Season 6 | Episode 17

From Heartbreak to Hope: New Life for Vicki's Wheelchair

Scott & Laura Price

September 12, 2024

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.

Today on the podcast, listen as Scott and Laura share the powerful story of their daughter, Vicki, who lived with cerebral palsy. Always smiling, Vicki exuded joy wherever she went. Whether she was at home, or out in the community, or at a Joni and Friends Family Retreat. When Vicki died unexpectedly at 27 years old, Scott and Laura's hearts were left broken beyond belief.
But little did they know, Vicki's life would leave a legacy of Gospel-centered ministry and hope for other families living with disability.

Scott Price:

We tried to have our own children for several years. We just found out after a while that that wasn't gonna work out. And so, we went to Colorado Springs and purposely spent some time praying. We took some time just to ask God, what should we do with our lives? I was working for the post office. Laura was a nurse, and we were feeling like we can go to Colorado and get jobs that'll be easy. And really at that time, felt like God was saying to us, go home to Minnesota and adopt kids with special needs.

Crystal Keating:

Over the years, Scott and Laura adopted six children into the Price family. Let's hear how they first came to meet and adopt their first daughter, Vicki.

Laura Price:

We went for a walk around a local hospital that was where they do abortions. And on that walk I prayed, God, if, a young woman comes here to abort her baby, would you bring that baby to me? That was in November.
In December, a young lady did go there, and they found that she was 27 weeks along and they said, no, we can't do it. You're too far along. We can't abort. And she went home and three days later came back and had broken her own water. And so, they had to deliver her. That was December 26th.

The birth mom called the adoption agency the next day, never saw her daughter, and left. And, they thought she was doing great. She was off a ventilator in 24 hours. She weighed two pounds, one ounce, but did really well. And a week later they did a routine ultrasound of her brain and found that it was full of blood.

It's called a grade four intraventricular bleed. They had families come in to see her and they would give them the information and they would get scared and leave. So, on January 14th, some very good friends of ours went to finalize their adoption. And their lawyer said, we're having a hard time finding a family for this baby, do you have any ideas?

And they said, oh, we know who. So they came home and called us, and we had another child in foster care with us at the time. And I said that's a nice idea, but I'm not gonna put this foster child into daycare so that I can go spend time in a neonatal intensive care. But the very next day, his birth mom called and said she was taking him back. So that opened the door for us so we could go.

The only name we'd ever thought about for a girl was Vicki. But, because of her circumstances we expanded that to Victoria because God had already been victorious in her life.

They'd told us that she was at high risk for cerebral palsy, mental retardation and seizures. But nobody would know, and we felt very sure that we were willing to take that risk. So not until she was nine months did we get the diagnosis that she had cerebral palsy. She was stiff, rather rigid. But again, when we got her diagnosis, God was very faithful to us.

Crystal Keating:

After receiving Vicki's diagnosis, Laura and Scott had to process how their lives would be changed by disability.

Laura Price:

What does it mean that she has cerebral palsy? How does that affect what we need to do to grieve and to figure out the doctors and the therapies and all those kinds of things?

When Vicki was here, it was a bit of a juggling act, but we were a really good team. I don't think we had to say a whole lot all the time of, okay, you do this, I'm gonna do this.

We just had a routine and as one was doing that, the other one was doing the other things. It was, we had it down pretty well. We've had a lot of help. We've had a lot of personal care attendants. In the busy years we'd have 'em two at a time. And it still is busy.

Scott Price:

Maybe one of the biggest challenges is navigating the system. The system of getting resources is amazing in our state, but it's also very difficult. Because in the beginning you don't know, and you don't even know what you don't know. So you have to ask a lot of questions, and I think one of the things that helped us early on was a support group.

We ended up spending time with other families who had young children with disabilities, and we learned a lot from each other. We would ask, what did you learn about the insurance? Or what did you learn about this doctor? Oh, hey, I know this specialist. And we realized that parents were really actually our best resource.

Over time, the more we spent time asking questions of them, and getting to know other professionals, we built our own little network of knowledge and then we started sharing it with someone else. So, it's a beautiful picture of just someone going before us and sharing their information, and then once we had that knowledge, then we shared it with the people that came behind us.

Vicki was a very happy girl. Like any teenager, you know, during those teenager years those might have been a little bit rough, but overall, she was always happy. She shared her smile with just about anybody from the time she was young until all the way till the end of her life, and she just, enjoyed life even though she lived in this body that didn't work very well.

And people often ask, how can she smile so much? Part of it is she didn't know anything different. She just knew the body she had. One of the best examples, and maybe a little bit strange, is whenever she would go down for surgery, she would be laughing and giggling all the way down to the operating room, and I think it was, she's going into this place, and she realizes I'm the queen, and everybody has to do what I say because I'm the queen.

So we're reeling her down to have a surgery and she's laughing her head off. And then of course, going through surgery and she's a little groggy when she wakes up, but as soon as she gets out of that medication, then she's laughing and talking and smiling again. And so, her ministry really was part of her smile.

For a number of years, she had a service dog, and when she got that service dog in middle school, her confidence went up and you could see that she would sit up in her chair and she would look around and she would say, I have a dog, and you don't, and I'm special because I have a dog. And so, people would come up to Vicki and they would say, can I pet your dog?

And she would always say yes, because she was thrilled that people were talking to her. Vicki and I would often go into schools. We trained Medtronic staff, we did girl scout groups. We trained over a thousand people on topics about disability, service dogs, how to use an electronic talker.

And she would use her talker to complete a presentation. And you would think that she was a professional. She worked so hard to get those words out by using just two switches that were on either side of her head to communicate the messages that we had prepared ahead of time. And by the end of the presentation, the best part for her was when people would ask questions. Because there again, it became well, I'm the queen again and you have to talk to me. And so people would ask questions, and then she would answer questions and I would fill in the blanks that she wasn't able to communicate. But she did such a good job, even when she couldn't talk clearly. She worked really hard to communicate the messages that she had for other people.

The day before she passed away was Mother's Day, and she had come to stay with us overnight. Vicki had the privilege of moving out to an adult foster home and it was her second home. Her foster family loved her very much and we were grateful for that time ‘cuz she got to be an adult living out in the world on her own.

The Mother's Day itself was this very special day. We were working on a little garden thing in our backyard, and she was out there and she was being the supervisor. We always need a supervisor with projects telling everybody what to do. And then later on in the evening, we had a meal. And she always enjoyed tasting the food. She really couldn't eat a lot, but her big thing was when she wanted to eat, she would say the word more and I would eat and feed her, and I couldn't keep up with her.

She was “more,” she would chew up the next piece, “more, more.” And so, she really enjoyed having that opportunity to eat again with the family. And then in the evening we sat down and we watched a movie about a horse. And Vicki always loved animals. She loved her service dog, and she loved horses. She rode horses for about 13 years through some horse therapy organizations.

And so at the end of that great day, I put her to bed like I've done for many years. Said goodnight to her. And we went to bed. And then the next morning I went up to get her to wake her up cause it was time for her to go back to her foster family. And I turned her over and she had passed away during the night. And we don't know why God chose that particular day, but he did. And she went on to meet the Savior that she loves.

Laura Price:

She doesn't need that wheelchair anymore. She's running and jumping and dancing.

Crystal Keating:

Because the Price family had come to our Joni and Friends Family Retreat over the years, they were aware of our Wheels for the World program and the opportunity to donate a wheelchair that could be restored and delivered to someone in need. The Prices wanted Vicki's chair to go to someone who would be a perfect fit for her purple wheelchair. And most importantly, they wanted to share the love of Jesus.

Scott Price:

Our daughter, Vicki, passed away in 2019 at the age of 27, at that time we considered donating her wheelchair and for a while we held onto it because it wasn't something we were quite ready to release.

My wife and I also have wanted to go on a Wheels for the World trip independent of the loss of our daughter. And so, we started asking questions. First of all, could we know who got Vicki's chair if we donated it? And the answer came back and it was yes. And then we asked, could we go on the trip and see the recipient? And the answer was yes.

And so then we waited and we waited for a trip to open up to find the right person and the right trip for her chair.

Laura Price:

That chair that allowed Vicki to have so much life and to be out in her community and to do the things that she did and enjoyed, now could be given to someone else. Vicki no longer needs her chair, but someone else can live their life out in the community and out doing the things that they want to do until it's their time that they don't need their chair. Wheels for the World is much like a wedge going into someone's heart, that it's just a way to get the love of God to them and a reason for them to know that God loves them and that this isn't the end when they pass away here, that they can have a true abundant life with Jesus.

Crystal Keating:

In the summer of 2022, Laura and Scott traveled with the Wheels for the World team to Mexico to hand deliver Vicki's restored wheelchair to its new recipient.

Scott Price:

Seeing Vicki's chair today was, it was quite an experience. I wasn't sure how I would react. As we prepared for the trip, we've told the story many times and so, I wasn't sure if I would be emotional or not. I think what started the day for me was seeing all of the wheelchairs lined up and ready to go, and that set my heart rolling right there.

As I was talking with someone else and turned around and saw Vicki's chair, it overwhelmed me in a very good way, and we were so pleased with the modifications that had been done. They had painted part of it a different color than her favorite purple, which was her other favorite color, which was blue, and then some additions to the headrest with the heart and a diamond on the the back just made it extra special to see that chair after all this time. We are able to fit Vicki's chair for another young lady and that young lady had a beautiful dress on a few years ago and she had a tragedy come into her life and now she needed a wheelchair.

Crystal Keating:

Liz, the recipient of Vicki's chair, lived with a brain tumor since she was a young child. And a brain surgery left Liz with much less mobility than before.

Francisco Aguilar:

My girl Liz, she's known about her illness since she was little, about her tumor. Last year we celebrated her 15th birthday. It was a great time for her. She really enjoyed it.

Laura Price:

They showed us beautiful pictures of her quinceañera, where she was in this gorgeous pink dress. And they showed us videos of her dancing and she was a very beautiful girl.

And then in January she had surgery again to have another brain tumor removed and a second surgery in February. And that second surgery left her with so much less than what she had before.

Francisco Aguilar:

The change came with surgery.

The doctor said that the uh, tumor was right in the middle of the brain in the part that orders the body to move. She said that our daughter's brain had got used to living with that tumor. It was like it was over.

We knew we would lose her. We reached a point in which they told us she wasn't stable, that her condition was very serious. I told my wife, you know, the best thing is that if God wants to take her, may his will be done, not ours.

Laura Price:

When I met the family and I told the parents the story that this was our daughter's chair, he grabbed his heart and was so thankful that we would give her chair to his daughter. And, they have struggled so much with the loss that their daughter has experienced.

And now for them to be able to have a bit more freedom and another way to care for her and to give her the best life. I was glad.

Scott Price:

She looks so beautiful in Vicki's chair. I was so pleased to be able to give to that family.

Laura Price:

I hope that this chair gives Liz some freedom from being in her house and just in one chair that she could recline in, but she couldn't sit up and be a part of what's going on in her family and in, out in her community. I hope it gives her dignity. I hope it gets her to be included in the rest of life with her family and friends.

Scott Price:

We often say when we talk about a wheelchair, that it's an extension of the person. And so now, Liz has the opportunity to have her person extended and gives her freedom that she didn't have without having wheels. Most of us get up every day and we can use our feet to and fro wherever we want to go.

And Liz needs just some wheels to help her get to where she wants to go. And now she has opportunity to get around easier than she did before.

Laura Price:

We wanted to write something to the family talking about the gift of the chair and, and how we also hoped that they would receive the gift of salvation.

And we put in there a picture of Vicki so that they could have a picture of her to remember who it was that had the chair before.

Laura Price:

I watched how her parents were watching what was being done. I could see that this was slowly starting to open their eyes to how their life could be better. The parents have lost so much with seeing their daughter go from a beautiful girl in a dress who walked and talked and danced. Now, she's still a beautiful girl, but she can't walk and talk anymore. And so they've had their own losses, I'm sure. And so as the time went by and as I was training her father how to use the chair, I could see in his eyes that he was becoming more and more comfortable with the chair, comfortable with the idea of how he was gonna help his daughter, and thankful.

And at the very end of the time together, He embraced me as if we had been best friends for many years.

Francisco Aguilar:

The experience that I've just gone through with Vicki's parents and with Joni and Friends, is so wonderful. I had never seen this. Your daughter is with us, and she will always be, because every time we look at the chair, we see her there.

It wouldn't be easy without the help of Joni and Friends. We were in a very difficult situation. They changed us. They gave our girl joy.

Crystal Keating:

I've heard grief described as love with no place to go. And although the passing of their beloved daughter left Scott and Laura with a tremendous sense of loss, they were able to bring beauty from ashes through gifting Vicki's purple wheelchair to Liz. The joy Liz expressed when receiving her new wheelchair was unmistakable.

And both families were joined together through this bond of friendship. I was deeply moved by Scott and Laura's desire to see another family blessed by their daughter's wheelchair. To be imitators of God and continue to love through the grief. Vicki's wheelchair passed along the freedom, comfort, and tangible expression of God's care through mobility.

The memory of Vicki continues through the smiles of Liz. And it reminds us of the ways God often shows himself faithful through our pain. Ultimately, working all things for good to those who love him, and giving us his comfort when we're hurting, so that we can comfort others.

Friends, if you were touched by this story, we'd love to invite you to be involved in sharing God's love through the gift of mobility. Wheels for the World, our international outreach program, is changing lives like Liz's. And you can be a part of this ministry by praying or donating a used wheelchair. You can also collect wheelchairs in your community or volunteer to serve on an outreach team. However you can serve or give, you can be part of sending mobility and the gospel to people with disabilities all around the world.

Thank you for listening today. For more episodes, find us wherever you get your podcast and be sure to subscribe. We'd also love it if you would tell a friend. And for more encouragement, follow Joni and Friends on Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube. And visit our website at joniandfriends.org/podcast. Thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

Listen to the episode