



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Why Am I Not Healed?

Guest(s): Joni Eareckson Tada

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Dr. Dobson: I want to tell you about a courageous lady today who recently passed away at 75 years of age. Her name was Marion Manwell and I admired her greatly. When she was an infant, she was sitting in a halter swing that broke. The spring came straight down and struck the baby in the soft spot at the top of her head. Immediate medical care was not available. And by the time a physician examined her, there was just nothing to do but cleanse and bandage the wound. "Even if the child lives," he said, "she will be mentally incompetent." But the country doc underestimated the constitution of this little girl. She survived and was blessed with a quick mind, although she was homely and unable to run or jump or catch a ball. The abuse she took from other children was incredible. One day as she trudged to school, a teenage boy came up behind her and said, "What's wrong with you? What are you limping for? Nobody wants to go with a girl who acts like that."

Marion had every reason to give up on life because the deck seemed stacked against her, but she was made out of great stuff. She later married, bore eight healthy children, and became an inspiration to everyone who knew her.

Now Marion Manwell is gone, and I thought her story might be encouraging to someone today, who's also considered giving up on life. If you're that person, I urge you to hang tough. If Marion could make it, you can make it too.

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Joni Eareckson Tada: I think back on much darker days, days when that neurologist told me that my quadriplegia was not only severe, but it was permanent. That lesion in my spinal cord was just that. Not a contusion. It was a lesion. And when the reality of sitting down for the rest of my life without use of my hands began to sink in, I wanted so much to cry.

Roger Marsh: That was the voice of one of the great living heroes of our faith, a true inspiration and a model of absolute Christian service in the face of adversity. She's our guest today here on Family Talk. Her name is Joni Eareckson Tada. Family Talk is a ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh.

At some point in our lives, each of us have asked the question: "Why? Why me, God? Why did you let them treat me like that?" Or, "Why did I have to go through that hardship? Why did you make me like this?" Or even, "Why am I not healed?" Joni Eareckson Tada understands those questions and feelings, maybe better than most.

When Joni was just 17, she had an accident that left her paralyzed from the neck down. Over the next several years, she wrestled with that why question. During today's broadcast, she'll share about her inner struggle and the truth that she clings to when those why questions arise.

Now, despite her physical disabilities, Joni Eareckson Tada has an incredible impact on millions of people. She serves as CEO of Joni and Friends, a Christian organization that provides programs and services for thousands of special needs families around the world. If you ever get the chance, by the way, you really should visit the 'Joni and Friends Worldwide Headquarters' in Westlake Village, California. The building is quite impressive, and many of the people who serve at the ministry have different abilities and needs as well. It's incredible to see each and every one of them thriving in their daily kingdom work. Our hope is that culture continues to embrace this type of work environment as the norm, rather than the exception.

Joni has also been involved in creating policy here in the US that assists those with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act was actually passed and signed into law during Joni's tenure on the National Council on Disability.

Joni Eareckson Tada is the author of many books, including *Where's My Miracle?*; *A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty*; and also, *Glorious Intruder: God's Presence in Life's Chaos*. She is an accomplished artist and served as general editor of the *Beyond Suffering Bible*, a special edition published by Tyndale for people with disabilities. Joni and her husband Ken live in Calabasas, California. Today you're going to hear a recording of a talk that Joni gave to a group of Christian doctors. Let's go there right now.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Thank you. Thanks friends. I want you friends to know, I feel right at home. I mean, here I am, a quadriplegic spinal cord injured from the fourth, fifth cervical level, talking to a bunch of doctors. This could be payback time. What do you think? Only in a group like this, could I possibly be comfortable talking about my decubitus ulcers or my iliac crest. You're the only guys who know what I'm talking about.

I think back on much darker days, days when that neurologist told me that my quadriplegia was not only severe, but it was permanent. That lesion in my spinal cord was just that. Not a contusion. It was a lesion. And when the reality of sitting down for the rest of my life without use of my hands began to sink in, I wanted so much to cry. Now, I put up a good face for my mom and my dad and my friends who would come to visit, but when visiting hours were over and

lights were turned out, my roommates were asleep, and I wanted so much to cry. But I did not dare cry because if I did, my eyes would get wet and my nose would run. And it's bad enough being a quad. You don't want to be a messy quad. So I'd sniff it back and I'd pull out from my heart all those treasure trove of hymns that I had memorized as a little kid. I would sniff back the tears and sing:

(singing).

I love to sing that song. I think because it echoed a favorite Bible passage of mine back then in those early months of my paralysis in the hospital. Christian friends would come to visit me, and when they would ask me if I wanted to hear something particular from the Word of God, I always, always asked them to read from John 5. I want to read it for you tonight. And I think you'll understand why it's such a favorite. For it says:

"There is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie; the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?' Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up and walk.'"

And then when visiting hours would be over that day and darkness would fall, if I didn't sing, I would pray. And I would imagine, I would picture myself there at the pool of Bethesda, lying next to all those other disabled people, the lame and the blind. I pictured myself maybe dressed in a rough burlap cloak, perhaps lying on a straw mat, maybe somewhere near that man paralyzed for so many years. And as I would begin praying, I would imagine in my mind's eye, in my prayer, "There comes Jesus, walking through the five covered colonnades. Oh, this is his sighting. I am so excited. Jesus is coming and he's bending over and he's touching and he's healing and he's blessing and he's ministering. Savior, Savior, do not pass me by." While on others that are calling, "Lord Jesus, come hear my humble cry. Heal me, heal me, heal me."

But it's for many months, and even the first two years that I was in that hospital, that I prayed that prayer earnestly and diligently, so many nights, picturing myself there at the pool of Bethesda. I never got up and walked.

I left the hospital in 1969 and I went on the farm to live with my sister. And how ironic it often was that she would do my range of motion exercises. Sometimes we would flick on the bedside TV, and if we happened upon a Christian television channel there, often we saw those faith healers and I would watch people seemingly jump out of their wheelchairs. It was all so odd with me lying there, still paralyzed. But I had heard that in the following month, the famous faith healer, Kathryn Kuhlman, was coming to the Washington D.C. Arena. Oh my goodness. I couldn't wait.

My sister and I got our tickets. We made plans. She transferred me into the front seat of her station wagon and we zoomed down State 29 to the Washington D.C. Arena. Even got there early, we did, and the ushers escorted us in early to the wheelchair section. And I noticed there were lots of people, people with cerebral palsy, people with spinal cord injury, people with muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis. The crowds began to pour in, the music began playing, and there she was. We just couldn't believe that it was Kathryn Kuhlman. And then, maybe a half-hour later, it seemed that on the other side of the D.C. Arena, God's Spirit was really moving, because over there we heard there were healings going on. And the spotlights centered over there, and there were whisperings, there were more rumblings and more applause over on that side of the arena.

Of course, all of us in the wheelchair section were looking at one another and we're bearing down on our hope. We are so certain that the Spirit of God is going to move our way real soon. But another half hour passed, and before you know it, the meeting will soon begin to end and the ushers came to escort us out early. I suppose they didn't want us to cause a traffic jam. And so there by the stadium elevator, I sat number 15 in a line of 35 people in wheelchairs, on crutches, listening to the echoes of singing and applause back behind the concrete walls of that arena. And there we were, this long line of 35, very quiet.

I looked up and down this line and I thought to myself, "Something's wrong with this picture." Frankly, I could not wait to get back to the farm and to get in bed because I wanted to picture myself back at that pool of Bethesda. I wanted to spend that time in prayer and I wanted to see the look in Jesus' eyes as he passed me by. I wanted to ask him in prayer, "Why didn't you heal me, Lord? Why not like the others?" And in my prayer that night, as I imagined myself there at the pool of Bethesda, I saw him turn to me and I missed all these others that he had healed. His eyes met mine and he seemed to say to me, "Joni, what is that to thee, follow thou me."

Well, in the following weeks, I dug deeper into God's word because I really wanted to understand what was wrong with this picture. And I stumbled across the first chapter of the book of Mark. You know the story. He had been healing virtually all day in the town of Capernaum. He labored long into the night. And in fact, he departed from his disciples. And Scripture does not record this, but we assume that he went out somewhere to pray. And the next morning, it says in the 38th verse, that the crowds were there before dawn bringing their sick and their lame and their disabled, looking for the healer. Where is Jesus? The disciples ran frantically looking for him. Finally, when they found him, they said to him, "Savior, everybody is looking for you." To which Jesus replied in the 38th verse, "Let's go somewhere else. Let's go to the nearby villages so I can preach there also, because this is why I have come."

Suddenly, I began to see that maybe this gospel was not just for my justification, but for my sanctification. It wasn't just to get me saved. It was to keep saving me. It was not only to send me to heaven. It was to bring something of heaven

here to me. And so, I mused on those words, "Follow thou me." I thought the best place to follow him was with my life verse, Philippians 3:8-10, where the apostle says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. And so somehow to attain to the resurrection of the dead, I want to know Christ." Of course, all of us want his power. We want power to live. We want the power to follow him, to smile, to enjoy the abundant Christian life.

But then I had to keep reading because it says that we should want to know Christ and not only the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. But if we really want to know him, we should want to become like him in his death.

Friend, nobody goes down that road. Nobody goes down the road to the cross. Nobody is drawn to the cross. The cross is where it happens, where we die to sin and become like him in his life. It is there according to 1 Corinthians 3:23, that all things are yours because you are of Christ and Christ is of God. Hallelujah.

(singing).

I don't dare, you don't dare venture away from the safety and the security and the shadow of the cross oh, Jesus. Keep me near the cross. I need thee. Yes, Lord, I need thee. Every nanosecond I need thee. It's the way to live. This is the way for the Christian to live. This is the only, this is the biblical way to live. And it is the way I have been living for almost 35 years as a quadriplegic in this wheelchair.

In James 4:6, God says that he resists the proud, but he gives grace, grace upon grace upon grace to the humble. And I tell you the humble are just those who are humiliated by their weaknesses and they recognize they need God. Little wonder Jesus said, "Blessed, happy are the poor in spirit. Blessed are you if you come to me with empty-handed spiritual poverty, because yours is the kingdom of heaven." I don't know if God originally ever would have chosen suffering as a path for his people, but since we humans opted for that detour back in the Garden of Eden, since suffering cannot be avoided and it can't, then God will redeem it to escort and usher us into the deepest recesses of his heart, where we become like him in his death and in his life.

A couple of years ago, my wonderful husband Ken surprised me and showed me tickets to the Holy land. All these places I'd read about, dreamt about, and we had a marvelous time. Ken had decided that we should go to the Old City of Jerusalem at high noon when all the tour buses wouldn't be around. And so we wheeled in to the Jaffa Gate, and we wanted to follow the Via Dolorosa, that's the way of the cross. And of course, the way of the cross goes up a bunch of steps, but when you're in a wheelchair, you'd do the Via Dolorosa bumpy, bump, bump, bump down the steps. It's the only way to do it. So we bumped, bumped, bumped down these steps and we got to the bottom and we visited

the bazaars and we saw the market place and we hobbled along these cobblestone streets.

And finally, we went down one long path, and oh, there to the right was the Temple Mount we were told, this is where the Sheep Gate was. Make a left-hand turn, and we go down this other cobblestone path and turn a corner. And oh, my goodness, would you look at that. "Ken, look at that. It's the pool of Bethesda. Oh my goodness. I can't believe it. And nobody's here. The place is empty. We've got it to ourselves." I leaned my elbow on the guard rail and let the dry wind dry my tears because I was crying, vividly recalling all those nights in the hospital when I used to picture myself here, here.

Lord Jesus, yes. I can even see where the five covered colonnades must have been. And I prayed right then at the pool of Bethesda. I prayed:

Oh Lord God, thank you. You were so wise to wait almost as many years as that man paralyzed on his straw mat. 30 some-odd years, you waited. You were wise to wait to bring me here so that I might look out over this broad expanse, this ruin, this pool. Thank you that you didn't pass me off, you didn't. And you answered my prayer. You said no. No to physical healing, but yes to strengthened hope, to a new dependency on you, to a buoyant hope of heaven. You helped me say yes, fostering sensitivity to others who hurt, giving me discernment, peace that is profound, a soul that is settled. You have stretched my hope. You have led me to a repentance of sin. You have goaded me to give thanks in times of sorrow and you have let my heart get beating in rhythm with yours. And Lord Jesus, I am so grateful. Sing it with me.

(Singing).

And he's here tonight. God bless you, friends, and thank you for listening.

Roger Marsh:

In Romans 8:28, Paul says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." And Joni Eareckson Tada is right. Suffering cannot be avoided, but God always, always redeems our suffering according to his plans and his purposes because we serve a good God.

I hope that you've been encouraged by today's broadcast here on Family Talk. By the way, to learn more about Joni Eareckson Tada, her ministries or her books, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. That web address is drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Or you can give us a call at (877) 732-6825. We're here for you 24/seven. Thanks for joining us here today. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you have a blessed day.

Announcer:

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

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hi everyone. This is Dr. Tim Clinton here for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. The news comes in all kinds of shapes, sizes and formats these days, but how do you cut through the noise and get to the heart of the matters that affect your family? Come to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and sign up for Dr. Dobson's monthly newsletter. You'll find clarity on tough issues, encouragement for your everyday life, and trusted principles to help you build strong, healthy, connected families. Go to drjamesdobson.org. Sign up today. That's drjamesdobson.org.

Dr. Dobson: Someone once said, "If you remove the rocks from a brook, it would lose its song." Well, that holds true for you and me as well. Author Scott Walker tells of the time he was asked to help some friends dig through the ashes of their house after a fire. When they arrived, all that was standing was a portion of the outer brick wall. Where the piano once stood, lay only a pile of ashes and twisted wire, nothing had survived the blaze. But while sifting through the debris, Walker came across a tiny China Bluebird. He wiped away the soot to find that the colors were still bright. A few hairline cracks had formed in the glaze, but beyond that, it remained intact. Walker writes, "As I gazed down at the bird's small beak and two black eyes, I wanted to weep. If only this little blue bird could talk, what a story it would tell. A story of the heat of the night, of terror, of survival against great odds."

And then the crucial question hit me. Why did this China Bluebird survive? It had survived the fire because it had been tested by fire. And so it is with human beings who have been refined in life's raging furnace. They are tougher, harder and more resilient than those who have never faced difficulty and loss. That understanding may help us cope the next time the heat is turned up on our tranquil little world.

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