

# Joni Eareckson Tada

Founder and Chief Executive Officer

## About Joni

Living with quadriplegia for over 55 years, Joni Eareckson Tada has looked for—and found—God’s strength in the midst of suffering and hardship. Joni is the Founder and CEO of Joni and Friends, a non-profit ministry providing practical help and Gospel hope to families living with disability worldwide. She is also a beloved Christian author, speaker, and internationally renowned advocate for people with disabilities.

The Baltimore, Maryland native broke her neck while diving into the Chesapeake Bay on July 30, 1967. The then-17-year-old had been an avid equestrian and athlete. God’s faithfulness helped her come to terms with her disability. During Joni’s grueling rehabilitation, she learned to paint high-detail fine art pieces by holding a brush between her teeth.



Barbara Walters interviewed Joni about her unique artistic talent on “The Today Show” in 1974. A book publisher saw her appearance, which led to the publication of Joni’s 1976 autobiography, *Joni: An Unforgettable Story*. The book sold five million copies worldwide and has been translated into 38 languages. It also caught the attention of evangelist Billy Graham, who produced Joni’s book into a feature movie.



Joni spoke at a dozen Billy Graham Crusades, including one in Budapest, Hungary in 1989 where Mr. Graham’s team underwrote the train fare for any special needs family who wanted to attend the Crusade. Some families dragged their disabled loved ones into the stadium on blankets or mattresses. Others were carried in old lawn chairs, or on the backs of family members to hear Joni speak.

**“He has chosen not to heal me, but to hold me. The more intense the pain, the closer his embrace.”**

After Joni’s movie was released, people from all over the world began writing to her with requests for help or guidance in dealing with disability and suffering. The letters revealed a deep need for Christian disability ministry. That’s why she founded Joni and Friends. For more than 45 years, Joni and Friends has envisioned a world where every person with a disability finds hope, dignity, and their place in the body of Christ.

The ministry’s signature outreach, *Wheels for the World™*, has provided over 230,000 wheelchairs to individuals living with disability in low-resource countries. Joni and Friends also provides marriage and family respite retreats, disability training for churches, and spiritual support for special needs families. The Joni Eareckson Tada Disability Research Center promotes a biblical worldview on issues that impact people with disabilities, and *Joni’s House* programs provide services in response to the needs of the local community in strategic locations around the globe—including physical therapy, job training, and food assistance.

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Joni also reaches people through inspirational media. She is the author and co-author of over 60 books, and her daily four-minute radio program reaches one million listeners each week.

As a powerful voice for people living with disability and suffering, Joni has had a profound impact in the secular arena, as well. She helped develop the first draft of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and she served on the National Council on Disability under President Ronald Reagan, as well as the Disability Advisory Committee at the U.S. State Department under President George H.W. Bush.

Joni is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the National Religious Broadcasters Association's Hall of Fame. In recognition of her work to promote the well-being of pre-born children with disabilities, the elderly, and the medically fragile, Joni received the Alan E. Sears Award in 2019 from the Alliance Defending Freedom. In 2024, the Global Leadership Network bestowed Joni with their inaugural Legacy Leader Award. She has also been honored by multiple colleges and universities, as well as elected officials such as Vice President Mike Pence.

She and her husband, Ken, have been married for over 40 years. They live in Southern California and enjoy serving people living with disability together.

**“I’m grateful for the grace of God which enables me to keep smiling not in spite of my disability, but because of it, for the weaker I am, the harder I must lean on God’s grace; the harder I lean on him, the stronger I discover him to be, and the bolder my testimony to his grace.”**

