters of fluids for resuscitation. I had antibiotics given for the infection. I remember them saying my blood pressure at the time of admittance was 50 over 30 and it went even lower. My bilirubin at one time was 28 and it should be one, that's liver. I had a clot on my liver. I eventually had no registered blood pressure at all for 12 hours.

Crystal Keating:

Oh my goodness.

Vicki Zoradi:

I had lactic acid; it should be seven. And anything under that does not sustain life. Mine was 6.5. And we talked to a trauma surgeon at Westmont College when we were speaking. And he said, "Any of these could have killed you. And you had what? Eight to 10 things that does not sustain life?" Everyone was in shock. I mean, they were just thinking it was an easy fix. And then the ER doctor looked at Mike and said, "This situation is life-threatening." And he said, "What? Like now?" And he goes, "Right now." And then Mike thought, "I need to walk out and pray because I'm just overwhelmed right now." And if you're-



Crystal Keating:

Well, I can't imagine your daughter and your husband bringing you in thinking, "Oh, the kidney stone isn't passing properly. Let's take a look." And you came so close to losing your life. You're comatose. So your husband steps out. How did prayer make a difference for you at the hospital and within your community at that point?

Vicki Zoradi:

Okay. Prayer was key, absolutely key. Mike immediately knew that my only chance of survival would be prayer and the power of God. Bottom line, bottom line. He walked out in shock and instantly began contacting family for prayer; family friends for prayer; church members that could initiate prayer lines. Tiffani was doing the same. Mike Washburn, her husband was doing the same. And so prayers were going out like crazy immediately. And this was anywhere from 1:00 AM to about 3:00 AM. So everybody was jumping in cars because Tiffani and Mike were saying, "She's not going to make it. You guys need to get here now, because only through the power of prayer is she going to survive."

And I didn't even stay in Marshall Hospital for even two days because I needed continuous dialysis and they didn't have it. So I needed to be transported to Sutter Memorial, which is a 63 bed ICU unit. But they told Mike, "She won't survive if she stays here, but she might not survive if she is transported." So that noon, I was transported and the nurse from Marshall went with me. She said, "I will make sure she gets there." And sure enough, God provided a way. And I was still comatose not understanding what was going on. They rushed me in, I was the sickest patient in that hospital who ever left alive. They put me in the very first room next to the nurses' station and next to the family lounge.

So how does prayer work? It was amazing because Mike instantly, as family members started arriving, we had about maybe 14 to 18 family members and friends that came to the family lounge. They basically took it over and they began praying and singing and earnestly praying for me. And by Monday night, the doctors said, "We've done everything we can for her. There's nothing else. We've given five vasopressors and now it's just up to her body." And Mike goes, "No, it's up to God." And they saw the family in earnest prayer.

When doctors said no, God said yes. And the doctor said, "Okay, it's time for you guys to now go in and say your goodbyes." The family did not want to say that. They thought, okay, that's admitting defeat. And Mike said, "Is God no less God if he takes her home or if he heals her? He's still sovereign and we have been praying for two or three days. So if you're with me, follow me into her ICU room." There was barely enough room for everybody to surround my bed because there were so many monitors taking up probably half the room.

What I recall was just them surrounding my bed. I could not hear what they were saying. They were saying their goodbyes and how much we meant to each other. I heard hymns. They sang three of my favorite hymns. And my heart was crying out to sing with them, but I could not move a muscle. Every time they moved me to clean me or to move any part of my apparatus that were keeping me alive, I would crash. My blood pressure would just crash, so they didn't even want to move me. And so I couldn't even lift my head off the pillow. That's how sick I was.

They were saying goodbye. And they walked back out and Mike and my niece, Michelle, they were still in my room. And Michelle turns and says, "Uncle Mike, look at the blood pressure machine. Does Aunt Vicki have a blood pressure?" And he said, "What?" And he turns around and there is a faint, faint blood pressure. I hadn't had blood pressure monitoring for 12 hours. They had gone in to try and get it out of my femur artery. Two trauma surgeons could not find it,



but God said, "Just wait, just wait. It's coming. When you guys say no, you can't have any credit for this." And so-

Crystal Keating:

That is God's pattern right throughout all of history. When there is no way-

Vicki Zoradi:

There's no way-

Crystal Keating:

... it's God's way and only he can get the praise and glory. And I just want to say I am so deeply encouraged by your husband's faith to labor in pain and praise the Lord, to raise a hallelujah in the midst of such deathly news.

Vicki Zoradi:

Yeah. Mike ran back into the room saying, "She's got a blood pressure, she's got a blood pressure." And so we went to the nurse and said, "Could this be right?" And they said, "These machines are not wrong." And so she went and got the doctor and by 2:00 AM Tuesday, my blood pressure came up to 120 over 60, within that prayer time. And what I saw was amazing, and I was able to share this with my family after I could talk, because I had a trach, and I could not talk for a couple of weeks. Mike said, "I want to hear what you went through." Whoa, do you ever. Because for me, the family was in earnest prayer on the other side of my ICU room. So we shared that wall. And whenever I prayed to God, because I was conscious in my mind. (So if people say that they can't hear you, sometimes you can't because I didn't hear the words, but I heard singing.) I would pray out to God, not knowing what was going on with me.

And I would look up where the ceiling met the wall and that's right on the other side of where my family was. One time I was praying to God and I saw this tower of angels. The top angel was massive. He was what I would call a fighting angel, a conquering angel. He was ready, dressed for battle. He was wielding this huge sword. And my first thought was, "What's going on?" They're not over me. They're not around me ministering to me. They're over by the wall. And I thought, "Is he warding off death? Is there some type of spiritual warfare going on?" And I didn't get an answer because they were not talking to me.

The angels down the column were praying, petitioning to God on my behalf. And like the scripture says, we don't know what to pray for, but the spirit does. And so the angels below our prayers, their prayers were going up to God and they didn't know God's will when they were praying for a miracle, but God did. And so just that, whether it was a vision or I truly saw what I was seeing, I went back and saw what Elijah with the fiery angels. And I thought, "Okay, now I know that this has at least happened in the past with people in the Bible." And it was very encouraging for me even not knowing what I had been through.

Crystal Keating:

Right. Well, we know the spiritual realm is real, but it's another thing when God lifts the veil and we can actually see and sense what's happening. So Vicki, you survived this harrowing ordeal, but you didn't come out unscathed.



Vicki Zoradi:

No. No.

Crystal Keating:

And something very significant happened. You had a huge life change. Take us now into that time where doctors had to make some critical decisions.

Vicki Zoradi:

When I was finally taken out of the induced coma in about a week or two, I noticed that my hands and feet were turning kind of a grayish color. And each day that I looked at them, they were getting darker and darker. And pretty soon they were looking like mummy hands. I called them mummy hands.

Crystal Keating:

And you're aware of this?

Vicki Zoradi:

I'm aware now, but they brought in this Doppler radar to see if I had any blood flow to any of my extremities. And in my hands and feet, the technician told Mike, "No, they did not pick up any blood flow." So Mike was my advocate during this whole critical time. He told personnel and had it even written in my chart that he was going to be the one, as my spouse and as my love, he would be the one to tell me that I would probably be losing my hands and feet unless there was a miracle again by God. And he said he would ask God when he felt that I was ready to hear that news. In God's perfect beautiful plan for me and Mike, he prepared me physically, psychologically, spiritually, for what was about to entail. And what that meant was I was going to lose all four.

Mike left that day, the hospital, going to family and he was just sobbing and crying out to God. Like, what are we going to do? But as he was praying, God gave him this eternal perspective that night. He kind of had a dream that God gave him, and something was wrong with my hands and feet. He knew that in the dream. And we were grocery shopping slowly together. He didn't know at the time that I would have prosthetics and I would be walking and going grocery shopping with him even today. He saw me in line and this lady looked at my hands and feet. And I said, "Would you like to hear my story?" And she said, "Yes."

So I told her a quick story, told her about my miracle, how God had healed me. She started to cry. And she told me of her trials. And I gave her the gospel message. And all of a sudden, Mike said, "That's it. It's not about this temporal life. It is about the eternal perspective." And so he knew, "Okay. You know what? God just told me that I can tell her." So when he came in the next morning, I was winking at him and I couldn't move very much, but he was telling me. I could just barely talk because my trach had been taken out. But I know this was God, because a normal human being would never say this. And my response after he told me that I was for sure going to lose my hands and feet. I said, "Well, you told me about my miracle, that I'm alive. Praise God. He kept me alive." I guess my ministry now will be that I have no hands and I have no feet. And I just went, "Wow. Okay, God. Then you have to give me hope and you have to give me this peace."



Crystal Keating:

Amen. Yes. Who would say that knowing her life was going to radically change and those around her?

Vicki Zoradi:

No one. Most people would probably curl up in a ball and say, "Okay, kill me now."

Crystal Keating:

I'm done.

Vicki Zoradi:

Let me just die. Don't even comfort me. I just want to slip away and go be with Jesus.

Crystal Keating:

Absolutely.

Vicki Zoradi:

But I knew that God had another plan. So I was transferred back down to Southern California and so it was scheduled that I would be amputated, all four. I talked them into doing it all at once.

Crystal Keating:

You knew that it was happening and you just made that decision. Let's just move forward.

Vicki Zoradi:

Let's just go. And so it was scheduled for September 1st, the long weekend. It was a Saturday and all my friends and family, and church members lined the hallway at 6:30 AM. But the night before, I had this precious time with Jesus. It was pre-amputation night. His peace, his hope, his comfort, and I was praying like I always did. I looked up at the top of the ceiling where the ceiling met the wall and I asked God for another miracle. My family had been praying and reading me the scriptures of the miracles of Jesus, so I asked God. I said, "God, I've been reading about your miracles, Jesus, and it's not too late. You could do this tonight and I could wake up with fresh limbs."

And I heard this small voice in my soul saying, "No." Just a soft voice. And I started to sob and I said, "God, I cannot do this without you. I can't." And instantly I got the scripture in my head from 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10 when Apostle Paul was talking about the thorn in his flesh. And he asked for God to take this away, and here's the scripture: "But he, the Lord said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast in the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

And I love that. And God gave me that night another vision in my mind. I didn't see it except in my mind of a little girl dancing at a fancy wedding. And she was dancing on her daddy's feet, and he was holding her hands and she was stepped on his feet. And he was guiding her around the



dance floor. And he was leading her to every spot she was supposed to go. And he said to me, "I will be your hands and feet." And I thought, "Okay, Lord, I can do this." And I did. And I woke up more like Rocky Balboa as you know, "Okay." Or David and Goliath. "What? I have the strength of the Lord."

Crystal Keating:

Amen. How we can go through such dark times, would we know the Lord is with us and that he's on our side. Greater is he who is in us than he that is in the world.

Vicki Zoradi:

Amen.

Crystal Keating:

And Lord, we never want to go where he is not, right?

Vicki Zoradi:

Absolutely.

Crystal Keating:

What a gift that he was so near to you. And as you're calling out to him, he met you there.

Vicki Zoradi:

Absolutely.

Crystal Keating:

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