Five-year-old Arlie, who has cerebral palsy, was all smiles at our Mississippi Family Retreat! Look inside for more Family Retreat fun!
When ‘disability’ is in a family, you can hardly imagine the exhausting demands. I know parents of kids with autism who take shifts sleeping—and they’ve been doing it for years. I know mothers who are on-duty all day long tending to their disabled child; when Dad comes home after work, he drops his things and immediately takes over. Day-in and day-out, year after year, it’s the same tiring routine.

These precious families are suffocating in isolation. Who can they ask for help? Who on the ‘outside’ is skilled enough to come and suction lungs, change adult diapers, or infuse feedings through a G-tube? It’s a desperate cycle that wears out the most stalwart saints…and splinters the best marriages. When Mom is emotionally numb, how can she muster strength to respond to her husband? Dad withdraws. Siblings drift into their rooms. Everyone ends up running on empty.

To many special-needs families, the church seems like a faraway place for normal people with perfect children. Sadly, without friends, their closest relationships are often medical doctors or therapists. Is there hope for these needy families?! Joni and Friends says, ‘Yesss’ with a fist-pump! We know how disability impacts families, and we bend-over-backward to reach out, care and connect. Through Family Retreats—whether in person or virtual—we lift social isolation, ascribe positive meaning to pain, network families with the outside-world, and give help and hope in Jesus Christ.

And not just at one Family Retreat, but through a whole array of personal touchpoints which offer respite and healing, relationship and community, hope and happy-hearted joy in the Lord Jesus. I am so proud of our Joni and Friends teams who work overtime to make certain no special-needs family is left behind. All are prayed for, cared for, and connected to specially trained churches who resonate with ‘disability.’

Most likely, you will never physically lift a disabled child into a wheelchair. But you can lift families out of isolation through your prayers and gifts. And no one is more grateful than I am for your partnership in the Gospel. Your support strengthens the ‘Family’ in every Family Retreat, and I love you for it! From my heart, thank you…

As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!

PSALM 40:17
Too many families impacted by disability are today’s widows and orphans, because when disability enters the family, fathers often leave...

Single mother, Jennifer, and her 19-year-old daughter, Maddie, know the hardships of being on their own all too well. Maddie’s disabilities are numerous and complicated. Cerebral palsy, seizures, and relying on a feeding tube for nourishment are just a few of the challenges that make Maddie so medically fragile. She requires a wheelchair for mobility, and an eye-gaze communication device to make her needs known. And all that is on a good day.

On top of her day-to-day caregiving demands, Maddie has needed to be hospitalized several times – with one recent hospitalization lasting an entire month. Simply put, life for Jennifer as a single mom is just plain hard. Both Jennifer and Maddie struggle with discouragement and the very real need for hope.

And hope is exactly what you gave them when they attended Family Retreat in Arizona! Jennifer, Maddie and her caregivers were all smiles knowing that they were welcomed and loved at Family Retreat – and that COVID-19 safety guidelines were being followed to a T.

At Family Retreat Maddie got to go fishing, horseback riding, and show off her wheelchair dancing skills – because everything at Family Retreat is fully accessible. She loved painting and meeting the Arizona firefighters who did a presentation for all the families, but a real highlight was when Maddie got a standing ovation at the Talent Show!

“This is a great reminder and example of how all people should be treated,” shared one of the special needs moms at Family Retreat with Jennifer and Maddie. “At Family Retreat, I grow in my faith and God teaches me distinct lessons. I feel renewed.”

And while Maddie was very sad to leave Family Retreat, she and Jennifer knew they were part of the Joni and Friends family – and important parts of the body of Christ! They don’t have to wait for the next Family Retreat for their next dose of encouragement, because we’re serving families impacted by disability 12 months out of the year. Through our Arizona Halftime Respite events and parent support groups taking place every month, Jennifer and Maddie – and other special needs families like theirs – experience the love of Jesus all year long!
Family Retreat Saves Marriages & Strengthens the Whole Family!

Adam and Katie have two children with disabilities. Caroline, who is 12 years old and has a congenital heart defect as well as cerebral palsy, and 8-year-old Luke, who has spina bifida. Their lives are overwhelmed with doctors’ appointments, multiple therapy sessions, and administering medications around the clock. It’s no wonder they’ve felt consumed by exhaustion.

But their whole family was refreshed, renewed and rejuvenated at our Mississippi Family Retreat! Caroline and Luke beamed with joy as they played games and learned all about the love of Jesus. And after six solid months of total isolation due to coronavirus, Family Retreat came just in time!

Six-year-old Vaida – who has cerebral palsy, neuromuscular scoliosis and global developmental delays – really let her light shine at Family Retreat! Being non-verbal didn’t stop sweet Vaida from making new friends and experiencing true joy in Jesus. And because everything at Family Retreat is fully accessible, nothing got in the way of Vaida having the time of her life!

Vaida’s Short Term Missionaries made sure she stayed safe and happy – freeing up her parents, Matt and Mary Kathryn, so they could focus on each other instead of the non-stop caregiving demands that are always before them. At Family Retreat, “We could put our marriage first,” explained Mary Kathryn. Thank you for saving special needs marriages!

At Family Retreat, we care for the entire family through parent groups, marriage enrichment activities, and programs for every child. Children with disabilities experience freedom in Christ, and so do their siblings! Vaida’s 9-year-old brother, Knox, does his part to help take care of her all year long, but at Family Retreat he got to take a break from being a caregiver. “Family Retreat gave Knox a chance to just be a kid!”

“Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”

PSALM 34:3
Warrior Getaways are Saving Lives!

After 13 years in the Marines and six deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan, Mike returned home from active duty with Post Traumatic Stress and severe anxiety. As it is with many of our combat veterans, Mike’s anguish became overwhelming, and he attempted suicide on three different occasions. Doctors medicated Mike to try to numb his pain, but they couldn’t find a treatment program that helped. That is, until Mike found our Texas Warrior Getaway.

“I was ready to give up on Mike,” confessed his wife, Beth. “But after coming to Warrior Getaway, now I have hope.” Mike continued, “Everyone is so positive here; so spiritual. They let us know we’re not alone.” At Warrior Getaway, Mike found peace in Christ.

Mike and Beth left the Warrior Getaway with renewed hope for their marriage, their lives, and the future. They were once filled with despair and on the brink of collapse, but through Warrior Getaway, Jesus has given them a new lease on life! Thank you for sharing the love of God with military families like Mike’s who sacrificed everything for our freedoms.

U.S. veterans commit suicide every day. Joni and Friends is dedicated to doing everything possible to give our servicemen and women hope in their hardships and save more lives – and souls – for Christ!

Travis, Farrah and their three children found hope and healing at Warrior Getaway, too. Also a Marine, Travis defended our country for four years that included two deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. He came home from the battlefield with Post Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injuries, seizures, depression and anxiety. And on the night before Warrior Getaway, Travis attempted to end his own life.

But God intervened and had a better plan for Travis and his family – one that included Warrior Getaway, for there “Travis realized that God loves him even with his internal battles. Travis loved being with the other Warriors who are fighting the same battles post combat.”

“The other veterans made Travis feel loved and supported without judgment and have shown him that this is how God loves him, too.” As Farrah explained, “Warrior Getaway gets him back on track.” And Farrah no longer feels alone in her care for her husband, because Warrior Getaway pointed her to Jesus!

Travis and Farrah arrived broken and living on the edge, but their faith in the Lord has been restored and strengthened through Warrior Getaway, and they now have a year-round support system to rely on. Thank you for giving back to our veterans who gave their all for us!

I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.

JEREMIAH 31:13

Hear another powerful Warrior Getaway testimony when you visit jonifriends.org/warrior
Supporting Special Needs Families All Year Long!

From New Mexico
John and Nichole have four beautiful children, including 6-year-old Charlie, who has Down syndrome. Nichole struggles with daunting fatigue and on those long days when she is simply unable to calm or console Charlie, her heart cries out, “I’m not strong enough for this!”

But through the support of Joni and Friends New Mexico and Family Retreat, this special needs family of six finds hope to face each new day. Joni and Friends is a “great reminder that we were not created to do life alone and why we desperately need community with others,” explains Nichole. Your love and prayers are holding families living with disabilities all year long!

From the San Francisco Bay Area
Butch and Judy received infinite hope at our Bay Area Family Retreat with their son Scotty, who has Down syndrome. That is, until Butch’s Lou Gehrig’s disease made attending Family Retreat impossible. But as Judy explained when we created Family Retreat at Home, “God knew exactly what our family needed! We got to worship with our Joni and Friends family in the comfort of our own home and it was heavenly. We felt that same unconditional love that we have experienced in person at Family Retreat!” Thank you for the beautiful ways you support families living with disabilities all year long!

From Mississippi
Jerry’s grandson, Kynan, was born with cerebral palsy. Watching his daughter struggle as a special needs mother – and loving Kynan as only a grandparent can – inspired Jerry to use his woodworking gift to bless other families impacted by disability, too. “Giving to Joni and Friends just means more because of my grandson,” explained Jerry, who has donated hundreds of wooden nativity sets and decorative churches to Joni and Friends Mississippi. And as one special needs mom said, “These are a reminder that we are not on this journey alone!”

Thank you for sharing your time, talents and treasure with families impacted by disability!

From Arizona
The strain of caring for a child with special needs places additional pressure on a marriage few will ever understand. That’s why so many families affected by disability end up broken, and it’s why Joni and Friends is committed to doing everything we can to keep marriages and families strong. Our Family Retreats include marriage support groups, and as we saw at our Arizona Family Retreat, the need for this type of support is monumental.

“When I married into this, I had no idea how hard it would be,” confessed one father. Another shared, “Most days it takes everything I have not to just walk out like my own dad did.”

But all those special needs dads who showed up to Family Retreat downcast and discouraged left with smiles on their faces and new resolve in their hearts! “I’m going to step up and lead my family,” announced one excited father. “I have to die to self and be all in,” declared another. “I’m committed to my wife and my family!”

Make no mistake, your prayers and support are protecting marriages and restoring families!

From Mississippi

From Arizona

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...

MALACHI 4:6

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11
Glorifying God Through Disability!

From Louisiana

Little Emma Kate was born with an extremely rare genetic disorder known as 2q37 deletion syndrome. Her disabilities are numerous, including a severe heart defect that has required multiple surgeries, as well as the need for a feeding tube. Life for her parents Trey and Rachel – and for her brothers Thomas and Luke – is dominated by disability. Wrestling with despair and depression would be understandable, but through the support of Joni and Friends Louisiana, Emma Kate and her family have found true hope in their hardships. At our recent outdoor adventure respite event, “We found genuine, unconditional love with kindness and compassion,” shared Rachel. The team at Joni and Friends Louisiana are the real “hands and feet of Jesus!”

Rachel went on to explain, “Joni's personal testimony of faith and her life are a true inspiration. It is my prayer that the works of God would be displayed in Emma Kate’s life, also.”

You have given families living with disability a new, biblical perspective on life! Thank you for declaring to the world that God’s power is made perfect in weakness!

From New England

With 11-year-old twin boys Austin and Joey, and 4-year-old Willow who has developmental delays and difficult sensory issues, life is hard for Mike and Amy. But their challenging day-to-day circumstances were magnified beyond belief when Mike got coronavirus and ended up in the ICU with double pneumonia. And as her husband lay fighting for his life in the hospital, Amy “wondered if she had the strength and mental energy to be Willow’s solo caregiver.”

But when our Joni and Friends New England team learned of this dear family’s hardships, hope arrived on the scene. We brought a Special Delivery basket to Amy’s door, complete with gifts for every member of the family and Christ-centered encouragement for all. We partnered with a local church, and soon Amy was blessed with groceries, note cards, and an abundance of prayer. Overcome with gratitude, Amy said our Special Delivery “came at just the right time!”

Your prayers carried this special needs family through another crisis, and now Mike is back recovering at home. Thank you for loving families impacted by disability in word and deed!

There are lots of exciting events happening in your area, too!

In addition to Family Retreats and Wheels for the World outreaches, our Field teams are offering Respite Events, Support Groups, Church Trainings and all sorts of Family Fun gatherings.

Visit joniandfriends.org/events today and find out how you can get involved!

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9
We gratefully acknowledge contributions given in memory or in honor of loved ones to further ministry in the disability community. To give a gift in memory of a loved one or in honor of a special occasion, visit jonietandfriends.org/donate

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