

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP

January is Sanctity of Human Life Month! Thank you for upholding the sanctity and dignity of all human life—and for glorifying God—through your steadfast support of all our Christ-centered programs!



*Celebrate Life!*



# from the heart

“Even before he made the world,  
God loved us and chose us in Christ.”

EPHESIANS 1:4

**B**efore God created time and space, before he created the universe and spoke, “Let there be light;” before he made the world and moved upon the waters, puckered up mountain ranges, or carved out rivers; before he created storehouses for the wind and snow; before all of this, God knew you and loved you.

From time immemorial, God was designing you in his heart, envisioning you as he intended you to be. God has been thinking about you for a long time.

That includes the people with disabilities we serve at Joni and Friends—people like Jimly on the next page. No matter how severe or twisted the disabling condition, no matter how profound the poverty, people like him are created in God’s image. Before there was a sun or moon, before there was day or night, God delighted to place his glory, his image on Jimly—and on every disabled person like him. What good news!

But here’s the *really* good news: when people like Jimly embrace Jesus as their Savior, they reflect something about God that’s much more specific—it’s “the image of the heavenly man,” Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:49). When Jimly smiles through his tough disability, he is bearing the image of Christ’s perseverance and

endurance, Christ’s patience, humility, and long-suffering. Oh, what a *convincing* testimony of the life-transforming power of the Gospel of Christ!

God always delights in displaying his power through weakness. And when people who live with affliction endure pain and poverty *yet* keep their hearts bright and their smiles fresh—their spiritual stability can only be explained by the miracle of God’s sustaining grace.

Truly, this is great news for the weak and infirmed! Yet there are countless thousands of people like Jimly who have yet to hear this news about Jesus Christ and his saving message. Oh, my heart aches to reach them!

So this month, as we embark on our amazing 45<sup>th</sup> year of ministry, would you please help me get the salvation message of our Savior to families far and wide who struggle with disability? It doesn’t get more glorious than helping a lost soul find his place in Christ. It’s what God intended from the beginning of time.



“Suffering has a way of heaving you beyond the shallows of life where your faith often feels ankle-deep. It casts you out into the fathomless depths of God. A place where Jesus is the only One who can touch bottom.”

JONI EARECKSON TADA

FROM HER NEW BOOK, *THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF JESUS*



# A MOTHER'S LOVE & THE **FATHER'S HEART**

**J**imly arrived at our *Wheels for the World* distribution site in Manila in an ambulance. At 22 years old, he has been too big for his mother, Lillian, to carry for a very long time. The only way to transport him was on a stretcher. His entire body is twisted due not only to his cerebral palsy, but also from the absence of early medical assessment and intervention. Lillian lovingly places socks on Jimly's hands to prevent him from clawing at his face.

"This is one of the saddest things we see," explains Joni and Friends President, Laura Gardner, who served Jimly and his family. "Disability like this is so heartbreaking because it's preventable."

Laura's own parents served as missionaries in the Philippines. In fact, she lived in the Philippines for the first three years of her life before her parents moved their family back to the United States. "I never imagined that 52 years later, I would be serving families struggling with disabilities in the Philippines myself."

"If you can imagine," says Laura, "since birth, Jimly has been lying on the floor of his home. That's 22 years on the floor, simply turning his head back and forth to interact with his family. It breaks my heart to know that someone has lived like that day after day after day under those conditions for 22 years."

With tears in her eyes Laura continues, "I wanted to take away all of Jimly's pain and suffering, but I knew that we had given him the best gifts we could ever give—a custom-fitted wheelchair and the love and hope of Jesus Christ!"

After Jimly received his new wheelchair, our *Wheels for the World* team shared the Gospel with him and his mother. And Lillian accepted Jesus as her personal Savior! "Her whole countenance changed!" says Laura. "She went from a mom who was just frustrated and weary and tired, to one who now has hope! Lillian learned that the trials of life are only temporary. And now that she has accepted Christ, Lillian will get to be with our Heavenly Father for all eternity!"

The sanctity of human life is clearly seen in the eyes of all people. We are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God!



"Like my parents, I was able to experience for myself what it is to fall in love with the people of the Philippines!" Laura Gardner, Joni and Friends President and COO.



“Jimly was so excited to get his new wheelchair! Once he was secure in his new seat of dignity and mobility, Lillian invited us to go visit their home,” says Laura. “We arrived at their squatter village, and as Lillian welcomed us into their home, I noticed that the ceiling was not high enough for us to stand up. We all had to squat and bend over to get into their home.”

“As trying as that was, we quickly learned that at least once a year the entire squatter village is flooded. It floods all the way to the roof,” explains Laura. And yet Lillian’s heart overflowed with gratitude.

“Thank you so much, Joni and Friends, for coming here!” said Lillian with a tear rolling down her cheek. “I never would have thought that today, Jimly would get a wheelchair and people would come to help my son. I will never get tired of saying, ‘Thank you! Thank you, Lord!’”

“What I learned that day is that no matter where you are in the world, a mother’s love is the same,” says Laura. “Lillian—a Filipino mom of a 22-year-old son with a disability—and me, an American mom of a 22-year-old son... We both want the same things for our boys—a Gospel-filled life with unwavering hope, unconditional love, and a sense of belonging.”

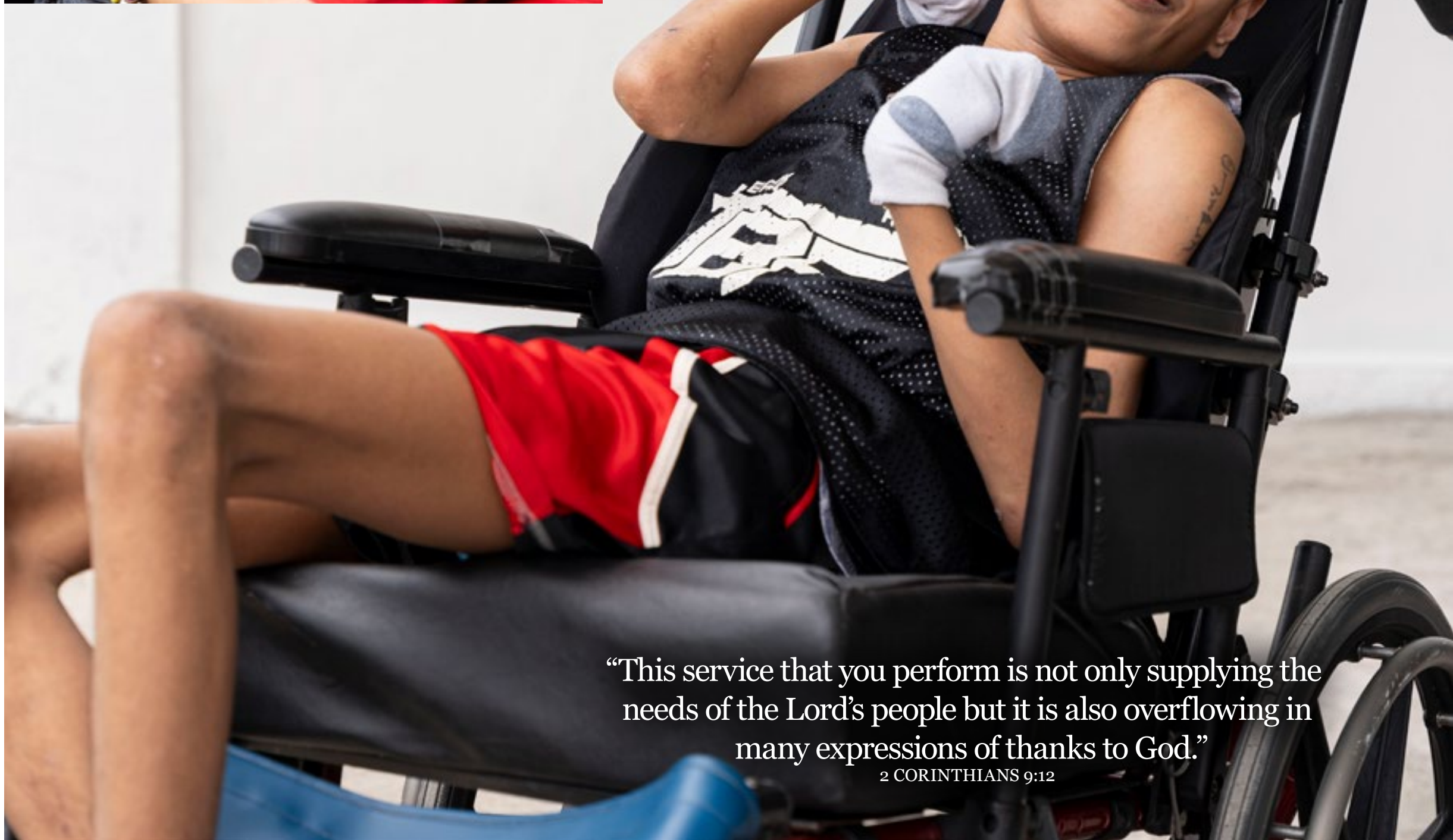
Not long after she returned home to the States, Laura woke up to a text that contained shocking news. She explains, “Only 48 days after Lillian received Jesus as her Lord and Savior, she had a heart attack and went to heaven. That morning—sitting on the edge of my bed, staring at that text and praying through a steady stream of tears—I praised God for the privilege of knowing Lillian. I praised him for the treasured moments we shared as two moms of 22-year-old sons. Most importantly, I praised God for Lillian’s salvation.”

**What if *Wheels for the World* had not gone to the Philippines? What if we never met Lillian? What if there was no Joni and Friends?**

God used our *Wheels for the World* team to change a young man’s life and share the eternal life of salvation in Jesus with his mother. The Lord used your prayers and generosity to demonstrate the real sanctity of human life here on earth and forever in eternity!



Here Lillian wears the Gospel bracelet used to help explain Christ’s gift of salvation. Now that she is in heaven, Jimly’s sister has become his caregiver. Their local church is helping them through this difficult transition, and Joni and Friends continues to stay in communication with Jimly’s family, offering practical help and ongoing hope.



“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but it is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”

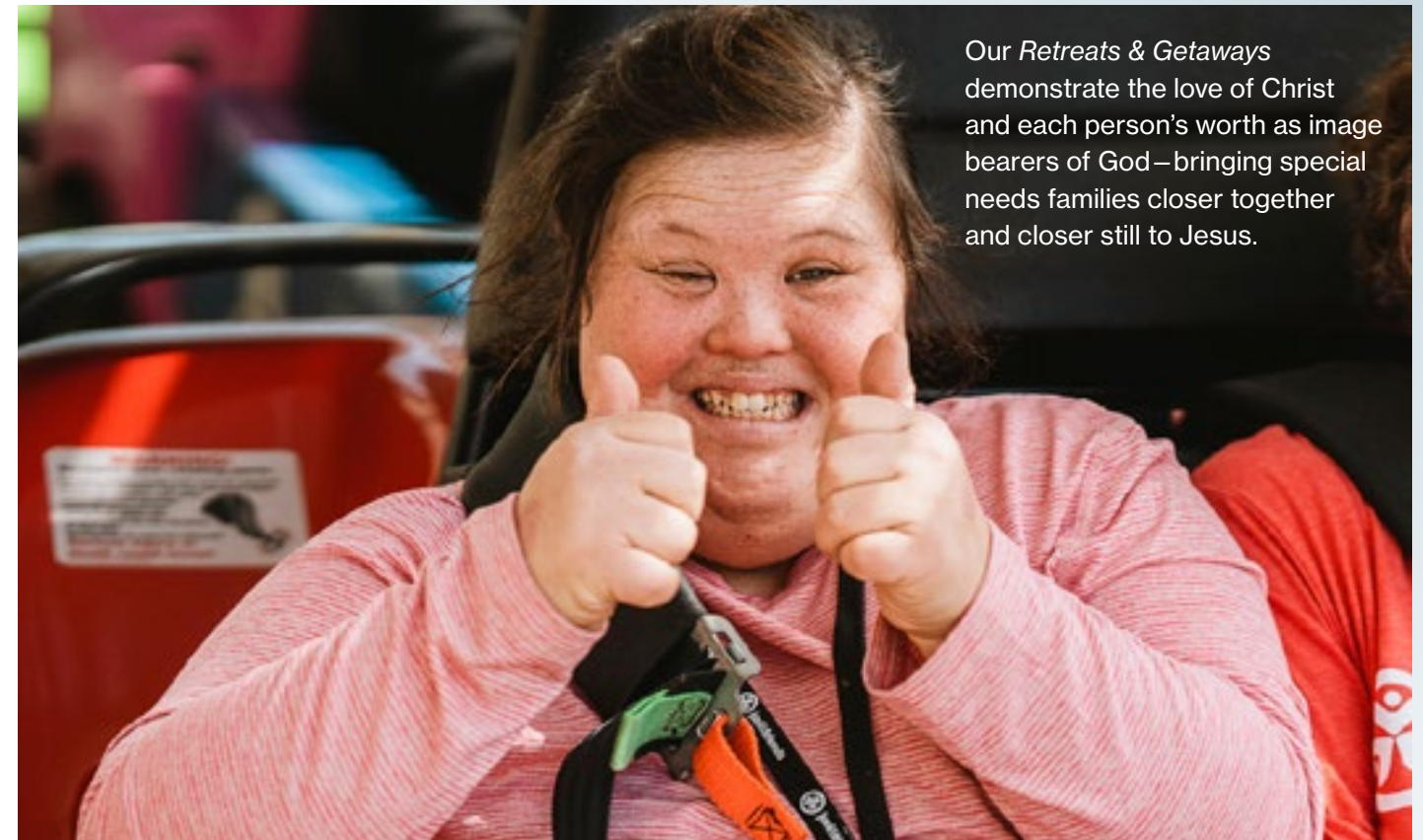
2 CORINTHIANS 9:12



# Happy 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Joni and Friends!

Jesus has been changing lives and saving souls through Joni and Friends for 45 years now! It happens through our many Christ-centered programs here in the United States and all over the world—and it happens because of your faithful prayers and generous support. We couldn't do what we do without you!

You're spreading the Gospel worldwide through *Wheels for the World*—distributing wheelchairs and Bibles to disabled children and adults who would never receive the gifts of dignity and mobility otherwise. And through *Joni's House*, you provide medical support, essential therapies, and spiritual care to entire families struggling with disability.



Our *Retreats & Getaways* demonstrate the love of Christ and each person's worth as image bearers of God—bringing special needs families closer together and closer still to Jesus.

Inspirational radio spokesperson, artist, author, and global leader in disability advocacy... Joni Eareckson Tada—and the international ministry that bears her name—envisions a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ.



*Thank you for your steadfast partnership in this God-glorifying, kingdom-advancing ministry!  
Here's to the next 45 years and beyond!*



# The *Love of Jesus* from Coast to Coast

## From New England ▼

Karl and Sarah visited Thailand and fell in love with the Thai people. Bangkok became their home and they began planting new churches. Little did they know the life-changing experience coming their way that would lead them into disability ministry.

When they learned of their second pregnancy, Sarah and Karl were eager to welcome a baby brother for their daughter, Eden. At a routine 20-week ultrasound appointment, however, Sarah learned that their baby boy had myelomeningocele spina bifida, the most severe form of spina bifida.

Doctors painted a grim picture of what their son's life would be like—once their baby was born, he would need two surgeries. He probably would never walk, he would not be able to use the bathroom on his own, and he would most likely have cognitive and learning disabilities. Despite doctors' advice to terminate the pregnancy, Karl and Sarah trusted God for his good plans.

Medical consults and testing done in the United States allowed the option of a spinal closure surgery performed at 26 weeks in-utero. Karl and Sarah named their son Judah. "Judah means 'Praise the Lord!'" they explain. "We continued to praise the Lord for Judah and for his future."

Judah required medical appointments and developmental evaluations that continued for nearly two years after his birth. His parents wondered if their missionary dreams had died—it seemed like everything they had prayed for and invested in had evaporated.

But then Karl and Sarah were invited to a *Family Retreat* for missionaries in Thailand. "I suddenly realized that God gave us Judah as part of our calling," says Karl. "People with disabilities are created in the image of God with value and worth. Churches need to welcome and include families with disability. Maybe that's what God is calling us to do in Thailand!"

At *Family Retreat*, Karl and Sarah's family met other missionaries, saw new opportunities, and sensed doors opening. "God showed us we are still called to missions and have important ministry work to do," says Sarah.

Karl, Sarah, and their beautiful children are now returning to Thailand as missionaries. "We praise God for our son," says Karl. "And we believe that through his life and his story, many people will come to praise the Lord, as well!"



## From Alabama ▼

Jim and Sandy know the personal impact of disability through their twin sons, Mike and Mark, who have Down syndrome. Their family is blessed—and a blessing—at *Family Retreat*. There, Jim and Sandy are able to go to sessions alongside other couples to bring biblical encouragement to their marriage. Mike and Mark are able to go with their buddies to Bible studies, arts and crafts lessons, and various fun activities designed just for them, including a refreshing afternoon in the pool! This wonderful family left *Family Retreat* encouraged by the fellowship they experienced and excited to become more involved with Joni and Friends.

Today, Sandy serves on the local board of Joni and Friends Alabama and has quickly become a faithful volunteer for the ministry. She and Jim desire to bring about more hope for other families who have children with Down syndrome, and they are very excited to be part of our Joni and Friends family.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." 2 Corinthians 1:3-5





## From Bay Area ▾

Lupita arrived at the *Wheels for the World* outreach in Monterey, Mexico carrying her daughter, Mariela, in her arms. Mariela has cerebral palsy—which was a devastating diagnosis to her family. Her parents were shattered by the thought that their daughter may never walk.

“Buying a wheelchair in Mexico is an impossible dream. We must use all our money to feed our family,” Lupita explained. Yet Mariela desperately needed a wheelchair—one that would allow her to go to school, the park, and church. Our Bay Area team was happy to help!

And because of you, Lupita did not have to make the choice between feeding her family and providing a wheelchair for her child. Mariela will also no longer be confined to her home. During our *Wheels for the World* distribution, Mariela’s smile and laugh were contagious! Although she and Lupita were exhausted from their grueling early-morning journey to the outreach site, both greeted our wheelchair mechanic and therapist with smiles that would melt anyone’s heart.

Along with a new wheelchair, your faithfulness also provided Lupita with a Bible and the Joni’s autobiography in Spanish. Her delight was evidenced by the smiles, laughs, and abundant hugs she gave to our seating team and anyone else she saw. And the memories of this experience with God’s people who showed them the love of Jesus will last a lifetime!



*Lupita and Mariela's future is bright because of your love!*

## From Texas ▾

When Brooke’s baby boy, Keegan, was born with Down syndrome, she felt supported. But sadly, she received “the cold shoulder” when she was divorced and became a single mom. Suddenly gone in her life were friendships with other moms, and Brooke longed for new connections. God provided those connections and much more through *Family Retreat*. “It was truly God’s plan that he orchestrated and ordained,” says Brooke. She was hard-pressed to imagine what *Family Retreat* would be like until she and Keegan arrived. “The cheering and dancing was so sweet and touching,” says Brooke. And she said to Keegan, “Look, they’re clapping and yelling for YOU!”

Keegan received the blessing of an extraordinary volunteer named Zack. During worship one morning, Brooke heard Keegan say, “I love you, Zack!” When Zack replied, “I love you, too, Keegan!” Brooke marveled, “What teenager gives up a week of his summer to devote to special needs kids... to love on families and make them feel so special? You just don’t see it these days.”

As for Brooke, the Lord provided a special group of ladies who shared their struggles, listened to hers, and encouraged her to take steps to heal from the hurt of divorce and feeling excluded from church.

Your support makes stories like this possible. You are making an eternal difference in the lives of many!



*Keegan and Zack are true brothers in Christ!*

# 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](http://joniandfriends.org/donate) or contact Joni and Friends at **818.707.5664**

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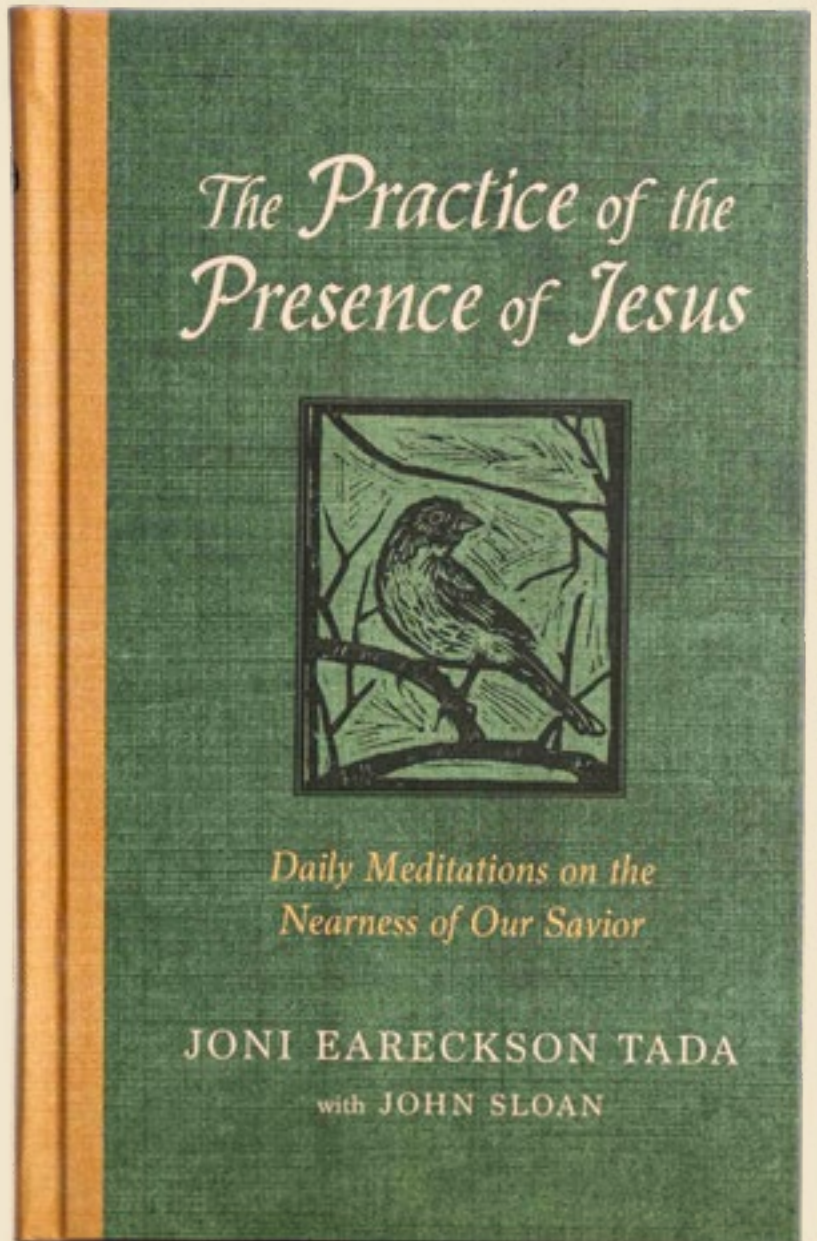
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