

Kenneth Copeland

Editorial Note: *The article below originally appeared in the June 1979 issue of Charisma:*

Kenneth Copeland leaned over, looked me straight in the eyes and said, "A man can use faith the way a mechanic uses a wrench, or a carpenter uses a hammer. Faith can be controlled just like fear can be controlled. You can turn it off, or turn it on."

Although I've had a few problems turning fear on and off, it was hard to deny Copeland's claim. Yet sitting in a comfortable office in the back of a turbo prop airplane 20,000 feet up, and talking to the man who said his faith had given him this plane, somehow it seemed real.

Kenneth Copeland, 42, is an evangelist, writer, radio preacher, singer. But his followers—and they are many—admire him most as a man of faith, a man of God.

Seventeen years ago, Copeland was unsaved and unemployed. Today, he has one of the most dynamic charismatic ministries in America. He is a powerful pulpiter who is easily as influential in the charismatic renewal as his former mentor, Kenneth Hagin, under whose ministry Copeland developed much of his understanding of faith.

I had read Copeland's books, heard his radio program, listened to his tapes. I wanted to interview him. After more than a year of letters and phone calls, it was finally arranged that I could talk to him en route to one of his two-day, three-night Victory Seminars.

It was the most unusual interview of my life. We never got around to the normal reportorial questions about the size of his ministry, the number of his books and records he's released, his "Victory Seminars," the number of radio stations

he's on, or talk about his lovely wife, Gloria.

(I found out later his ministry employs 63 full time; he's written six books, including *The Laws of Prosperity*, *The Force of Righteousness*, *The Trouble Maker*, *The Force of Faith*, *Our Covenant With God*, and *The Decision Is Yours*. His six records, usually categorized as "middle-of-the-road" include *I'll Fly Away*, *The Word*, *I Have Returned*, *Jesus Country*, *Bread Upon the Water*, and the newest—*I'm a Believer*. This year an estimated 80,000 will attend Victory Seminars in 22 cities. He's on 604 radio stations in the United States and Canada, and he has a mailing list of over a quarter of a million names. His wife, Gloria, is popular as a speaker and writer in her own right.)

"The greatest joy in my life," Copeland told me as we settled down to talk, "is getting my Bible, going where there are people and ministering the Word of God. It's my pastime, hobby, job, life. I enjoy it as much as getting saved in the first place!"

For three hours—until we landed—Copeland talked and I probed, asking about faith, the Word of God, about people whose faith isn't answered, and about the future of his ministry.

How, I asked, can someone turn faith on? Isn't faith something that falls from heaven like tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost?

"Oh no," Copeland said. "What most believers don't realize is that they can use the faith God gave them. In fact, a man is handicapped if he doesn't know how to use his faith. Usually we think of the handicapped as people who can't use their limbs or mind. But the greatest disadvantage is someone who can't use his faith."

Why is faith so important?

"We're saved by faith, we're righteous by faith, and Romans 14:23 says whatever is not of faith is sin. A man should do

everything by faith.”

Everything? Even get up in the morning?

“That’s right. I ask the Lord to wake me up, and I get up by faith. You can set your alarm if you want to, but you can also get up by faith.”

How about eating or getting a job? How can you do that by faith?

“The Bible says to eat by faith,” he said, reaching for his Bible.” Romans 14:23 is talking about eating when it says that anything not of faith is sin.”

Then Copeland told me how he went from 263 pounds to 180 by faith, and how he has kept it off by faith, and by correcting his diet—no bread, no sugar—for the past seven years.

And he told me about getting a job by faith when he was a student at Oral Roberts University. He knew he had been out of the will of God before in jobs. He told God he had to get in His will or die. “I’m ready to do any job You want me to,” he told the Lord.

Copeland had been a pilot for seven years, logging 4,000 hours of flight time before entering ORU at age 30. He took a job as Oral Roberts’ personal co-pilots and chauffeur on Roberts’ citywide campaigns. Roberts said the Lord told him a student would get the job. He offered Copeland the job when he learned of Copeland’s flying skills.

Copeland traveled everywhere with Roberts for nine months. During this time, he studied the teaching and techniques of the famed healing evangelist.

“Don’t lay hands on someone unless you’re ready to release your faith,” Roberts told him. “Then, when you lay hands on someone, release your faith.”

It was at ORU that Copeland began learning about living by faith. It was there that he began to see that the Word of God was speaking to him personally and that he should believe it.

How does a person learn how to turn on his faith?

Copeland's plan is simple:

1. Develop faith in God's Word; accept it as the final authority.
2. Meditate on the Word of God. Think about it. That feeds faith into your spirit. As you feed on it, your faith and God's faith become one. Meditating on God's Word builds capacity for faith.
3. Act on the Word of God. If it says to do something, do it much as you'd act on the word of a doctor or lawyer. As you read and study, ask questions. For instance: How does this apply to me?

First John 4:4 was one of Copeland's beginning faith verses. "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

As Copeland meditated on that verse, realizing that God was talking to him, he told himself that "I'm of God; God is my heritage; God is my source; I have overcome Satan. It's not that I will overcome, but I am victorious right now."

Although the verse was long ago committed to memory, he still read it over and over. He wrote it on a card and carried it around with him. As he thought about it, the Holy Spirit related it to other things he knew about the Word—and to other things in his life.

One day as he was meditating about 1 John 4:4, and reading "great is He that is in you," Copeland came to a life-changing realization.

"I had been putting my faith in the God of heaven, but I was ignoring the God inside me. One day I felt my prayers weren't getting to the ceiling. But then I realized 'greater is He who is *within* me.' But it doesn't matter if the prayers don't get above my nose. God is inside me."

4. As you act on the Word of God, decide to live by faith. "The just shall live by faith." It's a matter of the will.
5. And, finally, decide to live by love. Stay out of strife at any cost. Don't react to any situation. Of course, this isn't easy, and it takes practice. But 1 John 4:12 says "God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

Copeland's desire to stay out of strife is one of the reasons he likes to fly to his meetings in his own plane. Besides the fact that his plane was purchased for 20% of its original cost or that the commercial airfares for him and his crew for one year alone would pay for the plane, he has found that he avoids the hassles of airports and all that involves. Instead of airport hassles, he can, in the privacy of his own air-bound office, keep his mind on Jesus.

"Does avoiding strife mean you must avoid confrontations when they are necessary?" I asked.

"Not at all. Jesus talked tough to the scribes and Pharisees only because that was the only way He could get through to them. Confrontations are sometimes necessary. But you can confront in love without letting strife enter in."

The result of all this, Copeland is quick to point out, is that things begin to happen. The things the Word of God promises begin to become a reality in one's life. Things like peace of mind; financial blessings; health; a positive, active faith.

But it hasn't always been so in Copeland's life.

The son of a Baptist deacon, Copeland was reared in the church, but he didn't hear preaching about positive faith in the Word of God until he was in his 30s.

Born in Lubbock, Texas, he had a happy home life and a good relationship with his parents. He still is very close to both parents and considers them his best friends.

Like many teenagers, Copeland rebelled against his Christian upbringing at age 15. He had an incredible singing talent and wanted to make the bigtime in music. He sang in night clubs and joints. Then in 1957—at age 20—he recorded *Pledge of Love*, which made the Top Ten charts and sold more than 300,000 copies.

But the day he recorded it, he was drafted. And by the time he was discharged from the Army a year later, the song had dropped off the charts and Kenneth Copeland faded from the public eye.

During the time Copeland was away from God, his mother continued to pray for his salvation. Then, on one fateful day, in his own living room, as he was routinely putting on his shoes, he heard the voice of the Holy Spirit:

"If you and your family don't get in line with the Word of God," the voice said in the stillness of his spirit, "you'll go to a devil's hell."

Copeland dropped his shoe.

"I know it; I know it," he cried out. "I'll do whatever. Now, what do I do?"

Suddenly the words of his Sunday school teacher, Miss Taggart, came to mind: "Ask Jesus to come into your heart."

Copeland did.

His wife, Gloria, had accepted Jesus two weeks before. Now as

a family, they were following Jesus.

Copeland is probably best known for his teaching on prosperity. His messages are strong and straightforward. He has put into practice his own teaching, and it all seems to simple. But it hasn't always been.

In the foreword for his best-selling book *Laws of Prosperity*, Copeland describes those early days:

"When Gloria and I first began to put the things we were learning into practice, we had nothing around us but problems. I had returned to college at the age of 30 and from there God called us into full-time ministry in His service. We were deeply in debt and lived in surroundings that were very poor. The job God called me to do required that I travel extensively preaching and teaching His Word, but our car was completely worn out. We had no clothes. I had lost 75 pounds and obviously, none of my clothes fit. The trousers on some of the suits had been altered so many times that, instead of two back pockets, it looked like one big pocket! I could go on and on about our situation, but it's easy to see that we had less than nothing. We were thousands of dollars in debt.

"God used His Word to set the standards by which we would operate. It had to be by faith or not at all. We made commitments that seemed so hard. We declared that we would never ask any man for anything, including money or places to minister. We pledged ourselves and this ministry to Romans 13:8, that we would never borrow one cent. We would tell our needs only to God and expect what He was teaching us to produce. Little did we know then what a blessing these standards would be. We learned, many times the hard way. We prayed. We confessed our faith. We stood on God's Word when every circumstance spelled out absolute doom. God's Word worked! Things began to happen *for us* instead of *to us*. We began to grow. In 11 months, we were free from debt. Unless you have experienced the freedom of being debt-free, you

cannot imagine how great it is not to have any man putting pressure on you. We know what Hebrews 4:11 means when it says, 'labour therefore to enter into that rest.' There is peace and rest when you know how to operate in God's laws instead of being forced to seek help from men's sources."

It was these lessons that made his ministry the success it is today. For example, God taught him 10 years ago not to build his own ministry. "Put the needs of the people first," he felt God say, "and I will build your ministry."

In 1975 while praying, Copeland felt the Lord told him he was coming soon. He wanted "the uncompromised word of Faith" preached through every available medium—radio, television and print.

He visualized he would start with 10 stations, and would wait until they supported themselves and go on some more. But the Lord told him to go on every station that would accept his broadcast ... whether it would pay for itself or not. He began on 30 stations the first year. It grew to 260 the second and is now up to more than 600.

This year his big thrust is television. He bought time on stations in the top 100 markets. Most of the time was prime time. He taped four services at different Victory Seminars, chose the best one, edited it to an hour and added an intro and outro with Pat Boone. The show aired in March and April. The results, according to Doug Neece, Copeland's right-hand man (and brother-in-law) were exciting. Many people said they'd never heard anything like it.

Copeland believes that should the Lord tarry, there will be more major prime time specials and he will develop a daily 15-minute television show similar in format to his radio show. These will be aired on cablevision outlets that will accept them.

He would like to build a ministry center with a hotel resort

next door where people with needs could come for teaching and ministry. At least one service a day would be a healing service. The rooms in the hotel would be equipped with a closed-circuit TV that would have positive, faith-building programs to build up the believer. He also wants to build a Bible college.

The thrust of his ministry, Copeland says, is to help people realize who they are in Jesus.

This is resulting in a new generation of bold Christians who are beginning to do exploits in the name of Jesus.

"We're in the midst of a revival that's just beginning to surface," Copeland said. "This isn't just an isolated revival. It's a part of a genuine move by the Spirit. For years only a handful of preachers have preached faith. But now believers are beginning to exercise it, and I believe we're about to witness manifestations of faith unlike anything since the ministry of Jesus.

"We're going to begin seeing miraculous things that will capture the attention not only of the religious public, but of the general public.

"I believe we'll see raising of the dead; working of miracles, not just healings. That means that cut off fingers will be replaced and so forth.

"But the largest miracle will be in the area of finances: God will make godly men and women more wealthy than people serving Satan. The Bible says the wealth of sinners is laid up for the just. There are inventions waiting to be invented by Christians that will make as big an impact as fast as the new pocket-size calculators have.

"There is going to be a financial revival. The spiritual climate is ripe. People may be running out of ideas, but God isn't running out of ideas. I believe someone should invent a

car that will get 100 miles to the gallon of gasoline.

“A Christian will do it.”