

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP



Proving the *Power of the Gospel*

You can make Jesus real to people in need,
delivering hands-on help and hope in his name.

from the heart

“The name of the Lord is a fortified tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe.”

PROVERBS 18:10

People think I’m a strong person but I’m not. Before the crack of dawn, before my friend even arrives to help me get up, I look to heaven and whisper, *“God, I have no strength for this day. No energy. No courage. But Jesus, you have courage. So, help me be brave today! I can’t do this, but I can do all things through you who gives me strength.”*

My pain and paralysis could fill me with fear, but I stay a step ahead of my fears. Every day I turn fear on its head and, in so doing, I become a person of Psalm 34:4, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”

Just how does he do this? Let me tell you a secret which has sustained me these many years in my wheelchair. The secret is revealed in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

God promises that every temptation—every fearful trial or test that comes my way—also comes with a “way out” so I can endure it. Exactly what is that “way out?” It’s the promises of God. I access God’s power against fear as I make each promise of God my own.

I remember the time I was in a vacation house with my caregiver. During the night, she stayed down the hall with a baby monitor between our rooms. That way, if I awakened in pain, I could call her to help me reposition in bed.

At 1:00 a.m., I was jolted awake by excruciating pain. I called through the monitor for my friend. When she didn’t respond, I called again. Then, a little louder. Still, no answer.

I drew a deep breath and screamed, “Help! Help me!” The house was silent. Fear started turning into panic, but then I remembered Joshua 1:9, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” I prayed, *“Jesus, you tell me to be courageous for you promise to be with*



Ken and I thrive on the promises of God! We could easily say with the psalmist, “Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them” (Psalm 119:140). And we do!

me. I need you to make good on your promise right now!”

I started screaming the words of every Bible promise I could think of, hoping my helper would hear me: *“LORD... YOU ARE MY... EVER PRESENT HELP... IN THIS TROUBLE!... YOUR GRACE... IS SUFFICIENT!... YOUR NAME IS... A STRONG TOWER!”*

As I cried out the words of every promise, I could feel my fear begin to vanish. Finally, I heard a click on the monitor. My helper came running into the room, anxious and breathless. As she quickly turned me, I felt calm and peaceful. God gave me what he promised in Joshua 1:9... his courage.

God gives us his promises so that we might bring each one to him in exchange for the blessings they guarantee. So, the next time you sense fear on the rise, anchor yourself to a Bible promise and hear the voice of your Savior, saying, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Sparks of Hope

Non-verbal and living with limited motor coordination, balance, and muscle strength caused by cerebral palsy and microcephaly, Nicolly—like her family—has adapted to life with disability in extraordinary ways.

Despite doctors saying that Nicolly may not be able to move because of her disabilities, her mother, Alessandra, has helped her not only adjust to life—but embrace it. Still, Nicolly relies on her mom for everything: eating, bathing, and moving from place to place. To keep up with her younger sister, Nicolly has pulled on socks and knee pads to crawl around the house. “I just let her go,” says Alessandra. “And she got stronger.”

Nicolly’s challenges have not hampered her joy or magnetic personality, but they have limited her opportunities. Her future looked uncertain and bleak, especially since her devoted mom couldn’t afford the wheelchair Nicolly so desperately needed. Years ago, Nicolly’s father and older brother left for the United States so her brother could pursue a better education. Alessandra stayed behind with the girls, caring for them alone.

Deep, pressing need propelled Nicolly, her mother, and her sister on their long journey to our *Wheels for the World*™ outreach, held in a different state in Brazil. The trip took a toll, but they all sensed something new and fresh—a spark of hope transcending their fatigue and weariness of soul.

At our *Wheels for the World* outreach, they were struck by the touch of Gospel-love felt everywhere. Especially with their God-given gift of a wheelchair. Sitting up straight and comfortable, Nicolly lit up as she gazed at a tray built just for her. While in one sense it is a simple piece of equipment, Nicolly’s tray supports a whole new feast of possibilities, from tasty snacks and coloring projects to her new Bible. And after an in-depth assessment, our physical therapist delivered stunning news: with consistency in stretches, exercises, and therapy, Nicolly has potential not only to grow stronger, but even to walk independently one day. Praise the Lord!

Nicolly also received loving care from a visiting speech-language pathologist who offered simple but life-changing advice: begin using a communication board at home. With simple cut-out pictures, which can rest on her wheelchair tray, Nicolly can start expressing her wants and needs more clearly, giving her a voice like never before.

Our physical therapists and wheelchair mechanics fit Nicolly with a truly customized wheelchair while Alessandra watched in amazement. “We imagined we would just go home with any chair,” she said through tears. “We had no idea how much love and care would go into making this chair just for Nicolly.” That level of painstaking care was evidence of Christ’s love, as Alessandra would come to learn.



Nicolly’s family sat with our evangelism team—praying together and talking about God’s faithfulness. They were given Bibles, Gospel bracelets, and a copy of Joni’s story... plus an open invitation to become part of *Joni’s House Brazil*!

“Now to him who is able to do
immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...”

EPHESIANS 3:20

"God Bless

All Who Support *Joni's House*!"



Dania brings Axel to *Joni's House*—week after week, year after year—trusting God with every next step.



“Axel doesn’t move his hands much,” Dania told the doctor, cradling her baby boy in her arms. She couldn’t imagine the suffering ahead... At four years old, Axel received a diagnosis of cerebral palsy but continued to thrive. At age five, a massive seizure marked the beginning of a heartbreaking new reality. “After the seizure, Axel was in a vegetative state,” says Dania. “He lost control of his body. He couldn’t even sit up.”

Though he emerged from his vegetative state, nothing was the same after Axel’s catastrophic seizure. He spiraled into a regression crisis, which led to a new diagnosis:

leukodystrophy, a rare and degenerative brain disorder.

“That was a very painful stage for me,” says Dania. “Axel lost the ability to walk, talk, and remember what he had learned. The doctor explained that his condition was progressive—and terminal.”

In time Dania discovered *Joni's House Nicaragua*. A therapist assessed Axel’s needs and provided him with a walker and other devices. Over the years, *Joni's House* became a lifeline, supporting Axel through multiple setbacks. With every crisis came a new wave of physical and emotional challenges.

In 2022, Axel experienced another major seizure. His emotional state deteriorated. He often dissolved into tears, rejected affection, and struggled to express his turbulent feelings. That’s when *Joni's House* offered Christ-centered psychological therapy for Axel in addition to his physical therapy and other care routines.

“Axel was angry with God because he prayed to walk—and it didn’t happen,” says Dania. He wrestled to accept God’s love when his prayers weren’t granted as he hoped, but Axel found new hope and deeper healing in Jesus through the help of *Joni's House*.

“Axel told me he had accepted Christ in his heart,” Dania says. “The psychologist helped him pray, ask God for forgiveness, and ask God to heal his heart.”

Once angry and withdrawn, Axel began to speak softly, pray at night, and even talk about his father—whom he had long resented. “He hated his father and felt abandoned by him. But after he did the prayer of faith, he started asking to spend time with his father... and now he enjoys being with him,” says Dania.

“I have seen a lot of progress,” Dania continues. “I cannot afford to pay for a care center for my son, so this help is invaluable. From the bottom of my heart, *thank you very much!*”



Today, thirteen-year-old Axel shows signs of deep joy, even as his condition progresses. Receiving consistent therapy and loving encouragement through *Joni's House*, Axel’s speech is improving along with his emotional state. *Your ministry partnership makes this all possible!*

“He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.”

PSALM 147:3

NEW IN SEARCH OF THE *King* Christmas Cards

Joni's Bethlehem Urn Artwork Will Bless your Loved Ones this Christmas!

"I don't design or create pottery, but if I did, I would like very much to take a pile of clay and make this urn. I call it the *Bethlehem Urn* and when you consider its shape, it's an interesting juxtaposition of cultures. It has the appearance of a Greek urn, but it is covered with Christian and Jewish symbols. I painted this using wet watercolor on dry paper.

At the bottom of the urn, I painted an ichthus—the fish that is a symbol of Christ. Moving upward, there's the city of Bethlehem with its familiar domed buildings and towers. Then we see the three Wise Men on their camels—the first two appear as though they are moving single file around the vase. We only see the head of the last camel, but the other two give us all the clues we need. We know that the third Wise Man is going to end up at the stable, like his friends.

Now, let me say something about the Star of Bethlehem. Do you see it up there in the sky? If not, stop looking hard and just draw back a bit. Because what you are seeing as 'shine' on the vase is really the star! And its tail goes right through the manger! It's one of those fun secrets I wanted you to discover—to see if your eye could

switch from shine to star, and then back from star to shine.

And finally? At the top is the symbol of the Lion of the tribe of Judah: Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem. Jesus, whose star was seen by the Magi in the east—this same Jesus came through the lineage of the Hebrew tribe of Judah. Like Jacob said to his sons in Genesis 49:10, 'The scepter will not depart from Judah... until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.'

This urn—and the Christmas cards we made from it—celebrate exactly that! So, please accept my free gift to you, and send the enclosed *In Search of the King* Christmas card to someone you love. Someone who needs an encounter with the King of all kings this Christmas!"

— Joni



Interior Detail



"When they saw the star,
they were overjoyed."

MATTHEW 2:10

Joni's Christmas cards are only available
through Joni and Friends.
Quantities are limited, so please order right away!

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

TO ORDER: • Mail order form • Call toll-free: 800.736.4177
• Online: joniandfriends.org/shop • Phone: Text ORDER to 818.707.5664

Family Retreat Gave Us Space to Breathe

From Missouri ▼

For Eric and Melissa—parents of three beautiful children, Sophia (12), Will (9), and Lily (6)—disability has led their family on an uphill path. When Sophia was two years old, doctors diagnosed her with low muscle tone and ataxia. At age 10, Sophia was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder—an explanation for years of behavioral struggles.

With Lily's birth came new uncertainty. "We knew right away, with her beautiful almond-shaped eyes, that she had Down syndrome," says Melissa. Then at age five, Lily was also found to be on the autism spectrum.

Today, Eric and Melissa are on a waitlist to have Will tested for autism, as well. "It's a flood of emotions," Melissa says. "On one hand there's a sense of relief with the autism diagnoses, like 'I'm not crazy' for thinking these behaviors are not typical. On the other hand, it brings to a head the mourning over your child having these extra challenges. With the autism diagnoses, it was a more gradual realization, but with Lily's diagnosis of Down syndrome, it really hit like a ton of bricks."

Melissa continues, "It instantly shattered the preconceived dreams we had for our daughter. Some of this was selfishness in not wanting the pressures and sacrifices it would put on our family. And some of it was knowing her life would have extra challenges and not wanting that for her."

Life with multiple disabilities affects every part of Eric and Melissa's family. "It increases our mental and emotional load in ways that are hard to explain. It can be overwhelming, trying to learn strategies for each child's different needs. And it's isolating. You feel like you're constantly apologizing for your child's behaviors or explaining their needs."

At *Family Retreat*, there was no need to apologize. "I was at a loss for words," says Eric. "Why would people give up their time and money to serve families like ours? It was humbling. It was life-giving. It reminded us that God hasn't forgotten us. He continues to love us—and he's showing that love through his people. At *Family Retreat* we are reminded that God is near. He doesn't waste anything—even the hardest things and the ugliest scars we carry."



"We don't know where we'd be without *Family Retreat*. Those five days really help us make it through the other 360 and continually lean on Christ in the midst of our struggles."

From Minnesota ▼

All throughout *Family Retreat*, when people saw Elizabeth, they didn't see Down syndrome. They saw Elizabeth's energy and joy shining brightly. Her parents, Tom and Ann-Marie, found themselves deeply moved—not only by how carefully Elizabeth's buddies had prepared to serve their family throughout the week, but by how much the entire team clearly cared for every member of their family.

"You could truly see and feel the love of Jesus at work in the staff, volunteers, and families at *Family Retreat*," says Ann-Marie. And Elizabeth especially loved learning about and *telling people about Jesus!*

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

JOHN 3:16

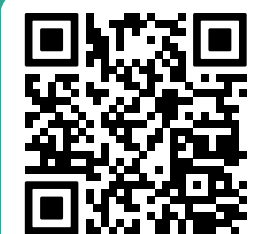


"*Family Retreat* authenticates everything we believe here at Joni and Friends, and everything the Bible says about how much God cares for people dealing with disability. And, like all of our Christ-honoring programs, every *Family Retreat* is bathed in prayer."

JONI EARECKSON TADA

Bless your loved ones & share the love of Jesus!

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



JONI'S NEW CHRISTMAS CARDS ARE HERE!

IN SEARCH OF THE *King*

Celebrate the birth of King Jesus with Joni's stunning new *In Search of the King* Christmas cards featuring her original *Bethlehem Urn* artwork.

With rich symbology and royal tones of blue and gold, this festive card will encourage your friends and loved ones to seek after Jesus, following the way of the Magi.

Card interior reads:

May the light of Christ's coming bring joy to you and your loved ones, this season and all year long!"

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." Matthew 2:10

Product Details:

- Exquisite embossing and gold foil accents
- Each box of stunning Christmas cards contains 15 cards and 16 envelopes

\$14 per box

As Joni's free gift to you, please find a sample Christmas card included in this newsletter package!



May the *light*
of Christ's coming bring
joy to you and your
loved ones, this season
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Interior Detail

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