



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Practice of the Presence of Jesus – Part 1

Guest(s): Joni Eareckson Tada

Air Date: May 6, 2024

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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, hello everyone and welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the radio broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, the co-host of Family Talk. And Dr. Dobson, today we have someone with us that I know you're very, very excited about having here.
- Dr. James Dobson: Listen, Roger, I am really excited about this day, not only the fact that you're here for, I think we've done it once or twice before.
- Roger Marsh: That's right, that's right.
- Dr. James Dobson: We're going to do a lot more of this. Welcome.
- Roger Marsh: Thank you.
- Dr. James Dobson: I'm also thrilled to have Joni Eareckson Tada to be with us again today. I tell you, I've been working with this lady for a long, long time. I don't know how many radio programs we've done and other things together. Joni, I'm delighted that you're with us.
- Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, Jim, thanks so much for having me on and to be with you and Shirley and the team there at Family Talk means the world.
- Dr. James Dobson: I was thinking earlier today, do you know the first time we did a radio program together? I bet you don't remember.
- Joni Eareckson Tada: You'll have to refresh my memory, sir. I just don't remember.
- Dr. James Dobson: It was 1982, and it was that Focus on the Family where I was at that time and came to our studio. You went to a great deal of trouble to get there and I deeply appreciated it. And you talked about your new book, which had to do with going to Heaven and seeing Jesus and even dancing with Him. Do you remember that?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, I remember it now.

Dr. James Dobson: And you sang to us that day.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Did I?

Dr. James Dobson: And I don't know how often you do that as a radio guest, but that was a thrill for us that day.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, I tell you-

Dr. James Dobson: I never forgot it.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Jim, you know I'm going to sing now, don't you? I'm thinking of, okay, so "All that will be glory for me. Glory for me. Glory for me. When by His grace, I shall look on His face." And that's not too far in the future, is it? Huh? "That'll be glory. Be glory for me." I always love singing Dr. Dobson, you know me.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I always love having you on the program. We've done it many times together. Also, some of those programs have been with Ken, your husband, and especially when you had breast cancer, as I recall.

Joni Eareckson Tada: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And we've got a lot of memories of you Joni, and I haven't forgotten any of them. I want you to know.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, that means a lot to me. Dr. Dobson, I remember, this has been years ago, a Larry King Live. You were on for the hour and Larry King asked you a question about the future and you said, "I just want to finish well." And that struck Ken and me. I think it was the first time we'd heard that phrase.

Dr. James Dobson: I can't believe you remember that, Joni.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh my goodness. Yes. Because you are an example, you and Shirley, of how one finishes well. We don't retire. We don't sit on our hands. We make the use of every opportunity, as it says in Ephesians 4. And we believe that every last breath on earth is to be used to glorify God in some way. And you do that, you are finishing well. And you got a long way to go, I'm sure, but it is an example to the rest of us. It really is.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I appreciate that coming from you Joni, because you have done the same thing and I have watched you both up close and personal and from a distance and you're serving the Lord wonderfully and have for all these years despite the difficulties and problems that you face. We're talking to Joni Eareckson Tada, and there may be three or four people out there who don't know you. The rest of them do. But I'm going to say for the benefit of those who are not well

acquainted with the ministry of Joni Eareckson Tada, let me say that she is a speaker, speaking around the world, really. She's a wonderful artist. She's a creator of many things, including Joni and Friends. Joni, let's stop right there. Tell me what Joni and Friends is all about. I think that goes back to 1979, doesn't it?

Joni Eareckson Tada: It does. When I started Joni and Friends, and the reason I did...That's 45 years ago, wow... The reason I did is because God had blessed me so much up to that point. I was in my late 30s and I wanted to pass on the blessings to other people with disabilities. And of course, the Joni movie, the Joni book, appearances with Mr. Graham on his crusades overseas and here in the States. And it generated a lot of letters from other disabled people asking the same questions I once asked. And so now, 45 years later, we're distributing wheelchairs around the world and Bibles. We'll go to 53 countries this year with wheelchairs and Bibles. We hold retreats and getaways. We'll do oh, 56 here in the United States this summer, and 76 overseas and developing nations. All of it is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with families with disabilities who struggle so with understanding how a good God could allow so much pain and hardship in the world. So 45 years, I've been at it, and we're growing.

Dr. James Dobson: One of your great accomplishments was to help the federal government establish a program by which disabled people were taken care of and a lot of changes in the law and you were behind most of that.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I served on the National Council on Disability under President Reagan and then under President George H. Bush. And our council authored the first draft of the Americans with Disabilities Act. And Jim, I'll never forget sitting on the South Lawn of the White House watching President Bush sign the Americans with Disabilities Act into law. And we went over to a hotel for a reception after the signing ceremony and the executive director of our council wanted to offer a toast. And he said to us, "This law is good in that it will remove discriminatory practices in employment for qualified disabled people. And this law is good in that people with wheelchairs won't have to wheel through the back alley and past the dumpsters in order to get to their dining room table. And this law is good in that mechanical lifts will be established on buses."

And then he paused and said, "But this law will not change the employer's heart. This law will not change the heart of the maître d' at the restaurant. This law will not change the heart of the bus driver." And then he raised his glass and said, "Here's to changed hearts." And Dr. Dobson, I was weeping because that's our message as Christians, we have the good news that will change people's hearts and state laws and proclamations can't do it. Disability awareness might scratch the surface, education and the like, but only the message of the grace of God, the salvation message of Jesus Christ can change people's hearts, right?

Dr. James Dobson: Oh my. Well, it also changed the nation in so many ways. Some people were not happy about that. You had some opposition along the way.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, yes, we did. But people sure do appreciate the ramps nowadays, don't they?

Dr. James Dobson: Yes, they sure do.

Joni Eareckson Tada: And it's good to have public accommodations so accessible. So people have gotten used to the ADA and its benefits for elderly people, for young mothers pushing baby strollers and even wheelchair users like me.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Joni, I said before that you've written 45 books. I think it's another, you just recently published this book, *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. Is that a new book?

Joni Eareckson Tada: It is. It's brand new. And it came out of the COVID era, those couple of years in which we were all sequestered away. Ken and I did not want to become settled into just sitting around and watching old movies. We decided to make it an effort to practice Christ's presence in every room of the house, to invite Him into our conversations, to sit in the backyard and glorify the Lord Jesus while we admire the birds and the roses and the trees and the breeze. We just made it a practice of inviting Christ into our daily rhythms of life in a fresh new way. And from that came this book, *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. And Jim, it's how I live.

You know me, I get up in the morning, I am overwhelmed by my disability. My quadriplegia seems impossible, especially now that I'm aging. And I have to say, Jesus, I cannot do this. I have no strength for this, no ability for this, but you do. You've got the strength. And so give me your smile today, Jesus, because I cannot make it through this day without you. I can't do quadriplegia, but I can do all things through you as you strengthen me. And it's that need of Christ, that reliance on Jesus, which is partly what this book is all about; how to lean on and rely on Christ urgently, desperately, needfully just as he wants us to.

Roger Marsh: Certainly a special day here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as Dr. Dobson is in conversation with our guest, Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni's the author of a brand new book called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. And we're going to get into that discussion a little bit more in the second half of today's program. Before we do, though, a reminder that we are here in the month of May and we currently have a May matching challenge for you to help support the ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute financially. A generous group of friends, friends of the ministry here at JDFI have provided this \$300,000 matching gift. And so now, every dollar you donate to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute will be doubled during the month of May. Learn more how you can participate in this \$300,000 matching challenge when you go online to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org.

Dr. James Dobson: Joni, you had an accident that changed your life when you were 17 years of age and you've been a quadriplegic ever since then. Tell us a little bit about how the Lord has worked in that experience.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Sure, sure. I think most of our listeners know that I broke my neck in a diving accident at the age of 17. I was taking a foolish inward pike dive off of a raft into what I found out real quickly was shallow water. But Jim, what I thought was the ruin of my life, breaking my neck, that was the beginning of God's greatest use of my life.

He chose the thing that I despised for His glory. And that, to me, is amazing. And I was just talking with someone today that I'm thankful in a strange way. I am so grateful to God for this paralyzing accident because it has helped me understand that the really important thing in life is the person next to you with needs that are greater than yours. And I have seen so many disabled people in developing nations whose needs are far greater than mine. And God has used my quadriplegia to help them, to lift them out of the dirt, to give them wheelchairs, to give them the message of salvation, to create access for them, to medical care and food. And I'm just so grateful that, although afflictions cut deep in my heart through which joy and grace poured in, it energized me to care for the needs of those whose situations are far worse than mine ever will be. And I include in there not only cancer, but chronic pain and quadriplegia.

And so Jim, what God has done is He's used my broken neck to not only wake me up spiritually and get me leaning on and relying on Him and requiring His help morning, noon, and night, but this quadriplegia has been the door through which I've discovered the needs of other people whose situations are far more critical than mine ever will be. And I want to be used of God to help them, to give them the gospel, to provide them wheelchairs, to provide them access to medical care. And so that's what our team at Joni and Friends do. Never would I have dreamed that I would be used of the Lord to reach other disabled people for Christ. There was a time I didn't even want to be around someone else in a wheelchair. My self-image was shaky. I wasn't sure that this disability of mine was working together into a pattern for good, but God used the thing that I despised, the ruin of my life, I thought. It was the beginning of His greatest use of my life, for which I'm so grateful.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you have taken what would look like a disaster and allowed the Lord to use it in your life and in the lives of so many other people. And you have talked about it somewhat in this new book. Let's get to it because the time's getting on, *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. There's a character in this book that's been quoted a lot, and it goes back to the 1600s. His name is Brother Lawrence and he was a monk at that time and also served in the military, fought in wars. This man has captured your attention and you have written a lot about him in this book. What role does he play and why?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, when I was a teenager in high school, everybody was reading Brother Lawrence's book called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. And it was a classic

that all of us young people back in the '70s discovered as we grew in our relationship with each other and with the Lord Jesus. Well, I put that book on my shelf and I really didn't think much of it until COVID in 2020. That's when we were all sequestered and we were picking books off of our bookshelves to reread and reread again. And that's what I did. I saw that book up there. I opened it up and I read some of Brother Lawrence's writings and I thought, you know what, Brother Lawrence is talking about practicing the presence of God. I want to talk about practicing the presence of Jesus and how everything that we do, and even the word of God itself, should ultimately point us to Jesus. And so I decided to journal during the Covid years, 20, 21.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you come down with COVID?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh, yes, I did, sir. It was a horrible experience. My husband contracted at the same time I did in December of 2020, and he was in bed. He could not help me. None of my helpers could come because they were either sick or they were tending to their young children and obviously did not want to carry COVID back to their homes. And so I laid in bed for, oh, I don't know, a day, a night and a day and a half with no help. And it was very frightening and very claustrophobic.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you have medical care?

Joni Eareckson Tada: I did not. And so I would lie there and I would just quote Scripture. "God, you will not leave me or forsake me. God, you tell me that you are my present help in every trouble. God, you tell me that you are going to fight my battles. God, you tell me that your grace is sufficient for every need. I believe these promises help me get through this, Lord." And He did, Jim, He really did. And that was a frightening time. And it also showed Ken and me that we're getting older and we need some help. And so that's when we started to look around to get a couple more caregivers to assist for those kinds of times.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that's the background for *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*, and it's quite a book. You've written 45 books, as I said, but this one is totally different than anything I've ever seen you write. Explain what your motive was and the purpose that you have for going back to a monk in the 1600s to get inspiration for some of the things that you were writing here.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, Jim, I love the Lord Jesus. As I get older, my love for Him grows deeper. And also it's simpler. My love for Christ is more simple than it's ever been. It has become a practice that I immediately go to the Lord when I wake up in the morning. I can't go to bed at night without communing with Him. If I wake up in the night in pain and I cannot turn, I just turn to Him for help. And as I age, as I get older, my love for Christ has become so much more buoyant and so much happier that I just had to put this joy down on paper because I want other people to experience the joy that can be found in practicing Christ's presence in your life.

Dr. James Dobson: Describe the format that you followed here. You have something that was written in the 1600s, and then on this side, the other side of the page, you put your explanation on what he was saying and elaborate on it, and it's quite an interesting approach. Describe that for us.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, of course, I wanted to introduce new readers to Brother Lawrence if they haven't read him. Again, it's a classic book, his book. And so I took my favorite quotations from Brother Lawrence's book, put them on the left side of the page and on the right side, I either respond to Brother Lawrence or I make more of Brother Lawrence's ideas.

Everybody was reading that book back in the 1970s, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. And although a Catholic monk, Brother Lawrence says some pretty wise insights. As you said, he struggled when he was in the Thirty Years' War in Europe, and he found his way to a monastery lame and injured, and the monastic monks took him in and he opened up his heart to Christ. And they assigned him very menial jobs, washing the floors, scrubbing the pots and pans in the kitchen, cleaning out the latrine. He had some menial duties in this monastery, but in those duties, he found a special enjoyment of God, and it was that simplicity of life and his constant reliance on God that gripped my imagination when I first read the book as a teenager. But as I said, it stayed on my shelf for many years until COVID. When I took it down, what, 30, 40 years later and began reading it again and I realized this Monk has some good things to say.

So I wanted to introduce his writings in my book as well as capitalize on what he had shared by augmenting his content with my own, with my own insights on practicing the presence of Christ.

Roger Marsh: Indeed, great words of wisdom from Joni Eareckson Tada. Today here on the special edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, along with Dr. James Dobson, and we're talking about Joni's brand new book called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. You'll find information on that book and also Joni's ministry, Joni and Friends up at our website, drjamesdobson.org.

May, of course is the month of Mother's Day, and our special monthly newsletter affirms motherhood. A very special greeting from Dr. Dobson himself awaits you when you read our May monthly newsletter. For more information on how you can receive the monthly newsletter from Dr. Dobson delivered to your email box each and every month, it's very simple to do. Just go to drjamesdobson.org/newsletters and you can sign up right there. That's drjamesdobson.org, and then you'll find the newsletter on our landing page. Also, May is an opportunity for you to stand with us financially. Your prayers and financial support make it possible for the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute to continue to minister to moms and to dads, couples, and to grandparents and kids all over the world.

And during the month of May, we have a special opportunity for you to see your gift doubled. That's right. Your \$100 donation becomes 200. Your \$500 donation becomes a thousand. Your \$1000 donation becomes 2000. You can do the math from there. Some special friends of the ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute have provided a \$300,000 matching grant right here during the month of May. So to take advantage of this special opportunity, it's very easy to do. All you have to do is go online to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org, and you can give a gift securely online. You can also give a gift using the JDFI app or give us a call at 877-732-6825. We'll be happy to take your call when you can make a donation over the phone, make a recommendation for a program, even ask for prayer. We'll be happy to do all of those and more when you call our customer care team at 877-732-6825.

And if you'd like to reach us by mail, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949. Again, our ministry mailing address, which is a great way to send your donation securely through the U.S Postal Service, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, or the JDFI for short, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The zip code, 80949.

Well, thanks so much for listening today, and be sure to join us again tomorrow as Dr. James Dobson continues this special conversation with Joni Eareckson Tada about her unforgettable story of a struggle against quadriplegia and depression, and the brand new book she's written about her experience called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. That's coming your way next time right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Roger Marsh: With today's Dr. Dobson minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: When I was about 10-years-old, I loved to play with a couple of dogs that belonged to two families in our neighborhood. One was a black Scotty, the other was a pug bulldog who had a notoriously bad attitude. One day as I was tossing the ball for the Scotty, it occurred to me that it just might be interesting to throw it in the direction of the old grouch who grabbed the Scotty by the throat. It took 10 minutes and a garden hose to pry the bulldog's grip loose, and by then the Scotty was almost dead. I regret throwing that ball to this very day. Now, I've thought about that experience many times and I've begun to recognize its application to human relationships. Indeed, it is a simple thing to precipitate a fight between people. All that's necessary is to toss a ball, symbolically, under the more aggressive of the two, the natural antagonism of competitors will do the rest.

Roger Marsh: For more information, visit drdobsonminute.org.

Dr. James Dobson:

Hello, everyone. Do you need help dealing with the everyday tasks of raising a family? I'm James Dobson here, and if you do, I hope you'll tune into our next edition of Family Talk. Our main purpose in this ministry is to put tools into your hands that will strengthen your marriage and help you raise your kids. Hope to see you right here next time for another edition of Family Talk.