



Season 4 | Episode # 29

## How to Help Ukrainians with Disabilities: The Long Road Ahead

### Galyna

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#### Part 2

Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating and you're listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can include people with disability in your church and community.

On our last episode, we talked with Galyna, our Joni and Friends In-Country Coordinator in Ukraine, about what it was like to rescue more than 600 Ukrainians with disabilities as war broke out in her country.

Today we're closing out season four of the podcast as Galyna shares stories of hope and the ongoing needs of refugees.

Well, Galyna, you touched a little bit about the various cities of refuge the Lord provided for those who were looking for safety in other countries as you made these caravans from inside Ukraine to the border. Talk about what's happening in the Netherlands. It's such an exciting story.

Galyna:

Well, yeah, it is really an exciting story. We evacuated three groups of people with disabilities to the Netherlands. The biggest one is in Rotterdam. Just recently, God blessed us with an amazing thing because we had a chance to do an International Family Retreat in the Netherlands and we could invite almost 100 people with disabilities and their relatives.

And we had a great family retreat and we really heard so many great stories from the people and they were surprised. They felt blessed because this place was really amazing. And one of the women who visited this family retreat, she said, you know, just looking at the sea, and thinking about God and his glory. You were just impressed with how he loves you. Mm-hmm. And many people with disabilities and their relatives, they were saying before the war broke out, we couldn't even think about going somewhere abroad. And right now, just because we had to escape, you know, we found the safe place, but also, we are surprised to be in such a wonderful-

Crystal Keating:  
Such beauty.



Galyna:

People were really touched with the care. They were happy to hear more about the Lord and they were opening more, opening their hearts, their minds to the word of God. And yes, people who are evacuated to the EU countries, maybe they have better social care. But no government institutions are thinking about their spiritual problems, their pain. Like it's just, you know, a tree that was taken with its roots and put somewhere in absolutely different place. And, you know, it's very difficult to, to be able to live in the same way as you, as you used to live in your country. Even if many things were not and are not perfect in Ukraine. But still, this is your country.

You have your roots there, and that's why it's much easier. And so that is why I'm very grateful to Joni and Friends for Family Retreat, for letting this happen. And I'm very grateful to the team from Joni and Friends who came to serve because they were a great blessing for these families.

There is the attitude, not only in Ukraine but in the whole world, that if you are a person with a disability like you don't deserve something really good. And here you have a great place, and here you have Americans and people from Germany who have come just to serve you. You know, not to earn money, not to do something else, but just to serve, to take care of you. And that was the most important thing.

Crystal Keating:

You know, we can hear about God's love and know that God so loved the world. And then Christ calls us to actually demonstrate the love of God to others. And that's when I think the spirit moves from these things are true to now you can taste and see that the Lord is good because you see the love in other people from other countries who don't know you, but they love you.

Galyna:

I remember this lady, 42-year-old lady with cerebral palsy in the wheelchair. She's a Christian, very sincere openhearted Christian.

When she came to the Family Retreat, she was crying and when I came to her, she said, you know, I am a Christian. I have been going to the church for many years, but I've never ever felt so loved. I've never ever felt such a warm acceptance. You know, we didn't have an opportunity and we didn't have a lot of money to prepare something, you know, extraordinary.

We just had the people in the Ukrainian costumes. We just had the Ukrainian music. We just had, you know, this special bread with which we meet people like special guests, dear guests. She was surprised with that. And then, recently I spoke with her, and she said, when I used to live in Donbas area, the people would call me an invalid.

And she said, when I came here, I feel so loved. And the people call me a person with special abilities, and this is so important for me.

And I was sitting, listening to it, and almost crying. You know, because I'm happy that the people coming to the Family Retreat, they can experience the love of God even more. And I can

tell you one thing. We did several Family Retreats in Germany and in the Netherlands and some Respite events for the evacuated groups in Switzerland and Germany. The Family Retreat that we had in Ukraine, I haven't seen people with so open hearts.

Crystal Keating:  
Their thirsty hearts are drinking it all in.

Galyna:  
Yeah, and people need encouragement. The people who are abroad, the refugees with disabilities, but even more the people who are staying in Ukraine. They need a lot of encouragement.

Crystal Keating:  
That's beautiful. And that is how we can be praying too, that God would speak the truth of the gospel over them, but also their true identity.

Galyna:  
And also, many people who are evacuated to the EU countries, they often feel this guilt of being a survivor. And just that they can enjoy their lives while other people in Ukraine are dying, both civilians and military. And here, this is one of the most difficult things to enjoy every moment of your life because you do not know what may happen tomorrow.

This is something that all of us have to learn. But also, even our soldiers, they often say that we are not fighting, so that you would be crying all the time. And you know, just avoiding anything nice we are fighting so that you could have life. So that you could enjoy. Yes, we want you to remember us.

Yes, we want you to help us, you know. But we want you to live. Yes. And this is, this is a very important thing, and it was very important for me personally. Especially, you know, when you come to the Family Retreat and you stay in the wonderful room with, you know, on the wonderful bed with wonderful blankets and pillows, and you have food to eat. And then you think of your soldiers who are sleeping outside in the trenches, in the cold, who are fighting in the rain.

And then you remember people with disabilities who may not even have a piece of bread and you don't know about all of them. Then you remember the story of the volunteer who says that when they started checking the apartments in the multi-story buildings to see if after shelling, somebody was left there and needed some help, and they came across a man like in his seventies in the wheelchair. And he said, thank you for coming, because all the neighbors just, they escaped when there was a heavy shelling,

Crystal Keating:  
He was left behind.



Galyna:

He was left behind. He couldn't move by himself, and he said, "I wanted to commit a suicide just because I didn't want to die of starvation." And when you hear of all this, just think, okay God, why I'm privileged to, to have all of this.

You know, because even that doesn't touch you personally. But still, that's your country. And it's just like your body when the food hurts, your full body hurts. And this is probably the thing that is the most difficult for me as well.

Crystal Keating:

You know, maybe you can help us better understand the plight of families that are still torn apart. Families who have husbands, fathers, and brothers in Ukraine and the other family members living as refugees and are unsure if it's safe or wise to return home. I can't imagine the grief and longing they must feel for their loved ones.

Galyna:

They do feel this longing to see and to meet their husbands or brothers or fathers. And actually, on the very first time when we were advocating people with disabilities and we were standing at the border, and I remember I turned my head to the left and I saw a family.

There was a husband, a wife, and girl, probably 10, 11 years old, and they stood together. They just hugged each other. And they were standing quietly for I don't know how much time. And then just the wife and the daughter, they took the luggage, and they went to the border, to the customs officer, and this man was just, just standing there and watching them to leave. And not just one family. There are many families like that.

And that is really what is very, very difficult. And I know that many families affected by disabilities, they want to come back. Some already returned back to Ukraine, especially those who are from the central and western parts. But many, they just cannot return.

They don't have any home, not anymore because their homes are destroyed. I often ask myself, okay, Lord, what will be in a year? Will the EU countries be able to support these families, to provide some care because these are not healthy people?

They cannot go and work easily and they don't have any place to return to. And even after the war is over, it'll take time to rebuild everything. Years.

Crystal Keating:

Right? How do you make sense of what's best when your physical home isn't there? But your heart is there because the country is your home, and the people are your home and families are being torn apart. These are the unseen, untalked-about things of war that many of us have no comprehension. What's happening in the churches in the country and not just the physical structure? But how are Christians coming together and helping people who are still there? What's it like?



Galyna:

You know, the Christians who didn't go abroad, who stayed in Ukraine, they are working hard right now to help at any place they can. So, they try to bring some humanitarian aid, like some food or diapers for kids or something for people with disabilities, wheelchairs, whatever. And just to give to the people. The Christians in the western and central parts of Ukraine, they are trying to provide some places so that the refugees could come and stay for the winter.

We wish the weather in Ukraine would be like in California when it's warm throughout the year. But in winter we have minus 20 Celsius. It's cold. Even right now it is cold. And so that's why the people from the east, they will be arriving to the western part of Ukraine looking for some shelter. It's a warm place because in the east it's even difficult to restore right now any power infrastructure to provide heating, to provide electricity.

And so, this is what the churches are doing. They are also evacuating people. They are taking care of their soldiers. Even at Agape Ukraine, we provide rehabilitation to both civilian and military people. So, the churches are actively involved in everything they can do.

Crystal Keating:

Galyna, for those of us listening, we have no way that we can change everything. But we do wanna know how can we pray and if there is something we can do to help, what can we do? I just sit here, and I grieve with you. My heart is broken with you. And we stand with you as a sister in Christ, and for someone who's really living out the call to be a voice for the voiceless and to be one who's rescuing those who cannot defend themselves.

Galyna:

Well, first of all, thank you a lot. Thank you so much to you as the Christians of the US and to the USA for supporting Ukraine. Because the Christians are praying for us, and the Christians are supporting either financially or with the humanitarian aid. I'm grateful both for the spiritual and for real weapon, physical, physical weapon. But what I want to ask you to pray for is for the victory of Ukraine. Pray that the aching hearts of people, they wouldn't turn into the stone hearts. Because I often read and hear from my friends on Facebook, does God really exist?

If he allows all this happen, but still you don't understand yourself why it is happening. Yes, you know that people are evil. Yes, you know that the hearts of people are sinful, but still.

Crystal Keating:

Right. It seems senseless. So, praying that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven for hearts to be turned toward the Lord, even if they don't understand, to know that there is life beyond this one. That this is why Jesus came, to eradicate and take away the sin of the world and to create in us a new man, a new person that is following after God.

Galyna, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today. We will join you in prayer, asking God for protection and for justice to be done, and for his love to be shed abroad in the hearts of the Ukrainian people, especially those living with disabilities.

Galyna:  
Thank you.

Crystal Keating:  
Friends, thank you for joining me today as we close out season four of the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. I'm so very grateful for you. And as we celebrate Thanksgiving and head toward Christmas, I invite you to help meet the urgent and ongoing needs of Ukrainian refugees with disabilities.

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