SHARING *Hope* THROUGH HARDSHIP

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

This October 15th, I turn 77 years old... wow! If I can get fresh jumbo lump crab meat shipped from Crisfield, Maryland, Ken and I will make a festive birthday dinner following my mother's recipe for crab cakes, served with corn, sliced tomatoes, and applesauce. Over our delicious meal, my husband and I will savor one another's company and reflect on God's love that has carried us through so many hardships to this miraculous milestone.

When I first broke my neck at age 17, doctors didn't expect me to live beyond a few decades, let alone work and thrive into old age! And I give Jesus all the credit for sustaining my body and my spirit all these many years, making my life a happy picture of Psalm 92:14, "They shall bear fruit in old age."

How exactly has Jesus carried me through nearly six decades of quadriplegia, two bouts with cancer, and chronic pain that has grown more difficult with age? The answer comes straight from the words of our Lord in John 15:5: "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."

You and I have the incredible privilege of being branches growing from the Vine, Jesus Christ. No matter how painful life becomes or how dire our circumstances, we can live abundant lives overflowing with Spirit-blessed fruit, telling everyone, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8)

As I remain in Jesus, He keeps me vital in all seasons, always growing, bearing fruit for the nourishment of others. And I am amazed that the more I grasp what it means to be united with Christ (John 15:4–5), the more I see sin in my life. Yet I can also rejoice in the mercy of salvation because there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ (Romans 8:1). Every time I look deeper into what happened on the cross, the greater and more merciful God becomes in my eyes. It's like a glorious spiral upward, enjoying more and more of what it means to be "in Christ" or "united with Christ."

This glorious upward journey of union with Jesus is what keeps my heart happy, even on the most painful days. It's why, when I sit up in my wheelchair in the morning, I am eager to get to work, as if it were my first day. I can't wait to wheel through the front doors of our Joni and Friends headquarters and "put my hand to the plow in God's vineyard."

There are millions of people with disabilities around the world who are drowning in hopelessness, and I want to do everything I can to reach them with the Good News of Jesus. I'm also looking forward to strengthening our partnerships with Christian disability ministries in Mozambique and Madagascar, Ghana and Guatemala, and so many more new countries! And I am thanking God for your partnership in this Christ-honoring ministry!

Thank you for being here to celebrate with me. Ken and I praise the Lord for your love, friendship, and dedication to reaching disabled people with the life-changing, soul-saving Gospel message. And, as I look ahead at my 77th year, I keep repeating, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy name!" Oh, friends, please join me in doing just that; simply go before God with lifted hands and bless Him for keeping your friend—this happy, aging quadriplegic—fit for service in His kingdom.

Joni Eareckson Tada
Founder, Joni and Friends

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” Psalm 34:8

Grace and her four children, including Sheila, who was born with severe spastic cerebral palsy, used to live under the threat of eviction from their single room home. When Sheila’s father abandoned the family in 2020, claiming shame and embarrassment over Sheila’s disability as his reason for leaving, Grace didn’t know where to turn.

While struggling to provide for her family by selling charcoal, Grace prayed for help to sustain her children and meet Sheila’s urgent physical needs. And our Lord answered her prayers through *Joni’s House® Uganda*. When Grace first brought Sheila to *Joni’s House* in 2025, they encountered the unmistakable love of Jesus through our staff. After a careful assessment, Sheila was enrolled in physical therapy, aiming to preserve her body’s existing functionality and enhance her overall quality of life.

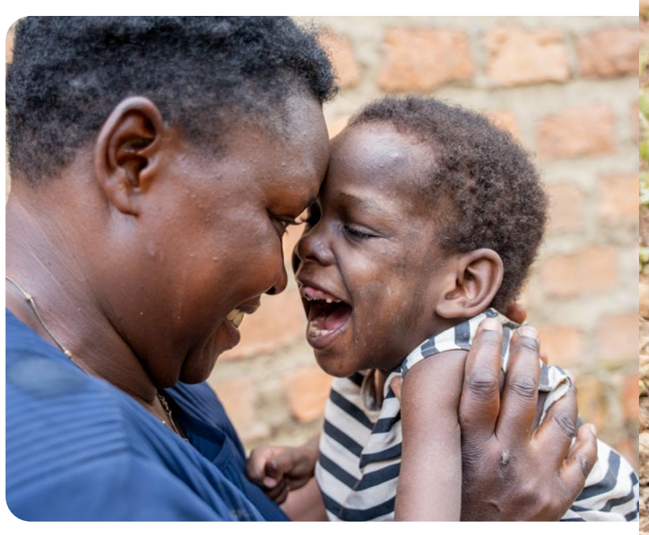
To build Sheila's strength, we offer her nutritional support, which has given her greater energy and capability to engage in her physical therapy sessions. Our team has also empowered Grace with tools and education as a caregiver and training on proper body positioning and transfer techniques, which protect Sheila’s fragile body and her own.

After months of consistent physical therapy and improved nourishment, Grace has been amazed at Sheila’s progress. Grace has also found deep encouragement, tasting the Lord’s goodness through the loving care of our *Joni’s House* team who consistently points to Jesus as the Provider, Healer, and Redeemer who never fails!

But even as Sheila progressed in her therapy sessions, Grace dealt with ongoing uncertainty about how to keep a roof over her children’s heads. When our *Joni’s House* staff learned about their unstable housing situation, your support made it possible to provide a solution beyond what Grace had imagined possible: a newly built three-room house they can call their own!

Because of your love and generous support, Grace and her children now have a secure home. Sheila continues to progress and gain strength, and, best of all, the family has found a place of belonging in their local body of Christ. A church near their house gladly welcomes Grace, Sheila, and Sheila’s siblings, rallying around them with prayer and support.

Thank you for sending the love of Jesus to Grace, Sheila, and their whole family. Because of you, they have tasted and discovered that the Lord is good indeed. And together, we can lead other struggling families to the Lord, inviting them to be blessed as they take refuge in Him!



Highlights of Grace

A Birthday Q&A with Joni

Anyone who has met Joni Eareckson Tada can tell you that she radiates the joy of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit happiness resonates through her voice on the radio, even as she struggles for breath. The beauty of Scripture shines through her devotionals. And the brightness of Joni's smile testifies to the goodness of God and the surety of hope in Him through every hardship!

Joni depends on Jesus all day every day—from nights of difficult sleep to work days packed with deadlines and meetings… and He never lets her down! So, as she celebrates her 77th birthday this month, Joni is excited to share highlights of God's grace in her life. She prays this special Q&A will encourage you to savor God's goodness and depend on Him in every season.

Q: Joni, what is the best birthday gift you've ever received?

A: When I turned three years old, my Daddy gave me my own saddle, hand-tooled in Cuba. What a gift! It looked just like the saddles my older sisters used, but this little one fit me perfectly. I could even reach the stirrups! I barely remember the birthday itself, but I'll never forget that beautiful saddle.

Joni's parents, John and Lindy Eareckson

Q: If you could go back 60 years and talk to teenage Joni at your 17th birthday party, what advice would you give yourself?

A: When I was a teenager and a new believer, I thought I had done Jesus a big favor by accepting Him as my Savior. I tucked God in the back of my jeans pocket and only thought about Him when I needed something. Then I broke my neck. With a jolt, I learned that God no longer fit into my back pocket.

So, I would tell my 17-year-old self, "Joni, God is not your bellboy, and prayer is not a vending machine where you pull the lever to get what you want. Stop thinking about yourself so much and start realizing you would be nothing without Jesus Christ. Stop running with the wrong crowd. Get with friends that care about what the Bible says. Just start taking your faith in Christ seriously!"

Unbounded Enthusiasm

Girls' Lacrosse Gains Popularity In County Schoo

JONI EARECKSON
Top scorer for Woodlawn's distaff lacrosse team

Q: Can you share a favorite birthday memory from childhood?

A: I recall a birthday when I was somewhere in my pre-teens. The cake was set before me with candles aflame, and before I made my wish, I glanced around the table at my parents and sisters, all of them smiling and waiting. I felt the joy of being in a family that loved one another, and that was my wish. I blew out the candles, wishing that it would always be that way. And through the years, even with disappointment, death, my accident and more… I have received my wish.

Joni and her sisters, then and now.

Tasting God's *Goodness...*

Q: When you go to work at the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, you are known for singing your way up the ramp in the building. What hymn have you been singing up the ramp lately?

A: I've been singing an old favorite by Fanny Crosby, "All the Way My Savior Leads Me." My friend Francie and I memorized the stanzas when we traveled to China to deliver wheelchairs and visit rehab centers in Beijing. We sang it everywhere we went (as a witness to the government official who was always with us).

All the way my Savior leads me,
Cheers each winding path I tread;
Gives me grace for ev'ry trial,
Feeds me with the living Bread.
Tho' my weary steps may falter,
And my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the Rock before me,
Lo! A spring of joy I see.

Q: What's on your wish list for those who would like to give you a birthday gift?

A: Years ago, when Ken and I realized we could not have children, we decided to "adopt" the children of the world, especially those with disabilities. I can't think of a better birthday gift than to give the Gospel, the Bible, and a pediatric wheelchair to a disabled boy or girl somewhere who needs a life-changing encounter with Jesus... So, if friends wish to give me a birthday gift, they would thrill my heart if they donated to Joni and Friends.

Sharing His *Love*

Q: How are you feeling as you go into the year ahead?

A: I am ever so happy in Jesus as I celebrate my 77th birthday! Never could I have imagined the glorious kingdom work God was setting before me when I broke my neck at age 17. Just when I thought my life was over, my Savior was putting my feet—really my wheels—on a path to share the Gospel with millions of people struggling with disability... What an amazing God we serve!

A *thank-you* note from *Joni*

Oh, Friend, I want to send you a big, "Thank you!" from the bottom of my heart for staying true to Jesus by praying and providing for people struggling with disability around the world. Your faithfulness to love and serve disabled people in the name of Jesus brings glory to Him and deep joy to my heart!

And to those of you who sent me a handwritten birthday note, thank you once again! Your words of encouragement are a powerful blessing to me and my dear husband Ken.

It's not too late to be part of my birthday celebration! You can send a note or give a gift that will delight the Lord's heart and mine at ***joniandfriends.org/birthday*****! And may God bless you for your kindness!**

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!

You are bringing families into God's House!

From Mississippi

Ethan, an adult living with autism, summed up his first *Family Retreat* experience in four words: "These are my people." It's a statement that captures the longing many people living with disability experience: to find a place where they are welcomed, encouraged, and understood.

When asked what he enjoys most about *Family Retreat*, Ethan mentions the friendships, worship, Bible study, and the annual talent show. "I enjoy using my talents," Ethan says. "And it is fun to see other people perform, too." Yet the activities are not what make *Family Retreat* so meaningful to him. The real impact comes from the people. "Everyone is so uplifting and supportive of my needs," Ethan says.

What stands out most to Ethan's father, Andrew, is the way Joni and Friends ministers to the entire family. *Family Retreat* creates space for every family member to be cared for. Individuals with disabilities are paired with dedicated volunteers who demonstrate the love of Jesus. Parents and caregivers receive opportunities for rest, encouragement, and spiritual refreshment. And siblings build friendships with peers who understand their experiences.

As Ethan has discovered, many friendships formed at *Family Retreat* continue long after families return home, through visits, text messages, and phone calls. This ongoing community inspired Ethan to give back, supporting Joni and Friends through a financial gift!

Like Ethan, thank you for stepping out in faith and generosity to support Joni and Friends. You make it possible for individuals and families living with disability to discover their place of true belonging in the body of Christ!

From the Northwest

For Marri and Trever, every day requires patience, planning, and perseverance as they care for their three children who each face unique challenges. Tanner (16) lives with autism. Tracy (13) has significant physical disabilities. And Hayden (11) joined the family through a kinship placement, an intervention preferable to foster-care placement. After years spent caring for his own mother, Hayden is learning what it means to simply be a child.

Together, this precious family balances therapies, counseling appointments, school, youth group, behavioral supports, and the ever-present unpredictability that comes with disability. And, as Marri says, "There are no caregivers. Everything falls on our family."

Despite the complexity of their home life this family has faced even greater difficulty at church. At their previous church, Tracy was repeatedly excluded from youth activities because accommodations were viewed as too difficult. Tanner's autism was often misunderstood. And while people frequently offered help, meaningful support rarely followed. **"The gap between what people said and what they actually did was heartbreaking," Marri recalls.**

During her family's season of struggle at church, Marri learned about Joni and Friends. And when her family came to *Family Retreat*, for the first time, they were surrounded by people who understood disability, welcomed them without hesitation, and offered practical support with joy. They didn't have to explain themselves or fight for accommodations. They could simply be a family.

This experience reshaped their idea of what church community could be. And soon after, they found a welcoming church home. "It felt like the spirit of *Family Retreat* had followed us home," Marri says.

Because of faithful friends like you, families like Marri's discover more than just respite at *Family Retreat*. They find encouragement, community, hope, and a pathway to full belonging in the body of Christ! Praise God!

Advent Scripture Cards

Prepare your heart for the birth of our Savior Jesus with these elegant Advent cards featuring 25 pieces of artwork by Joni Eareckson Tada on one side and hand-selected Scriptures on the other. They are perfect to display in your home, tuck into a card, or deliver to a friend to share the true meaning of Christmas!

$14.99

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

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