



Broadcast Transcript

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

Guest(s): Joni Eareckson Tada

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and in just a moment we're going to hear another entry from our 2025 Best of Broadcast Collection, a powerful conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and his special guest, Joni Eareckson Tada. Now, if you're not familiar with her story, Joni became a lifelong quadriplegic after a diving accident in the Chesapeake Bay when she was only 17 years of age. Rather than let it ruin her life, Joni, with God's help and strength, used this tragedy to fuel a lifetime of ministry and outreach to people living with disability. And today, her non-profit ministry, Joni and Friends, has been serving people with disability for over 45 years. I had the privilege of joining Dr. Dobson in the studio for this interview. He had been recovering from a lengthy illness, and it was his first time back in the saddle, as we say, back in April of 2024.

It was the final opportunity for Dr. Dobson to interview Joni Eareckson Tada who was a dear friend of his over the years, and they were so excited for the opportunity to talk about the remarkable book that Joni had written called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*. A daily devotional based on the timeless wisdom of the 17th century monk, Brother Lawrence. Now, before we begin, I want to remind you about an incredible opportunity happening right now here at Family Talk. We have a special matching grant in effect, and when you make a donation of any amount to support the ministry and receive the 2025 Best of Broadcast Collection, your ministry gift will be doubled. I'll have more information on that later in the program. Right now though, let's get into part one of this unforgettable conversation featuring Joni Eareckson Tada and Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Roger, I am really excited about this day, not only the fact that you are here for, I think we've done it once or twice before. 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 don't remember.

Dr. James Dobson: It was 1982 and it was that Focus on the Family where I was at that time and you came to our studio. We 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. And we've got a lot of memories of you, Joni, and I haven't forgotten any of 'em. 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 in 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 four. 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 from a distance and you're serving the Lord wonderfully and have for all these years, despite the difficulties and problems that you've faced. 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 'em 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 mean, I was in my late thirties 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 taking 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 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 and employment for qualified disabled people. This law is good in that people with wheelchairs won't have to wheel through the back alley and pass the dumpsters in order to get to their dining room table and 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? 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, and 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. And 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 admired 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, need, fully just as He wants us to.

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 pipe 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 grace. 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, that 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 gashes 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: 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 seventies 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: Did 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 wake. 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 30 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. I mean, 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 insights on practicing the presence of Christ.

Roger Marsh:

Great words of wisdom indeed from Joni Eareckson Tada on this special best of edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Dr. Dobson was in studio to record with Joni talking about her latest book called *The Practice of the Presence of Jesus*, and you'll find information on the book as well as Joni's ministry, Joni and Friends. It's all up at our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Well, I can hardly believe it, but we are two weeks away from Christmas, and the end of the year is drawing nigh as they say. We are already well into our Best of Broadcast season, and while this time of year is special for many reasons, we always look forward to sharing exceptional programs like today's conversation with our listening family. There's a part two coming up on the next edition of Family Talk, so be sure to join us for that.

And please keep in mind that this year's 2025 Best of Broadcast Collection is extra special. We've taken the best 18 programs not only from this past year, but throughout the 15 year history of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute as a memorial reflection on the life and ministry of Dr. James Dobson. Of course, the program you're listening to right now is part of that collection year after year. This wonderful resource has become a cherished keepsake for many of our listeners, and it's available right now as our way of thanking you for your year-end donation of any amount to support the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. So to make a donation online, go to drjamesdobson.org. You can also give us a call at 877-732-6825.

In an age where so much of our media is hidden behind a subscription-based streaming service available today, but not tomorrow, or when you make a donation, it's become rare to actually hold in your possession, the content that you love. And that's why we want to make sure that you have access to these wonderful Family Talk programs from Dr. Dobson for years to come. The CD, of course, is a special memorial keepsake, but thanks to some extraordinary

friends of our ministry, we have the historic Dr. James Dobson Memorial Matching Grant in effect right now. And this remarkable grant provides matching funds for up to \$6 million, and it's available now through the end of the year, New Year's Eve, December 31st. That means your donation, whatever amount you choose to give, will be matched and therefore doubled in size and impact. This grant is an incredible memorial and a statement of confidence for the only organization entrusted by Dr. Dobson to carry out his legacy and expand his work to new generations and geographies. As a non-profit organization, we rely on the generous support of listeners like you to provide that this broadcast and the many other resources that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute creates to minister to families here in America all around the world.

I really hope you'll take advantage of this opportunity and reach out to us to show your support for Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute. You can give a gift over the phone when you call a member of our constituent care team, 877-732-6825. You can also make a donation on our secure website. Go to drjamesdobson.org for more information. That's drjamesdobson.org. Of course, if you'd like to give directly through that webpage that we've established for the matching memorial gift, go to drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. And if you prefer, send a donation along with a Christmas card for the Dobson family and the team here at the JDFI. We would love to receive it. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for being with us today. And be sure to join us again next time right here when Dr. James Dobson continues a special conversation with Joni Eareckson Tada about her remarkable story of struggle with quadriplegia and depression in the book that she has written about her experiences 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.

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