

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP



March is
Disability
Awareness Month!

Your love and prayers help people with disabilities
like Emily find their place in the body of Christ!
Read her story—and many more—inside!

from the heart

“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.”

HOSEA 11:4

Not long ago, a distraught family member wrote a letter asking if I would please speak with a young man named Tommy who had just broken his neck body surfing. As I stared at the letter, I wept and shook my head, wondering what to say. Because... I know what Tommy is facing. I know what his parents are thinking. And I felt utterly overwhelmed.

When an accident happens leaving someone paralyzed, or when a child is born with multiple disabilities... Well, their family doesn't know what lies ahead—that their old world is gone. They must now enter a new and foreboding world. So, how can we as Christians help these families? What do they need to hear from you?

I can say from experience, they need prayer. Committed and specific prayer through which God will pour out strength and peace. Looking back, I am grateful for the people who prayed diligently for me and my family. It's how I eventually came up out of depression.

Next, a family that is in crisis does not need advice. My own family was in a state of numbness and disbelief for a good while. Even if someone had given me advice or a Scripture that assured this awful thing would fit into a pattern for good—it would

have gone right over my head. Worse yet, it would have been like rubbing salt in a wound. Romans 12:15 tells us to “weep with those who weep.” A time of crisis is a time for expressing heartfelt support and sorrow. Just being there; helping with errands and providing company.

I recall when I got out of the hospital, how good it felt when a friend would come over and read a book with me. That friend kept me connected to reality and drew me up and out of social isolation. True, at first I asked him “Why?” with a clenched fist. But eventually I started asking “why” with a searching heart. Still, when suffering is fresh, answers don't always reach the problem where it hurts—in the gut and in the heart. The plea of most hurting people is a plea for compassion; for someone to say, “*I'm with you. I'm here for you. Let me help you.*” That's what we want!

We want the assurance—Fatherly assurance—that somehow everything will be okay... that the world is not splitting apart at the seams. And thankfully, God never intended that his children should suffer alone and isolated. God says in Hosea 11:4, “I led them with cords of human kindness.” In other words, God helps, serves, leads, guides, heals, and loves through the compassion of believers.



This self-portrait depicts the darkness and depression I felt immediately following my diving accident. Thank God for sending me compassionate friends who were willing to suffer with me. And thank you for going the extra mile to support people living with disabilities!

We do more than give them the Gospel in words. We embody the Gospel in action. God wants us to hook our veins up to that person and pour our heart into them, as though giving a spiritual transfusion—warm, personal, and life giving. Go the extra mile and make the extra effort. That's what normal Christian service does. It's what Jesus would do, God with Us.

Your prayer, your hope is that someone like Tommy may come to the point where they will make 2 Corinthians 1:9 their anchor—eventually saying that, “These things happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God.” And hope comes in the form of caring Christians who don't mind participating in the pain of others.

How good it is to have friends who will stand beside you on your journey through suffering—people who adorn

the Gospel with their deeds. Remember when I said that answers for that newly injured person don't always reach the problem where it hurts? Well, Jesus is the Answer. He goes where no medication, no surgery, no doctor or counselor can go. Jesus, who was the most God-forsaken man who ever lived, says to all those who are traumatized, “I will never leave you. I will never forsake you.” And those are comforting words for everyone.

A New Disability Brought *A New Call*

“**W**hen a family experiences a new disability, they enter into a new and foreboding world,” says Joni Eareckson Tada as she remembers coming face to face with her own disabling accident as a 17-year-old girl. New disabilities bring with them a whole new set of medical appointments, caregiving routines, therapies, and heartbreak. But as Joni’s story and the stories of so many other people living with disability attest, Jesus can bring new life and new ministries out of new disabilities.

Vianey was involved in a horrific car accident that left her disabled and suffering with chronic pain. She felt rejected by her church as her disability was seen as a lack of faith. When she wrestled with feelings of insignificance and couldn’t sleep because of her pain, Vianey listened to Joni’s daily radio program *Joni Eareckson Tada: Sharing Hope*, which is broadcast where Vianey lives in Monterrey, Mexico. It was through Joni’s inspirational radio messages that Vianey found the encouragement and hope that she needed.

Vianey didn’t waste any time. She responded to Joni’s on-air invitation to contact Joni and Friends through our website. She let us know that—like Joni—she wanted to make a difference for Christ by helping other people with disabilities. Our response team prayed with Vianey, provided her with several resources, and invited her to our *Wheels for the World*™ outreach in her area where Vianey received a much-needed wheelchair.

The relationship that began through Joni’s radio program continued to develop, and soon Vianey received a Joni and Friends scholarship so she could complete our online *Beyond Suffering* course in Spanish. *Beyond Suffering* transforms hearts and worldviews by providing participants with a biblical perspective on disability and suffering. After completing her own *Beyond Suffering* program, Vianey became an instructor for the course. And in 2022 she became our Joni and Friends International Country Coordinator for Mexico!

Vianey has now led hundreds of students through our *Beyond Suffering* curriculum and is responsible for overseeing all our online *Beyond Suffering* trainings in Central America. She has become a trainer of trainers—mentoring other instructors and guiding each course to completion. More than that, Vianey personally ministers to the people God brings into her care. And as others listen to her testimony, they come to know Christ as their Lord and Savior.

“Jesus had a plan for his glory!”

says Vianey, and she sends her love from Mexico.

Thank you for your faithful support of all our programs! You gave Vianey hope when she needed it most. And through our radio programs and overall ministry, God gave Vianey a new calling and new ministry. The ripple effects of our broadcasts, outreach events, and resources continue to echo throughout Mexico, all because Vianey responded to Joni’s timeless message on the radio. And all because of your steadfast partnership in ministry!

You can listen to Joni’s radio programs and learn about our *Beyond Suffering* curriculum today by visiting joniandfriends.org!



“My condition has improved, and I was authorized to board a plane after twelve years!” says Vianey. “I don’t need my wheelchair all the time now—only for long trips or when I’m experiencing severe pain. When I traveled to El Salvador to receive Joni and Friends training, I needed to use a wheelchair. It was a long trip!”

I Am a Child of God!

World Down Syndrome Day is on March 21st, but everyone at Joni and Friends honors our brothers and sisters with Down syndrome every day of the year—and we know you do, too!

Emily is a beautiful young lady with Down syndrome. “The first year we came to *Family Retreat*, Emily had a lot of anxiety,” says her mother, Nancy. “She was scared to death to be onstage at the talent show. I remember seeing her bent over hiding backstage because she was so scared. But now... Emily marches up on stage all by herself and sings proudly into the microphone! *Family Retreat* gives Emily confidence.”

This summer, Emily sang “I Am a Child of God” during the talent show, and the audience went wild! For indeed, Emily—and all people with Down syndrome—are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of our heavenly Father.

“Emily feels safe at *Family Retreat*,” says her dad, David. “She gains independence and socialization skills when we’re here. *Family Retreat* is our home away from home.”

David and Nancy love *Family Retreat* just as much as Emily! “We always reconnect as a couple when we’re here,” says David. “*Family Retreat* is created for the whole family. We’ve seen parents change and children transformed here. People move from being angry about their circumstances to being lovers of Jesus. They arrive feeling alone, but after *Family Retreat*, we know we’re not alone anymore. Joni and Friends gives us all a support system.”



Emily’s performance of “I Am a Child of God” reminded everyone at *Family Retreat* that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made in God’s image.

“We’re all valued here at *Family Retreat*,” agrees Nancy. “The couples’ group is amazing, and the bond between women in the moms’ group is unmatched. It’s so healing knowing we don’t have to explain ourselves or our children—everyone just understands.”

“And the men’s group is a great way to create relationships with other dads!” says David.

“Emily is a person first—she is not defined

by Down syndrome,” says Nancy. And that is true for every family member attending *Family Retreat*, regardless of their disability.

Thank you for celebrating World Down Syndrome Day with us, and for loving families living with disability through your prayers and support. The Lord is using your faith in action to remind disabled people that they are beautiful children of God!



David, Nancy, and Emily give and receive God’s love at *Family Retreat*. Thank you for giving them a safe place of belonging!

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

1 JOHN 3:1

Mobility Changes Lives!

According to the World Health Organization, of the estimated 80 million people in need of a wheelchair, only 5 – 35% have access to one. In low-income countries, as few as 3% of people have access to the assistive mobility equipment they need.

You can change that when you join our *Wheels for the World* team! Sending your love and a custom-fit wheelchair to a disabled child or adult in a developing nation changes their future forever! With their new wheelchair, they can attend school, go to work, or worship at their local church. They can fully participate in all aspects of family life! You can be part of our *Wheels for the World* team by:

Donating a Wheelchair

Every wheelchair donated to Joni and Friends comes with a story. And as it is given, its original owner's legacy continues, bringing help and hope to a disabled person in need.

Volunteering Locally

You can make an eternal difference by collecting, storing, or transporting donated wheelchairs to be restored.

Volunteering Internationally

Join one of our outreach teams and share the Gospel while hand-delivering and custom-fitting wheelchairs to people in less-resourced countries.



By the time a donated wheelchair is restored, delivered, and custom-fitted to its new owner, it carries with it countless stories of God's grace in action.

Each wheelchair recipient receives so much more than a mobility device. They receive new-found dignity and a brand-new outlook on life. They receive a Bible in their language and hear the Gospel. And they're given the opportunity to connect with a local Christ-honoring church.

Go to joniandfriends.org today and find out how you can share the Gospel globally through *Wheels for the World*! God will use your prayers and hands-on partnership to make a way in the wilderness of disability, and he'll transform your life in the process!

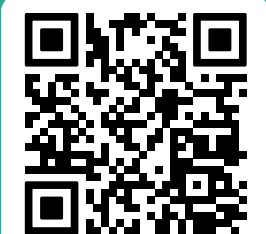


“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

ISAIAH 43:19

Bless your loved ones & share the love of Jesus!

Your gift given **in honor** or **in memory** of a loved one shares the hope of the Gospel with people living with disabilities worldwide! View your loved one's name on our online Digital Tribute Wall at joniandfriends.org/tribute or by using this QR code!



Sharing the *Love of Christ* Worldwide

From Pennsylvania ▼

In a corner forgotten by the world, Tong's only view was four drab walls. The air in his room was thick with loneliness and helplessness. Tong, who has cerebral palsy, was confined to his bed—his spirit imprisoned within an invisible cage.

But on a hopeful spring morning, Tong left his home and felt the unfamiliar warmth of the sun. He came to our *Wheels for the World* outreach in East Asia, and as our smiling team members custom-fit Tong's new wheelchair for comfort, he experienced an unprecedented feeling of respect. For Tong, that new wheelchair was like a pair of wings, freeing his spirit to soar.

Joni and Friends Pennsylvania has been serving through outreaches in East Asia for over 20 years—in person and through collaboration with our in-country partners—bringing new hope and possibilities to families like Tong's.

Each year, Joni and Friends partners invite families living with disability on collective spring or autumn outings. For Tong, every excursion makes his heart race with joy as his world broadens before his eyes. His ears attune to the songs of birds and whispers of the wind, stirring a sense of being fully alive.

In addition to *Wheels for the World*, Tong and his family attend our *International Family Retreats* in East Asia. There, seeds of love and faith have quietly germinated. And at one *International Family Retreat*, Tong's sister met and fell in love with one of the volunteers serving at the outreach. They are now married!

Last year, when Tong's mother needed surgery for a foot injury, their family faced another trial. Members of their local church and volunteers from our Joni and Friends team brought not only material aid but also spiritual solace. Their visits filled the home with warmth and hope, and their joint prayers helped Tong and his family feel the presence of God.

Deep within his heart, Tong holds boundless gratitude toward God. He prays, thanking God for all he has given, because Tong has come to understand that even though his body may be constrained, his spirit can still fly freely.



Psalms 23:4 has become Tong's motto. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Tong firmly believes that with love and faith in his heart, he can overcome any obstacle and embrace the dawn of a new life.

From Tennessee ▼

"Our journey isn't just about Noah finding his place," says JJ. "It's about Jesus placing us where we are neither just tolerated nor outright rejected. It started years ago with *Family Retreat*, which introduced us to a community that loves and supports families like ours. Jesus has carried us on a journey through different states, heartbreaking choices, unexpected challenges, countless adventures, and unforeseen victories to bring us to this church where we have been blessed with a season of growth and restoration."

JJ's husband Will agrees. "The church accepts Noah as a person and as a child of God. People and families with special needs are involved in the life of the church, reading Scripture, fellowshiping, and serving in ministry. We're part of the community. It's not, 'Hey, you're part of the church. Let us take care of you.' It's, 'Hey, you're part of the church. How can you serve with everybody else?' Just seeing that inclusivity feels like home. It's great, and we love it."

Will and JJ have three children with special needs. While 24-year-old Caleb and 20-year-old Sarah are now out of the house, 22-year-old Noah needs ongoing care. JJ describes Noah as a gift. During her difficult pregnancy with him, doctors warned that Noah might not survive. But God mercifully saved Noah, who lives with profound autism and went blind at age nine through a course of infections.

Having moved frequently and visited many churches over the years, Will and JJ found that most congregations didn't know what to do with a family like theirs. They came to feel that their family was seen as disruptive wherever they tried to worship. It's why Will and JJ contacted Joni and Friends for help finding a church that would embrace their whole family. Our team introduced Noah's family to one of the many churches we've supported in developing a culture of welcoming inclusion for families living with disability.

"When we got to Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church, we found something totally different. The people didn't just accept us—they were ready for us. And Will and I are not the only ones who know it. Noah knows it. Noah loves going to church, even though he still feels anxious sometimes. At a typical service, he makes it through the music and announcements before heading

to the wiggle room. But at this year's Inclusive Service—hosted by Cedar Springs and Joni and Friends Knoxville—it was different. This time, he stayed for the entire service," says JJ.

Noah's family recently moved to a new house in Knoxville, which brought a lot of anxiety to Noah. One of his concerns was that this would also mean going to a new church. JJ assured him that they would stay at the same church. She speaks on Noah's behalf about what the "same church" means:

"The same church with friends like me? The same church with a class for me even though I am still too afraid to say more than 'good morning' to the people who are there with me? The same church with the elevator? The same church where people don't fall apart when I do? The same church that has a special service that doesn't hurt my ears? The same church with fidgets in the hallway? The same church that has a wiggle room with a couch that I can hide on when I get scared? The same church with a waterfall that I can hear so I always know that I am there?"



JJ calmed Noah's fears. "Yes, Noah, we will stay at the same church... the very same church." Noah's family finally found a place where they're not just tolerated. They found a place where they belong.

HORSE *in* WILD MUSTARD

Art Print by Joni Eareckson Tada



“I have a love affair with horses,” says Joni Eareckson Tada. Horses have always been one of Joni’s favorite subjects to render in her artwork. When she created this painting in 1984, she originally intended it to be a pastel pencil drawing. But once she completed the design, she decided, “This simply must be painted!”

Product Details:

- 20" x 16"
- Frame not included

\$24

Joni transferred her pencil sketch onto a piece of 300 lb. Arches watercolor paper, which withstands water well. As she painted, Joni aimed to draw the viewer’s eye to all her favorite places on a horse—such as the ankles, jaw, and ears. As she says, “I played a trick on the eyes and painted violet next to the yellow-gold tones to create a buzzing effect. After all, opposite colors attract.”

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

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