

Season 2 | Episode 29

Patience That Leads To Perseverance

Joni Eareckson Tada

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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 welcome and include people impacted by disability in your community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to [podcasts](#) so you don't miss any of our encouraging conversations. You can also find all of the helpful resources that we've talked about at Joniandfriends.org/podcast.

Well, Joni, it was so great to speak with you last month on the anniversary of your diving accident, as you celebrated 53 years in your wheelchair. You're the only person I know who celebrates 53 years in a wheelchair. And when people hear 53 years, I know many have to wonder what's kept you going all these years? I mean, in a world where people are so often looking for a quick fix, how have you persevered?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Well, I'm glad you used that word, Crystal, perseverance. It's so key. And it means staying the course, not deviating, holding fast, not letting go, and especially remaining patient. Trouble is, nowadays nobody wants to be patient, but patients over time leads to perseverance. We know that because in Romans chapter five, verse three, it says that, "Perseverance then leads to character." We all want the character of Jesus, but it takes patience. And I think Jesus tried to convey this. When he said in Matthew chapter 13, get this. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour, until it worked all through the dough." So just a tiny bit of yeast over time slowly changes the entire character of the dough, of bread. And in the same way, I think a small victory taking steps, small ones, in one day by day, small victories and suffering slowly over time works its way like yeast until your whole character has changed.

I like to think of that as a fermentation process. As we all know fermentation happens when yeast causes dough to rise, it's a slow process. And again, we don't like things to be slow.

Crystal Keating:

No.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Yeah, yeah. We want strong character.



Crystal Keating:

Especially when we're suffering.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Sure. We want strong character in the midst of suffering, but we want it fast. So, most people opt for carbonation, rather than fermentation. I mean, they try to carbonate their character, inject a little bit of spirituality that kind of gives you a buzz, albeit artificial, something fast, something quick, something that looks and feels and has the same fizz as fermentation. But sadly, it's not the real thing. It falls short. Persevering, that patience over time, carbonation does not change your character, but fermentation does. Crystal, I've got to share with you one of my all-time favorite quotes. May I?

Crystal Keating:

Please do.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

On this subject? Because this is my life right here. Okay. Frederick Faber said, "In the spiritual life, God chooses to try our patience first by his slowness. He is slow, but we are swift and precipitant. It just because we are, but for just a little time. And he is for eternity. Thus, grace, for the most part and our lives, acts slowly. It works little by little. There's something overarching in the extreme slowness of God." Frederick Faber says, he says, "Let it overshadow your soul. Wait, and God will come. And when he comes, go with him, but fall behind a little, would you, when he quickens his pace, be sure of it that you should quicken yours. But when he slackens, slacking at once, do not be slow only, but be silent, very silent for he is God." I love that quote-

Crystal Keating:

Oh, my goodness.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Because that's the way I've lived. You got to just, as Galatians chapter five says, "Keep in step with the spirit."

Crystal Keating:

Yes.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

And when it comes to dealing with suffering, God works slowly. He tries our patience-

Crystal Keating:

He certainly does.



Joni Eareckson Tada:

With his slowness, but you know what, Crystal, honestly, looking back, I can't believe it's been 53 years. It's like a snap of the finger. It's like, yikes. Didn't I just break my neck a few months ago. It's gone so quickly. And I think that that is a grace, a blessed grace, that God gives those who are patient, who persevere and wait on God while he is slow.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. Well, and Frederick Faber said it exactly. It's because we're but for a time, but he's been for eternity. What a great perspective, and okay, 53 years in a wheelchair. And I've asked you this before, don't you ever get tired? I mean, not just physically, but do you ever feel like, you know what? It's just too much. I'm so overwhelmed. I can't do this anymore. The quadriplegia, the chronic pain, the cancer, the COVID-19, the sheltering in place, and on and on and on.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

All the time, Crystal. All the time I feel overwhelmed. I feel like, can I really do this? Right now, my husband and I have a shortage of caregivers because of COVID-19 and one of those caregivers, she's one of my overnight friends who stays to give Ken Tada a break. She gets up in the middle of night and turns me a couple of times, re-tucks my pillows. Well, she's getting married and she's moving on. And this means I've got to train somebody new, find somebody new to help. I've got to invite them into the privacy of my bedroom. I've got a lie there naked while they learn this, and that and all the routines, and my catheter, and my toilet. It's like the other night we were training a new girl and I'm thinking, is this going to be a good fit? Is this going to work out?

Oh Jesus, I am so tired. I don't think I can go through this again. What kind of a learning curve does this girl have? Will they be pai... I'm overwhelmed. And so yes, of course I get tired, but Crystal, I prize something higher than the temporary fix of giving into my emotions. I purposefully prize the work of Christ in my life. Man, I've invested too much to give up. Now why jeopardize the treasures that I've laid up in heaven? Why risk destroying my eternal joy? So, I am going to persevere. I am intentional about being patient, and waiting on the Lord is something that my wheelchair has taught me. Well, the Bible is constantly telling us, wait on the Lord, wait on the Lord. Well, you know what? When you're in a wheelchair, it's almost built in, you have to wait on the Lord. And speaking of great quotes, which have inspired me, may I share another one?

Crystal Keating:

Please do.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Okay, Charles Spurgeon, he really explains what I mean when he says, now get this, "Beloved it is a mark of great grace to be able to comply in tribulation. To welcome it and say, 'Oh, now the Lord is about to elevate me, teach me some deeper truth that I have not yet learned. Work in my heart some new grace, which has never been there before.'" Crystal, you can't learn to swim on dry land, and you cannot learn to be patient without having something to endure. And so, in that way, my wheelchair is a severe mercy. Oh, it's a tough, hard bruising of a blessing. It's a dark, dark guest, but it is a friend. It's a guest, nonetheless, that I have to welcome into my life.



Crystal Keating:

Well, and I think that you've really embraced what Charles Spurgeon says that in the midst of suffering, I think you are quick to turn from the hardships, to the focus on God is about to do something new in my life. He's going to give me a new grace, that's never been there before. And may we all have that perspective as we embrace the hardships that come, and the unexpected things. I think that's what we've really been seeing in this season is we don't know one day from the next.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

I like to think of this COVID-19 season as the desert of desolation described in Deuteronomy, when God's people, what did they do? Wandered in circles, aimlessly, it looked like they weren't going anywhere. And doesn't that feel like COVID-19?

Crystal Keating:

Yes, it does.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

But we're told in Deuteronomy that God led them in circles, led them through this desert to cause them to hunger, to test them, to see what was in their hearts. I'm telling my husband, Ken this all the time, because he tends to get down and discouraged. He's worried about me getting COVID-19.

Crystal Keating:

Of course.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

He's afraid to go to have lunch with his guy, friends. Because he's afraid he might bring back some nasty into the house. I'm trying to get him out of the house. And I say to him, "Ken, we just have to trust God like God's people in the desert, it looks like we're wandering aimlessly, but let's just trust him with the plan."

Crystal Keating:

Right. He is the one thing that's sure in the midst of all these changes and we're talking about persevering. You have 53 years in a wheelchair, but we're celebrating another big milestone. We need some celebrations in this hardship.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Woo hoo.

Crystal Keating:

I mean, you've been sharing the message of hope in Christ through every hardship on the Joni and Friends Radio for 10,000 programs.



Joni Eareckson Tada:

I can't believe that.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, my goodness. So, as you rolled up to the microphone, that very first time to record, did you have any sense that you'd be reaching millions of people, millions with the message of Christ through your broadcast 38 years later?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

No, never. And it's not that I'm unaware of the reach of my message. Whether on the radio, or speaking, or books, it's just that I'm intentional about not thinking a lot about it. I don't labor. I don't worry about the breadth, or the reach, or the scope of my message. What I worry about is its depth and its integrity. And I'm going to let Jesus take care of the breadth of my message. I mean, I'm always telling friends with disabilities, they want a big platform. They want to speak; they want to share their story. They want to write books, and I'm all for it. But I will always tell them, you know what? Work on the depth of your message. Get into God's word. Just really get deep and live it out with integrity. And you let God worry about the scope and the breadth of your message and how far it goes. And that's something that a friend once told me early on, and I pass those good words on to others.

Crystal Keating:

Be faithful and let the Lord take care of the impact. That is so true. And that's been evident in your life. As someone who's now recording, I get a lot of nerves, even when we're starting here. I mean, were you nervous the first time that you were doing radio recordings?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Well sure. Because Crystal, if we're talking about the word of God, I'm always thinking of First Peter chapter four, verse 11, "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God." And that's a little unnerving. But Crystal, I love sharing hope through hardship. It's been the message of my life ever since Christ rescued me with his heart transforming hope after I broke my neck. And since then, Crystal, I just love jumping on every opportunity to share that same hope with others who feel utterly overwhelmed with their hardships.

I mean, when I first started the radio recording studio was a closet and it didn't even have great insulation. We didn't have fancy expensive insulation to make this little studio soundproof, but we made do. And I remember when I started recording, every once in a while, when a big truck would rumble down the road, outside our office, I'd have to stop do a retake. And it was just a little teensy, weensy, tiny little recording space, but oh my goodness. The scope of the message that went forth from that tiny little closet converted into a studio. I'm still awe struck looking back. Oh, Crystal, back then. If I interviewed somebody like you're interviewing me, you'd have to sit on my lap. I'm serious.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, my goodness.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

The little closet was that small.

Crystal Keating:

I can't imagine. Well, what was your mission when you first started broadcasting?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

My mission in broadcasting is really my personal mission in life. Someone once challenged me after I started taking the Lordship of Christ in my life seriously. He challenged me to write a mission statement for my life. And so, I did just that in one sentence. And in my mission statement, I said, I want to be God's best audio, visual aid of how his power shows up best in weakness, in order that I might encourage others to do the same. And that fits whether writing books-

Crystal Keating:

It's perfect.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Whether speaking at a conference and especially on the radio. I love it crystal. That's so many of the listeners of the Joni and Friends Radio Program, they don't have disabilities, but they have hardships. So, it's the theme of our ministry at Joni and Friends. You know this well; we share hope through hardship. And that's the mission statement for the radio outreach.

Crystal Keating:

Well, you've certainly been that audio visual for so many of us, no matter where God has us in life. Well, Joni, where does your inspiration come from? When thinking about the messages you want to share with listeners?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Well, I read a lot, and when I read something that just touches my heart deeply, I think, I bet others would like to be inspired by this as well. For instance, right now, my husband and I, every Sunday, listen to pastor Bob [Bjerkaas's 00:14:06] sermons from our little Reformed Presbyterian Church in Calabasas. And every Sunday, I'm listening and I'm thinking, I got to remember that. I got to... That's a great thought. And then immediately after the sermon, I will quickly go to my computer and download what I remember. In the old days, I would sit with a cassette recorder, and I'd be listening to sermons, and I would use a mouth stick and I'd punch the pause button, the go button, the record button. And I compiled hundreds of cassettes from listening to people speak. And also, during COVID-19 I have been rereading all of Elizabeth Elliot's classic books, all of them.



And I'm having a great time with my caregivers at night, I've got different girls who stay overnight to give Ken Tada a break. Elizabeth Elliot and her life is so relevant now in this season of COVID-19, some of our listeners might not know, she was a young 29-year-old when her jungle missionary husband was speared to death. And there she is a young mother with a two-year-old on her hip, deciding to stay and live among those same people in South America that killed her husband. And I'm thinking, I want to be like her. I want to learn from that lady.

And so, when I was in high school, I devoured her books. I read more after my diving accident, and I'm rereading them again. Because she has taught me how to "Do the next thing." Life is hard. You don't want to get up out of your bed because you're steeped in depression. You got a load of laundry that needs to be folded. You got dishes in the sink that need to be washed, just get up and do the next thing, whatever it is. And God, as you do, it will infuse your heart with the energy to persevere. And she's taught me that. And it has served me well these many years.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and that goes back to that idea of perseverance, that when you make the choice to believe, to obey, that God gives you grace in the moment. And so that is the little piece of yeast that just keeps growing and growing the relationship that he has for you.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Exactly Crystal, but I'm afraid that so many of us, we just don't want to take action on what we know we should do. Rarely is it that we're at a quandary as to what to do. Usually we know what to do, but we don't want to do it. It's like developing the discipline to lift barbells. We will read about great barbell lifters in the past. We will memorize verses from great barbells. We will buy studies. We'll go on YouTube and we'll observe others lift bar... We'll do everything but walk up to them barbells and reach down and give them a good jerk. We just don't want to do the hard thing, but I harken to Elizabeth Elliot, do it anyway, and God will enable you to take the next step.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and that's where we see God's powerful hand in the midst of our circumstances. And over the years, you've been faithful to share hope through hardship, even in some interesting circumstances. Even now a lot of your recording has been from your house. We're recording from your house right now.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

That's right.

Crystal Keating:

While you've been in quarantine. Do you have any interesting stories about recording?



Joni Eareckson Tada:

Well, I wish our podcast listeners could crowd into my recording studio on the day that I do record because I've got a honey, got lemon, I got Throat Coat Tea, I've got Chloraseptic spray. I even have a bottle of energy drink. And we sing a lot. We pray a lot. And always at the end of a recording session, we end with prayer and some sort of a celebration song. It could be All Hail the Power of Jesus Name. Or it could be Kool & The Gang, Celebrate Good Times, come on. It's just fun to celebrate what God is doing over the airwaves, or whether people download the Joni and Friends Radio Podcast and subscribe. I never wheel up to the microphone and say, "Okay, another day of recording. Let's just, open my mouth and blah, blah, blah." No it is a time of Holy Spirit intervention. It's a time of great yielding and dependence on God. It's a time of celebration. During break time, we might listen to a couple of rock and roll tunes from Chicago, just everything and anything to just have fun because ministry should be a joy.

Crystal Keating:

Joni, you have so many faithful listeners, and I'm always amazed when we receive emails from new people who stumbled across your radio program while they're driving in their car. And so many say, "Wow, you shared the exact scripture I needed to hear." Or they may even say, "You said more in four minutes than my own pastor." I'm sure they love their pastor, but I'm convinced that God speaks through you. And so many people say, "God wanted me to listen to exactly what you shared." How do you explain the kind of impact you've had these past 38 years?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Well, I've always tried to share insights that I think would be truly applicable. I've tried to be honest, to share when I'm depressed, when I need prayer, when I am struggling with pain. But whenever I share stories, whether they are my stories, or the examples of others, I always make certain to weave into these stories the fabric of God's word. My friend, Steve Estes told me when I was writing the Joni book, as I'm doing the manuscript, he's looking over my shoulder, and he kind of like rubs his chin. And he says, "You got a great story, but it's not going to change anybody's life. Only the word of God is going to change a life. So, when you tell your story, Joni, whether it's in a book or an article, or you're on a platform speaking, you make certain to give people the kinds of scriptures that will be anchors for their own faith. Just don't talk up yourself."

Crystal Keating:

Wow.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

"Talk up the word of God." And Crystal. That's what I try to do on the Joni and Friends Radio Program. Only got four minutes, and it has to be succinct, and I don't want to waste a second. So, I try to share stories, but also share scripture that could be life changing.



Crystal Keating:

Well, I think that's why people love you. You're so honest and transparent, but you make the application in God's word, and you bring it alive. People love that. And you always sound so joyful and energetic on your radio programs. How have you stayed so happy in the Lord all these years, I mean, how does someone who's persevered through so many trials and hardships turn around and pour out encouragement on others?

Joni Eareckson Tada:

I wish I had a quick answer to that. The other night I was lying in bed, and I was so much in pain, and yet awake at 2:00 AM. I'm looking at the ceiling and I'm thinking, I'm so darn happy. How can I be this happy? Jesus I'm just so happy in you. I've got this little practice when I can't sleep at night. It's a little... I don't know how to put it. It's kind of a breath prayer. I breathe in Lord, Jesus Christ, son of God. And then I exhale some name of his. So, I breathe in Lord, Jesus Christ, son of God, you are the lamb slain for the world. Lord Jesus Christ, son of God. You are the living water. Lord Jesus Christ, son of God. You are my glorious sword. I mean, I've memorized hundreds of names or titles for the Lord, Jesus.

And what a great way to spend your sleepless hours just reciting the name of the Lord. Because Psalms tells us, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and they find safety." And I tell you what, they also find joy and happiness. And that's why I can be so happy. Even when I'm in such pain. James chapter five, verse 13 says, "Is anyone suffering? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."

And I believe God is worth it. I believe that his reputation is at stake in the way that I respond, whether it's on this podcast or whether it's in bed at 3:30 in the morning. And I believe in Proverbs chapter four, verse 23 "Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it." So, I turn my eyes. At least I try to, turn my eyes away from worthless things. And I try to recite those breath prayers in the middle of the night. Because I cannot afford not to stay happy. Quadriplegic life is too hard. So, I'm going to do everything from my end, trusting that God will pour out his Holy Spirit as I obey, and do my best to strengthen myself in the Lord as the Bible says.

Crystal Keating:

For all who are listening and, they may be feeling weary. They may be listening to the conversation and feel like, well, that's good for you, Joni. You're famous. You have a platform to minister to others, but how can I serve the Lord from my bed, or from my wheelchair, with my limitations or with what's happened to me? How do I persevere through my own suffering and get past feeling like my life has no purpose?



Joni Eareckson Tada:

Just go out there and find somebody else suffering worse than you're suffering, and encourage them. I often tell people to create what I like to call a pain pal, private Facebook pages. I've got a private Facebook page in which a number of people who are bedridden. They can't get out. They've been living in bed and intractable pain for decades some of them. One of them for 20 years in bed. And they have a marvelous ministry on this pain pal page posting quotes from William Law, from Charles Spurgeon, from John Piper, from Alan Redpath. And we strengthen each other in the Lord. So go out and find somebody to strengthen in the Lord. There are always people suffering worse than you are. And I've found them on my pain pal page. They're living with intractable pain in bed, and their perseverance inspires me.

Crystal, I'm also going to challenge our listeners to start a journal of your favorite quotations. I've done this. When you come across a quote and I've mentioned Charles Spurgeon here on the podcast, and other great writers, great saints from the past, start a journal. Cut and paste, clip them into a journal or perhaps an electronic folder where you can just have these quotes ready. And one of my favorites is from Alan Redpath. He says, "There is no circumstance, no trouble, no testing that can ever touch you until first of all, it has gone past God. And it has gone past Christ right through to you. And if it has come that far, it has come with great purpose." And all of us have a purpose. It's just yielding ourselves to Jesus to find out who that person who's suffering worse than we are, who they are and how we can minister to them.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. That is the secret of perseverance. Doing that next thing and entrusting God with the impact, and the breadth and depth of what all he wants to do in and through you. No matter your circumstance.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

Crystal, this has been an awesome time together. Thank you for celebrating the 10,000th radio program, such as your subscribers already subscribed to the Joni and Friends, Ministry Podcasts.

Crystal Keating:

Yes.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

They can subscribe to the Joni and Friends Radio Podcast. We've got two podcasts out there on the platform. And so, I would encourage our friends listening to subscribe to both.

Crystal Keating:

Joni. It's always a pleasure to be with you. I love our times.

Joni Eareckson Tada:

I love our time together too. Love you, Crystal.

Crystal Keating:

Love you. What great encouragement. No matter what season we find ourselves in the message of perseverance is always timely. And as Joni shared, she is celebrating this week. If you'd like to hear more about her radio message, milestone, follow Joni and Friends on Facebook. And if you enjoyed this conversation, would you give us a five-star rating on your favorite podcasting app? Thank you for listening. I'm Crystal Keating. And this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

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