

Season 3 | Episode 29

Fueled by Faith

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.

In our last episode, we heard from Vicki Zoradi, who on her 60th birthday was diagnosed with a kidney stone that became lodged between her bladder and kidney. Within 36 hours, she was rushed to the hospital in severe septic shock. Medical professionals gave her virtually no chance to live, but God had a different plan.

Despite miraculously beating the odds and surviving 35 days in the ICU, inadequate blood supply to her extremities caused Vicki to lose both her hands and feet. Now, fitted with prosthetic arms and legs, she's returning to the podcast for part two of our conversation, to go deeper into her struggles with loss, but how she's seen God's power in her life.

Vicki, take us to now, you've gone through amputation, how are you adjusting to life without your hands and your feet?

Vicki Zoradi:

Yeah. Yeah. It's strong to how I adjusted, because only through God and the support that I had from Mike. I just felt like Mike was my rock.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, yeah.

Vicki Zoradi:

We'd been married for 40 years and especially out of the hospital, he supported me even before, but now so much more. He'd be an integral part of that. And it really surprised me how closer it brought us. And the support that Mike gave me was found in so many ways. So it's a two-part question, I guess. I'll go with it support first, how Mike gave me support, and then really how our love deepened because of it.

Crystal Keating:

Yes.

Vicki Zoradi:

We met at 17 at a church camp, and we had been married since 1979 for 40 years. And he totally supported me. We were best friends and what not, so when we had a chance then to look back over our 40 years, God was preparing us. It was really like Moses. And I thought of, wow, Moses was commissioned by God to go before Pharaoh. And for 40 years, he was in Midian.

We could look back and see, Mike was a caregiver for his mom. God preordained that when we needed. Tiffani became an occupational therapist four years before this happened to me. She got licensed at six weeks before this happened. And what did I need the most? An occupational therapist and a physical therapist. So God just weaved our lives, unbeknownst to us, with what we needed. And then I became a schoolteacher, so speaking publicly was no big deal. I had never written a book, but I love to read books and so that inspired me as well.

I want to just say the support that Mike's done since this. All the doctor appointments, he drives everywhere. I haven't driven since. The medications, he monitors that. He gets my prosthetics on and off and cleaned and plugged in every night and put back on in the morning. He does hygiene routines like showers and brushing teeth, brushing my hair. So our roles have really switched. Before we were in this predicament, he did all the outside. I did all the inside. And now, I would say, gosh, he does 99% of all of it. But we still are best friends. And we find those things that deepen our love.

One verse that really keys in, just like Moses had, it's Exodus 17:10-12. It's when Joshua is fighting the Amalekites, and Moses and Aaron and Hur, H-U-R, went up to the top of the hill. And whenever Moses held up his hands high, Israel prevailed. And whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.

So in verse 12, it says, "But Moses's hands grew weary. So they took a stone and put it under him. And he sat on it while Hur and Aaron held up his hands, one on one side and one on the other side. So his hands were steady until going down of the sun."

And I felt like that was Mike was on one side holding me up, and Tiffani was on the other side holding me up, and God just brought the victory.

Crystal Keating:

Well, what a sweet marriage you've had. I have to say for anyone who is listening, you have to see the video of Mike putting on Vicki's-

Vicki Zoradi:

Oh.

Crystal Keating:

...prosthetics. You can just see the care and tenderness in his eyes, if you go to vickizoradi.com.

Vicki Zoradi:

Yeah. There's an eight-minute video. It just puts you right in the situation.

Crystal Keating:

It is.

Vicki Zoradi:

Yeah.

Crystal Keating:

And the tenderness of brushing your hair and putting on lipstick for you.

Vicki Zoradi:

I know.

Crystal Keating:

And so Vicki, I know life isn't the way it once was.

Vicki Zoradi:

Yes.

Crystal Keating:

And in your book *Tested by Fire...Fueled by Faith*, you really talk about grief, and grief can take many forms. How have you worked through waves of grief, even as you've adjusted to your new normal and your family's new normal?

Vicki Zoradi:

It really, yes. Tiffani moved out to start her own new family. When this happened, her and Mike Washburn moved back into our family home, and they gave us a year. And she and Mike and Mike cared for me that year.

But the grief, no matter how difficult, it comes in many forms. And I think of other people that grieve, because my loss was so profound, but people lose loved ones. They lose a marriage, they lose jobs, they lose businesses, maybe medical diagnoses.

Crystal Keating:

Right.

Vicki Zoradi:

Me, I lost body parts. It could be anything that's dear to us. Grief came definitely in different stages with Mike and me. We cried many times together grieving our loss: our loss of life, our loss of what ifs, or what could be our future. We returned to the cabin for the first time the next year and it was bittersweet. We both cried for about five minutes, 10 minutes. I really never said why me, but why not me? I had been truly blessed. We both had for 60 years.

I think of those in Afghanistan right now who are suffering for their faith. So who am I to complain? I mean, I live a blessed life in California, even without my hands and feet. But I do miss my hands and feet and I grieved them. And they were truly miracles. I miss my hands more. Walking on prosthetic legs are like stilts, and it gets easier with time. And now, I have ankles that pronate.

And I cried just the other day when we went to a shoe store, and I couldn't even pick out a pair of shoes off the shelf that go on my new feet. And so we had to really think about it and process it. And Mike, again, was my rock. But my hands, oh, whoa, I grieve those much more.

I grieve in different ways. I grieve memories. I can't touch my husband's face or hold his hand. I can't pet my cat. I can't feel my grandbabies' soft skin. I can't play the piano. I can't crochet. I can't sew quilts with beautiful colors and patterns that I used to do.

Another grief though, that I have are "the nevers." I call them "the nevers." I have never changed a grandbaby's diaper, or given them a bath, or put them to bed. I've never planted flowers in our new home's courtyard. I have never cleaned this one-story house, but I have to look at what God has allowed me to do with my prosthetics in His strength.

I never before have used prosthetics to write a book. I've written three books with his strength. I use my computer, my iPad, my phone with a stylus locked into my prosthetic fingers. I can sign cards. I did my Christmas cards. I did business documents. I can use the restroom alone. I can even put on my own lipstick now. So I am so grateful.

I'm grateful to Mike for his love and support and comfort through this grief. He grieves. I try and allow him, he can leave without me now for several hours of which I'm so grateful. And I can be self-contained now, but I still need him. And I need God. But I want to say, God has truly become my hands and feet through all of it. So yeah, grief is a big thing, but I just know that God is stronger than the grief and his comfort is paramount.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and the watching world longs to see God magnified or mighty or faithful in the lives of people.

Vicki Zoradi:

Right.

Crystal Keating:

And so Vicki, you've been given a platform to share the gospel and minister to others because of your loss.

Vicki Zoradi:

Right.

Crystal Keating:

What's that been like for you?

Vicki Zoradi:

Well, my pastor originally met with us when I was still in a wheelchair and I had shrinkers on all four limbs. He said, "You have a platform and you better not mess this up." So how many people do you think have lost all four appendages and live to tell about it? Not very many. It doesn't happen. Most people that die from septic shock die.

Crystal Keating:
So this is a rare-

Vicki Zoradi:
Yeah, rare, rare.

Crystal Keating:
...occurrence.

Vicki Zoradi:
So that's what gives me the platform. If I did not lose all four, I believe that God's story through me would not have been brought to fruition, really. And people love to hear a good miracle story, so when-

Crystal Keating:
Oh, I know I do. I'm so encouraged already by our conversation because of the way God met you.

Vicki Zoradi:
Yes.

Crystal Keating:
And that the way God ministered to you and was near to you.

Vicki Zoradi:
Yeah. And when I was in the hospital, even in the ICU bed, two weeks after I woke up, God put on my heart, "You will write a book. You'll write a book for me." And I went, "Okay, God, then you'll equip me." He calls you; he'll equip you.

And so I began the writing process in November of 2019. And I had met Joni in March of 2019 with all my disabilities and everything. But with COVID lockdowns, I was able to really take my time with that book. God had stopped our speaking engagements, and beauty out of ashes, this allowed me time to complete it.

Chapter seven includes the gospel message weaved through the book's theme of winning the race that's set before us. And the verse I got from writing the book, it was when Paul was speaking in 1 Corinthians 9, I believe it's 24, "Do you not know that in a race, all the runners run?" And I couldn't run anymore. "But only one receives the prize, so run that you may obtain it."

And my mantra now is, "Race to win." And that means spiritually, not only physically, emotionally, but spiritually. It's a great Christian ideal to strive for and keep grief and daily trials at bay. I mean, that really helps my grief is saying, "Hey, with God, all things are possible."

Ministering to others, our pastor, Pastor Mike Fabarez, his motto is actually an acronym and it's called, A-T-A-P-A-T. We call it ATAPAT at our church. It means anything, any place, any time. And I need to be willing to just share my story no matter who and help others through their trials. It gets my focus off me, and Mike says it does the same for him.

Our speaking engagements have slowly started opening back up. And even just the other week, the prosthetic company, their staff called and asked me a few weeks ago, "Would you come talk to this struggling patient that lost both his arms?" Just they wanted to see that this could be done. If a 60-year-old lady can do it, so can these young people. With God's help, anyone can do it. It's about the eternal.

Crystal Keating:
Right.

Vicki Zoradi:

What we go in this life is so temporal and it's never going to be compared to the glories that await us. And in Romans 8:18, it says, "For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us."

Crystal Keating:

Yes. And may God give us faith to really embrace that. As you're speaking, I think of all those who are listening, who feel like they're running a marathon and they may feel so tired within their own challenges, whatever it be, whether it be physical, or spiritual, relational, emotional.

Vicki Zoradi:
Yeah. Oh.

Crystal Keating:

And just that encouragement that God will never leave us or forsake us, that he is with us. And he often displays his presence through other people.

Vicki Zoradi:
Right.

Crystal Keating:

And so as you take those opportunities to share the gospel and minister to others, and even your opportunity to mentor, I mean, we all need someone in our lives who's gone before us.

Vicki Zoradi:

I suffered awfully with phantom pain one morning. And pain radiated in palms and feet that I no longer had. So severed nerves were angry with me. They didn't know what to do. I tell people, "The worst pain is like someone shot my fingers off, or they drove a nail or a tent spike into my palm." I mean, that's how painful it was. And I cried out to the Lord this one morning, begging him for relief.

And then all of a sudden, the thought dawned on me, this just gives me a glimpse of what Christ suffered on the cross for me. He had spikes driven through his hands and feet. And now, I felt just a glimpse of what that may have felt like and understand the penalty that he paid for me and my sin. And he didn't deserve it. He was blameless. I deserved the pain and death, but not this perfect Savior. But what I received from him was grace. And what he gave to me was mercy. God

takes away pain and shows us his pain, that we can endure pain because he did. He endured the cross for us.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. And that is grace. That is God's good news that Jesus took all of that. He takes away our sin on himself and gives us his righteousness, so we can stand before God holy and blameless in his love.

So Vicki, as we close our time together, can you share some words of encouragement? I mean, you've been encouraging the whole way through, but can you specifically talk to those of us who have gone through deep seasons of grief?

Vicki Zoradi:

Yeah.

Crystal Keating:

What would you want to share with those who are listening today?

Vicki Zoradi:

I just want your listeners to know that every one of us will feel grief at different times in our life. It's inevitable and in varying degrees. You could either be going into a fiery trial like I was and not even know. I didn't even know it that July 2018. So you could be going into one, or you could be in one now, or possibly exiting even on the back side of one. But no matter what it is, it's my faith and confidence and trust that Jesus has got this.

Jesus Christ gets me through each step of the way. And I just want to encourage you all with that, that you will feel this grief and loss and pain and disappointment, and maybe even possibly betrayal right now, but just trust him. He's sovereign. He knows every pain, whether it's physical, emotional, spiritual. Let Him be your rock, because my faith in Jesus Christ, that was the only way. He strengthened me through all the loss of all four of my extremities.

I used to trust myself. I used to say, "Oh, come on, you can do this, just have a little more faith. You can get yourself out of this jam. Push yourself through the pain or tragedy. Buck up,." Kind of "I can do this" attitude.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah.

Vicki Zoradi:

But when a person totally feels helpless like I did, you have nowhere else to go, but to the anchor.

Crystal Keating:

Amen.

Vicki Zoradi:

And I want to leave with this verse because my anchor is Jesus Christ in these storms. And I must put my faith and trust and cling tightly to him in every situation. So here is the verse and it's paraphrased and it's Hebrews 6:18-20, if you want to look it up.

"We who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf."

So thank you so much. I hope that's encouraging. And thank you for listening to my story today.

Crystal Keating:

What a great picture.

Vicki Zoradi:

Thank you, Crystal.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, Vicki, it's been such a joy to speak to you, even to my own heart. As I know many of us are going through trials, but just to picture our anchor being so settled and so just firmly placed in someone who is so faithful.

Vicki Zoradi:

We could be tossed to and fro, but if Christ is our anchor, then we're not going to drift.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. Amen. Vicki, thank you so much for your time today.

Vicki Zoradi:

Oh, you're welcome. Say hi to Joni for me.

Crystal Keating:

I surely will. Thank you for listening today. If you've been inspired, please send me a message or leave a five-star review on your favorite app. That's a great way to help other people find encouragement from these conversations. And to get our next episode automatically, subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. I'm Crystal Keating. And thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

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