At Family Retreat, Jayna and Nicholas finally found a place where they belong. Read their amazing story inside!

Finding Jesus
at our Retreats & Getaways!
At Joni and Friends, we take seriously the charge to give the Good News of Jesus whenever we can! We do it because of scriptures like the one above. God’s people must not waffle when it comes to giving the salvation message. So at Joni and Friends we tell people with disabilities that “sin kills… hell is real… but God is merciful… he can save you… and Jesus is the Way!”

Just earlier today Ken and I visited a young woman who just broke her neck in an accident. Tears welled as she described her dismal plight. But sitting in our wheelchairs side-by-side, we enjoyed a heartfelt exchange – I explained to her the way of salvation and with eyes smiling, she gladly embraced Christ as Lord and Savior!

And as we head into 2022, we are fully aware that there are thousands like her who have yet to hear this astounding message. Sadly, they are being passed by, ignored, or neglected by others. But at Joni and Friends, we give the hope-filled news that through Jesus Christ, they can have a home in heaven, escape from hell, a purpose for living, and the power to be “more than a conqueror” (Romans 8:37).

Now, Son of Man, I am making you a watchman for the people... if I announce that some wicked people are sure to die and you fail to tell them to change their ways, then they will die in their sins, and I will hold you responsible...

EZEKIEL 33:7-8

The fields are white for harvest, as our Savior would say, and we have a big job to do this year. It’s why I’m glad they’ve released a 45th anniversary edition of the Joni book – we’ll use it everywhere to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love. Yep, it’s all about spreading the hope of Jesus – just consider the results from Family Retreats, Warrior Getaways, and our local outreaches across the United States... the message of victory in Christ is transforming hearts and changing families!

So, thank you for partnering with me in reaching into places where people with disabilities have little-to-no chance of hearing about Jesus. Help us go into overdrive this year through your prayers and gifts. And God bless you for taking God’s charge seriously!

[Signature]
Before finding Joni and Friends, Jayna and her 17-year-old son Nicholas didn’t have anywhere to go for support. And as the single mom of a child with severe special needs, Jayna needed a lot of support.

Nicholas has cerebral palsy, seizures, cannot walk or talk, and requires a feeding tube for all of his nutrition. His medical needs are so intense that Jayna must use a trailer to bring all of his equipment and daily care supplies to Family Retreat. But for Jayna and Nicholas, the six-hour drive to Retreat is so much more than worth it!

“Joni and Friends shows me that I can get through this and that I’m not alone,” explains Jayna with tears rolling down her cheeks. “At Family Retreat, I feel safe. We don’t have to worry about what anyone thinks about us. Everybody understands us.”

“Family Retreat lets me forget about everyday life and connect with God and not worry. It’s the only place where I can be myself and not be judged. Family Retreat shows me I can face my fears, and it shows Nicholas that he’s loved.”

Choking back the tears, Jayna continues, “I don’t want to imagine life without Family Retreat. Nicholas can’t do anything for himself, but he has so much joy at Family Retreat because he gets to do things!”

Thank you for giving special needs families a safe place of belonging within the body of Christ!

Nicholas went on his very first nature hike using a special adaptive wheelchair at Family Retreat. “It was so peaceful being in God’s creation,” shares Jayna. “I saw Jesus on the hiking trail with Nicholas.”

Scan here to watch Nicholas and Jayna’s incredible story!
Stephanie agrees wholeheartedly. “The fact that Warrior Getaway is Christ-centered has really changed our lives – bringing us closer to God and encouraging us to bring our children closer to God. I feel safe here. The most important thing I’ve learned here is not to give up hope. God’s love is going to get you through even when things look hopeless.”

“There’s nothing I could ever do to repay the kindness and love I’ve received here,” states Josh. “Warrior Getaway is Christ-centered care for your soul.”

Our Veterans and their families have made unimaginable sacrifices for our safety and freedoms. Thank you for showing them how very much they are appreciated through your prayers and support. At Joni and Friends, we know we’re the ones who can never repay these Warrior families for laying down their lives for us, and we are grateful for your partnership in honoring them now that they’re home.

“Without Joni and Friends, my marriage would have been over a long time ago,” shares Josh. “Coming to Warrior Getaway was the best thing for me and my family. It’s holy ground, meeting with other Warriors. I’ve never felt more open, real and authentic than when I’m in the Warrior support group. And the ‘secret sauce’ is Jesus Christ the whole time.”

“Hope has a Name: Jesus!”
Life-Changing Stories from the Field

From the Bay Area

Yolanda arrived at our Wheels for the World outreach in Guadalajara, Mexico carrying Gabriela in her arms and wondering if this could be the day her daughter might finally receive the wheelchair she needed so desperately.

Gabriela was born 13 years ago with cerebral palsy and is non-verbal. Yolanda does her best to care for Gabriela, but they have a very hard life. As a single mother who needs to carry Gabriela everywhere she goes, Yolanda simply cannot afford adequate medical care for her little girl.

When our Joni and Friends Bay Area team first met Gabriela, she was very quiet and reserved. Yet while our physical therapists and mechanics worked tirelessly to custom-fit her wheelchair, a beautiful smile lit up her face as well as the whole room! Her joy and gratitude were contagious!

And after Gabriela was safely in her new seat of dignity, we shared the Gospel with her and her mother. They welcomed Jesus into their hearts, and now Yolanda clearly sees the visible Gospel with her own eyes every time she looks at her daughter in the wheelchair you sent. Thank you for sending your love all over the world!

From Arizona

While Krista was volunteering at Family Retreat, she heard God’s call to adopt Kynslee, who has Down syndrome. Over time, the demands of raising a child with special needs and the unexpected trials of life increased. Krista returned to our Arizona Family Retreat as a single mom knowing it was a place she could come back to for some rest and spiritual refreshment.

“Family Retreat allowed me time to rest, relax, and be spiritually refreshed,” explains Krista. “Not only did Kynslee’s volunteer buddy provide great care for Kynslee, but she also supported me.”

Family Retreat provided Krista with time to rest, which has been sparse since Kynslee was born six years ago. She also found new friendships and an additional loving community in Christ!

From Knoxville

At only nine months old, Clementine has already had to face mountains of hardships. Born under traumatic circumstances, she had a brain bleed that resulted in seizures leaving her legally blind and most likely with cerebral palsy. Her parents, Kelly and Lottie, struggle with the uncertainty of what the future might bring, as Clementine has yet to receive any official diagnosis.

Yet this young couple found renewed hope at our Knoxville Marriage Getaway, where they could focus on how to strengthen their marriage within the context of having a child impacted by disability. And they know that being connected to Joni and Friends at this early stage of Clementine’s life will give them the support needed in the months and years to come. Thank you for loving special needs families through every season of life!
At Family Retreat, Families Come to Jesus!

From Chicago

Hao Long is eight years old and has autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Through a Chinese interpreter, his mother, Cui En, explains daily living with Hao Long. “He runs around, he snatches things up, he just does a lot of damage wherever he goes, and people look at us very differently. Many people don’t understand him. But I’m so grateful to be here at Family Retreat. Because all of you – every one of you – understands us.”

Hao Long’s whole family felt the peace of Christ at our Chicago Family Retreat. When their interpreter shared the Gospel with his father, Ting Man, he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior! And when one of the other special needs dads witnessed that miracle, he received Christ into his heart, too!

God is using your love and prayers to bring more and more souls into the kingdom! We praise God for you!

North Carolina

Jaysen is 13 years old and has cerebral palsy and hydrocephalus. From the time he was two years old, his grandmother adopted him and raised him as her own. Sadly, seven years ago, Jayson’s grandmother died suddenly as the result of a stroke, leaving Jayson without a guardian or anyone to care for his very special needs. At that point Jayson’s great-grandmother, Barbara, stepped in and has been completely devoted to his care ever since.

This summer Barbara and Jayson attended their first Family Retreat in North Carolina. All throughout the week Barbara kept saying, “Family Retreat is a slice of heaven on earth!” She went on to explain that it was, “The very best week of my entire 81 years!”

Jaysen absolutely loved his time at Family Retreat, too! He enjoyed making new friends, riding the zipline, and riding on golfcarts. But his very favorite part of Family Retreat was encouraging the volunteers and other families in attendance. Jayson plans to be a pastor when he grows up, and at Family Retreat, he got the opportunity to use his God-given gifts of ministry.

On the last day of Family Retreat, Jaysen assisted our camp pastor in sharing the salvation message and inviting others to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior! He shared his favorite Bible verse, and as the Family Retreat pastor held the microphone close to Jaysen, Jayson said, “Come to Jesus!” It was a powerful altar call. For everyone there that day, it will never be forgotten. Two people accepted Christ on the spot! Jaysen was thrilled to have the opportunity to express his love for the Lord with those in attendance, and as Joni says, “Disability ministry is not disability ministry unless the disabled are ministering.”

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

ROMANS 10:13
Jesus is Close to the Broken Hearted at Family Retreat!

From New England ►

Even though Family Retreat is one of his favorite places on the planet, Bradley was not sure if he wanted to go last summer after his father died. But his mom, Maureen, knew Family Retreat would be a secure and safe place to process their grief. Maureen explains, “No one judges at Family Retreat. Someone can have an outburst, and no one stares at them or makes a mean comment.”

Bradley, who has Down syndrome, arrived at Family Retreat very closed off, sad, and angry with God. He confessed, “I just miss my dad too much to have fun.” Yet after talking to our camp pastor, Bradley recommitted his life to God and even decided to get baptized when he returned home from our New England Family Retreat!

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

PSALM 34:18

Thank you for giving special needs families a loving community and safe place to be vulnerable with each other and renewed by the love of God!

Special needs families are already signing up for our 2022 Retreats & Getaways. Please pray about volunteering at an event near you in this new year.

When you choose to serve with Joni and Friends, God will use you to do absolute miracles in the lives of others, and in the process, you will experience Jesus in new and powerful ways yourself!

Go to joniandfriends.org/volunteer for a list of our 2022 events or fill out the enclosed contact card and we’ll get in touch with you. We can’t wait to hear from you!
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 joniandfriends.org/donate or contact Joni and Friends at 818.707.5664.

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“Volunteering with Joni and Friends is quite possibly the best thing you could ever do for a family. It is a life-changing, God-honoring experience, and your volunteering will help families be more than they thought they could be.”

From one of the special needs dads served at Retreat

Go to jonifriends.org/volunteer for a list of Retreats & Getaways in your area, and fill out the enclosed card to answer God’s call to serve families living with disability in the year ahead!
Joni: An Unforgettable Story

Joni Eareckson Tada’s earnest struggle to find hope has resonated with millions of people facing all types of challenges and helped them overcome their own limitations with a determined smile. Filled with practical insights, her story reveals the power of God’s love to transform, as well as the triumph of faith over pain and suffering.

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