

11/22/21 from 5/27/21
Week 22: Spring Mission Feeding
James and Betty Robison
Joni Eareckson Tada

JAMES: Well, welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm so excited. Betty and I are just thrilled to get to share this time with you. We have got one of our favorite people, Joni Eareckson Tada is with us. You may not know this, all of you viewers, but one of the first interviews she did right back somewhere right around the year '70, 1970, we talked to her because Billy Graham and the Walter Bennett Agency wanted me to talk to her. We've been praying for each other, been praying basically ever since. Joni, we're so happy to get to talk to you. How are you right now?

JONI: Well, I'm doing well; and I can't believe that all these decades have passed since I first was on *LIFE Today*. So thank you for having me on and a special greeting to all our viewers.

JAMES: We must have just been kids the first time we talked. But right now, I've told our audience and they know this, Betty and I both are 77. She says because I'm 77 one month before her, "Don't tell everybody that I'll be there in a little while." Okay. So you've been around. You want to tell people how long you've been around?

JONI: Well, I'll be 72 this year and honestly, here I am a quadriplegic of, this year it will be 55 years in this wheelchair, and I battled two bouts with Stage 3 cancer, and my lungs are fragile. I went through COVID earlier this year; so what can I say? It is a miracle that I'm sitting up and moving forward into life and very grateful to God.

JAMES: Joni, from the moment you started sharing your testimony the same glow and glory of God is on you just as it was then. It has never faded. I want to talk to people about the book. I really pray that for everyone who has ever felt a challenge. Now think about this, a paraplegic, neck down, basically very young when this happened, boy has she been a shining light.

Now here is the book she's released, and it is probably most appropriate in the time of this pandemic right now. Here's what it is: *Finding God in Hidden Places* like you would think with a broken neck and paraplegic, how are you going to find God in that kind of hidden place?

"His presence in the pieces of our lives." Joni, I just want you to just take off and tell us about your journey, about the battle, what you want us to hear. But I want you to tell us why you wrote this book now and what you hope but also believe this book can do for all who will read it.

JONI: Well, thanks for asking. Sometimes we find God in the places where we would least expect him to show up. I'm thinking right now of what, Stage 3 cancer, I mentioned that a moment ago. I'll never forget one day after chemotherapy I was weak, I was tired, I had gone through surgery, mastectomy. I was on my sixth round of chemotherapy and my husband was driving me home in the van down the freeway. I'm tied down in the back of the van in my wheelchair and we're having this conversation through the rearview mirror as my husband is driving. We're talking about how suffering is like little splash overs of hell because I was so weak, I was feeling so nauseous. I'm a quadriplegic, I deal with chronic pain; how much more can I take? So we start speaking of how suffering is like splash overs of hell waking us up out of our spiritual slumber and getting us seriously thinking about the hell from which Christ has rescued us.

And so then as we pull up in the driveway, we started talking about what are splash overs of heaven? Are they those easy breezy break days when there are no problems, when all the bills are paid, there is no pain, the sun is shining, the birds are singing, all is looking bright? And when Ken turned off the engine and we sat there thinking, I said to him, "No, that's not a splash over of heaven. A splash over of heaven is finding Jesus Christ in your splash over of hell. It's when we find Christ in the midst of the most hellish circumstances, that's when we experience heaven's joy and His grace and the peace and the profound power of being able to smile not in spite of adversity but because of it. Because in some strange way you've been drawn closer to Christ than you would have ever dreamed possible."

So that's what this little book is all about. Finding God in those splash overs of hell, those awful places where we think we're most alone and most separated from him when in fact, we are pressed up against his breast in a more intimate way than we ever would have dreamed possible. And we have the assurance that Jesus is never going to give us a cross so heavy, so big that it will outweigh the grace that always--always accompanies it.

I can tell you this, 55 years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic, without use of my hands and my legs and two bouts of cancer, chronic pain, having just come through COVID, God never gives us a cross so heavy, so great, so big that it outweighs the grace that always accompanies it. And this little book speaks about that. It really does.

JAMES: I was really touched a moment ago when you said that we press in against his breast, his chest, his heart. I wanted to say, if you don't, just know that he wants to pull you up to his heart because you are on his heart and he loves you so much. And he wants you to feel the comfort that only he can give in these valleys of the shadow of whatever pain or death that comes in your family. He really wants to give you the peace that does pass understanding beyond all explanation.

And so I just tell you that you have shown us how to find God in those very, very challenging places. I think that verse in Romans 8:28, all things work together for good, to not everybody, but to those who love God and I think know they're called according to his kingdom purpose. You're here for a purpose. I think that if you'll just understand he does not for a moment say all things are good, all things are without pain or suffering. He doesn't say that. All things period--however painful. They work together for good to those who love him.

And by the way, don't wait for pain and tragedy to come to start trying to grow to love him. Sometimes in tragedy you accuse him. You curse him almost. Stop that! Let's fall in love with the one who loves us with all his heart. I want to ask you this, before you broke your neck, did you love Jesus?

JONI: I liked him. I read about him. I tucked him away in the back pocket of my Levi jeans.

And I approached him as I would, oh, I don't know, going up to a candy machine. You pray, you say all the right things, you pull the right levers. You expect answers to bless you, give you a smile, make your life comfortable. I did not realize that I was living not the abundant Christian life, I was living the great American dream.

I soon found out after I broke my neck that God permits what he hates to always accomplish that which he loves. And truly, that's what my broken neck taught me. God permits what he hates. He takes no pleasure in my broken neck. He takes no pleasure in my cancer or my chronic pain, but he permits things he hates always to accomplish that which he loves, and that is Christ in us the hope of glory. And we only experience Christ in us when we cast ourselves upon him out of desperate need. Jesus, I cannot do this thing called life. I have no resources. I have no strength, I have no ability, but you do, Jesus. I lean on you for your strength, your ability.

And friends, I just don't think we would do that, if God did not give us suffering to push us up against the cross where we always find power. We're told in God's word, "The cross is the power of God." And that's where I found my power as I go to God daily saying, man, I can't do this quadriplegia one day longer. I'm so tired of being paralyzed. Jesus, I can't do it! But I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Those are good words for our friends today, aren't they?

BETTY: It really is, Joni. I've just been so blessed sitting here listening to you. You really have expressed through your experiences, through your love for the Lord the joy that is so unspeakable. In those times when we all feel so hopeless. Everyone has those times. But like you said, he says he will never leave us nor forsake us. And I look back on the times in my walk with him, those times where it's been so difficult, the loss of a daughter, many, many things in our life, and I think, God, at those same times I've never been as close to you as I have as when I'm curled up in your arms, you holding me and letting me weep, and then you bringing joy and peace into my life.

JONI: Well, Betty, you and I resonate because I totally identify with what you are saying. And you know, really quickly, speaking of identification, all of us are always so grateful that God

identified with us. We've got a great high priest who has been tested in every way like we have and he sympathizes with our weaknesses. But Betty, I just bet, when you were at your worst, when you were suffering your greatest, as have I, as have I, it is our chance to identify with him. Isn't it wonderful that we get a chance to identify with Jesus? That we can empathize with his pain, his anguish? A man of sorrows acquainted with grief. We can understand his heartache. That kind of builds a bond between us and the Lord Jesus when we suffer.

And oh, I cannot wait for that glorious day when all the pain and suffering will be behind us and we will see God's blueprint laid out in perfect harmony. We will understand it all and we will say yes! Of course that's what you were doing. Why didn't I see it? But thank you for the grace you gave me to trust. Right, Betty?

BETTY: I agree. Absolutely. It's going to be a joyous occasion.

JONI: Woo-hoo!

JAMES: Joni, let me ask you, how long after your accident that put you in the condition you're in before you found the first, let's say measure of peace and miraculous supernatural work of God? How long after the accident before you experienced that which you're wanting people to experience finding God in hidden places?

JONI: I think it took about three or four years of desperate suicidal despair. I just could not face a life of total paralysis, sitting down for the rest of my life without the use of my hands. I was so discouraged. I thought God had the wrong person. Jesus, I'm the least likely candidate to enjoy life in a wheelchair. I cannot do this.

But it was the Word of God, and I think the prayers of faithful friends that made the biggest difference. And I read in First Peter where I was told that it has been given to me to suffer for his sake. It is a gift. Why is suffering a gift? It is hard, it is painful, it is uncomfortable! We hate it at first. But it is a gift in that it binds us to our Savior as nothing else. So he has left us an example, as it says in First Peter to follow in his steps.

So that's what I started doing. I started getting into the Word of God, memorizing his promises, trusting that he'll never leave me or forsake me. That he was my ever-present help in this trouble. That His grace was more than sufficient. That yes, even this would somehow work together for my good in his glory. I kept recounting, kept recursing, kept saying out loud promise after Bible promise. And honestly, God's word revived me like nothing else and it did a miracle in my life. And I'm so grateful that I've hid God's word like a treasure in my heart.

So in my darkest days, even now in my 70s when I wake up in the morning and I don't think I can take one more day of quadriplegia, I've got a treasure trove of his Bible promises to hang on to.

So I would encourage our friends listening and watching to memorize the Word of God. Memorize his Bible promises because those are going to be the things that will anchor your faith to the Lord like nothing else, right?

JAMES: Does it come to your mind, *Finding God in Hidden Places* a couple, the kinds of hidden places that you have either found and/or watched others finding that you might want to mention that people would perhaps identify with?

JONI: Well, I think COVID is a challenge right now. It's on a lot of people's minds. I had COVID very recently and when I was told I had it, for a quadriplegic with a compromised immune system I thought it was a death sentence and I had to go to bed. You need to understand that when I'm lying flat paralyzed in bed, gravity is my enemy. And so I had to strengthen myself in the Lord by recalling that my disability had already taught me how to carry crosses. Yes, even this most recent cross of COVID.

And so I listened to the voice of God in the night, and I would encourage our friends to do the same in their most anxious midnight hours where God will say to you at 2:00 in the morning, do you believe me? Do you trust me that I will never leave you or forsake you? Do you know that I'm your ever-present help even in this trouble? Do you understand that doubting me only makes

things worse? Do you believe that my grace is sufficient?

And friends, in the dark when I had COVID and I was in such pain I cried out, yes, Lord, I believe but please help my unbelief. And then in the ensuing hours I sensed this, I don't know how to describe it, this wonderfully odd calmness as it seemed the Lord just took hold of me and pulled me to his breast, as you mentioned earlier and gave me that indescribable peace that human understanding can't explain.

So again, COVID, that's something current, that's something we all fear, right? But I don't know if you happen to encounter COVID, I would encourage you to approach it as did I in the middle of the night, start recursing those Bible promises and let the Holy Spirit chase away all anxiety and fear as you anchor yourself to his word. And it will give you that calm assurance that yes, even with this cross there is enough grace to bear it.

JAMES: Well, I want everyone to hear what we know. We lost our daughter, our beautiful baby girl. She died at 40, mother of three teenagers who are just still on fire for God. Beautiful family. She has grandchildren now that she sees from heaven. But I know I just wanted to scream at God. I want to say to everybody, he can handle your questions. He can handle your challenges. He can handle your anger.

But here's what he wants you to know, whatever you want to say to me, whatever you want to think about the moment, I can handle it. Just don't pull away from my love because I want to hold your broken heart. Because if you'll let me I can heal your broken heart and use you to heal the broken hearts of others.

And Joni, that's what you're doing. You have Joni's Homes or Houses, I think. You've tried to take care of people that are struggling. Give us a website. We always tell all of our viewers, if you want to help one of our guests, because we just love everybody. We want to put God's arms around the people that put God's arms around people, and that's what you do. How would they find out about your houses and the homes that you're trying to help the hurting? And I'll just say to all of them, you go online and you pray about helping Joni. How would they find them? And

how would they help you?

JONI: Well, they can go to JoniAndFriends.org. That's J-o-n-i-a-n-d-f-r-i-e-n-d-s, JoniAndFriends.org and you'll learn about Joni's House. During COVID we discovered early on from the World Health Organization that people with disabilities were suffering from starvation. They were totally blocked out of any access to medical care. So we have established Joni's Houses. These are disability centers where we give wheelchairs, do wheelchair repair, we give evangelism, we give bibles, we give the good news of Jesus. We scholarship surgeries. We provide food and dignity kits and medical assistance for people with disabilities who for the most part have been pushed off the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder in many developing nations, as you two well know, since you have a work among many people in developing nations. The needs are so, so great there, especially among those with disabilities.

So I would encourage our friends watching, if you've been inspired by what the three of us have talked about and to pass on that inspiration, pass on that blessing, pass on that encouragement to someone else who is hurting worse than you are. Because there are always people who are hurting worse than you are. Nothing will break your spirits more, nothing will chase away your depression quicker than getting your eyes off your own problems, fix them on Jesus and finding out how you can help somebody else who is hurting worse than you are.

JAMES: Amen! Joni, we've got your address up on the screen and our phone center and our website will have it. I pray you'll go on there and you'll help. We will send all of you today, if you would basically, what we know you're aware, we're trying to feed hungry children and the increase in those who are starving in the third world countries is increased because of the COVID. It's damaged the workers in the area where COVID has hit. But we will send you *Finding God in Hidden Places* just to say thank you. You will look at Joni's website and see if God wants you to have a part in that.

Joni, I can just tell you, *LIFE Outreach* is going to send you a gift in the mail for this wonderful outreach. And just know that, we're going to do it. I hope our viewers will too.

Right now we're going to hear from the mission overseer, the son of the mission overseer that put his arms around the whole continent of Africa, and we worked with him for nearly 30 years before he went to heaven, that's Peter Pretorius' son Isak. Let's listen to him and then let's reach out and put God's arms around so many people who need to be pulled up close to God's heart. Watch closely and prayerfully.

On the mission field:

ISAK: In South Sudan, we're experiencing levels of need that are not just at crisis levels, they're the worst that we've ever experienced. Some of that is being caused by the worst flooding in recorded history to hit that nation. Close to a million people that were permanently displaced, lost absolutely everything. Our programs have been directly impacted. Our malnutrition clinics, 16 of them totally destroyed.

ANNOUNCER: Over the past several years, *LIFE's* missionary partners have established numerous small malnutrition clinics strategically located in the most rural areas of South Sudan. These clinics serve as a last haven of hope for thousands of families who are unable to travel longer distances to a clinic in the city. As the record-breaking floods subside at the destroyed clinics the missionary staff continue to try and help as many malnourished children as possible. But the resulting food crisis is creating an even greater need for these rural malnutrition clinics to be rebuilt.

ISAK: We have to continue to reach out to the communities in South Sudan that have been so desperately impacted. We have to be able to continue the malnutrition response as part of the mission feeding programs. It is the most critical component of our mission feeding programs. Those malnutrition clinics, that malnutrition response is literally the barrier that stands at death's door and saves those children's lives. But we cannot continue those programs without you. That is why I'm asking you today please, dip deep inside your heart and give the very best gift that you can give. You will enable us to rebuild those clinics and to save those lives. We cannot do it without you.

End of video

In the studio:

JAMES: Well, I just thank you for, I thank you for the fact that you're still watching because Betty, anybody watching now has got to have the love of God in their heart enough to say, "I care about my neighbor."

We need a miracle; 16 malnutrition clinics, many of them mobile, and all you can see is scraps of parts of them. Some of them are full buildings. But wherever they've been destroyed, most of them in southern Sudan, but others in other places because of tragedies so we've got right at a \$400,000 need. So I've said God, there are 400 people watching today who could possibly give \$1,000. Please touch their heart and make them joyfully able to give it; cheerful in it. Could you give \$1,000? Is it possible you could give a clinic? You've been so blessed by God, trusted by God and where your heart is, that's where you put your treasure. So what you're overseeing, would you put it in building a clinic, an entire \$24,000 plus? Would you do it?

And then Betty, if everybody watching will just take the simple math, \$30, \$50, \$100 for the next months, we're able to feed three, five or ten children. The fact that it has remained that over these years is a miracle, Betty. And what you prayed, about going back toward 30 years ago, "God please let the line to feed these children be longer than the line to be fed." Okay. Could you give \$100 and feed ten, \$50 and feed five, \$30 and feed three? Please do it right now. Go online or dial the number, take your bankcard, use it like a check. Thank you so much for doing it. If you mail it in, call us and tell us you're putting it in the mail. Thank you for doing that.

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Across the continent of Africa, children are suffering, facing severe

malnutrition and even death. With food reserves gone and many areas experiencing severe famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us.

Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for three full months. Also, please consider an extra gift to help immediately rebuild malnutrition clinics destroyed by record flooding in South Sudan. This urgent need is \$392,000 above our normal feeding budget and is critical to help save the lives of those suffering most.

With your gift of any amount, we will send you *Christmas Grace*. This eye-opening, new 31-day devotional will give you a fresh perspective on the greatest gift ever given and the life-transforming hope found in Christ's birth.

With your gift of \$100 or more, request the "Love and Thanks" tumbler set with scriptures reminding us that "God's love never fails" and to always "Give thanks." These tumblers will keep drinks hot or cold wherever you go.

Finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed and care for 100 children, be sure to request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant."

Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

End of video

In the studio

JAMES: I want to thank all of you so much for helping. I hope you will pray about helping Joni. She puts God's arms around people that desperately need it. We will send you the book. You can get it online, in the bookstores but we'll send it to you if you'll just help us put God's arms around some of these hungry children and support these missionaries.

Joni, we want to say to you again good-bye, God bless you, we love you. You have blessed us

beyond measure. Thank you for sharing with us.

JONI: Absolutely. And for those of our viewers who your children, Ruth 2:12 says, "May the Lord repay you for what you've done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel." That's a great blessing to sign off with.

JAMES: It is! Thank you, Joni. Thank all of you for watching. Thanks for sharing God's love.