

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP



Retreats & Getaways are
Sacred Ground

where we witness miracles of resilience and redemption!

God is using you to make a transformational difference for families like Dillion's.
Thank you for your unwavering prayers and support!

from the heart

“Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

PSALM 90:12

My friend Larry lived for over 40 years with quadriplegia. He had come to Christ shortly after his accident and his wife was able to take good care of him, bless her heart. But about ten years ago, she suddenly passed away—leaving Larry without his life partner and his caregiver. He wasn’t able to stay in their apartment alone, he couldn’t afford caregivers from agencies, and he had no children to take him in.

Larry is a great example of the tremendous need for long-term care support in our country. And there are thousands like him—alone and desperate for help.

What happens to people like Larry? You don’t have to be a quadriplegic in a wheelchair for this to apply to you. You and your spouse could be doing fine—in good health with a savings account and a circle of friends. And then, before you know it, you’re in your late 70s with a serious injury. That’s when most people start thinking about long-term care... when it’s too late.

Or you could have an adult child with an intellectual disability. According to Medicare, eight million people with disabilities under the age of 65 have

Medicare, but it does not generally cover long-term support services. So, if you are the parent of a child with a disability, start planning early for their long-term needs. And when I say early, I mean while they are still young children. It gives you a chance to learn about residential services and what they cost. And you certainly want to plan for your adult child’s long-term care before *you* age and need help yourself.

Psalm 90:12 says, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” It takes wisdom to foresee that time when either you will need lengthy care, or your disabled adult child will. Caregiving agencies are expensive and so are residential facilities. But like the Bible says, there is safety in an abundance of counselors. And believe me, there are many good Christian counselors in wealth management groups. Whether you are advised to invest in long-term care insurance or tap into your savings, a pension, or other retirement or investment income, it’s a delicate balance (safeguarding not only your disabled child’s future, but your own, as well).



Speaking of the future... you might be wondering what happened to Larry. Was he forced to go into a county nursing home? That’s often where many adults with disabilities have to live. And I feel, well... I feel that just shouldn’t be.

Larry was fortunate. He held fast to hope and to Psalm 68:6 which says, “God sets the lonely in families.” That’s exactly what happened to my quadriplegic friend. A Mennonite family had great compassion on him and—praise the Lord—as an act of true Christian service, that family invited Larry to live with them. They provided the care he needed.

This, friend, is what God means when he speaks of setting those who have no place else to live *in a family*. Yes, it’s costly to demonstrate that kind of sacrificial love, but it is so like Christ

and the sacrificial love he showed us.

By the way, not long ago, Larry went home to be with Jesus. The family he lived with misses him dearly.

Why not ask God if you can make a difference in someone’s life? It could be radical—it would be sacrificial. But God considers sacrificial service *normal Christian service*. Proverbs 19:17 says, “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.” God is so generous, and he loves it when we pass on his generosity to others in need. Others like Larry. The need is big—but not as big as our God.

Family Retreat Leads Special Needs Families to Christ

Before Dillion's birth, his parents, Sandy and Joe, had every reason to believe he would be healthy. No illnesses ran in the family. They already had one thriving daughter, Alisha, and Sandy's second pregnancy went as smoothly as her first.

When Dillion was born, the nurse commented, "I have never seen this coloring on a baby." But doctors didn't seem alarmed. So, Sandy and Joe thought all was well with their new baby boy... But then, at three months old, Dillion had a seizure—the first of many. And eventually, Dillion got his diagnoses: a seizure disorder, global developmental delays, and Sturge-Weber syndrome, which is a rare vascular neurological disorder characterized by

a facial birthmark, abnormal blood vessels in the brain, and eye abnormalities like glaucoma.

"Dillion was in and out of the hospital all the time," says Sandy. "It was very scary, and we had no people, no family, and no community to help."

For Sandy, Dillion's early years overflowed with grief. She felt profoundly isolated and remembers crying constantly. While Dillion loved to be around people, Sandy hesitated to take him places because people stared at him, and other children wouldn't play with him. "I was lonely, sad, and tired," says Sandy.

Sandy had no energy for her daughter or her marriage. But everything changed for her and her family through *Family Retreat*.



"At *Family Retreat*, Dillion's disability is not seen as a hindrance, but as a complement to our lives. *Family Retreat* is life-changing!" says Sandy.

"I connected with other parents going through similar things, had a date with my husband, and spent time with my daughter," says Sandy. "And I was amazed that all the people at *Family Retreat* loved and cared for Dillion so much. They touched him and talked to him, and you could see the joy on his face!"

When Sandy asked people why they loved her son so much, they pointed to Jesus and invited her family to church. The message of Christ's saving grace took root in Sandy's heart, and she decided to follow Jesus.

Dillion's disabilities continue to be a challenge.

He has therapy appointments almost every day. And as Dillion gets older, caring for him and transporting him gets physically harder for his parents. But they have new strength now—through their faith and the support of their church community. And Sandy thanks Joni and Friends for making a life-changing difference for her family.

Your love paves the way for families struggling with disability to find respite, hope, and faith through all our *Retreats & Getaways!* Thank you for loving families like Dillion's, in your local community and across the globe!



Dillion and his family attend *Family Retreat* every year now. Alisha helps with the children's programs. And as for Dillion, he enjoys the talent show and the bounce house, giggling and laughing like never before. "Dillion loves, loves *Family Retreat!*" says Sandy.

Retreats & Getaways: Strengthening Families and *Strengthening Faith*

As a little girl, Rachel listened to Joni Eareckson Tada's radio program with her mom. She remembers hearing about *Family Retreat* on the radio and developing a desire to serve people with disabilities. Little did she know that God would use Joni and Friends to strengthen her faith—and to eventually strengthen her marriage—in remarkable ways.

Rachel accepted Jesus as her Savior when she was a child, but it wasn't until later in life—when Rachel met one of our *Family Retreat* volunteers in church—that she experienced true discipleship. Her relationship with Jesus grew deeper, and her interest in serving became stronger as she heard her friend's stories about *Family Retreat*. Rachel became a Joni and Friends volunteer herself in 2022.

"It was a great experience!" says Rachel. "Right away I knew I wanted to volunteer again!"

Rachel's love for Jesus and her love for serving others was strong. God was truly working in her life—he even introduced Rachel to her future husband!

"I just never thought I would ever get married," says Rachel. "And then I met Nick."

Nick is passionate about music. He studied music in college and has been a member of various choirs for years. And Nick is blind.

"I found dating challenging," says Nick. "As soon as women found out I was blind, that was it. I never thought I'd get married or even date again." But then Nick met Rachel, and their happily ever after began.

While they were dating, Rachel invited Nick to her church's small group, where he learned about Jesus through discipleship sessions with another Joni and Friends volunteer. "And during one of those sessions, something clicked," recalls Nick. "I prayed to receive Christ, got baptized a year later, and I've been walking with the Lord ever since. God's done a lot of great things in my life!"

One of those *great things* is marrying Rachel, and another is getting more involved with Joni and Friends. Nick and Rachel serve as volunteer buddies for blind adults at *Family Retreat*, and they attended *Marriage Getaway* as a couple being served. *Marriage Getaways* are specifically designed to meet the needs of spouses navigating the challenges of disability. There, Nick and Rachel found a rich community of other couples who understand their unique situation. Through biblical teaching, worship, fun activities, and Christ-centered encouragement, Joni and Friends has been able to give back to this sweet couple who gives their hearts and souls to serving others. And through it all, Nick shows the world: "There's more to me than being blind."

"Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."

PROVERBS 11:25



Rachel introduced Nick to the world of Joni and Friends. Not only have they been blessed by attending our *Marriage Getaway*, but they also serve as buddies at *Family Retreat*!

Veterans Have *Heroes*, Too!

Chet retired from the Navy as a Petty Officer 2nd Class, serving several tours as a combat photographer, capturing action on film as it was happening. His job was to photograph frontline military missions and provide documentation for future operations and strategy. Chet served his country honorably in both Desert Shield and Desert Storm. But he returned home with much more than photographs. Chet has PTSD and multiple traumatic brain injuries.

“As a combat cameraman, every emotion you can think of hits you at the same time,” says Chet. “In the moment, you’re disconnected because the shield of the camera lens is always in front of you. But it hits you later... the sheer terror, feeling numb. And the thing that’s with you the whole time is fear.”

Chet now suffers from severe migraines, vision loss, brain fog, and freezing up mid-sentence. “I find myself constantly saying the same thing without ever knowing that I said it in the first place,” says Chet. And while Chet’s physical and mental challenges are hard enough, the emotional toll he must endure is relentless.

“Those of us who go to war and have to experience the worst of mankind and the real ugliness of the world—we really start to question morality,” Chet explains. Photos of the horrendous things he saw would flash through Chet’s mind like a slideshow. “Not everybody can go back home to a brick-and-mortar church and find their healing process.”

That’s why Joni and Friends created our *Warrior Getaways*, to serve Veterans desperate for healing due to the visible and invisible wounds of war. “*Warrior Getaway* showed me that people care,” says Chet. “It allowed me to reconnect and know that people can be good—not everybody is bad.”



“As Warriors, we all think we can do it ourselves,” Chet continues. “We think we can fight through it, but we find out our shoulders aren’t that broad, and it’s ok to ask for help.”

Help is exactly what Chet and his wife, Amy, found at *Warrior Getaway*. In fact, their healing has been so profound that Chet has a special message for you....

“Veterans have heroes, too,” says Chet. “And that’s you.”



Thank you for being Chet and Amy's hero through your prayers and support. God has used you to change their lives and the lives of other military families like theirs. We are deeply grateful for your ministry partnership!

“Family Retreats Have Transformed Our Lives for *The Lord!*”

From Illinois ▼

“Exhausted, broken, hurting, confused...” These are the words Paul used to describe his family when they arrived at their first *Family Retreat*.

“It was as if the few-hour drive to *Family Retreat* was a 40 year walk in the wilderness,” says Paul. “As a dad and a husband, I felt like a weary leader and somewhat isolated. My wife, Kathy, felt like a lonely mom who just couldn’t make sense of the world that God placed her in.”

Paul and Kathy have two daughters, Katelyn and Madelyn, both of whom were born with the same rare condition that causes them to be medically fragile and physically disabled. Katelyn and Madelyn require extensive and complex equipment for their care. Getting them and their equipment packed and on the road to *Family Retreat* was no small feat. *Would all of Paul and Kathy’s effort be worth it?*

Opening the door to their room, they discovered welcome baskets with something special and personal for each member of their family. In that moment, Paul explains, the first brick fell from the defensive wall he and his family had built around themselves. And throughout *Family Retreat*, divinely appointed moments and people continued to knock down bricks, clearing the way for God’s love to flow in.

Paul connected with other dads who understood the deep desire to take care of your family and “fix the hardship,” and the helpless feeling when there is no fix, and the pain won’t go away. And Kathy found kindred spirits in the women’s groups, finally finding a place to share and see others nodding with the all-powerful, “I get it.”

“Through the years at *Family Retreat*, we created memories we never thought possible,” says Paul. “Our girls were able to get on a boat ride and ride horses! And Katelyn even went down the zip line! At *Family Retreat* we felt accepted, like a family who shares in loss and victories, in struggles and heavy burdens. We built community.”

“*Family Retreat* isn’t just a fun week or an experience,” says Paul. “*Family Retreat* transformed our lives for the Lord.”



From Ohio ▼

Just as Tana had finished third grade and was ready to enjoy a day at the beach, her world turned upside down. She contracted an aggressive form of mono that attacked her liver.

Rushed into an emergency liver transplant, followed by a bone marrow transplant, Tana teetered between life and death. She fell into a coma and was never expected to wake up. Tana’s mother, Jennifer, prepared for the worst.

Tana did, in fact, emerge from her coma. And while Jennifer sees Tana’s journey through the lens of faith, there are many challenges surrounding her complex and intensifying health issues. Because Tana has nocturnal seizures, Jennifer gets broken sleep at best. On a deeper level, Jennifer wrestles with a pervasive burden of guilt, feeling like she can’t adequately meet Tana’s needs or spend quality time with her husband. Most painful of all, as Jennifer says, “There’s mourning a life that my child will never have. And probably worst of all is watching her day in and day out with challenges and hardships that I can’t help her with or take away from her.”

Diagnosed with a rare form of epilepsy, which is deteriorating her brain, Tana has declined significantly over the years. Jennifer takes her on adventures whenever possible, praising God that he has spared her infectious giggle and smile. Still, Jennifer gets emotional when she and Tana have to sit on the sidelines and watch other children. But at *Family Retreat*, Jennifer’s emotions changed from poignant longing to joy.

“I watched Tana look around and see so many other kids just like her. *Family Retreat* is a place where other people waited for Tana and helped her participate. There were no kids trampling on her to get to the front. She didn’t get told to use her whisper because she was loud, and we didn’t get gawked at because of her habitual teeth grinding,” says Jennifer.

“I found solace at *Family Retreat*,” continues Jennifer. She and her family have found that *Family Retreat* is a place where God removes sidelines and shushing, gives a profound sense of belonging, and turns complete strangers into trusted friends.



“I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

PSALM 27:13

Joni's Fishing on the Lake Scarf



This elegant silk scarf features watercolor artwork by Joni Eareckson Tada, which was inspired by a misty morning with her husband Ken fishing on a lake in the Sierra

Mountains. The idyllic scene reminded Joni of God's words in Isaiah 30:15, "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength."

Product Details: 24" x 24" • 100% Silk • Dry clean only

\$35

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

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