

SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP



Family Retreat is a
slice of heaven on earth!

from the heart

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

JOHN 15:5

There's nothing like picking berries ripened on the vine. I remember the long, generous days of June as a child. My sisters and I would soak in the sunlight as we filled baskets full of vibrant strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries. Some got baked into pies, others turned into preserves. But the cream of the crop were too luscious to resist... so we'd eat them right there on the spot, with smiling faces and juice dripping down our fingers.

It doesn't take a farmer to recognize a healthy plant in the berry patch. Any child can lead you to the thriving stem with its tantalizing fruit. And the same is true of the grapevine Jesus talks about in John 15—if I am a branch growing from His vine, I want to be heavy with fruit, bursting with life and flavor!

But how, you might ask, does a branch become fruitful? The world gives one answer. You can make it on your own! To succeed, you must strive, strain, and prove yourself. Compete to be the best... outdo your peers in ministry, home life, or physical appearance. Whatever the cost, you must make sure you stand out above the crowd.

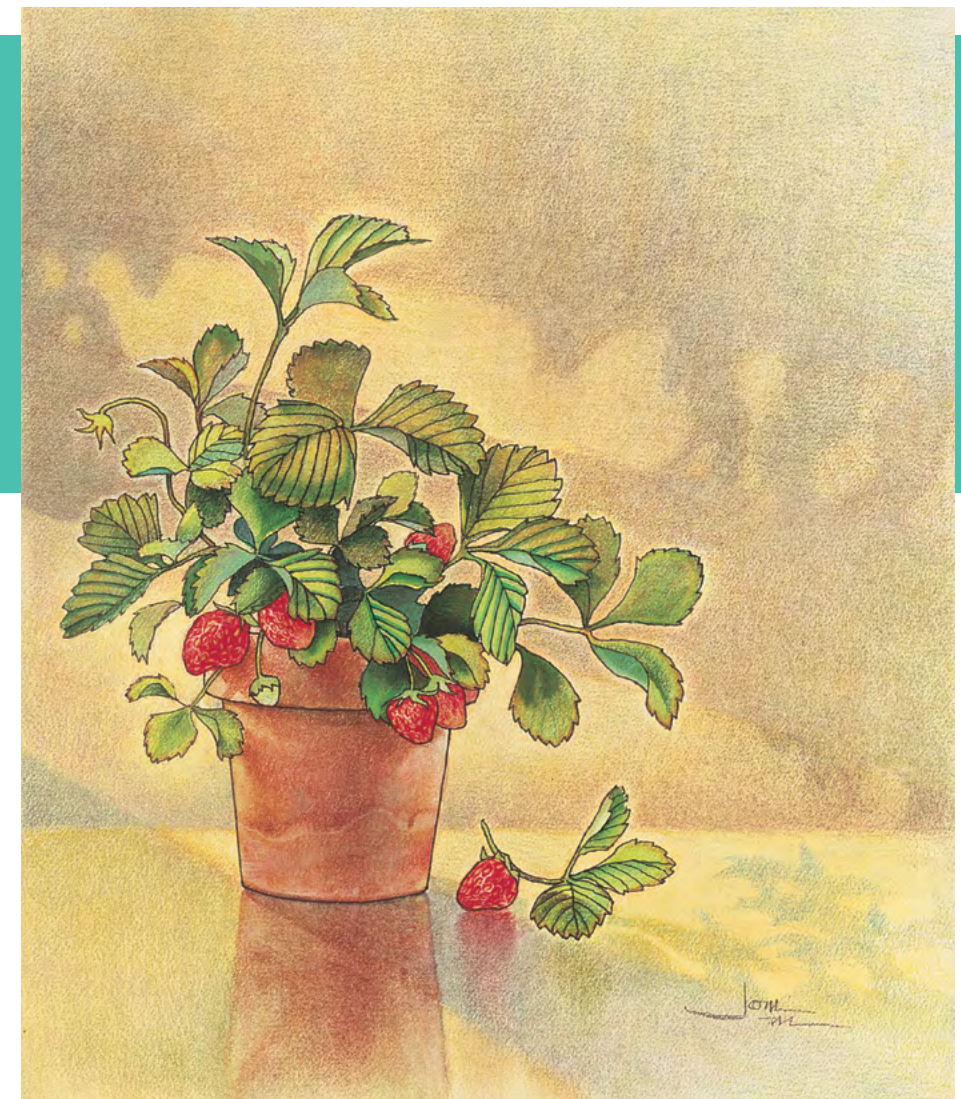
What a recipe for exhaustion—picture a dry branch with curled yellow leaves and not even one pale grape to offer. If you feel like this beleaguered branch today, Jesus the Vinedresser is here to revive your withering heart by offering a different way: Himself!

When Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” He declares that life with God flows through Him alone.

Jesus is not merely pointing to the divine source of life. He *is* the Divine Source. If you feel tired or stretched thin, He is your relief. God's work does not depend on your strength or mine, but on our position *in* Christ. When we abide in Him, His life flows through us, even when progress feels slow.

Think of it this way: fruitfulness is the result of connection, not striving. A branch does not strain to bear fruit. It remains rooted in the vine. Life flows quietly and steadily, and fruit appears over time.

As we make the daily choice to dwell on the promises of God and seek the sweet company of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, a miraculous thing happens...



An *abundance* of fruit overflows, just like Jesus assures in John 15:8. That fruit brings glory to our Father, and spiritual encouragement to people, near and far. In the hands of your great Vinedresser, fruit flows from you, sending joy, hope, and strength in Jesus Christ to people with disabilities around the world who live outside the vineyard. Let's bring them to Jesus! Thank you for abiding in Him and helping Joni and Friends multiply a rich harvest for the kingdom!



Joni Eareckson Tada
Founder, Joni and Friends

Remain in Me...



Even before they met, God planted seeds in Molly and Justin's hearts—a desire to adopt a child with a disability. This deep-rooted calling grew over years and came to fruition in 2014 when they adopted Zeke, a baby boy from China with ongoing needs related to his bilateral cleft palate.

With Zeke thriving, Molly and Justin prayed about adopting another child with special needs from China. And soon, God answered their prayers. As Molly says, "He made it really clear that Isla was who we would be adopting." The adoption process went quickly and in 2017, Isla joined the family as Zeke's beloved little sister.

Soon after Isla came home, Molly and Justin learned that she has a life-threatening genetic condition called Jarcho-Levin syndrome. With fused ribs, lungs half the size they should be, and a compromised airway, doctors estimated that Isla would survive for two years at most.

"We were given zero options for Isla," Molly and Justin recall. "From there we prayed. We just knew there was more for her—and that we'd need to fight for her."

As Molly and Justin cried out for help, God led them to a medical team determined to provide hope for Isla's future. "The doctor we found was the creator of a device and procedure that can help Isla's rib cage grow, giving her room to breathe," says Justin. "And Isla needs this surgery twice a year."

For years, Molly and Justin have poured themselves into their children's complex needs. Every week they balance medical treatments, physical therapy, and occupational therapy, all while providing a sense of safety and normalcy. For Isla, ongoing medical trauma has left scars of PTSD and intense anxiety, which are heightened by a sense of isolation.

and I in You...

"The continued trauma has been really hard," says Molly. "Isla is in pain on a daily basis. Just trying to function and do normal life is difficult." Molly and Justin longed to provide their children with joyful experiences, praying for opportunities to connect as a family outside the structure of their daily routines.

But because of Isla's critical medical needs, as Molly says, "It feels like we're living crisis to crisis." Especially now, when few options remain to support Isla's airway moving forward, getting away to enjoy family time seemed almost impossible.

Facing deep uncertainty about the future, Molly and Justin have asked God to help Zeke and Isla grasp onto Jesus and learn that, in all circumstances, strength and joy come from Him. And Friend, you provided answers to their prayers, both for meaningful family time and for a powerful experience of Christ's love, through Joni and Friends Family Retreat...

When Molly and Justin learned about *Family Retreat* from another special needs family, they [continued on next page](#)

Isla shined the light of Christ during her performance at our Family Retreat Talent Show.



spotted a glimmer of hope—for rest, connection, and a breath of fresh air for their family. In faith, they brought their excitement, exhaustion, anxiety, and fragility before the Lord, pulling up at their first *Family Retreat* in Oregon.

Tears flood Molly's eyes as she recalls the warmth and love that welcomed them into the Joni and Friends community. "Even though Isla's anxiety comes with her wherever she goes," says Molly, "she was so excited as we came in. It is something we have been praying for."

Meeting Zeke and Isla's buddies at *Family Retreat*, Molly and Justin saw God's detailed care for their children's needs. Zeke connected with his buddy immediately, eagerly jumping out of the car to play. And Isla got two buddies, both of whom are nurses well equipped to keep her safe while enjoying new experiences, from horseback riding to singing in the talent show.

"What felt so detailed and impossible to us, God made possible beyond our expectations," says Molly. "And it gave us so much peace, which helped us to relax because we felt safe and secure."

While Zeke had a blast swimming, playing games, and catching minnows with new friends, and Isla's anxiety faded into joy, Molly and Justin got the rare opportunity to rest. For the first time, they felt understood, loved, and accepted for who they are and what their family is navigating.

"It has been a hard road lately," Justin says. "We've been saying we need a little bit of heaven. And this has been a little bit of heaven. I wish I could bottle it up."

"I think I've cried 500 times this week, tears of joy and thankfulness," Molly reflected. "We won't stop giving thanks for all those who make *Family Retreat* possible. We got the respite and rest that we needed so badly. It gives us renewed courage as we step into some really difficult days ahead."

Friend, Molly and Justin are giving thanks for you! Because of your generosity, this precious family has seen God bountifully answer their prayers. And now, abiding in His presence, they can face the challenges ahead knowing that Jesus will provide in every season. Thank you!



"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

JOHN 15:7

Your Faithfulness...

Deployed in Iraq in 2004, Andy narrowly escaped death when his vehicle was hit by enemy fire. After pulling himself through the turret of his tank, Andy recalls taking stock of his body—and the missing portion of his right leg, lost in the explosion. Returning home to recover, Andy couldn't imagine how God would use his amputation to write a beautiful new chapter in his life.

In 2016, Andy's friends introduced him to Julia, a woman missing her left leg since birth. Having struggled with years of unprocessed trauma, drowning out his pain with substances and distractions, Andy got a sense from God that Julia had been sent to invite him into a new way of life.

When Andy and Julia got married and had three children, Jana, Hudson, and Henry, their family dealt with the unique difficulties of two parents missing a leg caring for three children who love to run and play. And beyond the physical challenges they faced, Andy and Julia acknowledged that they needed to find deep healing from the trauma and grief woven through their story.

Julia first heard about *Warrior Getaway* through a Joni and Friends *Grief Share* program. And when they arrived at *Warrior Getaway*, Julia's family found not only the healing they sought, but joy—and even a reunion with a fellow Veteran who served alongside Andy in Iraq.



For Julia, *Warrior Getaway* offered just the encouragement she was craving. As she says, "Andy and I are building our relationship and *Warrior Getaway* gave us the tools we need, provided counselors, and gave us a chance to connect with other couples and families going through similar struggles."

For Andy, seeing his whole family welcomed and embraced brought relief and refreshment. "The people here are amazing," says Andy. "They make everybody feel welcome. They're here for you—for your whole family."

Glorifies God!

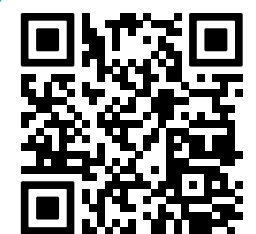


Warrior Getaway also created a safe place for Andy and Julia to talk about difficult subjects, praying for healing that will flow into their children's lives. "We want to do our best not to bring our past traumas to our kids," Andy says. "And by the grace of God, we're getting to do this at the right time to give our kids the best."

Friend, God's grace flowing through you is providing healing, hope, and faith to Andy and Julia's family and other U.S. Veterans who need to experience God's presence in a powerful way. Thank you for connecting these families to the Vine of Jesus through your prayers and ministry partnership!

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!



Your Love...

From Illinois ▼

"It felt as though we had been punched in the stomach. We had no clue how to navigate through a special needs diagnosis." This is how Ken and Yvonne recall the moment when doctors diagnosed their four-year-old son, Ryan, with autism, and later bipolar disorder. And for decades, Ryan's disabilities left his family struggling.

Ryan's inconsistent moods and what his parents describe as debilitating behaviors made it difficult for his family to find places of belonging, until another special needs family invited them to *Family Retreat*...

From the moment Ryan's family arrived at *Family Retreat*, as Yvonne says, "We felt surrounded by God's loving presence." She and Ken will never forget how Ryan beamed with joy as he experienced what it's like to be accepted, celebrated, and understood like never before.

While the time spent at *Family Retreat* bore fruit for Ryan's family, including refreshment, joy, and freedom, the friendships established within the Joni and Friends community have blossomed long after the week ended. The experience also gave Yvonne and Ken new clarity and joy in their calling as special needs parents, thanking Ryan for being who he is, wonderfully made in the image of Christ. "Being special needs parents has taught us to truly savor the small victories as blessings from God," says Yvonne.

Thank you for connecting Ryan's family to the Vine... Jesus! Because of you, they know they are sustained by His love, which never fails.



Bears Fruit!

From Ohio ▼

"She talks to her Jesus like He is sitting beside her." That's how Teresa describes listening to her daughter, Katelyn, pray.

Katelyn, the oldest of Ryan and Teresa's three children, was born with a genetic disorder called Williams syndrome. The diagnosis thirty years ago, as Teresa recalls, rocked her family's world, sending them on a journey of countless doctor visits, medical complications, and dying dreams for what Katelyn's future would hold.

Even now, with Katelyn in adulthood, every day carries challenges for her family: exhaustion from caregiving demands, flares of Katelyn's anxiety and digestive issues, and a scarcity of true community. This is why *Family Retreat* is exactly the place of welcome needed to refresh Katelyn's family.

As Teresa says, "*Family Retreat* is a place for Katelyn to be herself! It is the highlight of her year." And as Katelyn puts it, "*Family Retreat* is where I feel normal..." But what Katelyn's family appreciates most is how Joni and Friends encourages her walk with Jesus and invites her into experiences of joy—from dance parties to Bible studies.

And now, Teresa has a message of gratitude for you: "We are so grateful for how you have impacted our lives! The friendships we have made and the spiritual refreshment we receive are so important! We want others to experience this for themselves and know there is a ministry that will walk with them through the journey of disability."



KEEPING FAITH WHEN LIFE HURTS

100 DEVOTIONS FOR HARD DAYS

Joni is thrilled to share her new devotional, which answers the tough questions people have about the goodness of God when they suffer hard.

Each of the 100 reflections included in *Keeping Faith When Life Hurts* has been honed and hard-won through deep pain, weariness, and the question “why?”

As Joni says, “These hand-picked devotionals have been crafted to introduce my work to a new generation of readers, hungry for hope. So, thank you for placing this special book in the hands of people you know who are hurting.”

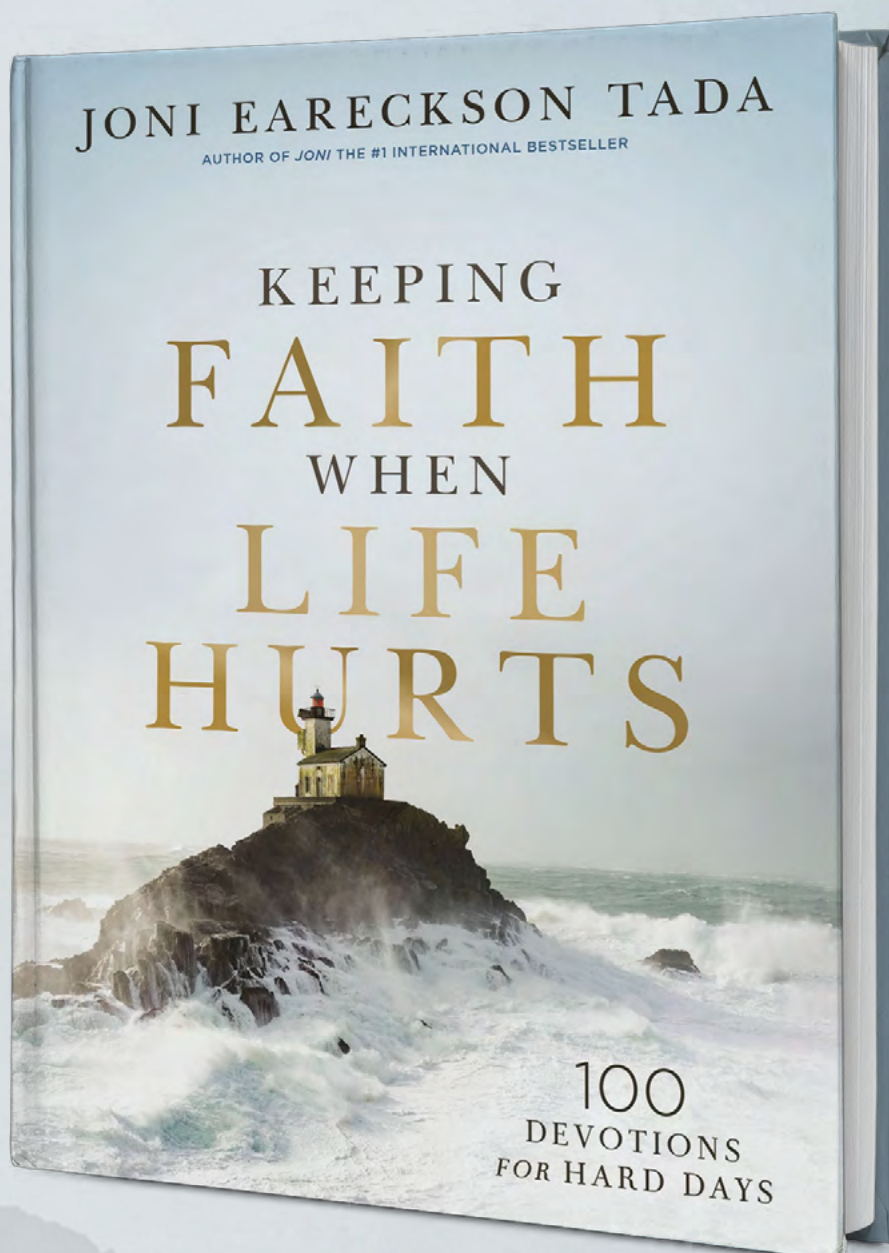
**Get Joni's new devotional...
and give one to a friend!**

Product Details:

224 pages

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

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