



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Practice of the Presence of Jesus – Part 2

Guest(s): Joni Eareckson Tada

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the radio broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today you are in for a treat, part two of Dr. Dobson's powerful conversation with author, speaker Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni has written many books over the years, nearly 45 of them to be exact, and her latest book is a bit of a departure. It's a book called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. Talks a lot about spiritual suffering and pain based on works of the writings of Brother Lawrence back in the 17th century.

Before we get into part two of today's conversation, a reminder that May is when our matching gift is in place. We have a special \$300,000 matching gift that you can take advantage of, and every dollar you donate to the JDFI today will be doubled. Your \$100 donation becomes \$200, for example, or a thousand dollars donation becomes 2000. You can learn more about how to give a gift online at Drjamesdobson.org. And now, let's continue with Dr. Dobson's conversation about the practice of the presence of Jesus with his guest, Joni Eareckson Tada, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Item number 22 in your book and you have a little over a hundred of those pages that I described before. You have an item entitled Pain Defang. I don't know whether that was written by Brother Lawrence or whether that's your explanation of it.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, you know what? I deal with chronic pain and sometimes we get very anxious about our chronic, our physical pain, and we say things that are filled with worry and frustration like, "Oh bother, why do I have to deal with this? Oh, this is so hard. I can't stand this." But talking like that to your pain only makes it worse. It only exacerbates it. And so I have learned to what I call defang pain, like pull the fangs out of it by talking to it quietly.

And I will quote it Scripture, I'll tell my pain, if I'm in bed and I can't move, I'll say, "Pain, you want to crush me, but 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse eight says

that, though I am hard-pressed on all sides, I am not crushed. And so I'm going to believe that my God is greater than you pain. I'm not going to listen to you. I'm going to listen to my God and his word and I'm going to trust Him that He's going to see me through this." And so then I take a deep breath and I enter as it were. I embrace pain. I don't become anxious about it or wish it away. I just move through it. And in the middle of it, I always find my Jesus who has transformed it into a place of reliance on Him and it's a doorway to hope and peace. And before you know it, I'm forgetting about my pain. I don't even feel its crunch or agony anymore because I've defanged it with the Word of God.

Dr. James Dobson: I indicated earlier that Roger Marsh is here with us. He is introducing the program and sitting there three feet away from me, I'm going to hand you the book.

Roger Marsh: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: The title is *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. And the item that we're talking about is chapter 22 called Pain Defanged. This on the right side is what Joni has written. Would you read that to our listeners to give everyone a feel for what the book is all about?

Roger Marsh: Well, what Brother Lawrence writes is, I do not pray that you may be delivered from your pains, but that God earnestly that he would give you strength and patience to bear them as long as he pleases. And here's what Johnny wrote in response to that. People who regularly run marathons learn to live with pain. They defang pain in its terror by familiarizing themselves with its nuances and distinguishing features. They don't try to beat pain. Instead, they carry it with them, managing and minimizing it as best they can. I do the same. When pain becomes agonizing, I don't fear it. I breathe deeply and enter into it. Much like the Hebrews who turned into Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace when they entered there, I expect to meet Jesus in there, just as those three Hebrews met the son of God in the flames. Expect to meet Jesus in your pain and you most certainly will, for he has already entered that awful place ahead of you.

He transformed it by his power and presence and came out on the other side. He uprooted its dread and left it a place of resurrection and hope. So take a deep breath and step into your agony, anticipating that you'll see Jesus, he will give you courage to deliberately look pain in the face, study its stern features, and enter unafraid. Most of all, be patient. Quietly stand in opposition to your fear, steady your soul and calmly let pain know that it will not and cannot overwhelm you. Your Savior assures, "When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, for I, the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, your Savior will be with you." That's Isaiah chapter 43 verses 2-3.

Dr. James Dobson: Joni, that's just beautiful considering what you've been through and how hard it has been and to write those encouraging words for anyone who's going through difficult times. You want to elaborate on it?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I certainly do. Pain is one of those things where it's a friend but it's a dark friend. It's a guest, but it's an unwelcomed guest. And the reason I call it a friend and a guest is because pain is the very thing that forces us to rely on Christ all the more. If it were not for my pain, I don't think that I would lean as hard on Jesus as I do. And so in that regard, pain is a friend. At times, a dark friend, a nasty friend, but is a friend nevertheless, because pain escorts me to the foot of the cross. And what a great place to be. What a great place to find yourself when you have great needs that need to be met.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, those two pages stood out to me and really spoke to me because I know what you've been through, Joni and to turn it over to the Lord and let Him use it is a marvelous thing.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I know that Shirley has also struggled with pain and I've corresponded with her a couple of times about that, and it's always good to find other people who struggle with a similar ailment that you might so that you can offer your encouragement.

Roger Marsh: Joni, I know that you write about this in the book and you've written about your family. Growing up, being a really strong family. My family would be envious of all the hymns that you knew by heart and sang and shared that together. But I know your dad played a huge role in your faith, and I wonder with his athletic prowess, I mean being a championship wrestler and inducted into the national Wrestling Hall of Fame, what kind of example did he set for you? Now here you are in the state of quadriplegia and dealing with constant pain and struggle. How did that help you spiritually and mentally to accomplish what you've accomplished?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, even as a teenager, I knew my father dealt with a great deal of pain from his wrestling injuries, mainly. Torn ligaments, joints knocked out of place and broken legs. He had his share of pain, but because he was an athlete, he was very disciplined. And it was that discipline that get up in the morning and pull yourselves up by the bootstraps of grace and go out the door, trusting that God is going to give you the strength to do what you need to do. I saw my father do that every day and he never complained. Philippians chapter 2 verse 14 says, "Do everything without complaining." My father was good at doing that. He did not complain, and so he said-

Dr. James Dobson: Very few of us are good at that though.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm not.

Joni Eareckson Tada: But he set such a good example. He really did. And so when I started to deal with pain, the memory of my father was very sweet, very near and dear. Again

as an athlete, those qualities of perseverance, the virtue of endurance, self-control, pushing through the pain, yeah, my dad was a great example.

Dr. James Dobson: Joni, there's just so much in this book. I'd like to take you back to your early years, maybe before your accident. When did you find the Lord and describe that experience. Take us back to who introduced you to the scriptures. Take us through that.

Joni Eareckson: Well, I knew the scriptures growing up. My parents were Christians, but you know how young people are, you're just kind of like, "Okay, dad, mom, that's good for you." And it wasn't until I was in high school that I realized my need of Christ. I went away on a Young Life weekend camp. A Young Life is in evangelistic outreach to young people across the country. And I went to a Young Life camp and I heard the speaker talk about the 10 Commandments, and he challenged us kids to measure our lives up against those commandments one by one. And as I did, I realized how I was missing the mark. There was no way I could meet God's standard of righteousness. I was lost. But then I was a little bit confused because why would God give us a bunch of commandments that he knew very well we couldn't keep?

Well, it was like bing. A light bulb went on over my head as I realized that's why Jesus came. God knew that we couldn't keep those commandments, so he sent his son Jesus, to live the righteous life for us. And that's when I realized, oh, my goodness, what my mom and dad have been telling me is true. And so I opened my heart to Jesus Christ.

Dr. James Dobson: At what age?

That was at the age of 14. And by the age of 17, I was paralyzed and on a hospital bed and facing a life of sitting down for the rest of my life without use of my hands or legs. And at first I was very angry and very... How could a loving God allow something like this to happen? But I praise God that many Christian friends were praying for me. Those same friends who introduced Christ to me at Young Life and they were the ones who encouraged me, cheered me on, befriended me once I got out of the hospital, didn't abandon me. And that friendship with Christians is what really pushed me forward in my own walk with Christ.

Roger Marsh: Well, doctor, before we continue with today's conversation with Joni Eareckson Tada, let me remind our listeners that we're talking with Joni about her new book called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus* today here on Family Talk. And if you'd like more information about the book or Johnnie's ministry, you could visit us online at drjamesdobbson.org, that's drjamesdobbson.org. Doctor?

Dr. James Dobson: In reading the book Joni, I learned that the wickedness of these 1960s when the Christian faith itself was challenged, you say that you were captured by some of that for a period of time. Did I read that correctly?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, yes, you did. Jim, when I came to Christ, I thought at first that the abundant Christian life was the great American dream of losing your weight, getting a boyfriend going off to college. And I was lured by the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Much to my dismay, now looking back, I'm ashamed of the things I did with my boyfriend. And in fact, in my senior year of high school, "I prayed, God, I have fallen into a trap of my own making. I am so ensnared by sin and by lust, I can't even break free of it. And I'm living the life of a hypocrite and I don't want to, I don't want to shame your good name. And so God, before I go off to college, would you do something in my life that's going to jerk it right side up? Because I'm making a mess of my Christian testimony. I can't even call myself a Christian. By the way, I'm acting on a Friday night with my boyfriend"-

Dr. James Dobson: Joni, have you ever shared that before? Have you ever gone into that chapter of your life before? I don't remember ever hearing that.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Yeah, well, I have in a couple of places, but I guess writing this book, in fact, sharing that chapter of my life in this new book, I'm thinking there's so many young people, even Christian Young people who toy with addictions, whether it is addiction to drugs or addiction to Facebook, social media, addiction to sexual activity, and even Christian young people. And my heart breaks to hear this. And so this is one reason why I thought I've got to warn some young people that if you're serious about God and don't stay away from sin, sin might have you, it might have you.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm so glad that you put that story in there because I lived through the '60s too, ahead of you by 10 years or so, and I was on the university campus and there was so much wickedness there. I mean, it takes your breath away. I was at USC and it was no different than any other university, and I just saw everything that I believed and cared about and my love for the Lord and all of that was overwhelming to me. I didn't get captured by it because I was ahead of that, but I saw it. I witnessed this. That is very interesting to me to hear your chapter, how you got through that era.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, unfortunately, I had been ensnared by it. I was captured by it. And I pray that as I share this in the book, people will understand that sin is a snare. It is insidious, it is deceptive. It will beguile you into thinking black is white and white is black, and you won't be able to discern the righteous path if you allow yourself to be taken over my habits, sinful habits and behaviors. So I think what the Lord allowed to happen in my life was a little bit of his discipline, not punishment. Certainly, that was taken care of on the cross. God did not punish me with a diving accident, but he allowed it to discipline me to reprove and correct me and to get me ultimately, ultimately back on the right path. And so I praise God for his wisdom in my life. It was a hard wisdom and it was a hard discipline. But now so many years later, I am so, so grateful.

Dr. James Dobson: Roger, you and I have been reading the same book. Do you have anything-

Roger Marsh: It was fascinating. One of the quotes that Joni has, and I'd love to get a comment from her in response to this. When you talk about pain and you talk about how pain never lets up, pushes you to the limits where you nearly collapse, and sometimes you do, but in your case you wrote, "Pain has also melded my heart with my saviors. I find comfort in the man of sorrows who is acquainted with grief. That's such a huge statement from someone who has a ministry. Joni, of course, that like you said, you didn't plan on this and it's not like God was punishing you, but pain's been your constant in your life, and that you found that solace in seeing that for Brother Lawrence it was the same situation.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Right. And you know, I believe that God shares his joy on his terms. And those terms call for us to, in some measure, suffer as his own son Jesus Christ suffered. If we want to get close to Jesus, we're going to have to feel the sting of the cross that we bear. God will not allow a cross in our lives that is, what? One inch too long or one ounce too heavy, but it will be just heavy enough, just long enough that we simply cannot bear it by ourselves and we must have his help. And when we go to Him for help, he gives us so much more than just help.

He gives us His courage and His endurance and his patience and perseverance. He gives us His joy, His hope, and His peace, and He increases our faith. So the tenderness with which I enjoy my relationship with the Lord Jesus is because I need Him so. I just need Him so. But He reveals a degree of sweetness and preciousness that I never would've dreamed possible many, many years ago. But leaning on Him and relying on the man of sorrows acquainted with my grief, well, He gives His joy in return and I wouldn't trade it for any amount of walking.

Roger Marsh: What a beautiful way to conclude our time together here, doctor. This is such an inspiring conversation about pain and suffering, but also God's purpose for it in and through it. And through Joni's testimony, it's just truly remarkable.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, a good place to start is by reading this book because there's so much content here. Joni, you must be very excited about the book itself because it's so different from what you've done before.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I am, and it's up for the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association finalist in the devotional category. So I'm quite excited. Just being picked as a finalist is quite the honor.

Dr. James Dobson: As we come down to the conclusion to the program, let's talk about the title itself, *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. Unpack that for us.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, Jesus is worth knowing. It's worth any amount of suffering to know Jesus. So make it a practice, friend listening. Make it a practice to read your Bibles faithfully, to pray faithfully and to be joyful in your hope and patience and your affliction. Practice His presence and you'll find that you'll be calling Him sweet and precious on year and dear as well.

Dr. James Dobson: Joni, I always enjoy talking to you and it's great to have you on the program carrying on a tradition we've had for many years. Shirley and I did attend your wedding. Do you remember that we were there?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, I sure do. I remember what you gave me. It was a beautiful cactus, bronze cactus, and I keep it on my hearth and it's quite something. Dr. Dobson gave us that forever.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I thought you were going to say I gave you a kiss.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, you did too. You did that as well.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's a pleasure to have you. How's Ken doing these days.

Joni Eareckson ...: Ken is doing wonderfully well. He is amazing. What a good caregiver he is, my best friend. This is our 20th year in reading through the Bible together every year. We've done it now for 20 years, and I always tell him, "Ken, my favorite time of the day is when I can sit down at the kitchen table with our open Bibles, a cup of coffee and just read the word together." That is a special time he and I share.

Dr. James Dobson: He has been a great husband and caregiver for you. Hasn't he?

Joni Eareckson Tada: He really, really has, and I'm happy he's packing up to go fishing because the man needs a break from my disability. You didn't object. No, not at all. I push him out the front door with his fishing rods.

Dr. James Dobson: When you're ready to do another program with us, you give me a call because I always get something out of it, and I know our listeners do too. I appreciate you Joni, more than you can know, of your dedication, of your love For the Lord, of the way you've taught about the scriptures, your contribution to the Christian way of life has been remarkable, and I thank God for you.

Joni Eareckson Tada: And I thank God for you and Shirley as well, and all of the team at Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We'll do it again.

Roger Marsh: Such a beautiful discussion over the past couple of days here on Family Talk. Dr. James Dobson reminiscing a bit with his good friend, Joni Eareckson Tada, about her nearly 50 years of ministry, and also the brand new book that she's published called *The Practice of The Presence of Jesus*. Based on the writings from the 17th century of Brother Lawrence, a monk who lived in the 1600s, who wrote about pain and wrote about what it meant to be a child of God who understands lowly position and hardship. By the way, if you'd like to learn more about Johnny's book, *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*, we encourage you to go to our website at drjamesdobson.org. Now, of course, this Sunday is Mother's Day and Dr. Dobson has written a special newsletter article just for

moms called "Affirming Motherhood," which is under attack now more than ever before in our culture.

You can get a copy of this absolutely free when you go to Drjamesdobson.org. You'll find it right there on our landing page. Of course, if you don't want to have to bother clicking through to the website, you can receive Dr. Dobson's monthly newsletter each and every month simply by signing up for it. Go to drjamesdobson.org/newsletters and you can get "Affirming Motherhood," his latest ode to Moms for Mother's Day, as well as every other newsletter that Dr. Publishes each month. And keep in mind, May is the month of our \$300,000 matching gift. Some very generous friends of the Ministry of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk have put up a matching challenge for us as listeners. Every time you call and make a donation at 877-732-6825, that donation will be doubled. Or if you give a gift online at drjamesdobson.org or using the JDFI app, that gift will be doubled as well.

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Well, thanks so much for joining us for Family Talk Today, and be sure to tune in again tomorrow as our tribute to moms continues, we have a very, very special program for you featuring Fern and Ty Nichols. Fern is the founder of Moms in Prayer, and we have a powerful story that's actually a tribute to mothers who pray for their wayward children. Make sure you don't miss a moment of tomorrow's broadcast right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. This is James Dobson inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline, or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?