

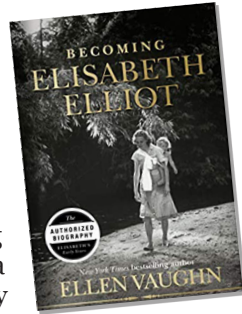
Joni's Favorite Books for 2020

The following is a list of books I've either listened to on audiobooks, read on the plane or used in research (*always fun research!*). It's constantly being updated as I read new titles, but the books here have stuck with me during 2020.



1. **Becoming Elisabeth Elliot** Ellen Vaughn

Throughout the long season of COVID-19, I strengthened myself by re-reading the works of this remarkable saint from the last century. Elisabeth was a young missionary when members of a violent Amazonian tribe savagely killed her husband Jim and his four colleagues. Incredibly, she took her toddler daughter, snakebite kit, Bible and journal back to live in the jungle with the very Stone Age people who speared her husband to death. *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* is the new biography of her life (I had the honor of writing the foreword). Her husky faith and no-nonsense approach to trials kept my hope focused on Jesus during months of sequestering.



2. **The Warner Boys: Our Family's Story of Autism and Hope** Ana and Curt Warner

Joni and Friends serves thousands of families impacted by autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and I am always touched to read their stories. My heart is attuned to pray for weary parents whose homes are filled with chaos, emotional exhaustion and the constant fear for the safety of their beloved, but unpredictable, children with ASD. If you want an inside glimpse of such a home, please take time to read this revealing and highly personal book. Former Seattle Seahawks star running back Curt Warner and his wife share their inspiring story from stardom to heartbreaking, self-imposed isolation. Above all, it's a story that proves faith in Christ is always the path to healing and peace, no matter how significant the disability in a family.

3. **The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment** Jeremiah Burroughs

Here's another classic work I re-read during "sheltering in place." Jeremiah Burroughs was a Puritan preacher who was known for his contented, uncomplaining and grateful walk with God. In this book, Burroughs writes gently yet authoritatively on cultivating contentment. His principles are timeless, especially in this age of grumbling when so many people are discontent with God's ways concerning the

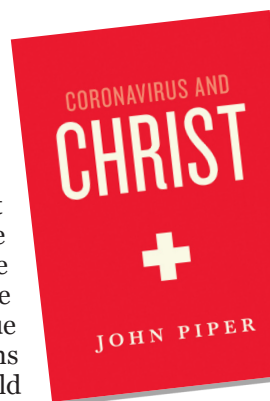
global pandemic. If you desire to be satisfied with life as God gives it, this book is your guide.

4. **Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering** Makoto Fujimura

I have long been interested in things Japanese. Especially Japanese art. It's why I was drawn to this unusual book by artist Makoto Fujimura. The author/artist not only explains the nature of Japanese art, but its hidden connections to suffering and the Gospel. Fujimura refers often to the persecution of Christians in 17th century Japan and how their suffering – and the Japanese people's subsequent silence on the subject – helped shape his Christian faith, as well as his artistic style. In my own suffering, Japanese art has always provided an aesthetic soul-rest that I do not often find in Western art. So, if you are an artist – actually, if you are an artist who struggles with suffering – I recommend this work (especially the audiobook, given that Makoto Fujimura is the narrator).

5. **Coronavirus and Christ** Dr. John Piper

Even back in March of this year, Dr. Piper sensed that coronavirus was not merely a blizzard that would quickly pass, or even a long winter season that would drag out. He proposed that COVID-19 might turn into a little ice age through which we would learn to survive and thrive. Piper paints an accurate picture of what we must do as we continue to deal with this virus. His book contains hope-filled lessons every Christian should cleave to when sequestering, whether working long stretches at home or lying flat in bed with a lingering illness. He states, "Hope keeps people moving forward; it keeps waking us up and getting us out of bed in the morning. Hope gives meaning to our daily lives, even when they are locked down and quarantined." Should this strange virus continue, *Coronavirus and Christ* will provide spiritual balance and life-giving hope in the months to come.



6. The Strength of His Hand (Chronicles of the Kings Book #3)

Lynn Austin

I'm usually not a fan of fictional books based on true stories from the Bible, but I make an exception with the Chronicles of the Kings series. Especially having listened to the audiobooks. Suzanne Toren's creative narration (with her many voices) breathed a fresh reality into the age-old story of King Hezekiah. As I listened, I felt as though I were the one scrambling through the cobbled streets of Jerusalem to escape the approaching Assyrians in all their savagery and ruthlessness. So now, when I open my Bible and read the stories of the Judean Kings, I can more easily visualize the people and their times. This series also gave me a deeper appreciation for the way God may have worked out his sovereign plan during that heartbreaking era in biblical history.

7. The Practice of the Presence of God

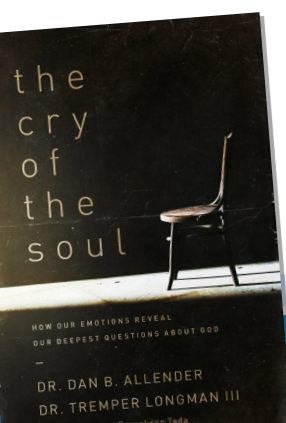
Brother Lawrence

Most Christians want to live godly lives that reflect the love of Christ, but many fail to "put into practice" what they already know. Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk who lived in Paris in the 1600s, was at first a proud man. Eventually, he began to see that menial, everyday tasks provided the perfect opportunities to develop intimacy with Christ. The principles in this classic work will humble you as you learn to value the benefit of small chores. Whether laboring in a soup kitchen, a laundry room or in a nursing home, each is a worthy path to a deeper, livelier walk with Christ. This small but significant book helps me "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

8. The Cry of the Soul

Dan Allender

If you choose to read this, you will have stumbled upon the best of guides to help you out of depression. I should know. I first read it decades ago when I was still climbing out of the clinical depression brought on by my diving accident and resulting quadriplegia. The Cry of the Soul showed me what to do with my anger and hurt – not stuff it under the carpet of my conscience, or minimize it, but actually do something good with it. In this book, Dan Allender gives a study of emotions from the Psalms, explaining to the reader that all emotions, whether positive or negative, give us a glimpse of the true nature of God. My main take away? When we have negative emotions, we recognize them as the cry of our soul to be made right with the Lord.



9. Gay Girl, Good God

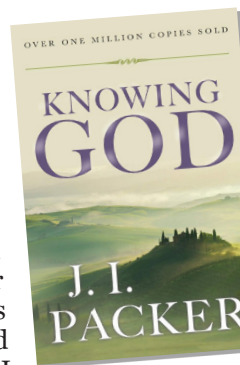
Jackie Hill Perry

Much is being said nowadays about homosexuality, so I chose to listen to this audiobook to better understand the issue from the perspective of a young woman who had, at one time, fully embraced the gay lifestyle. Jackie Hill Perry shares her own story, giving the reader an understanding of how God can completely transform the deep-seated affections of a heart gone awry. This book opened my eyes as to the complexities, as well as conflicts, in the heart of individuals that follows a gay lifestyle. It will enlighten and encourage you to pray for friends or family members who are enmeshed in this aberrant way of thinking and living; the book will also better inform you on how to engage gay individuals in meaningful conversations.

10. Knowing God

Dr. J. I. Packer

Whenever I'm asked "Joni, who has greatly influenced your walk with Christ," I like to point to Dr. J.I. Packer. His classic book Knowing God shaped my ideas about the importance of knowing, praying to and communing with the triune God. Packer goes into detail explaining how all things come from the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. In the early 80s, after I wrote to tell him how much I appreciated his work, Dr. Packer and I became friends. Many years later, I still paraphrase his words, "The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. To live with your 'thorn' uncomplainingly – that is, sweet, patient and free in heart to love and help others, even though every day you feel weak – is true sanctification." This book will help you grasp who our triune God is and why he should be worshipped.



11. The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination

Dr. Loraine Boettner

Okay, the list was to be only 10 books, but here's my bonus book. In the early days after my accident, I kept pushing the replay button on my dive off the raft, trying to imagine what was happening in the heavenlies. Did God take a "hands off" approach and allow me to do something stupid of my own free will? Or did Satan go before God with Job's playbook, asking for permission to shove me off the raft? Or maybe God himself pushed me as he held back protecting angels. I found answers in this theological text. Boettner takes great pains to explain the thinking of John Calvin, portraying the doctrine of God's sovereignty as a source of great comfort. I know I'm safe because God's wise and good decrees overarch everything. How does God pull off decreeing but not necessarily "doing" awful tragedies? Welcome to the world of finite humans trying to comprehend an infinite God.