

MINISTRY NEWS FEBRUARY 2024 SHARING Jope THROUGH HARDSHIP

Your prayers in action

show the love of Christ to people living with disability in Uganda and all over the world!

from the heart

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." $_{\rm JOHN\ 15:13}$

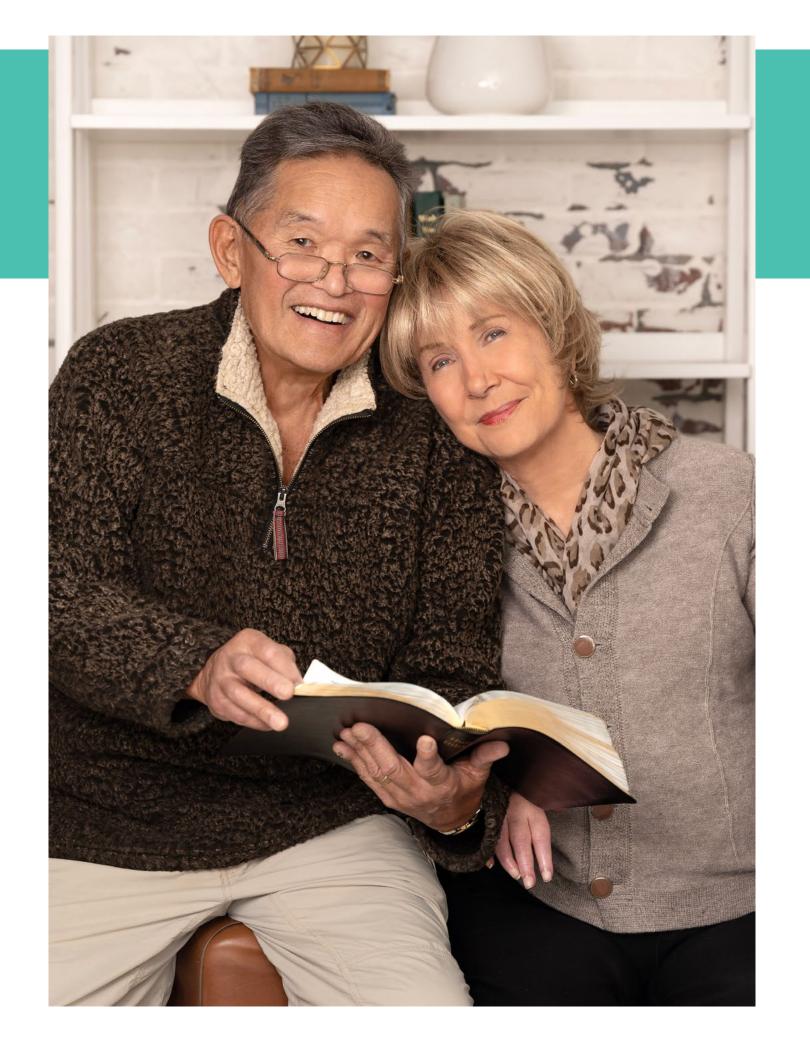
There I was... trembling, standing blindfolded in front of the firing squad, guilty, condemned, and about to be executed for my sins. Then a man drew me aside, and as he hurriedly untied my blindfold, he said, "I love you, and I am taking your place." But before he squared himself to the rifles, he looked at me and said earnestly, "Now tell others what I've done for you, and that my love will do the same for them." Then clasping his hands behind his back, he faced the squad and demanded, "Fire!"¹

That is a picture of the Gospel, and for all of eternity, I will adore and serve the One who 'took the bullet' for me. Yet when Jesus plucked me from the firing line, he never intended that my rescue be a private affair just between us. "Go home to your friends," he says, "and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

I take Jesus's words seriously, and so do my team members at Joni and Friends. When families who struggle with disability show up on the doorstep of a *Joni's House*, we give them the salvation message of Christ, then we adorn that gift with food packages, medical support, biblical counseling, or physical therapy for their impoverished child... or we might even construct a safe little home like the one we did for Justine. A home that has a real floor, instead of one made of packed dirt and chicken dung.

God's gift of salvation is meant to be carried to the ends of the earth, whether it's the end of the cul-de-sac where an overwhelmed family mainly lives behind closed doors... Or to the four corners of the world where disability is viewed as a hateful curse. So, thank you for being one of the 'friends' of Joni and Friends. Your prayers and gifts are making it possible for us to tell others about the Man who 'took the bullet' for them.





¹ Inspired by John Piper's 1988 sermon, "The Gallows and the Gift of Life."

Joni's House is God's Love

House El Salvador for many reasons. "At Joni's House Ever gets physical therapy to help him have mobility in his body, and he gets occupational therapy so he will have mobility in his hands." This allows Ever, who has an intellectual disability and cerebral palsy, the ability to feed himself. "He needs these therapies so that his muscles don't experience atrophy," explains Claudia.

"Joni and Friends blessed Ever with a wheelchair when he was six years old. Now, ten years later, his wheelchair lets us bring Ever with us wherever we go, including to therapy sessions at Joni's House," says Claudia. And Ever receives educational therapy at Joni's House, too. "Because of Joni's House El Salvador, Ever has more mobility, more independence, and he communicates better."

But therapies aren't the only gifts Ever receives through Joni and Friends and through your love. "Joni and Friends is very spiritual," says Claudia. "The people we meet through Joni and Friends—at *Family Retreat* and *Joni's House*—they bring us closer to God's love. We feel God's love through each volunteer and staff member."

"Through Joni and Friends, Hearned that Ever and I have a purpose. We both have a mission to fulfill—a mission from God," says Claudia. **"Joni and Friends has changed** every aspect of our lives."



The Good News of God's Love

66 In Uganda, persons with disabilities are often the poorest of the poor," explains Anthony Basaba, our Joni and Friends International Regional Manager in East Africa. *"Joni's House Uganda* is our opportunity to show the love of Christ to people with disabilities."

One way we do that is through house transformations. "Village homes are made out of dirt, mud, and sometimes even cow dung," says Mary Basaba, R.N., Anthony's wife and ministry partner. "That creates medical problems. These houses aren't clean, and people with disabilities are frequently on the floor."

Anthony agrees. "House transformation is a legitimate need for our people. It is a need met through *Joni's House* programs."

Justine and her children are just one of many families who have been blessed with a home from *Joni's House Uganda*. "I was born with a crippled leg," explains Justine. "I used to live with my brother, but then he passed away." Justine had nowhere to live until *Joni's House* built her a home—one made out of cement and bricks.

"This house has helped me," says Justine. "I have always been discriminated against, but now I have many friends. In my heart, I feel happy and loved."



"Joni's House checks in on me. They encourage me and show me God's love," says Justine. "Now I have a home with my children and we are strong."

Blessed to be a Blessing



Watch the powerful story of Justine and others in her community who have been blessed through her new home provided by Joni's House.

Justine welcomes the women of her village into her home for Bible studies and fellowship so that every family can feel God's love.

> "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

> > ZEPHANIAH 3:17

oday, Justine blesses others with the blessing that she received by hosting Bible studies in her home for the other women in her community. She never would have been able to afford a home on her own. And now, she's using it for God's glory.

"Justine's social capital in the community has been improved through this house," explains Anthony. "She now sees herself as valued and appreciated. And the other people in her community now see Justine as their sister. She has been elevated through her new, respectable home."

"And when people ask why *Joni's House* cares for people with disabilities, that's when we share the hope that is in us that is in Christ Jesus,' says Anthony. House transformations provide the opportunity to demonstrate God's love and in that way, each new home is a visible, tangible expression of the Gospel.

From New Mexico

Jim, Nadine, and their son Ben, who has Down syndrome, had a life-changing experience at Family Retreat.

Ben was able to go horseback riding, hiking, and sing all his favorite songs during karaoke night. And Jim and Nadine were able to enjoy time together and received support from other parents going through similar experiences.

Jim says, "I didn't have to worry or deal with all the everyday mundane things of life. We focused on having fun with each other." Jim was also amazed at how impactful it was to come together with the other men, encouraging one another in their own walks with Jesus. Family Retreat gave him the opportunity to fellowship with other dads who understand what life with disability is really like.

Nadine was deeply blessed, too. "The fellowship time and the raw emotions that come out at Family Retreat and the healing that happens is amazing to experience. Joni and Friends is a place to learn about and experience Christ. You need a faith-based relationship to deal with disability," says Nadine.

She continues, "From the time we drove up, everyone exuded what Christ-like love looks like. I

cried tears of joy in that moment! The volunteers and Joni and Friends staff were truly the hands and feet of Jesus. We were blown away, and Ben could not wait to jump out of the car and hand out hugs. And that was just the beginning! Again, that was just the BEGINNING. It was the most amazing example of Christ's love to us."

Thank you for giving families struggling with disabilities lifechanging experiences through your faithful prayers and ongoing generosity. You, too, are the hands and feet of Jesus!



The love of Jesus from Coast to Coast





From Minnesota •

Charles and Beth came to *Family Retreat* with their two sons, Ethan and Philip, who has autism. Their lives were transformed, as Charles so eloquently explains...

"Family Retreat was an experience I can only describe as 'out of this world.' From the moment of our arrival, we were treated like VIPs. The love and care exhibited by the staff and volunteers was literally written on their faces. We could see that this was coming straight from the heart of every person we met. It was like a beautiful dream that you never want to end.

Let me share with you the experience of being a family living with disability. Disability gradually isolates the entire family from those they have known as friends. There are cases where rejection is clear or sometimes communicated in subtle ways.

We should also mention that we are immigrants in this country. This fact has a significant impact on our life in that, we do not have family to count on for support. We are a small family struggling to cope with disability.

This has been our story for 21 years. But everything changed at *Family Retreat*. For the first time in so many years, my wife and I were able to relax for the greater part of the day without worrying about Philip—we had total confidence in the buddies that cared for him. Though he is not verbal, we could see how excited he was. Philip made friends, and Ethan had a great time, too! Meeting and interacting with other families who are also living with disability was a source of inspiration and encouragement.

The idea of Family Retreat was a stroke of genius! Our experience will live in our hearts for a long time!"



From Ohio **•**

Sean, Kelly, Cole, and Libby trusted us to provide them with an unforgettable experience at *Family Retreat*, and they were not disappointed! Although families living with disability often feel isolated and rejected by society, at *Family Retreat* they find overwhelming love, acceptance, and connection!

Cole, who is 16, has a chromosome disorder that causes many other medical issues like epilepsy, nonverbal autism, hypotonia, and cognitive impairment. Cole will never live on his own and may require a wheelchair later in life. His family is also unsure of his life expectancy.

But at *Family Retreat*, Cole was able to participate in activities with his family that he cannot enjoy otherwise. That's just one of the incredible things about Joni and Friends events – they are fully accessible to everyone!

Family Retreat holds something for every member of the family. While Cole was with his volunteer buddy Jonathan enjoying activities, his sister Libby was able to spend time with other typical siblings her age. While siblings are often the greatest advocates for individuals with disabilities, they have needs of their own and thrive in this environment—sharing with others who understand their unique family dynamics.

The pandemic was very hard on Kelly who was home with Cole all day every day. As a result, she experienced burn out. All she could see were Cole's disabilities in front of her all the time. But *Family Retreat* offered Kelly a safe place with other moms and caregivers who have been in her shoes and could understand and encourage her.

"God used Joni and Friends to remind me of his unconditional love for me and my family despite rejection, circumstances, and other things we experience due to disability," says Kelly.

Sean and Kelly had the opportunity to spend time together as a couple at *Family Retreat*, which met another need. They don't have anyone providing respite for them when they are at home, so they struggle to find time to be together. "Our whole family loved every minute of *Family Retreat!*" says Kelly.





From Georgia •

Josh and Chelsie met in the US Army in 2003. They now have six beautiful children, including five-year-old Rosie who has Pfeiffer syndrome – a rare spontaneous gene mutation affecting one in 100,000 births.

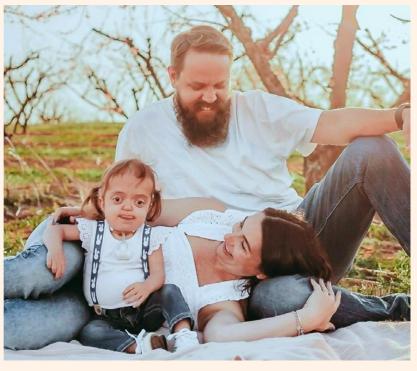
With no pre-diagnoses and cleared by their medical team, Rosie arrived in a beautiful homebirth, but immediately it became clear that something was wrong. Rosie was rushed via ambulance to the Cardiac ICU and had open heart surgery when she was only three days old. Along with Pfeiffer syndrome, Rosie has multiple heart, brain, and spine conditions.

Rosie is a sweet and happy girl with parents and siblings who absolutely adore her, but after 23 surgeries in Rosie's first five years of life, Chelsie and Josh needed a break. And at Marriage Getaway, the Lord provided

exactly what Josh and Chelsie needed to rejuvenate their relationship. They participated in biblical teaching and small groups with a local pastor and his wife throughout the weekend-and they were able to truly connect with each other one-on-one for the first time in years.

Due to Rosie's disabilities, she requires a skilled caregiver 24 hours a day. This affects Josh and Chelsie's ability to get time away, or even sleep at the same time, as someone must always be awake and alert in case of a medical emergency. Marriage Getaway gave Josh and Chelsie their first night together in the same room in nearly two years.

"Choosing each other and choosing to fortify our marriage in the face of our struggles with medical diagnoses and disabilities was divine," say Chelsie and Josh.





Marriage Getaway changed Josh and Chelsie's lives! Thank you for your ongoing support of families living with disability.

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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NEW! Joni's Floral Wooden Tray

Perfect for gifting, and your own home or office décor, this handmade solid beech wood tray features laser engraving of floral art originally by Joni Eareckson Tada and encouraging words from Psalm 62:5: "Yes, my soul, find rest in God..."

As we recognize God with us moment by moment, our mundane becomes holy. Our pain becomes peace-filled. And our uncertainties fade into the greatest, most certain hope of all.

Product Details:

- 7" x 4" x .5"
- Trays vary in color and grain pattern

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\$30

100% of proceeds go directly to advance ministry to children and families living with disability.

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