



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Ministry of Hymns – Part 1

Guest(s): Joni Eareckson Tada and Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, which is a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm James Dobson and you're in for a treat today. I want to take you back to the year 2000 when we recorded what has become one of my favorite programs of all times.

It occurred on a day when three very good friends came to be my guests in the studio. They were Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth. Bobbie has gone on to be with the Lord in 2014. She had a beautiful voice. You're going to hear that on the program today. Robert has gone on to remarry Nancy DeMoss. Nancy has her own ministry called Revive Our Hearts.

The centerpiece of this interview was Joni Eareckson Tada who, as most of you know, became a quadriplegic when she was 17 years of age in a diving accident. She took this tragedy, and gave it to the Lord, and has been an advocate and an encourager for disabled people ever since. Let's get right to the interview. Enjoy "The Ministry of Hymns."

Joni, this idea originated in your head. Explain where it came from.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, I grew up with hymns, and hymns were a way that my mom and my dad connected me and my sisters to the historic faith. For me, whether I'm in an elevator or sitting around in a lobby in my wheelchair, biding time, or in the airport, or wherever, I love to be singing a hymn. For me, it's a way of witnessing. I could be on the platform of a convention such as I was a few years ago at Christian Bookseller's Convention, Dr.

I spotted Dr. John MacArthur in the front row. I said, "John, get on up here, and let's sing a hymn together." Well, he looks to his left and his right and very nervous. He comes up. I've done this to him before. I have put him on the spot. There, just the two of us launched into a wonderful old hymn. I think it was a delight to the people in the audience. Of course, in the audience, there was the publisher of Crossway Books who, being, a light bulb went on over his head.

Dr. James Dobson: Always looking for a new book, right?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Right. He approached me afterward. He said, "You really do know hymns," because I was talking a lot about my favorite hymns from that platform. John

and I were bantering back and forth. I just love singing, and I love singing these wonderful old hymns, Dr. Dobson. So, that's how the book idea was given birth.

Dr. James Dobson: It gives the history of the individual hymns and some of the lyrics. Then there is a CD with it where you all actually recorded the music.

Robert Wolgemuth: We are people who love music, but we certainly don't have record companies waiting at our doors to sign us to contracts.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, after today, you might. I don't know.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Dr. John MacArthur gives the theological context of each hymn, and he does a great job. I give a bit of a contemporary devotional vignette along with either Robert or myself. Then Bobbie, bless her heart, the hymnologist among us-

Bobbie Wolgemuth: The research lady.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Right. Tell us what you do.

Dr. James Dobson: The church lady.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: These hymns have-

Dr. James Dobson: Bobbie, music has been a good part of your life.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: Oh yes. A passion for music, really, and in our family too, to talk to the girls as they were little about, what does this hymn mean? The theology... Robert has said, "It's like a bird's nest on the ground." It's theology 101 in four verses. It's such good theology focusing on God. Really, some of the stories behind the hymns, I did the research on, and it was so fun to find out who wrote them and why.

Dr. James Dobson: We went to the inauguration of George W. Bush together and we were in a van with a driver, there were about eight or nine of us. And we were singing these songs. It was just wonderful.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: Old hymns.

Robert Wolgemuth: It binds people together and whether you're speaking this language or another language, Joni has traveled the world and hymns bind people together regardless of their nationality. 8

Joni Eareckson Tada: I was in Romania once. I was on the third floor. We were delivering wheelchairs over there with Wheels for the World. We were conferring with some of the people there, a few people from Poland, several from Romania, one or two from Bulgaria, a couple of Germans, myself, an American.

Neither of us spoke each other's language, and there weren't enough interpreters, but somehow, we landed on the fact that we all loved hymns. We started singing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" in everybody's different language. It was awesome to just have that unity of the brethren right there in that little room with that bare dangling light bulb and on the third floor of that dingy hotel, singing glories to the Lord because of our mutual love for hymns.

Dr. James Dobson: Didn't Luther write that hymn?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Yes, he did.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: Yes, he did.

Robert Wolgemuth: Talk a little bit about that, Bobbie.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: Well, just the fact that the... "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" was the battle cry for the reformers. The world was changed because Martin Luther believed that next to the Word of God, a hymn and theology in music was the way to totally change the mind of the people, and get them to focus on, truly, who God is and to have biblical knowledge inside of their life in such a passionate way.

In fact, he often would say that if... He said, "The devil would flee before the sound of praise." His whole thing was getting the people to praise God and then giving them something to hang onto. Remember that these people were being burned at the stake if they read the Bible in their own German tongue. Often, they said the people that were taken to the stake, they had a hymn on their lips as they were dying.

Dr. James Dobson: Many of the old hymns were written by theologians or by ministers, weren't they? Charles Wesley, John Wesley, and so on. Well, the reason that I love the hymns is because of the theology, the poetry, and, of course, the music.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm going to reveal my biases. Okay, take your best shot.

Robert Wolgemuth: Here we go. 18 more years of mail.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm going to be banned again for another 18 years.

Joni Eareckson Tada: When I was in Young Life back then in the '60s, we sang hymns. One of the songs was a hymn, "Man of Sorrows, what a name for the son of God who came." Dr. Dobson, shortly after those Young Life experiences was when I dove into that shallow water and broke my neck back in 1967.

I was languishing for a year in bed in that dark depressing hospital room, so discouraged. I'll never forget. One night, long after visiting hours were over,

lights were out. The nurses were on break. My high school hockey buddy, a young girl named Jackie, had hid behind the sofa in the visitor's lounge.

While the nurses were on break, she crawled on hand and knee into my room, a six-bed ward, and very quietly came past my sleeping roommates. When I saw her form next to me in the darkness, I just said, "Jackie, what are you doing here? If they catch you, they're going to kick you out," to which she proceeded to, "shh, be quiet," and lowered the guardrail of my hospital bed, and, as high school kids will do, climbed into bed with me. In the darkness, she held my hand and held it up so I could see it. I could not feel her fingers.

In my pain and anguish, she touched my heart in the only way that it could be touched back then. She started to softly sing in the dark. "Man of sorrows what a name, for the Son of God who came." Her singing of that hymn did more to calm my restless spirit. Interestingly enough, doctor, 30-some-odd years later, I received a call from the chairman of my high school reunion committee. I was so excited that to see all my friends and to think that I might see Jackie.

The chairman of the reunion committee told me on the phone that morning, "Oh, but Joni, you need to understand. There was a horrible incident. Jackie's son died. He committed suicide just yesterday." It was so... Took my breath away. I tried to get a hold of her on the phone. Couldn't reach her.

I wrote her a letter. In the letter, I said, pretty much, "Jackie, if I could be with you right now, I would do what you did with me 30 years ago. I would hold your hand, and look into your eyes, and sing that song, "Man of Sorrows." I have nothing else to say. There are no answers for this kind of tragedy except to point you, as you once pointed me, to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of joy, but the Man of Sorrows who knows our pain."

"Man of Sorrows, what a name. For the Son of God who came; Ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Savior! Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood; Sealed my pardon with His blood; Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

Choir:

"Guilty, vile, and helpless, we, Spotless Lamb of God was He; Full redemption—can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior! Lifted up was He to die, "It is finished!" was His cry; Now in Heaven exalted high; Hallelujah, what a Savior! When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring, then anew this song we'll sing Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

Robert Wolgemuth:

The music that you're hearing isn't just John MacArthur, and Bobbie, and Joni, and me, but Dr. Paul Plew, the director of the Choral at the Master's College, came, and spent the time in the studio with us, and brought 50 of their college students.

It was an incredible experience, partly because these are young people who know these hymns. It was so encouraging to us that there is a generation of college-age students who also know these hymns and count them very dear. Those are the wonderful voices that you just have heard.

Dr. James Dobson: As has every generation of believers-

Robert Wolgemuth: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: For a hundred years or more. Robert, you asked me earlier to share the story of my mother. You all experienced it with Shirley and me. I would like you to tell it. Would you explain what happened on that day?

Robert Wolgemuth: Sure. It was a Sunday afternoon. Bobbie, you can jump in on this. It was a Sunday afternoon. Your mom was in Pasadena. You folks lived in Arcadia.

Dr. James Dobson: Right.

Robert Wolgemuth: You said, "Let's go over and see Myrtle." Bobbie and I had known and loved Myrtle for a number of years.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: We had sung around the dinner table at the Dobson's, especially New Year's Day. Myrtle loved hymns. We knew that, and we were going to go sing with her or sing to her.

Robert Wolgemuth: Beans and hush puppies, right, Jim?

Dr. James Dobson: That's right, our traditional meal.

Robert Wolgemuth: We went to visit Myrtle. As we were walking, getting ready to walk into the room, Jim said to Bobbie and me, "Now she may not know who you are, so you better be ready for that because some days, she's lucid, and some days, she's not."

Dr. James Dobson: She had Parkinson's disease. She was in the latter stages of the disease. She really didn't know very much at that time, that-

Robert Wolgemuth: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: I think two or three days later-

Robert Wolgemuth: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: She didn't even know me. I didn't expect her to respond to you all at all.

Robert Wolgemuth: Well, we came in. You said, "Do you know Robert and Bobbie?" She kidded you. Of course, Myrtle-

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, she had a great sense of humor.

Robert Wolgemuth: She did. She called you a nut for something for thinking that she wouldn't know who we were. We sat down on the bed. We hugged her and sat down on the edge of the bed. In fact, we have a photograph right here in the studio of that very day, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Bobbie's like Joni. She says, "Let's sing." I don't think of it. Bobbie thought of it. She said, "Let's sing." Well, we knew that Myrtle loved to sing because we had sung with her before. We started to sing. The first hymn we sang was "O Worship the King."

Myrtle seemed to know where we were and follow along, but just smiled. She didn't speak. We got to the fourth verse of "O Worship the King," "Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail. In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail."

Now we're sitting on the edge of the bed of a very frail woman, but guess what? She sang along. Her lips began to move. Then she didn't just remember the words, but she sang in alto. She was a great alto.

Dr. James Dobson: She did. She did.

Robert Wolgemuth: We sang. We finished that song in three-part harmony. Boy, that got us rolling, and we sang, and sang, and sang. As I recall, you were sitting over-

Dr. James Dobson: This is the lady who had not expressed an original thought in probably a year. Here she is, singing the fourth verse in perfect alto.

Robert Wolgemuth: Do you remember how that affected you?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Yes, how did that affect you?

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, I bawled like a baby, that's what. Do you remember that?

Robert Wolgemuth: I sure do.

Dr. James Dobson: I could not get control of myself because I'd heard her sing beautifully like that when I was young, and she was much younger.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: Those tracks in her mind were so deep, the fact that she remembered every word to every hymn after that.

Robert Wolgemuth: Part of our dream for the *O Worship the King* project is that people would take their children, and push them ahead 60 or 70 years, and realize that what they're doing is making an investment in their own children so that when their children's grandchildren are sitting on the edge of the bed, these will be the

things that really control their subconscious mind. It's a powerful and wonderful thing.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Or if their child has a disabling injury, such as I had at the age of 17. Dr. Dobson, I was so confused, and so despairing, and depressed, but the memory of those wonderful texts, such as, "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night. Thine eye diffused a quickening ray I woke, the dungeon flamed with light." Just to rehearse a verse of a hymn like that when you're facing a life of paralysis, it's the biblical insights, as we've shared already, the theological richness of these texts.

Dr. James Dobson: There is a place for praise choruses, but there's nothing that will replace what you just sang. The incredible theology, that was Charles Wesley, wasn't it?

Joni Eareckson Tada: Yes, it was, and you're right. It's all theology. At a time when I was doubting the goodness of God, doubting my salvation, doubting God's sovereignty, I had a hymn that I could rehearse in my head and sing in the quiet of the night when my roommates were asleep. I think it was God's way of taking His gentle hand and impressing those truths deeper and deeper into my heart that made the huge difference. As Robert has said, that's our hope for parents, for their children, with this project, *O Worship the King*.

Robert Wolgemuth: There wouldn't have been a Charles Wesley without-

Bobbie Wolgemuth: Susanna Wesley.

Robert Wolgemuth: That's right.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: What a mother. She had the children. She had 19 children and homeschooled them. Every day, she would get up, and the kids would start... Before breakfast, they had to sing a Psalm. That's how the boys started with getting all these beautiful lyrics and meter in their mind. The combination of music and lyric does something. It goes so deep into your heart.

It envelops your spirit. If I had two textbooks to give to my children, I would say a Bible and a hymn book. It's not just in church to sing these, but to have these for your own personal devotions, to take these, as Joni does, written on a card and in front of her all day. I think to take them with you in your purse or your briefcase.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Right. When I travel, I memorize. My friends who travel with me, whether it's my husband, Ken, or girlfriends, we pick a hymn for a trip. When we were in China we picked, "All the way my Savior leads me. What have I to ask beside?" We memorized all four verses. These Chinese looked at us, some of our Christian friends over there, "You people sing a lot."

When we got to the Great Wall of China and my husband, Ken, was lifting me up, I don't know how many steps, Dr. Dobson. It must have been 120. Dear Ken, he lifted me up to the top of the Great Wall of China. I'm singing, "Love lifted me. Love lifted me."

It's a way of witnessing. We are to be Christians who exude the joy of the Lord Jesus. Little wonder the Bible tells us to have a melody in our hearts, when we wake up in the morning, to ask the Lord Jesus to give us one of His melodies to sing throughout the course of the day, that it be the witness, that it be the testimony, that people might look at us and say, "Something's awfully different about you."

1 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." Well, when you've got a hymn on your heart, when you're memorizing scripture, such as Bobbie and I were just talking about, it is a way of praying without ceasing. If we can be singing a hymn during the course of the day, we are offering unceasing prayer. That is so exciting.

Dr. James Dobson: Joni, I would think that "It Is Well With My Soul" would be high on your list of favorite hymns-

Joni Eareckson Tada: Oh yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Sitting in a wheelchair or since you were a teenager. Does that mean a lot to you?

Joni Eareckson Tada: "It Is Well With My Soul." The beautiful story behind that hymn... Perhaps, quickly, you can share it, Bobbie.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: The man that wrote it had already experienced, in Chicago, the loss of his business and the loss of his son. He sent his wife and four children onto Europe to be a part of Dwight Moody's crusade. While they were going across, another ship hit them.

His wife went on, and sent a wire to him, and said, "Saved alone." He quickly got on another ship and went over. They paused at the place where his four precious daughters had drowned. He wrote "It Is Well With My Soul."

Joni Eareckson Tada: "When peace like a river attendeth my way. When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say. It is well, it is well with my soul.
It is well (it is well) With my soul (with my soul). It is well, it is well with my soul.
And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight. The clouds be rolled back
as a scroll. The trumpet shall resound, and the Lord shall descend. Even so, it is
well with my soul! It is well (it is well) With my soul (with my soul). It is well, it is
well with my soul."

Dr. James Dobson: That is beautiful.

Joni Eareckson Tada: Well, it is well with our souls, isn't it?

Dr. James Dobson: Isn't that beautiful? My goodness. There is a place for praise choruses in churches today, certainly, because I know that's the style of language and music that younger churchgoers typically enjoy. I just hope we can all agree that no matter what style of music we sing, if our heart is focused on God, then we're on the right track.

I really enjoyed interacting with you all today. In fact, Joni, and Robert, and Bobbie, I appreciate you being with us today. I know that you have to leave, but we're just going to go on talking and singing today. We'll record that and let our listeners hear what takes place tomorrow. There's something good going on here. I'm being ministered to. If you all don't mind, we will just continue talking and recording. Again, thanks for being with us today.

Bobbie Wolgemuth: We loved it.

Robert Wolgemuth: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: The beautiful hymns we learned in childhood can become lifelines of hope and comfort. They remind us that even in our darkest moments, God's Truth can sustain us when nothing else can. You've been listening to a special edition of Family Talk and the first part of Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Joni Eareckson Tada, Robert Wolgemuth, and Robert's late wife, Bobbie Wolgemuth, shortly before she went home to be with the Lord. They've been talking about Joni, Robert, and Bobbie's book called *O Worship the King: Hymns of Assurance and Praise to Encourage Your Heart*.

If you'd like to learn more about our special guests, or the books they've written, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And that's also where you'll find the audio for the complete broadcast of today's program.

Well this coming Thursday, is May the 1st, it's the first Thursday of the month of May and that means it's a very special day for our nation, the annual National Day of Prayer. You'll recall that for 25 years, our own Shirley Dobson served as the chair of the National Day of Prayer and helped to spread the good news of the gospel through prayer on the first Thursday of May for a quarter of a century. In honor of this momentous occasion, I encourage you to download an excellent free resource from the James Dobson Family Institute that traces America's rich heritage of prayer from the continental congress to today. This beautifully designed guide shares inspiring historical accounts, presidential proclamations and practical ways to pray effectively for our nation during these challenging times. Go to drjamesdobson.org to download your free copy and while you're reading it, you'll also discover how prayer has shaped America's history and how you can be a part of this living legacy. To receive your free

National Day of Prayer guide, go to drjamesdobson.org and also be on the lookout for a special link for the National Day of Prayer event that will be livestreaming on our website this Thursday, May 1.

Well, that's all the time we have for today. I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. Dobson and all of us here at the JDFl, thanks so much for listening. Join us again next time as we continue our conversation with Joni Eareckson Tada and Robert and Bobbie Wolgemuth 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: This is James Dobson again. As we close today's program, I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions. And I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.