

How Speaking in Tongues Saved This Woman's Life

Kathi and David Byker woke up abruptly at 4 a.m. on August 9, 2011 to the sounds of yelling in their bedroom. Two men wielding knives and dressed all in black stood over Kathi and her husband. They wore ski masks and all the couple could see were their eyes.

Kathi, believing she was having a nightmare, closed her eyes hoping when she opened them again the men would be gone. When the 60-year-old grandmother opened her eyes, what she had feared most was true: The men were still there. Kathi was terrified.

One of the intruders demanded money from David. The other intruder wound duct tape around Kathi's wrists and ankles and she suddenly realized they were going to take her away. The thought of being separated from her husband of 40 years was horrifying and she began kicking the man to get free.

"Stop, honey," her husband said, "he's got a knife to your neck! "Kathi, who hadn't realized that the intruder was holding her at knifepoint, stopped struggling.

Pulled and yanked outside their Grandville, Michigan home to her own sport-utility vehicle—which the men planned to steal—Kathi was frightened. Duct tape was put over her eyes and mouth as she was commanded to lie down on the back seat. To feel so vulnerable and helpless and to be under someone's control like that "was just hell," Kathi says.

According to police reports, the two intruders demanded the ransom from the couple or, they said, they would kill Kathi. They gave her husband a cell phone number and told him to call when he had the cash. A third, an older man identified as the ringleader of the group, had supplied the kidnappers with

masks, knives, gloves and duct tape.

The Ride Into Darkness

After meeting up with the instigator, one of the intruders, driving the stolen SUV, sped into the darkness away from the Byker's home with Kathi. She didn't know where they were going, what the men were going to do to her or how long the frightening ordeal would last. The kidnapper drove with his left hand and kept his right hand with the knife over the back of the seat, continually demanding that Kathi lie down. He told her if she sat up that he would kill her.

"I believed that he would," Kathi told *Charisma*. "He had the knife right to my neck."

Up to this point there was so much trauma, confusion and disorientation it prevented Kathi from thinking about prayer. At the point she realized she was totally helpless, Kathi remembered to call out to God. This was the turning point, she says.

She was still in the same situation, but everything had changed in her heart. After that moment, God was front and center in her mind, heart and spirit. Lying in the dark in the back seat of the SUV, not knowing whether she would live or die, Kathi focused on God and prayed in the Spirit. She was too overwhelmed to utter a word in English. Romans 8:26 says, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

"It's the perfect prayer because it is from my spirit to God's Spirit without the mind getting involved," she says.

The duct tape kept her mouth shut, but it couldn't keep her tongue from moving as she prayed, she says. Sometimes, all she could mutter was "Help, God." As she prayed in the Spirit, she felt her body relax.

“The Holy Spirit prays for us when we don’t know how to pray,” says Harold Vinson Synan, dean emeritus and visiting professor of church history at Regent University. “Speaking in tongues is a personal gift that can be exercised throughout your whole life.”

This is a gift that is for everyone who puts their trust in God. Deb Kirgis, the associate pastor of Resurrection Life Church in Grandville, Michigan, says she knew that the reason Kathi so quickly began praying in tongues was because she already knew the power that was available. She’d experienced other victories as a result of praying in the Spirit in the past, so it came naturally for her to respond to this situation with her supernatural language.

Pleading the Blood of Jesus

Kathi prayed in the Spirit and the next thing she remembered to do was to plead the blood of Jesus over her body. She thought about the Scripture from the book of Exodus that talks about the blood over the doorposts being protection and realized she needed God’s protection. The more she surrendered to the Spirit, she says, the more scriptures came to mind, including Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

She thought, “I don’t know what’s going on here, but I’m (going to acknowledge) Him.”

As God brought Scripture after Scripture to her mind, a tremendous peace washed over her. The situation hadn’t changed, she says. Before she acknowledged God she felt scared, but afterward she felt powerful.

“The fear factor was lessening as the God factor was going up,” Kathi says.

Kathi believes she was given supernatural empowerment through

the Spirit. She was still terrified but had an otherworldly peace inside. Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Her thoughts came fast and she remembered Psalm 91 and the word, "protection." Psalm 91:1-2 says, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my god, in whom I trust.' "

It was then Kathi realized that God was greater than her fear and she could rest in Him.

A Miraculous Escape

Soon after, the driver stopped the car and pulled into what she thought was a forest. She remembers thinking, "I am not going to be one of those people who are never heard from again, in Jesus' name!"

Kathi was dragged into a field in another Michigan county where the abductor began binding her to a telephone pole with duct tape.

"There's somebody behind you and if you try to escape, he'll kill you," he told her and then he left. Kathi didn't believe he was telling the truth; she never got the sense that anyone else was there. She heard him leave, and while he was gone, she counted to 10 before wiggling out of the duct tape on her wrists and pulling it from her eyes and mouth. Kathi then realized she was in a cornfield with corn stalks towering around her. She looked around and didn't see anyone else. She looked down and saw the duct tape around her knees and easily pushed it apart.

"It was a miracle," she says. "The duct tape that was holding me to the pole ripped as I just put a slight pressure on it."

She thought, *"Wow, God!"* It was then that Kathi made her escape. The police detective later confirmed that there had to have been some sort of help from above. "It was regular duct tape," Kathi says. "It was strong and wrapped around a couple of times. It was tied around my knees. I saw it rip after just slight pressure and it was a miracle."

Listen to God's Directions

Kathi ran to the road and paused. "It's extremely important which way I go—straight, left, or right," she realized. "In my heart, I asked God which way?" There was no doubt in her mind that God was leading her to go straight, she says. She didn't know which way her kidnapper had gone, but she learned later that she would have run into him if she had gone to the left to get her vehicle. She also found out why her abductor had left her alone; he had run out of tape and gone back to the car for more.

No one prepares themselves for this kind of situation, Kathi says, and she had no idea what to do; she didn't know whether to keep running or find a place to hide. She was still scared for her life.

"I never felt so alone in my life," Kathi says. "Nobody knew where I was—nobody."

She ran behind a farmhouse in the dark, barefoot and in her stretchy leopard print pajamas, duct tape hanging all over her. Sometimes she stopped to hide and pray, like inside the 3-by-4 metal box she came upon. Other times she just ran for her life, zigzagging behind whatever she thought would give her cover in the dim early morning light.

At last, in front of a building, she saw a sign in the distance that read, "Classic Transportation." God kept directing her eyes to the sign and she told herself to remember it. As she prayed, God clearly told her to go closer where she saw a 12-foot chain link fence with white semitrucks

lined up inside. "I was so happy the gate was open," Kathi says.

She hurried past the darkened trucks until she saw one lone red truck with the parking lights on and the engine running. She assumed someone was inside and banged on the truck, but nobody answered. She was relieved to find the driver's side door unlocked and cautiously opened it before softly calling in to a man who had been sleeping in the back.

"Can you help me?" she cried. "I have been kidnapped."

At first, he was in a state of disbelief. But after hearing Kathi's desperate story, the driver called the local police in Allegan County. While they waited, he explained that he was waiting for Classic Transportation to open so he could apply for a job. "He had never been there before and I felt God had put him there to help me," Kathi says. "I told him, 'I think you're an angel,' and he laughed."

Afterward, the police came and took her to the rural police station where she retold the events of that night. After that, since the kidnappers had crossed county lines, the Grandville police arrived and questioned her again. "I just praised God that I was a witness to His power," Kathi says.

Prayer: The Deciding Factor

Kathi first became acquainted with the Spirit shortly after her son's birth three decades ago. At the time in 1984, her son was just three months old. She had attended church many years, but always felt something was missing and was searching for more. It was then that a friend told her about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, laid hands on her and prayed. "I was filled with the love and knowledge of God," Kathi says. She then began voraciously studying Scripture and underlining all the verses about the Holy Spirit. She came to the verse in Ephesians 4:30 that says don't grieve the Spirit. "God said I was resisting the part about speaking in tongues," she says.

“But He waited until I was ready.”

Kathi was happy praising God in English and anything more was out of her realm of understanding. She wasn't open to praying in tongues until she realized she was grieving the Spirit and repented. It was only after that she let herself be open to speaking in tongues. Her prayer language began with only one word, but has gradually grown as she has opened herself up to the power of the Spirit.

Doug Bergsma, 63, pastor of Rockford Resurrection Life Church in Rockford, Michigan, has known the Bykers for more than 20 years. When Kathi was kidnapped, Bergsma, who considers himself a straight-line Bible teacher who believes in the gifts of the Spirit, was one of the people David called. Bergsma immediately prayed. By the time he arrived at the Byker's home, there were nearly a dozen people already gathered praying, some in tongues, and claiming Scripture for Kathi.

He explains that when you are baptized with the Holy Spirit, you get a prayer language: the ability to speak in another language. In 1 Corinthians 14:15, Paul says, “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding.” Tongues are a spiritual gift and there are so many things that come from that, Bergsma says. “I have seen so many things over the years like words of direction, stories of divine protection, revelation and illumination beyond what the mind can grasp,” Bergsma says. “In that situation, for Kathi to have peace and find peace is amazing proof of God's divine protection,” Bergsma says.

Release of Bitterness

The three men involved in the kidnapping are now serving long-term prison sentences. “Because forgiveness is a choice, and not a feeling, I have chosen to forgive these men before God,” Kathi says (). “And therefore, God has miraculously removed

bitterness and resentment from me and He's freed me. Most Americans like me take their freedom for granted. When mine was snatched away, even for a short time, I discovered how extremely valuable it is. To be free is a treasure."

God is our freedom fighter and deliverer, she says. "There are a lot of people who are going through things spiritually that I went through physically," she says. "They are bound up. They are being held hostage. The devil does that; he doesn't play fair, he hates us all, and God is there to rescue us all. I can testify He is there at the most hardest times we can imagine. He's not just there for me; He's there for everyone."

Ruth A. Zschomler, a native of the Pacific Northwest, is a multi-platform writer and photographer with an MFA in creative writing from Goddard College. Her work has been published in The Oregonian, The Columbian, The Vancouver Voice, The Pitkin Review, Canyon Voices, and Rain Magazine. You can follow her on Twitter @rzschozmler.

Watch Kathi Byker share her story of being abducted and then rescued by the Holy Spirit's power at .

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.