

BIO: Joni Eareckson Tada

Founder and CEO



JONI EARECKSON TADA – Full Bio 2020

Joni Eareckson Tada is a beloved Christian author, speaker and an internationally renowned advocate for people with disabilities. She is Founder and CEO of Joni and Friends, a Christian organization known for sharing hope through hardship within the disability community. Located in Agoura Hills, California, the Joni and Friends International Disability Center serves as hub for a global outreach which impacts hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities and their families.

A diving accident in 1967 left Joni Eareckson, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. After two years of struggling through depression and rehabilitation, she emerged with new skills and a fresh determination to help others in similar situations.

During her rehabilitation, Joni spent long months learning how to paint with a brush between her teeth. Her high-detail fine art paintings and prints are sought-after and collected.

Her best-selling autobiography *Joni* and the feature film of the same name have been translated into many languages, introducing her to people around the world. Mrs. Tada has also visited over 50 countries, multiple times.

Mrs. Tada has served on the National Council on Disability and on the Disability Advisory Committee to the U.S. State Department. She has served as Senior Associate for Disability Concerns for the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and serves in an advisory capacity to the American Leprosy Mission, the National Institute on Learning Disabilities, Christian Blind Mission International, as well as on the Board of Reference for the Christian Medical and Dental Society. Joni and her husband Ken currently serve on the Young Life Capernaum Board.

After being the first woman honored by the National Association of Evangelicals as its “Layperson of the Year” in 1986, Joni was named “Churchwoman of the Year” in 1993 by the Religious Heritage Foundation.

She has received numerous other awards and honors, including the American Academy of Achievement’s *Golden Plate Award*; The *Courage Award* from the Courage Rehabilitation Center; The *Award of Excellence* from the Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center; The *Victory Award* from the National Rehabilitation Hospital; and The *Golden Word Award* from the International Bible Society. 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 Alliance Defending Freedom.

Joni has been awarded several honorary degrees, including: Bachelor of Letters from Western Maryland College; Doctor of Humanities from Gordon College; Doctor of Humane Letters from Columbia International University, the first bestowed in its 75-year history; Doctor of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary; Doctor of Divinity from Lancaster Bible College; a Doctor of Humanitarian Services from California Baptist University; and in 2009, a Doctor of Humane Letters by Indiana Wesleyan University. She was also inducted into Indiana Wesleyan University’s *Society of World Changers*.

Joni has written over 50 books and is a regular columnist in several magazines. She was inducted into the Christian Booksellers’ Association’s *Hall of Honor* in 1995 and received the *Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award* in 2003 from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

Joni’s works cover topics ranging from disability outreach to understanding the goodness of God and the problem of suffering. Her books include: *A Christmas Longing*, depicting her best-loved Christmas paintings, and *Life and Death Dilemma*, addressing the complex issues surrounding physician-assisted suicide. The mystery of suffering is systematically examined in *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty*, a book written with Steve Estes in 1997 which won ECPA’s *Gold Medallion Award*.

In 2003, Joni wrote her memoir *The God I Love*, chronicling a lifetime walking with Jesus. In 2011, *A Place of Healing* was released, recounting her journey through physical pain and addressing questions concerning prayers for healing. After battling stage III breast cancer in 2010, Joni wrote *Diagnosed with Breast Cancer: Life after Shock*, released in the fall of 2012. *Joni & Ken: An Untold Love Story* was released in 2013. Joni’s book detailing new health challenges, *Beside Bethesda: 31 Days Toward Deeper Healing*, was released in 2014. In October 2016, her daily devotional, *A Spectacle of Glory* was released by Zondervan – cataloging insights from her battle with chronic pain, it won best devotional book in the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association’s 2017 Christian Book Awards. Joni served as General Editor of Tyndale’s *Beyond Suffering Bible*, a special edition published for those who suffer chronic conditions, as well as their caregivers. In 2018, an updated and expanded edition of her classic book *Heaven* was released, bringing a new understanding of what heaven is, along with new mysteries and hopes.

Beginning in 1982, she began hosting “Joni and Friends,” a daily 4-minute radio program that shares hope for people’s hardships. This radio feature airs on more than 1,000 outlets and reaches one million listeners a week. Her one-minute inspirational program, “Diamonds in the Dust,” also airs daily on more than 800 stations nationwide. In May 2022, the “Joni and Friends” radio program will celebrate 40 years of broadcasting.

Joni served as host of a 30-minute television series called “Joni and Friends,” which highlights the stories of people enduring difficult trials while continuing to trust in God. In 2012, the TV episode “Cancer – Joni’s Journey” was released, detailing her first battle against stage III breast cancer, including surgery and chemotherapy. Episodes can be viewed on the television page at joniandfriends.org.

In 2002, Joni received the *William Ward Ayer Award* for excellence from the National Religious Broadcasters’ Association. In 2012, the National Religious Broadcasters Association inducted Joni Eareckson Tada into its *Hall of Fame*. In 2015, Moody Radio awarded Joni its prestigious *Robert Neff Award* for distinguished spiritual excellence in religious broadcasting. In 2012, The Colson Center on Christian Worldview awarded Joni its prestigious *William Wilberforce Award*. In 2017, Biola University conferred upon Joni its highly acclaimed *Charles W. Colson Courage & Conviction Award*. In 2019, Joni was presented the *Sing! Lifetime Achievement Award* at the Kennedy Center by Vice President and Mrs. Michael Pence.

She has been interviewed or featured on TV shows such as “Larry King Live,” “ABC World News Tonight,” and Fox News’ “The Kelly File with Megyn Kelly.” PBS’s “Religion & Ethics” program featured Joni and her work among persons with disabilities worldwide. She has appeared in print outlets such as *Christianity Today*, *World Magazine*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times* and on radio shows such as “Breakpoint,” “Focus on the Family” and “FamilyTalk with Dr. James Dobson.” Joni’s commentaries on disability-related issues have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and *TIME Magazine*. She writes occasional articles for *Christianity Today*, *The Gospel Coalition* blog and *Desiring God Ministries*.

Joni and her husband, Ken Tada, have been married since 1982 and enjoy serving the Joni and Friends ministry together. On July 30, 2017 Joni “celebrated” 50 years of living well in her wheelchair, a remarkable testimony to God’s sustaining grace. After battling a recurrence of breast cancer in 2019, on October 15 of that year Joni celebrated her 70th birthday – it was an extraordinary celebration given that spinal-cord injured quadriplegics usually do not survive that long in such good health. “I’m grateful for the grace of God which enables me to keep smiling not in spite of my disability, but because of it,” says Joni, “For the weaker I am, the harder I must lead on God!”

In 1979 she founded Joni and Friends to provide;

- Christ-centered ministry to special-needs families
- A wheelchair and the Gospel message to those struggling with isolation around the world
- And Disability training for churches.

The organization celebrated 40 years of ministry and continues to grow. In 2020, Joni and Friends will hold 90 Family Retreats in the US and in developing nations, providing respite and spiritual refreshment for needy families struggling with disability. Through its Wheels for the World program, by the end of 2020, Joni and Friends will have delivered over 200,000 wheelchairs and Bibles to people living with disabilities in developing nations who are rejected and ignored. The organization carries her lifelong ministry passion to share hope through hardship to people living with disability and their families.