

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP

Thank you for helping us fulfill Christ's call in Luke 14... Your love and prayers are bringing people with disabilities—like Fernando and his family—into the house of God!

“Go out quickly... and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame... so that my house will be full.”

—Luke 14:21,23



Until God's House is Full

from the heart

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”

EPHESIANS 2:14

Years ago, when I was a member of the National Council on Disability, I was thrilled to see the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For too long, Americans with disabilities had been dealing with barriers to jobs, transportation, and places like theaters, restaurants, and museums. Our council had worked hard on the first draft of the ADA, and after collaborating with other disability groups, it eventually passed in Congress.

So, on a breezy July afternoon in 1990, we gathered with other advocates on the White House lawn to watch President George H. W. Bush sign the ADA into law. After the ceremony, Paul Hearne, our council's director who had brittle bone disease and used a three-wheeled scooter, proposed a toast.

He looked at his drink for a moment and said, “This is a wonderful day. This landmark civil-rights legislation will open a great door of access to all Americans with disabilities. Discriminatory employment policies will soon be a thing of the past—it will mean qualified people with disabilities will enjoy greater access to jobs. This law will also set new

standards for constructing buildings, and it will provide greater access to public accommodations—wheelchair users will no longer have to be carried up the steps of a restaurant. And one day, buses across America will be outfitted with mechanical lifts—there'll be no barriers to public transportation.”

Paul took a deep breath and proceeded, “But the ADA will not change the heart of the employer. This law will not change the heart of the maître de in the restaurant. It will not change the hearts of architects. And this law will not change the heart of the bus driver.” He then lifted his glass and said, “Here's to changed hearts.”

Tears overflowed my eyes as I realized, *that's what God does*. The government cannot do it; neither can federal laws. Only Jesus Christ can transform hearts and attitudes. The Americans with Disabilities Act could force the transformation of social institutions, but it wouldn't necessarily improve attitudes or uproot prejudice or discrimination. Education may raise disability awareness, but even that only goes so far. It doesn't make a disadvantaged class of persons valued or celebrated.



President George H. W. Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush thank Joni for her part in developing the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

We can be thankful that over the last decades, many ADA mandates have been accomplished. We've come a long way since the days when Paul Hearne and I, and millions like us, had to wheel down alleys, past dumpsters, and into the back doors of restaurants. Today I can roll my wheelchair into a building with ease. My friend who's blind can walk into a museum with her service dog. Children with autism have access to special education programs. There is immense cause for celebration.

Yet much remains to be done, for only the Gospel of Christ transforms the character of individuals and nations. They say that access is having a ramp to the table... mainstreaming is having a seat at the table... inclusion is having a voice at the table. But true embrace is being heard at the table. We will only embrace people with disabilities when character is transformed, on a personal and a national level.

Ephesians 2:14 declares, “For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” I envision a society—and a church—in which all people with disabilities are truly celebrated. It happens when families struggling with disability are happily embraced. It's why I encourage you to join Joni and Friends in celebrating the ADA by asking God to work in the heart of your church.

Need help in making that happen? Joni and Friends stands ready to help with resources and training. Because we envision a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joni".

We found a *home* at Joni's House!

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”

HEBREWS 6:10

“**F**ernando is twelve years old. He has microcephaly and epilepsy. Doctors told his parents that Fernando would never have any movement in his arms and legs, and local agencies believed Fernando would not benefit from therapies or services. In their eyes, he just didn't have enough potential. His mother, Rebeca, felt the sting of isolation and discrimination. More than that, she felt that she and her family had become a burden to their community.

But all that changed when they found *Joni's House El Salvador*. “We feel the discrimination from the outside community,” explains Fernando's father, Walter. “But here at *Joni's House*, we are received with kindness. The people here are very caring.”

At *Joni's House*, Fernando was given his very own wheelchair, and now he receives physical therapy, occupational therapy, and swim therapy. And praise God, the doctors who gave Fernando such a bleak diagnosis were wrong! As a result of the therapies he receives at *Joni's House*, Fernando now has the hope of increased mobility!

“The treatment Fernando gets at *Joni's House* is a blessing,” says Walter. “Here we find something different than anywhere else. *Joni's House* offers us a better quality of life.”

Rebeca couldn't agree more. “*Joni's House* gives us the encouragement we need to keep going on. The people here have helped us believe more in God and to value each moment with our son. We have stopped questioning God—now we thank God for Fernando.”

Fernando isn't the only one whose life has been changed by the Gospel-love families find at *Joni's House*. Rebeca has been empowered by the entrepreneurial classes *Joni's House El Salvador* offers, and she now has her own business making and selling jewelry! When *Joni's House* held a market for those who participated in their classes, Rebeca was there with her beautiful wares on display. And *Joni's House* helped Rebeca register with the local government so she can do business as a licensed entrepreneur. Now she can sell her products in the city market, too.

Rebeca is earning money to help support her family, and she is giving back to her community, as well. She's been inspired to form a support group for families with children who have microcephaly. Sixty families are in Rebeca's group, supporting one another and raising awareness for people with microcephaly. Please pray for Rebeca as she works to get her group registered as an NGO.

“*Joni's House* is full of angels that God has sent into our lives.”

— Rebeca



Walter, Rebeca, and Fernando are a beautiful example of the Christ-centered care found at *Joni's House*. Thank you for giving otherwise isolated families a place of belonging through your support of *Joni's House*!

Breaking Down Barriers for *Jesus*

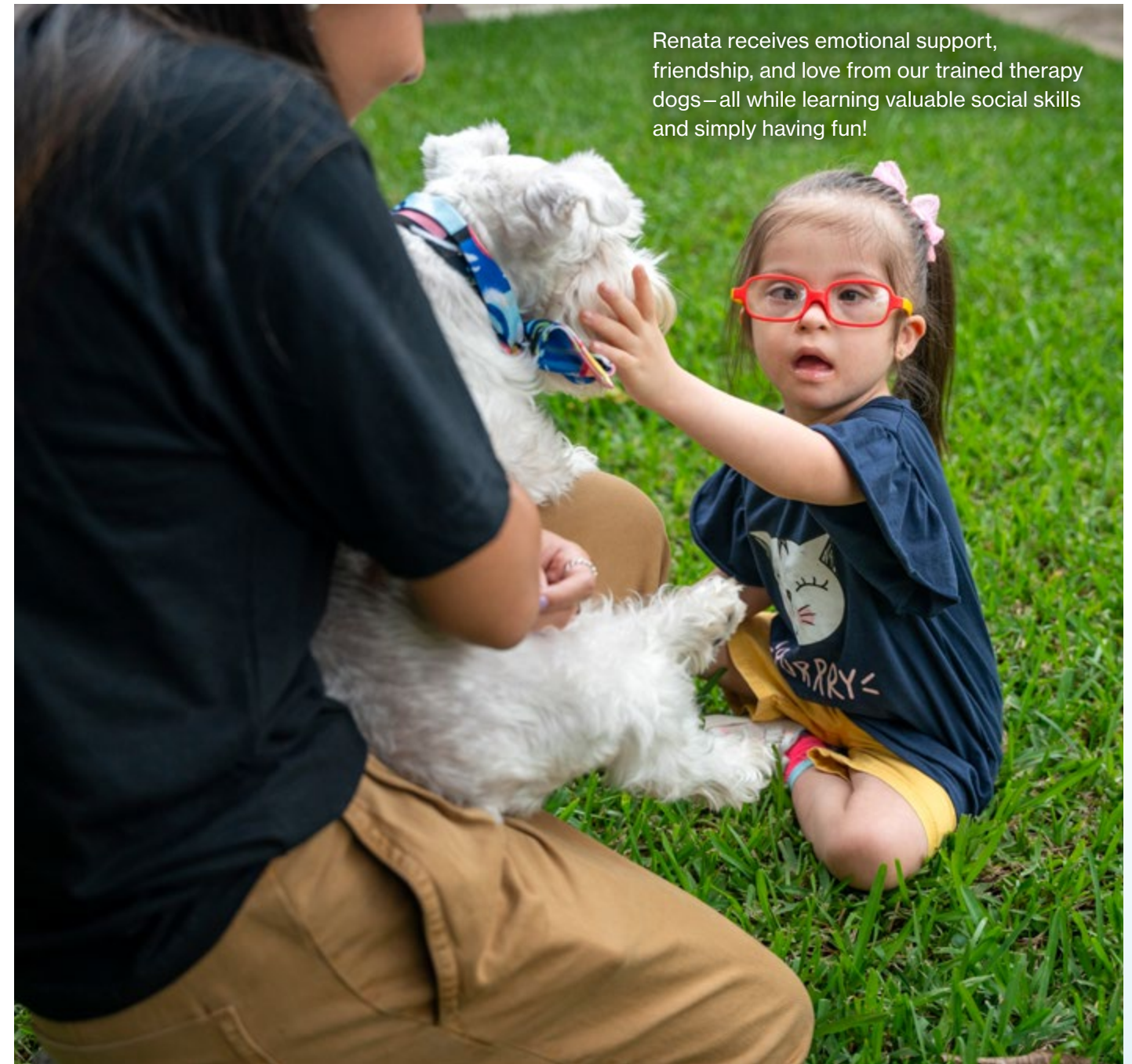
Sign language is one of the many classes offered at *Joni's House El Salvador*. Maria, a *Joni's House* staff member who is deaf, teaches weekly sign language classes to parents, volunteers, and other staff members. Sign language is an excellent mode of communication—not just for deaf people, but also for hearing people who are non-verbal.

“Non-verbal children can learn to communicate their needs through sign language,” says Maria. Without the ability to

make their needs known, children—and adults—can become frustrated. And sometimes, that frustration turns into behavioral problems. Sign language breaks down communication barriers, empowering children with disabilities and fostering a sense of community and belonging. And when parents learn how to talk to their non-verbal children through sign language, whole families are brought closer together. It's all part of the complete, Christ-centered care found at *Joni's House*!



“At *Joni's House* I feel like I belong,” says Maria, who teaches her class with these words from Charles Spurgeon on the wall: “May the main sermon of your life be preached by your behavior.”



Renata receives emotional support, friendship, and love from our trained therapy dogs—all while learning valuable social skills and simply having fun!

Animal therapy improves quality of life for children and adults with disabilities. And at *Joni's House El Salvador* we partner with a number of therapy dogs to provide emotional support for the families we serve. Therapy dogs help children with Down syndrome, autism, and physical disabilities build confidence and learn social skills. Our canine team members help

to reduce stress and anxiety, allowing disabled children to participate in necessary therapies that would otherwise be too challenging for them. Plus, therapy dogs foster language development and provide companionship and friendship—which are all too often missing in the lives of children with disabilities.

“A cheerful heart is good medicine.”

PROVERBS 17:22

“For I know the plans I have for you...”

Thirty-four years ago, the National Council on Disability laid the foundation for the Americans with Disabilities Act. Little did that council—or Joni—know that their efforts would have an international ripple effect in the future!



“When I served on the National Council on Disability, we drafted the original Americans with Disabilities Act. And this was a photograph to demonstrate the need for access into public buildings such as this government building in Washington, D.C. That ramp is totally inappropriate—way too steep—but that was this building’s best effort to accommodate people with disabilities. But, of course, it was totally

unusable. No way I could wheel up that without flipping over backward,” says Joni.

Today, appropriate wheelchair ramps are prevalent in public buildings and gathering places across the United States. And, as Joni reminds us, true inclusion is much more than a wheelchair ramp. True, biblical inclusion happens when people with disabilities are *celebrated* for who they are in Christ.



Sisters and ministry partners, Monica (left) and Claudia (right), serve the Lord, Joni and Friends, and families living with disabilities at Joni’s House El Salvador.



That’s exactly what happens at *Joni’s House El Salvador*, which was recognized when we were presented a prestigious award from El Salvador’s National Council for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities. Our *Joni’s House* team is known for eliminating physical, social, and emotional barriers in the lives of families living with disability. Joni and Friends is well respected for promoting human rights and the equality of all people, regardless of ability level, worldwide.

“This award motivates me and everyone at Joni and Friends,” says Claudia Aguirre, our International Regional Manager for Central America. Claudia herself lives with disability

and understands personally the need for raising awareness about inclusion for disabled people in society. “We will continue serving people with disabilities—dignifying their lives. We thank God for giving us the privilege to serve him this way as instruments in his hands.”

“We take great pride in representing Joni and Friends in our country as we extend God’s kingdom,” says Monica Aguirre, Director of *Joni’s House El Salvador*. “This recognition reveals, once again, the purpose God has for our lives as it gives meaning to hardship. It reinforces our commitment to people living with disabilities and their families.”

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

JEREMIAH 29:11

God's Power on Display

From Central California ▼

"At *Family Retreat*, I am just Kylie."

As a young, vivacious woman with spina bifida who uses a wheelchair, Kylie appreciates that at *Family Retreat* people really want to get to know you—all about you—and not just your disability. "*Family Retreat* is a community of people that is always welcoming and kind," says Kylie.

This simple-yet-profound experience of belonging sets the stage for a week of joy, rest, and fun at *Family Retreat*. Kylie will tell you that the fully-accessible activities, from playing with bunnies to ziplining and swimming, are not what make the experience so important to her. "It's all fun, but it is the people and community that make *Family Retreat* so special," says Kylie.

Kylie thrives among friends in the *Family Retreat* teen program, where each person's gifts and strengths get to shine. She participates eagerly and is inspired to try new things. "I have seen God's power at work in the lives of so many families at *Family Retreat*, and I see that I can have fun and be used by God to motivate and encourage others."

When Kylie's aunt and cousin, who also lives with disability, joined her at *Family Retreat*, the Christ-centered love, acceptance, and service they all received confirmed to Kylie that she wanted to serve others through Joni and Friends.

"I was hesitant to share that I would like to serve because of my disability. But I was

encouraged by family, friends, and our group leader to trust God's calling.

While how I serve might look different, I think I am ready. Maybe I will partner with another volunteer, but I would like to provide others the same amazing experience that I have at *Family Retreat*."

In demonstration of her faith in Christ, Kylie recently got baptized. She shared that much of her testimony flows from her experiences at *Family Retreat*—the fellowship, teaching, worship, and prayer... all of which supported her growing faith.

Kylie hopes to serve with *Wheels for the World™* in the future. She knows firsthand how a wheelchair can change someone's life—and that a diagnosis doesn't define a person. And knowing that most people in the world who need a wheelchair have to do without breaks Kylie's heart. She wants every person to be able to get out of the house—and every child to be able to play with friends and go to school.



Kylie (on far right) made a big impact on others at *Family Retreat*—including Joni and Ken!

From Minnesota ▼

"Life-changing is the best way to describe *Family Retreat*," says Jennifer. "The staff and volunteers of Joni and Friends are truly doing the work of Jesus."

Jennifer and Bryan brought their sons, Roa (15) and Gunnar (13), to *Family Retreat*, and their lives have never been the same since. "The daily prayer, worship, and activities are so inclusive and inviting," Jennifer says. "And the breakout sessions inspire real conversations about faith and disabilities. Never have we felt so connected and accepted!"

When Roa was diagnosed at age one with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, the outlook was bleak. The neurologist was kind but straight forward, saying, "He'll never walk, he'll never talk, he'll never hold a pencil... he most likely won't even be able to use a wheelchair."

Jennifer continues, "We fell away from church for a while. We dared even to question God and all that was happening to our family. Multiple therapies, appointments, procedures, and specialists led to exhaustion. Roa not only has cerebral palsy, he has a sleep disorder to boot. If God had this in his plan for us, our faith in him was far from perfect or positive."

But as Roa grew he gained skills his family never expected. He could drive a power wheelchair at a fairly young age and started using an eye-gaze device to communicate around age six.

And the way Roa smiled up at Jesus hanging on the cross on the bedroom wall radiated faith.

Bryan and Jennifer decided to return to church and join one that's closely connected to Joni and Friends. Before long, their youth ministry started talking about baptism, and using his communication device, Roa said, "I want."

In front of a full church, Roa chose Jesus in the most public way possible. The pastors and church volunteers helped him maneuver his wheelchair and get baptized.

During the baptism, all Jennifer could do was sit and cry in complete surprise. But afterward, when she and Bryan asked Roa why he wanted to be baptized, he used his eye-gaze communication device and said, "God is big King. Yes, Jesus!"

"I've had my ups and downs with the Lord," says Jennifer. "But Roa is spot on. And that's how my son with multiple disabilities led me to know Jesus."

"Joni and Friends is a ministry like no other," explains Jennifer. "Roa can't wait to go back, and Gunnar wants to start volunteering at *Family Retreat* when he gets a little older. We are blessed to be on this path with fellow Christians who are living life differently, just like us."



From Missouri ▼

“*Family Retreat* gives us something to look forward to every year,” says Betty, who has been part of our Joni and Friends family for decades!

When Earle and Betty’s firstborn, Janelle, was only 15 months old, God blessed them with twins, Nick and Kendall. The boys faced medical difficulties from the start. Because of their twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, Kendall received too much blood in utero while Nick didn’t receive enough. Nick also had the umbilical cord wrapped tightly around his neck.

Nick and Kendall were born two months early. From the time the boys were babies, Earle and Betty could see that there was something atypical about Nick’s condition and development. At first doctors thought Nick was blind because his eyes had trouble tracking. While it turned out that Nick can see, he received a diagnosis of cerebral palsy around six months old.

Nick’s diagnosis hit each of his parents hard. Earle felt pained and saddened while Betty struggled with disappointment and grief. Both parents had deep concerns for Nick, but also worried about their other two children. “Because our greatest focus needed to be on Nick, Kendall and Janelle were affected,” explains Betty. “We tried to give them what they needed too,

but both to some extent—especially Kendall—were negatively impacted by the situation.”

“Having to deal with disability has caused us to turn toward God, rather than away from him in anger or bitterness,” says Betty. “We didn’t give up; we started looking for things and people who might help Nick. We saw Nick was a fighter. Nicholas means ‘victorious,’ and he has lived up to his name!”

When the twins were four years old, Betty heard Joni speak at a conference. Meeting Joni set her family on a new and exciting course. Joni invited them to *Family Retreat*, and the rest, as they say, is history! They’ve since attended 14 *Family Retreats* in seven different states!

Plus, Earle now serves as a wheelchair mechanic with *Wheels for the World*, and he’s collected 200 wheelchairs to be restored for people living with disability in developing nations!

Joni and Friends provides respite and Christ-centered encouragement for each member of the family. *Thank you for partnering with us to give families struggling with disability a place of belonging in the body of Christ.*



From Georgia ▼

On the first day of our *Wheels for the World* outreach in Arequipa, Peru, we met Maria and her daughter, Rosemary. Maria looked exhausted and seemed physically and emotionally burdened. For eighteen years Maria had been carrying Rosemary on her back in a traditional, multicolored wrap. Transporting her daughter without a mobility device through the dusty, dry streets of their high-desert city had taken its toll on Maria’s body and spirit. She seemed to lack any extended-family support and was without a connection to a church in her area. Maria brought Rosemary to our distribution site in hopes of getting their first-ever wheelchair.

Even though Rosemary is a young adult, her multiple disabilities have stunted her growth to the point that she needed a pediatric wheelchair. And though she is unable to speak, Rosemary has learned to communicate in her own ways. When she saw the wheelchair chosen just for her, Rosemary beamed and made her heart’s desire clear—she wanted to sit in her new wheelchair right away!

Because of the curve in her back from pronounced scoliosis, Rosemary and Maria had to wait for our mechanics to modify Rosemary’s wheelchair to prevent sliding and maximize comfort. At the same

time our team created a seat pad to prevent dangerous pressure sores.

As they waited for adjustments to the wheelchair, Maria and Rosemary got to know volunteers from a local church—hearing the Gospel and receiving a Bible in their own language. They spent time in prayer lifting their specific needs up to God. Rosemary and Maria’s burdens were being lifted not just physically, but spiritually, as well.

By the time our occupational therapists seated Rosemary properly in her custom-fit wheelchair and gave her a doll to take home, her glowing face said it all. Now, in addition to the new dignity and mobility Rosemary’s wheelchair provides, she and her mother have access to a church community for ongoing support and encouragement in Christ.

There were 180 people with disabilities who received wheelchairs and the Gospel at this *Wheels for the World* outreach in Peru. That’s 180 people and their families whose physical, emotional, and spiritual burdens have been lightened through the love of Jesus and your steadfast support. *Thank you for partnering with us to meet families’ needs that have gone unmet for years!*



“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

MATTHEW 11:28

Bless Your Loved Ones & Share the Love of Jesus!

When you give a gift in honor of your loved ones, you share the gift of the Gospel with people living with disabilities worldwide! To make a contribution in memory or in honor of someone special—or to acknowledge a special occasion—visit joniandfriends.org/donate or call us at **818.707.5664** today!

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Chris Wyman

WARREN BURGESS
James and Cathy Duttweiler

We have much to celebrate this month!

July 30, 1967 Joni's Diving Accident

July 3, 1982 Ken and Joni's Wedding Date



“Who am I, God, that you have brought me this far?!” Who am I that I should be so blessed in a marriage with Ken for 42 years? And how did I ever have the strength to survive 57 years as a quadriplegic in a wheelchair? And both of these anniversaries are in July!

The answer lies with Psalm 31:15, “My times are in your hands.” The years may shift and change, but they change according to God’s unchanging love, and they shift according to the One with whom there is no shadow of turning. With each special milestone, I praise my sovereign God who has held my times in his loving hands.

And to what end has he “brought me this

far?” That my marriage to Ken Tada might be a testimony of his guidance and grace. And that I might view my remaining years in this wheelchair as gifts of God to invest in his kingdom work for, “my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).

Anniversaries are milestones in which we joyously rededicate ourselves to the tasks the Lord Jesus has given us. So here and now, I want you to know that I am re-dedicating myself to the task of testifying to the Good News of God’s grace in a world that needs Jesus desperately. And I am so grateful to God that you have come alongside me in this glorious task!

“Who am I, Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?”

1 CHRONICLES 17:16



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Joni's New Art Print!

Silent Witness



Frame not included

“Imagine quietly walking through a moonlit, snowy woods, and coming upon a buck deer and his doe. He raises his head, and you stand motionless and breathless with excitement. I painted this gouache-and-watercolor rendering in 1992, hoping the viewer would experience that delightful moment of surprise. Rather than paint the deer in detail, I rendered their ‘attitude’ with just a few strokes,” says Joni, who created this artwork by holding paintbrushes in her mouth.

Silent Witness is a quiet, yet powerful expression of Psalm 33:8, “Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.” Truly, the moment captured in this painting is a silent witness of the beauty of God in all of creation... even the deer.

Product Details:

- 20" x 16"

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

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