

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP

Larissa now sees the world from a

seat of dignity,

thanks to your love and

Wheels for the World!



from the heart

“Use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.”

EPHESIANS 4:28 NLT

Not many photos make it to my bookshelf, but when they do, they are usually snapshots of friends who inspire and bless me. Like this one. These two men, Dana and Jim, have served as seating mechanics on countless *Wheels for the World* outreaches.

Why do I find them so inspiring? It has to do with that fragment from Ephesians 4:28 above. Dana and Jim are not afraid of “good hard work” and they “give generously to others in need.” I’ve seen them work up a sweat whenever we distribute our wheelchairs. They strap on their knee pads, get down on the floor, and get busy—shortening foot pedals, screwing on chest supports, and widening the wheelbase.

Like the rest of our *Wheels* team members, our seating mechanics work long and hard—sometimes four or five hours—to make certain every wheelchair perfectly fits the needs of a disabled child or adult. They think nothing of laboring late into the night to get it “right...” It’s what it means to “give generously to others in need.”

Not long ago, Jim went home to be with Jesus—but not before he had served on 40 *Wheels for the World* outreaches! It’s people like him and Dana who inspire me to keep going despite my quadriplegia. Like them, I’m not afraid of hard work for I simply *must* help make a difference for Christ among those who feel helpless and hopeless in their disabling condition.

Never do I want my limitations to become a roadblock to ministry, and I don’t believe you do, either. You may not be able to go to a developing country, but you can still step through doors of ministry when they open—like praying and giving so that others can go.



So, bless you for going the extra mile... making the extra effort... and not allowing your limitations to slow you down. Use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. And *thank you* for doing that through Joni and Friends!

P.S. I’m excited that my 2024 Planner is being featured in this newsletter! Give to others in need by ordering a copy for a friend or two—because all proceeds go directly to supporting our great programs like *Wheels for the World*!

Seeing the World from a Seat of Dignity

Disability and poverty statistics are climbing, and the cries for help keep coming. Worldwide, people living with disabilities are at the bottom rung of every cultural ladder. The world shuns them, and many wonder if they'll ever find help to relieve their suffering. That's why our *Wheels for the World* teams travel all over the world—delivering practical help and the eternal hope of Jesus to people like Larissa and her family in Brazil.

Larissa was born two months prematurely with cerebral palsy and mixed tetraplegia, the inability to voluntarily move the upper and lower parts of her body.

“In the beginning, I didn't want to accept it,” explains her mother, Sheila. “I cried out, ‘Lord! Not my child!’ I thought it was the end of the world. I cried a lot.”

Over time Sheila learned to accept Larissa's disability, but she was unable to provide her daughter with the wheelchair she so desperately needed. Then, when our *Wheels for the World* team traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Sheila and Larissa's lives changed dramatically.



Larissa listened intently as we shared the Gospel with her and her family. Her new wheelchair—and her new perspective on life—put a huge smile on her face!



“Providing Larissa with a wheelchair is life-giving for her,” says Katie, a member of our *Wheels for the World* team. “Now she can move around independently and see the world potentially for the first time—things that are so important for a 21-year-old young woman.”

“This wheelchair will help Larissa at home and at school,” says Sheila. “And it has a tray so she can eat by herself! Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I'm sending kisses to all of you because God is so faithful!”

Larissa wasn't the only one blessed by the gifts of mobility and dignity during our outreach in Brazil.

There were **189 children and adults** who received wheelchairs during that *Wheels for the World* distribution, **438 people** heard the Gospel as a result, and **144 people** accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior!

You are making an eternal difference! Every wheelchair you send begins a new story of joy and restoration in Jesus! *Thank you* for remembering people with disabilities and their families through your prayers and gifts!



Larissa, her mother, and sister have new hope in Jesus because of the love and support you sent! *Thank you!*

Oscar Found New Life *in* Jesus!

Oscar and his mother, Vilma, received God-filled hope through hardship because of your love and *Wheels for the World!*

Vilma was told that her baby had a disability while she was pregnant with Oscar, and doctors pressured her to abort. “The doctor said he would be a vegetable,” explains Vilma. Others told her, “This is a punishment.” But even after receiving such devastating news, Vilma believed that her baby would be a blessing, and she determined to give him life.

Oscar was born with myelomeningocele hydrocephalus, a form of spina bifida that

includes a build-up of fluid in the cavities deep within his brain. He had two emergency surgeries soon after birth to assist in extracting fluid from his brain. “As a mother this is very tough,” confesses Vilma. “It’s not easy. Oscar needs a lot of help. He’s always struggling.”

Yet Oscar has a big, bubbly personality and is full of life! His playful smile stole the hearts of everyone on our *Wheels for the World* team in El Salvador. And while Oscar waited patiently to be placed in the perfect wheelchair, he made friends with each person he met—teaching us Spanish and showing off his high energy by wiggling around like any other boy his age.

Vilma and Oscar were all smiles at our *Wheels for the World* outreach in El Salvador!



“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”
JOHN 10:10b



Oscar and our Joni and Friends seating therapist, Nicole, both experienced the love of God through *Wheels for the World!*

“This is huge for us because we can’t afford this wheelchair,” explains Vilma. In El Salvador, people with disabilities are even more neglected than they are in the United States. But because of your generosity, children like Oscar no longer need to settle for leftover scraps of care. You sent him the exact opposite of what he had been used to... you sent him respect, dignity, hope, and love. And you showed him Jesus.

When we asked Oscar if he was excited about his new wheelchair, he proudly declared, “Yes! I

want to run!” And “run” he did! Now that Oscar has the remarkable gift of mobility, he is able to become more and more independent.

“Once he’s in his wheelchair, he’s free! He goes where he wants to!” beams Vilma. “You made his dream possible!”

“We know these wheelchairs are expensive,” shares Vilma. “I’m thankful to all the kind-hearted people who have great love for others that they don’t even know.”

Vilma is talking about you!

Your heart and your love is so big that disabled children like Oscar can feel it even on the other side of the world. Thank you for letting Jesus use your prayers and gifts to change lives and bring people into the family of God!

Brand New!

JONI'S 2024 PLANNER



Available exclusively from Joni and Friends.

The stunning 2024 Joni Planner features Joni's delicate line art and a joyful theme from Psalm 96:12–13: "Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them... Let all creation rejoice before the Lord..."

Devotions by Joni, hand-picked Scriptures, and personal encouragements will help you experience the joy of the Lord throughout the year. And with spacious monthly spreads to organize your goals, activities, and prayers, the Planner will help you stay on track every day.

Get your Joni Planner while supplies last—and gift one to a friend! All proceeds go to support disability ministry worldwide.

Product Details:

- Size: 6.5" x 9.25"
- High quality paper stock
- Gold foiled artwork on cover
- 12-month agenda planner
- Updated content for monthly and weekly sections
- Chronological Bible Reading Plan
- Gold spiral binding
- Weekly layout begins on Sunday of each week
- Interior 2 pocket pages
- Lay-flat design

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You will love these new monthly devotionals by Joni!



Stay God-focused as you plan out your days, weeks, and year.



Be blessed by the Bible verses and inspiring messages and quotes from Joni all throughout the Planner.

“Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them...

Let all creation rejoice before the Lord...”

PSALM 96:12–13

Family Retreat Transforms the Entire Family!

From the San Francisco Bay Area ▼

"I am a single mom with three kids," says Andrea. "Vincent is eleven and has autism and anxiety. Victoria is ten and Viviana is seven."

When asked how *Family Retreat* impacts her family, Andrea answers with tears streaming down her face. "We have experienced sincere love without judgment. When we arrived, we felt 'seen' and we feel like we are family. I was blessed to see the kids' names on signs as we were welcomed. That touched my heart. *Family*

Retreat is better than being at Disneyland. The kids can be kids and there's freedom in that. The love of God and his compassion has brought us to *Family Retreat*. My children love their one-on-one buddies. Here... we matter, and we are not alone."

Andrea and her children left *Family Retreat* filled with hope and encouragement. *Thank you for giving families struggling with disability Christ-centered hope through their hardships!*

From Pennsylvania ▼

Andrea brought her two children, Cosette and Eva, who has Burnside-Butler syndrome, apraxia and many autistic characteristics, to *Family Retreat* and found a safe place where they feel loved, supported, and encouraged in Christ.

"I think that at first, our oldest daughter, Cosette, benefited most," says Andrea. "As the 'typical sibling' she realized for the first time that she wasn't alone. The Lord met her through lasting friendships and understanding, while showing her that he would provide the grace needed to carry on when life is hard. Cosette loves her sister, and through their relationship plus the ministry of Joni and Friends, she now has a sensitive and compassionate heart for those living with disabilities."

"Eva enjoyed *Family Retreat* with all its activities, but what I especially noticed was my little girl having freedom to be herself. No one required Eva to play a game if she couldn't understand the rules. If a

room was too overwhelming, she was allowed to sit in a wagon in the back, getting pulled around by her volunteer. When she rolled on the floor at lunch instead of politely asking to be excused, no one batted an eye. That kind of acceptance isn't usually found in public," says Andrea.

She continues, "While my children were with their groups, I found myself at a table being cared for by the dearest ladies in women's ministry. The hands of Jesus reached out through these ladies, holding my fragile heart tenderly. In that space, the tension was released and the healing began."

"While sharing at our table, another mom and I discovered that her daughter—who rarely reached out to invite anyone to play, had asked Eva, who rarely gets invited to play—to be princesses together.. As the other mom began to cry, I knew that something so simple spoke volumes to mothers like us. We had a shared understanding found in few other places."



Andrea, her children, and all their volunteer buddies experienced the love of Jesus at *Family Retreat!*



Families like Eva's find true freedom in Christ at *Family Retreat!*

From Louisiana ▶

Growing up, Charlotte Hollman's sister was disabled. In addition, Charlotte's son, James, has autism. James brightens the day of all who meet him and has taught Charlotte much. Now a pediatric neurologist, Charlotte has devoted much of her career to the care of families living with disability.

However, Dr. Hollman is not simply known for her professional care for others. When patients ask her if she has a support group, she is quick to point them to the community found in Bible studies. For many years, Charlotte has led a Bible study for mothers of children with disabilities. Even more than the physical care of others, Charlotte is most concerned with the spiritual care of families struggling with disability, which is why she volunteers with Joni and Friends.

Charlotte teaches at our church ministry conferences, delivers Christmas gifts to special needs families, encourages her patients to attend *Family Retreat*, serves at *Family Retreat* herself. And she passes out Bibles and Joni and Friends materials in her professional office.

"I am thankful for Joni and Friends because people with special needs often feel ignored," says Charlotte. "Joni and Friends is done through the love of Christ."

Joni and Friends can't advance God's kingdom without volunteers like Charlotte *and you!* Go to joniandfriends.org to find out how you can change someone's life today!

From Knoxville ▶

"Joni and Friends reassures me that Jesus really cares about every little detail, every single step of the way. We are not alone," said Maribeth after she and her husband, Chris, attended *Marriage Getaway*.

Their daughter, Ella, weighed only two pounds when she was born at 26 weeks. With cerebral palsy, autism, and an intellectual disability, Ella will require full-time care for the rest of her life.

Chris and Maribeth are willing to do anything for their daughter but know they can't do it all on their own. They know they need the Lord and a Christian community around them, which is why they have become part of our Joni and Friends family.

"Within a few hours of hearing, seeing, and taking part in this ministry we could feel the Lord providing the specific encouragement and hope that we needed exactly in that season. We could sense that God was making provisions for our future. There was such a tremendous peace and hope that washed over us from the very moment we were introduced to the mission of Joni and Friends," says Maribeth.



Charlotte helps people with disabilities shine at *Family Retreat!*



Ella's family is brought closer together and closer to Christ through Joni and Friends!

From New England ▼

"We didn't realize until we went, the ways *Family Retreat* would transform our entire family."

At first, Samuel and Miriam had concerns about leaving their isolated, yet safe, routine of staying home in order to attend *Family Retreat*. "I didn't think going with four children—two with disabilities—was going to work. To try was crazy," says Samuel. "Trying new things was just too difficult."

Their daughter Natalia has Down syndrome and autism and is non-verbal, and Lucy has autism. They always had to worry about who would climb what, who would run where, who would make unexpected noises, and what kind of terrible glares from onlookers would follow. Staying home was just easier.

Strangers often missed the beauty in their family. The way Natalia and Lucy would light up at the sound of music, the wonder and amazement in their eyes, the warmth of their hugs, and the ways their brothers, Samuel and Antonio, cared so deeply for them.

Samuel and Miriam broke out of their comfort zone and took their family to *Family Retreat*, and what they found there was completely life-changing.

"At *Family Retreat* we did not have to worry about the social anxiety of always trying to fit in. A weight was lifted. We didn't have to worry about being judged—or worse—ignored," says Miriam. The intentionality of the volunteers was so foreign, yet refreshing. They worked hard to make sure Miriam and Samuel knew their family was not a burden.

"We thought *Family Retreat* was for Natalia and Lucy, but it was for all of us," says Samuel. "God gave our boys a place where they met other siblings in the same boat." Even better than that, Antonio asked Jesus into his heart at *Family Retreat!*

"God has used Joni and Friends in incredible ways in our lives," says Samuel. "What if we had decided not to go? I cannot believe what we would have missed!"



Natalia (above), Lucy (right), and their whole family found a place of belonging at *Family Retreat!*



“...where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.”
2 CORINTHIANS 3:17

Honor a Loved One, Transform a Life

We gratefully acknowledge contributions given in memory or in honor of loved ones to further ministry in the disability community. To give a gift in memory of a loved one or in honor of a special occasion, visit joniandfriends.org/donate or contact Joni and Friends at **818.707.5664**

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