

Baptist MK felt prayers during Kenya hostage crisis

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NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)—Katherine Walton—the daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries—relied on the prayers of Christians around the world during the horrifying hours she and her children were trapped in Nairobi’s Westgate Mall.

The family crouched in a mall grocery store, praying God would protect them from terrorists who were shooting guns and throwing hand grenades. The siege in the Kenyan capital left 67 people dead.



International Mission Board Missionary Bert Yates reported that helicopters hovered over her home near Westgate mall for 72 hours before the terrorist takeover of the Nairobi, Kenya, mall finally ended. (BP Photo by Bert Yates)The Waltons credit God with delivering them from the terror attack, but they also believe God had a purpose in allowing them to be there in the first place.

“I talked with our boys after it happened and talked about God’s perfect timing. He didn’t have to allow us to be there that day. The truck could have broken down, the prescription could have not been ready ... There are

a lot of things he could have put in our way to prevent us from being there, but he didn't," Katherine Walton said.

So, why did God allow it? Walton doesn't know, but she wonders if maybe her opportunity to speak so publicly about what God did to deliver them is part of the reason. She's been interviewed by *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *TIME* and *People* magazines and even *Glamour* magazine.

"With all this media attention, God must be getting some good out of it," Walton said. "I'm not telling my story because I want to but so that I can share all the great things God did in it. He's given me a peace ... strength to be able to share that I wouldn't have thought possible. That's just amazing."

'God things'

Many "God things" happened that day, she insisted. Another American family in the store recognized her boys—Blaise, 14, and Ian, 10—when the attack began and helped them to safety. The Walton girls—Portia, 4, and Gigi, 2—went into a type of "sleep mode" during the four- to five-hour siege, maintaining quiet and unnatural composure. Petra, 13 months, cried long and hard, but others said later they didn't even hear her.

Walton made eye contact with the terrorists several times, yet they never seemed to see her, although they were calling others out and shooting them. The woman who shielded Portia in the initial round of gunfire was injured, yet Portia remained unharmed and had the courage to run to her rescuer. He was a stranger with a gun, but he looked like a man she knew and trusted, so she felt safe.

"Even as we look at the breakdown of how events occurred and being in the exact place we were, we can attribute those things to God," Walton said.

Her husband, Philip, was in North Carolina on business when the siege took place. He received a phone call from a friend who told him his family was trapped in the mall.

Prayer chain

“He started praying immediately and started reading Psalm 40,” Walton said. He called his parents and in-laws, all former Southern Baptist missionaries to Africa. They began to pray and call others to pray on their behalf.

“It was like the whole world was praying for us,” he said.

Katherine Walton and her husband met at boarding school and married during their college years. They began to sense God’s call to return to Africa three years ago. They discussed going through a missions agency but decided instead to go with a “business-as-missions” mindset, planting their lives in the community and creating a witness among the Kenyan people.

Their connections to the country are strong, and their church, as well as the larger Kenyan community, has come alongside them during this tumultuous time.

“For us, it really hasn’t changed our perspective on what we’re doing here and why we’re here. In fact, in some ways, it’s strengthened our ties to Kenya, our love for Kenya,” Walton said. “I feel like I love Kenya more because I have suffered with them. I can share in this traumatic event that has happened to the community.”

From interviews, people recognize them. One Kenyan woman recognized Portia and came to hug her. “I think it means something” to those she encounters, Walton said.

Healing help

Their core group of friends—their church family and Philip Walton’s business partners—surrounded them with love and support. They took care of details, prayed and comforted. When they asked Walton what she needed, she said: “I don’t know what I need. I need you to make decisions for me.” They did just that.

Walton and her family still are healing emotionally, struggling with memories, fatigue and difficulty sleeping. And she worries about their families in the United States.

“I think they have had a much more difficult time than we have with this because we’re not there for them to feel us and touch us and know that we’re OK,” she said.

The Waltons plan to visit the United States in December to spend Christmas with extended family but will return to Kenya in the new year.

Walton and her family are so grateful for Christians who lifted the family up in prayer.

“Thank you for being such prayer warriors. I know a lot of people were on their knees,” she said. “And those prayers—they mean so much.”