

Season 5 | Episode #10

Christopher Davison

From Disability to Ministry: Serving God While Living with Terminal Illness

Crystal Keating:

This is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast and I'm your host, Crystal Keating. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship and practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. As you listen, visit joniandfriends.org/podcast to access the resources we mention or to send me a message with your thoughts.

Christopher Davidson, who lives with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and Functional Quadriplegia is the founder of Wheel Truth Media. His organization proclaims God's word on digital platforms to equip Christians to live boldly for Jesus and challenges them to be witnesses of the Gospel. He's joining us today to talk about living with a progressive disability, his experience as a pastor for ten years, and how God has used his life in ways that he never thought possible. Welcome to the podcast, Christopher. It's wonderful to have you.

Christopher Davison:

It's great to be here. Thanks for having me.

Crystal Keating:

Absolutely. And I'm so glad to speak to you. From what I understand, someone living with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy has a short life expectancy. And so, for you as an adult who has done so much by God's grace, I just know that your story is gonna be such an encouragement to our listeners.

So, as we begin this conversation, maybe you can help us understand how Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy has shaped your life. What is it and how does it impact you day to day?

Christopher Davison:

Yeah, so Duchenne is a disease that gradually weakens my muscles because the protein called dystrophin, and it's a protein that's responsible for strengthening and protecting muscles, it's not produced correctly or even at all. And this protein would typically protect your muscles from injury as you use them, and it would repair them. But since my muscles don't get that protection or that process of being repaired, they just continue to weaken. So, it's that gradual progressive weakening of the muscles.

And that really, as you can imagine, does certainly affect my life in various ways. It was something I was diagnosed with at age six. After my parents noticed that I was physically behind, they kinda wondered what could cause that and started asking doctors and they did



some tests and, you know, as my physical activities continued to decline, found out then that I had this disease and that put me in a wheelchair at age 8.

As things just continued that decline, it led to multiple surgeries, and one of those was a pretty severe surgery, a pretty major surgery. It was a spinal fusion that was needed because my muscles, you know since they weaken, they couldn't hold my back straight. So, it gave me scoliosis and they had to put rods in my back to kind of keep things straight to my posture so it wouldn't cause other issues later on down the road. So, I've had several surgeries and it's also affected my breathing. So, I have to use basically the same machine that I would be used for ventilator if you had like a tracheostomy instead of having a hole in my neck. I think without that I probably wouldn't be alive today. So, it's a blessing from God that things like that exist so I can continue living life for the Lord.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. It's just remarkable to me that many of us take for granted just breathing. It's so automatic for many of us, and that's the very thing that's sustained your life for so long. One of the many things. Wow.

Christopher Davison:

And you know, just think of all the things in your body that are controlled by muscles. It's all of them to some degree. Thankfully, things like my heart, since my heart is low normal, they do test on it every year to kinda see how it's functioning, and it still shows normal numbers. It's a low normal, but it is still normal. And that's a blessing from God, it's by the grace of God kinda unusual for someone at my age with my condition, day to day. That means I need help with most things. Whether that's bathing, using the restroom, getting dressed, brushing my teeth, or eating, just throughout anything that requires physical activity. Thankfully, I'm able to use a computer pretty well with the technology that exists these days. It's like I have a way to control my computer. I have an eye tracker. I can still kind of use a mouse to limited a degree. That's kind of how I interact with the world through my computer, so, because that's something I can still do basically by myself, and it sure does affect my day-to-day life a lot.

So as much as my muscles do affect things, I'm grateful that God provided a way for me to still be able to interact with the world and be able to get out and go to church and go to social events.

Crystal Keating:

Absolutely. And you know, I think it's easy for someone maybe in your condition to see the things that are really hard, but I just hear in your voice that you are thanking God and being grateful for so many of the things that sustain your life and really give you such a quality to how you're living. I just love that spirit. I think you are, from what I understand, unique in that many of those who are diagnosed with Duchenne's, don't often live past their teenage years, right? It's often considered a terminal condition.

Christopher Davison:

Right. A fatal disease basically. That's how it's classified.



Crystal Keating:

Okay. Well, and so how is the gift of life and living much longer than doctors may have predicted impact you?

Christopher Davison:

Well, like, like you said, and really until recently, life expectancy was until the late teens or early twenties at best. They actually adjusted that now to say twenties or early thirties. And I'm currently thirty-one, so I'm kind of right on the edge of what they expect. You know, this just shows that man doesn't know everything. And God is sovereign. He's the one in control, not doctors. Doctors have a general idea what certain conditions might mean for your future and your life, but only God has determined my life and the life of anybody listening. That's true for anyone. My life is in his hands. And it's ultimately shown me that God is not done with me yet.

And that I can continue to serve him. I'm not here to live for myself. I'm here to serve the Lord, and by still being alive, I think that means that I can make a greater impact by continuing to live for Christ. You know, I think of like Philippians 1:20-21. It shows me that even though my body is weak, Christ can still be honored by what I do with my body and by still being here. That phrase for me to live is Christ because I have been blessed with a life longer than what they initially expected.

I'm here to live for Christ. That life is for Christ. And it's an honor and joy for me to be able to be used and for the Lord.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, and God really has used you in so many ways. And so, I just wanna jump into your heart for ministry. I was so surprised to hear about your experience as a pastor at Redemption Hill.

And so, I'd love if you could share a little bit about your 10 years as an associate pastor there.

Christopher Davison:

Yeah, sure. So, I was asked to join the pastoral staff at Redemption Hill Church in 2011. And at the time I was nineteen. At the time, I was almost halfway through my undergraduate degree, and it was in ministry studies but, you know, I didn't really expect that at that age. I had already committed my life to the ministry. My idea was to go through school and then, you know, figure it out later. But I was asked, and it turned out being a privilege, you know, it was the church I grew up in. So, the people were already familiar with me, and it was just a great opportunity. I didn't know really if I was ready. You know, I spent time praying about it and God showed me that I could do it even at that age. And you know, of course, what really encouraged me was what Paul wrote to Timothy and 1st Timothy 4:12.

And it says let no one despise you for your youth. Accept a believer as an example in speech and conduct in love and faith and purity. So even though I was young, God could still use me. Even though I was in a wheelchair, God could still prepare me to do that even though I was still in college. Well, in that job I did some preaching and teaching. I assisted the pastor with several



things. I helped in the student ministry, and I had that part in my job description where it was do other things as assigned by the lead pastor.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. You wore many hats.

Christopher Davison:

It was a lot, but I enjoyed it. God taught me a lot about leadership, about trusting him and about caring for others and instructing them and handling the issues that come up in ministry. It was a great time. It was with the people I enjoyed serving to show them what God could do through a life like mine. There were many times I used that to encourage others and there were times that the pastors would share a teaching rotation for the senior adult ministry.

And because of my disability, even though I'm a lot younger than the senior adults, I could identify with a lot of things they were going through with aging bodies. Even though I'm a lot younger, my body's in worse shape than many of theirs. So, I could use that to encourage them that God could use them even in their advanced years.

So, things like that I could really enjoy and get into and make a difference for the Lord in those things.

Crystal Keating:

I mean there's a couple of wonderful factors there that you are familiar with this church body because you've been a part of it for so many years. But it's really unique that someone as young as you would be able to speak into the lives of you know, maybe some of the senior saints or those who are on the older spectrum of life and how God has uniquely equipped you to care, especially for them. And, you know, I have a friend who lives with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, which I think it has some similar weaknesses in the muscle to Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy. You know, she's talked about how her disability can sometimes disarm people and make them more comfortable with opening up about their own hardships. Did you find that was true for you also?

Christopher Davison:

I did. I did see that. For people to see the things I had gone through, the things that I had faced, you know, the surgeries I'd had up to that point, it really does give you a good platform to say, hey, this is what God can do. And for people to say, I can't imagine going through what you do, and I complained about these little things. Why should I complain about this when you don't complain about your disability? Of course, they don't know, I complain about it at home. But you know, God opens up those opportunities. It's amazing to me that my disability could change the dynamic of ministry such that I can make an even bigger impact and speak into the lives of people with the truth. It's just amazing that God uses things like that to not only equip you but to help others. I see that as a blessing.

Crystal Keating:



Well, and I think the best kind of ministry is the one that's genuine, where we have been changed by the Lord, we have been transformed by his word. And so, when we go into full-time ministry, we're not just giving away something that hasn't already redeemed us.

And so, I can see if you're relying on God's word in your own challenges, in your own sufferings, in your joys, how much more are you able to show how reliable and how truthful and how wonderful it is to follow the Lord. So, Christopher, did you ever think you would be in full-time ministry? I mean, was ministry specifically to people with disabilities and their family ever on your radar?

Christopher Davison:

Yeah, that's kinda funny. For a while as a kid, I would say that I wanted to be a fireman, a preacher, and a dad. I think it was just before I was a teenager, where I kind of started to get into computers and I got really good with it, and I wanted to study computer science or some other IT-related field. And that was kind of my plan. That was what I wanted to do. But, you know, ministry didn't really hit me until 2008 when I was at youth camp with my church youth group. And there God just kind of showed me that I could teach. You know, I can't do a whole lot physically, even though I could still use a computer. What if I instead studied scripture and taught that? So, God really changed the direction of my life and then, that was when I began to think that I would eventually be in full-time ministry.

So, I went to college in seminary with the purpose of going into full-time ministry, of course, got hired by my church, and at the time, that was just part-time with the expectation that I'd find a full-time job, or the church would bring me on full-time after I graduated. But they couldn't really do that.

You know, they didn't really have the resources to bring me on full-time. And after I graduated, I looked for opportunities and I couldn't really find anything. You know, it was kind of strange. And it's like, well, okay, I did all this study, here I am.

So, you know, I continued work at Redemption Hill, and then in 2019 about at the end of the year I kind of got the idea for Wheel Truth Media.

You know, that was right before the pandemic, and was just kinda of throwing that idea around, trying to brainstorm and then the pandemic hit. So, you know, what was the thing that every church started doing at the pandemic? Started trying to figure out how the live stream.

Crystal Keating:
Yep, online church.

Christopher Davison:
So, I was the unofficial IT guy. What did that mean?

Crystal Keating:
Your services were much needed.



Christopher Davison:

Exactly, so I gladly served. I gladly helped them figure it out. But you know, that just added other kinds of busyness to my schedule. So, the idea for my own ministry kind of got put on hold.

And during that time, I could do online studies for the church and that kind of showed me what was possible, what I could do online for ministry. You know, once things kind of slowed down last May, I resigned from that position so I could start Wheel Truth Media and do that full-time.

Crystal Keating:

Right. And that's Wheel Truth, right? Not Real Truth. Wheel like wheelchair.

Christopher Davison:

Yeah, exactly. That was where I drew the inspiration.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and I guess that's what happens when we answer the call to serve the Lord and use our gifts. Like what I'm hearing from you, it's you're just being faithful wherever God's calling you. And you also have a unique platform because of Duchenne's. And so how amazing that God is using you in multiple ways. You know, I kind of wanna go back to your time in pastoral ministry because, you know, this was a question we kind of discussed. Just that interesting balance of like when you're serving others and you yourself are living with a disability, was there ever a time in pastoral ministry when you felt like you had to overcome any misperceptions from the church?

Christopher Davison:

One thing that was helpful was I was at a very understanding church, and you know, I mentioned I grew up in that church, so people were already kind of aware of my physical limitations and the things that I could do.

So, I do think that helped. That doesn't mean there weren't ever any difficulties or misunderstandings as a pastor regarding my disability. You know, there were just a couple times like they would hold a church meeting in an area I couldn't access or maybe plan an event that was difficult for me to participate in.

People who don't live with it day to day, don't always consider those needs. Or they just overlook it, you know. They don't really do it with any malice or anything like that. They don't always think about those needs. So, I don't always try to be gracious and understanding about things like that.

The Bible tells us to bear with one another. So, I would always try to be gracious when there were any things like misperception or misunderstanding. That doesn't mean it wasn't hard at times, but, you know, I learned to handle those things well and to trust God in them, and just be okay with the fact that I was faithful in serving him. I found contentment even in those situations.



Crystal Keating:

That is a blessing. And you're right because you were known, you were known for you, and maybe not your disability as the forefront. You know, we've heard from families who are trying to enter a church and disability feels like it's on the forefront and really, they wanna be seen, known, accepted, and belong just like all of us. And so I think that's one of the things that Joni and Friends, especially with our church training resources, which are found on our website, we have so many excellent resources that help for churches to overcome some of those misperceptions and move past them to really look at relationship and even what you said, people designing either programs or events where they weren't necessarily considering maybe some of the challenges that you would have to face or overcome in order to participate or come.

I think that's such a strength that when you are in relationship, then you can ask the person, hey, what do you need? Or how can we make this happen for you? Or what are some of the supports that you need in order to come and join and participate? So, I just love that about our ministry. That's a strength that we're really trying to help churches just understand and know. 'Cause I think a lot of it is just, they just don't know. We just don't know.

Christopher Davison:

And that's why ministries like yours are so important because providing those resources and like some of those courses you offer for church leaders, it's just a huge benefit to not just the disabled, but you know, it kind of helps them see maybe ways that they weren't considering everyone.

And even though that, I'm sure that's unintentional, it's a great way to grow. I think that just shows that everybody needs to continue to learn. It's important to learn about those things, so, I continue learning. I don't even feel like I'm always that good at ministering to others with disabilities.

Crystal Keating:

Well, you're human just like the rest of us. It's all an opportunity to learn and grow and get outside of ourselves and God enables us to do that. So, Christopher, as you think about your future, what are some of your hopes, prayers, and dreams that you're looking forward to pursuing, especially with Wheel Truth media?

Christopher Davison:

Yeah, the biggest one is definitely Wheel Truth Media, just for ministry growth. It's really just me right now. So, everything you see that we do it's all me.

Crystal Keating:

And what's your website?

Christopher Davison:

It's wheeltruth.com.

Crystal Keating:



Okay. And is it mostly online? Is it interactive?

Christopher Davison:

Most of what I do right now is I produce videos that includes teaching, and those are available on YouTube. So, if you search Wheel Truth Media on YouTube, I'll be there. But, you know, I just really want to see that grow and just to expand the content and programs. I want to see God use that. I hope to inspire people.

Just to continue to be put in those positions of helping those around me and being able to impact the Kingdom of God. And like anybody who is a believer, it's my goal to glorify God. So, it's my prayer that God would just continue to use my life to glorify Him.

Crystal Keating:

Well, you're on that pathway toward it. And you've certainly inspired us by coming on the podcast today. Would you like to share any words of encouragement as we close our time for those who are listening today?

Christopher Davison:

Yeah, of course. And I think whether you're disabled or not, there are times we all need encouragement. Don't give up. If you're going through difficult situations, whether it is a disability or not, don't give up. And the reason for that is because God is with you. The Bible says that he will never leave you nor forsake you. And I believe that with my whole heart. I can trust him because I know I can depend on him.

And I'd say that's anybody else. Trust him and depend on him because he's trustworthy. And you know, I think many people are tempted to make excuses. Whenever things like that come up, it's like, oh, I'm in a wheelchair. What can I do? You know, I even have friends with the same condition I have, and they basically stay home and play video games because they don't feel like they can do anything with their life. But I know that if God can use me, he can use anyone. God can still use you no matter what situations or weaknesses you face. And I wanna share kind of my life verses. And that's from 2nd Corinthians 12:9-10. The Bible says, what he said to me my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for the sake of Christ then, I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So, if you need encouragement, know that whenever you're weak, that's when God can use you the most because that's when his strength can be revealed. That's when it can be seen. It doesn't matter that I'm weak in body. Because of God's grace, you can use me despite that weakness.

And I know that can be true for anyone else listening to this.

Crystal Keating:

Well, that is a wonderful encouragement, Christopher. You are embodying the grace of God working in and through you and it's such a pleasure to speak to you today. And if you're listening

and you wanna visit, Chris's website, he is the founder of Wheel Truth Media. You'll be blessed and encouraged.

Christopher, thanks again for joining us on the podcast today.

Christopher Davison:
You bet. I enjoyed it. It was a great time.

Crystal Keating:
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