

[00:00:00]

Vaneetha: Welcome, Joni. Thank you so much for joining me today.

Joni: Oh, Vaneetha, it is good to be with you and of course, an honor to spend, uh, this time with you and with them, with all our friends listening.

Vaneetha: I have been so excited about this conversation, honestly, because I remember when I first met you, it was over 10 years ago at the N R B convention. I got to sit beside you at dinner. And that was honestly one of the most memorable conversations of my life. I remember just watching you live. And you were everything that I had read about and I was really surprised by that because I think a lot of people are different when you meet them from what you read.

And your books changed my life *When God Weeps* changed my theology. And so it was such an honor to meet you [00:01:00] and that's why it feels like such an honor to introduce you to people on this podcast because you really have shaped me. So as we begin, I would love to just find out from you, what does your day-to-day life look like?

Joni: Well, right before we, uh, hit the record button on our conversation here, Vaneetha, I confessed to you it's, uh, been one of those mornings. What can I say? You wake up in the morning and you look at the day, and I was telling Ken, my husband, I said, "Ken, I've just got this buzz. I've got something's uneasy, something's wrong."

And uh, I wear cath. I wear an indwelling catheter. I wear a corset. I'm, uh, your friends might not see this if they're not on video, but I wear chest straps, which help me breathe. And so I've got, Bladder issues, breathing issues, you know, all kinds of issues to sit up straight. And some days it's just a little overwhelming. [00:02:00] Just a little overwhelming. And you would think I'd get used to this. Like you would think that I'm the professional, right? That I've got this thing figured out, uh, how to approach the day. How to manage, uh, multiple issues that's converged on a perfect storm for discouragement. And, uh, yeah, I can say that intellectually, yes, I've written about it, I've spoken on it.

I know how to handle this, but every time it's a challenge to wake up in the morning and say, Jesus, just breathe his name. Jesus. I cannot do this. But I can do all things through you who strengthens me. And so you know what? That is a good morning. That is a great morning when you wake up in the morning and

you feel like you simply cannot go on, and yet [00:03:00] you have the spiritual wherewithal to know enough to go to God to go for help, to cry out.

I need you. I cannot do this. Help me, Jesus. And what can I say that is the best way to wake up in the morning? It's the only way to wake up in the morning. And so, Vaneetha, I know that you struggle with, uh, shoulder problems. You and I have talked about that with your post polio syndrome and, uh, your muscles are weakening because of that.

And I'm an aging quadriplegic. My muscles are weakening. And I confessed to you, uh, a few days ago that I'm having trouble feeding myself now. Oh, come on. I've fed myself for 55 years in this wheelchair. You mean I gotta give that up too. Those little griefs, those little losses, those little things you've gotta let go of what you were able to do last week, you're not able to do this week.

It's a constant dying to self, [00:04:00] isn't it? But even that is a good thing because outwardly though, we are wasting away. Inwardly, we are being renewed day by day and Vaneetha, I think what I love about you is that you prize the inward renewing day by day, and you are honest and realistic enough to acknowledge that it is those little griefs, those little disappointments, those little losses, those difficult mornings.

When you wake up and you think you can't go on, you're honest enough to admit that. You know what? That's hard, but I'll take the inward renewing. I'll take more of Jesus every day. So, uh, to answer your question, that's how my day's going.

Vaneetha: Wow.

Joni: Got a long answer to a short question.

Vaneetha: that. You have taught me so much about how to trust God in the midst of overwhelming pain every day. Now for the my listeners, for the listeners who aren't familiar with your story of suffering, it's [00:05:00] been layered and I was wondering if you wouldn't mind just sharing briefly just all that you've been through for the people who aren't familiar with your story.

Joni: Well, for, some of our listeners who do not know my story, and please forgive me, for those of you who do, I, uh, was a young, active teenager, ready to grab hold of life. Heading off to college, and, uh, Oh, I don't know Vaneetha, I wasn't honoring God as I should. I wasn't walking with him as closely as I knew I should.

I was, uh, fooling around with my boyfriend doing things I shouldn't be doing on a Friday night and waking up on a Sunday morning and confessing it all, and then back in the same sin cycle the next Friday night. And I don't know, as a 17 year old, I knew enough to realize I was. I was shaming the Lord Jesus.

I was making a sham of his gospel power. And 'cause at that point I had no power to break free of what I knew was [00:06:00] sin. And, somewhere about a couple of months before my high school graduation, I prayed and I asked God to please Jesus. I don't wanna embarrass you further. I don't wanna make you look bad to my friends.

I need you to jerk my life right side up and I give you freedom to do anything you want, God, to help me honor you as I should. And then I broke my neck in a diving accident. About two weeks after graduation, I was out, on the Chesapeake Bay with my sister Kathy, and, swam out to this raft way far offshore and thought it was far enough offshore.

Uh, that I could safely dive from it. But, when I did, immediately my head hit a sandbar and I crunched my head back and it snapped my spinal cord, uh, crushing it and leaving me paralyzed. And, the part of the story that I so enjoy telling is that [00:07:00] my, my, my sister did not see me floating face down in the water, but a crab bit her toe.

And so she turned around in the water to scream to me, watch out for crabs. And when she did, she saw my, you know, blonde hair kind of floating on the surface of the water. And then she knew something awful had happened. So I like to joke and say I can't eat a crab salad sandwich to this day without thanking God for those little critters.

I've got little glass crabs, you know, here and there and everywhere, just kind of reminding me of God's providence and goodness. And he rescued me, thankfully, through my sister. But when the doctors told me I would be paralyzed or quadriplegic, uh, for the rest of my life without using my hands, oh boy, my, ah, I thought, God, you gotta be kidding.

You took that prayer this seriously? Yikes. I don't know that you will be trusted with more prayers from me or I just was, uh, Yeah, taken aback and I plummeted into a pretty dark depression after that. But you know about [00:08:00] depression, I'm sure. And our listeners probably do as well after some deep disappointment or accident or bad medical report.

Right.

Vaneetha: Yeah. Wow. But that wasn't all the suffering, Joni, you, I mean, that was horrible and so difficult, and yet you have been through lots of other suffering as well with pain and cancer. I don't know if you wouldn't mind just talking about that for a minute as well.

Joni: Well, okay, uh, real quickly, fast forward, uh, from that diving accident, I finally, uh, was backed into a corner spiritually. I, God got me seriously thinking about Christ's lordship in my life as a young person. and, I began to see, oh my goodness, I, this is a wake up call. I need to trust God with this new situation, this disability. And, so slowly but surely through the support of great Christian friends and a lot of prayer, I began to walk with [00:09:00] God and I didn't turn back. I put my hand to that plow and I didn't look behind me. I just kept moving forward. And, uh, year by year, decade by decade, learning to, uh, what Psalm 62 verse eight, trust in the Lord at all times. All times, Jesus. Really, uh, yep. All times. And so that's what I purpose to do and, trusted him through some pretty difficult seasons in my life. until what I got this diagnosis of cancer in, uh, 2010 and then chronic pain began to, uh, oh my goodness. It was like, it was jaw splitting. It was mind bending. It was gut punching pain, and that was new for me.

And I told my husband, Ken, I'd been married by this time, uh, many years. And, uh, I told my husband, Ken, I said, oh my goodness. This makes my [00:10:00] quadriplegia feel like a walk in the park. Like quadriplegia is easy. I can do life without use of my hands or my legs. I cannot do life when pain is so excruciating that I cannot put two words together in a sentence.

And yet, uh, 1 Peter 2:21, um, to this, you were called because Christ Jesus suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. And Vaneetha, I'm sure you'd agree, isn't that what God's purpose in our suffering is that we daily take up our cross and follow in his steps.

Stay hot on his heels. don't drag too far behind. but following the steps down that hard. Difficult, bloodstained road to Calvary where we learned to constantly die to ourselves. We died to the sins that Christ died for on his cross, right? So we died to complaining. We die to doubts and fears of the [00:11:00] future.

We die to anxiety. We die to the temptation to wander down dark paths that we know full well will only lead to depression. And when we die to all those things comparing, competing with others who seem to have it easier in life, uh, all those things, it's so difficult to die to those things and this flesh and blood world, which screams for our undivided attention.

But that's what suffering does. That's what affliction does, doesn't it? It sandblasts you to the core .Exposing, you know, the real you of which you were made, which isn't very pretty. And you gotta confess those sins. You gotta confess those, uh, those, uh, transgressions. So forgive the long-winded answers here. I'm so sorry.

Vaneetha: No, that was great. Thank you. I know from experience that sometimes limitations for me, they're hard, but I can get used to those. But pain is something you just can't get used to when it kind of rambles through the door, depending on how severe it is, [00:12:00] you really. Have to die to yourself every day, every time that happens.

Whereas I think with limitations, you just figure out how to work around them. But pain is not work around all I would say, as well. So

Joni: That's a good way of putting it. it's, uh, it's a little different than just tough circumstances. It, uh, it, I think, Vaneetha, pain can so easily rob you of your joy.

Vaneetha: Mm-hmm.

Joni: and your peace of mind, which is why I'm comforted that 2 Corinthians 6:10 says, uh, you, you can still be sorrowful.

Carrying your pain with you is not easy yet. You can always be rejoicing somehow, some way God is gonna get you through. God is gonna give you hope that there'll be a brighter day, perhaps tomorrow. and so, you know, although we have nothing, we possess everything. and, so those kinds of scriptures really help me where the Bible acknowledges, you know what, this is hard.

You gotta live with some [00:13:00] pretty hard stuff, but God's grace is gonna get you through this.

Vaneetha: Amen. Well, when would you say, as we were just talking about pain and hard, when, maybe take us back to one time when you've just felt hopeless, maybe abandoned by God, and maybe describe the situation, how you were feeling, and how that changed and what brought you hope.

Joni: I remember being in bed and, uh, My doctor at that point, I had a different doctor, not the best doctor. I don't think he prescribed that I just stay in bed for three months and take ibuprofen every day and so that we're gonna do

something. And, I got so depressed. I felt like my life just didn't go beyond the four walls of my bedroom.

And it felt like life was going on without me like, I'm, I gonna have to stay in this bed forever. It felt like forever. And, uh, I wanted so badly to cry, [00:14:00] but it was pretty hard to cry, lying flat, uh, on a mattress and not being able to wipe your nose. And, uh, even that I felt was God asking too much here?

I can't even cry. I'm not even free to wipe my own nose. God, this time you're asking too much. And, I shared that with a friend, and my friend pulled up her chair close by my bedside and said, well, Joni, maybe you're concentrating on God asking too much of you and not really concentrating enough on what God has already given you because he who did not spare his own son, graciously can give you all things, even the kind of things, the kind of grace that's gonna get you through this. Richer, wiser, better, happier, more peaceful. [00:15:00] I mean, she just went on with a litany of, wonderful characteristics, blessings that would come of this, uh, dark season in my life if I would, but quit thinking about what God was taking away from me and start thinking about, according to Romans, uh, what God has already given me.

Romans say he's given us everything we need. Uh, it says in the Bible for living, uh, the Godly life. Everything. And the challenge is to believe that in the toughest of times, and I know that's always hard, but when we do believe it in those darkest seasons of our lives, the hope is god's gonna change us.

We're gonna be, we're gonna become people that we never dreamed possible. We're gonna become more peaceful, more joyful, more happy. We're gonna become more focused on heaven, more mindful of others who hurt more prayerful. We're gonna have insight into God's we're gonna, we're just gonna be different people if we would, but trust him in the hard time.

So for me, that helped. [00:16:00] And you know, I must say Vaneetha, I was so grateful for my girlfriend being that blunt. and keeping me accountable. you know, she was, according to Ephesians. Uh, speak the truth in love.

Vaneetha: Yeah.

Joni: tell the truth to people. Oh my goodness, what a friend. Uh, speak the truth. Uh, do it in love, but tell the truth and that, that helped me a great deal.

Vaneetha: Yeah, it's interesting cause I think a lot of us, if we have a friend who's really suffering, it's often hard to speak the truth, you know, to kind of remind them of God's promises. I find that. I go a little more to just comforting them saying, oh, this is horrible. And yet what really pulls us out of the pit is people reminding us of God's promises.

Joni: Absolutely. And we tend to think that God's comfort, uh, you know, when we administer comfort to someone who's in deep pain, we think that. Means empathizing with them, being tender toward them, putting our arm around them, holding the box of Kleenex, uh, feeling for them, oh sweetheart, I'm so [00:17:00] sorry.

You gotta go through this. But I appreciate the kind of comfort that makes me stronger to endure.

Vaneetha: I appreciate the friend who somehow, gently, but wisely gotta be wise as a serpent when it comes to deep affliction. Someone who will forge iron into my weak heart and my weak faith. That's the kind of comfort that Gods give.

Joni: He does. He doesn't just sit down beside us and agree with us. He makes us stronger to endure. He gives us some words of courage and, yeah, that's, uh, that's different than the way the world comforts, isn't it?

Vaneetha: Right. Yeah, I love that. And you know, just for listeners thinking, you know, how am I gonna walk alongside my friend? What a great word that, you know, you do weep with them, but you do strengthen them in God. And that's real strength and that's real comfort rather than the temporary, oh, poor person.

And certainly there's place for that. But if that's all we do, often I think people leave more helpless, than [00:18:00] kind of

Joni: There was somebody once told me, somebody once said, never give scripture to people who are. Who are in deep suffering, just wait, uh, for a season until it seems more appropriate. Well, you know what? Come on. We've got the entire book of Psalms that are filled with Bible verses of grief, of loss, of disappointment, I mean, it for me, and I think for any of us who hurt, uh, what forges iron into our weak faith is hearing from the Bible that, oh my goodness, God's people have grieved and they understand what I'm going through so far better than you saying.

Honey, I really empathize with you. let's see what David, the psalmist has to say about empathizing. You know, let's get a little lament here. let's get some job stuff going. Let's get some people who, from God's word, have, uh, wrestled with sorrow and deep grief, and, uh, because it's God's word, it'll change.

People's perspective, it changed my perspective. And so there are [00:19:00] appropriate bible verses that you can share with confidence. And of course a lot of them, as you just mentioned, Vaneetha, are indeed promises

Vaneetha: Mm.

Joni: those promises are good anchors for the soul, aren't they?

Vaneetha: Right. And I think some people are afraid to do that because they think, oh, this sounds like a sort of a band-aid, but it's not, it's life. You know, if we don't slap them on like platitudes, but really speak them as things we believe in, you know, lamentation Psalms job. I mean, that's modeling for people.

How do we talk to God in the midst of our pain while trusting his goodness?

Joni: Yep. You know, I'm so glad you used that word, platitudes,'cause I think that's what we're all thinking about. Like, I don't want to come across like, I'm just spouting off a platitude. Well, the difference is that you do get down into somebody's pain. You do sit with them. I mean, when you give God's word, you just don't, I often say it's not like when you give the word of God to somebody who's hurting, it's not like taking a,[00:20:00] not like taking a pint of blood and slapping it on the counter and say, here, ingest this. This'll be good for you. You'll feel better. Just take this. no. We don't give God's truth that way. We give God's truth by. By hooking up our spiritual veins into the veins of that person who's hurting. and we grieve with them.

We spend time with them. We listen to them. We pray with them. We just sit with them. And that's what it means to give God's truth where you actually impart some of yourself, into that person. and I know Vaneetha, I know you've had friends like this, and you thank God for them. You look back at them and you think, oh, God bless that girlfriend for sticking with me, staying with me, you know, through my grumbling and complaining and, but she hung in there with me and didn't abandon me. You know, those are the kind of friends, right, where when they do finally say something from God's word, it just, ah, it just sticks.

Vaneetha: No, it does. I love that picture of just hooking up[00:21:00] a line between our veins and their veins and yeah, really giving them comfort that we ourselves have received from God. Not sort of this blanket comfort, but really the comfort that God has poured into us. We are pouring into others.

Joni: Exactly. Couldn't say it better.

Vaneetha: That's beautiful, Joni. Thank you. Well, I was wondering, you have such an amazing faith and you are so strong, you are human and so I'm sure there are things that you are afraid of that you deal with. maybe if you could share what makes you afraid and what do you do when you're afraid?

Joni: Well, first, let me say, you, you use those words “amazing faith,” you know, Vaneetha, I still think my faith is the size of the grain of a mustard seed. I really do. I just don't think it's very great. I just do my best to keep it focused on Jesus, you know, fix your eyes on Jesus and I, and secondly, I don't know how strong I really am.

I just recounted to you how I woke up this morning and. [00:22:00] Oh, you'd think after all these years I would have it figured out and I don't. And so I, again, I don't know how strong I am, but it, but one more time. I know where to run to for help and maybe that's my strength. I

Vaneetha: Mm-hmm.

Joni: But my fears, good question.

My fears, I fear my disability getting worse, and I'm sure you understand this with your post polio syndrome. My fear,

I, I fear, will I be able to feed myself at dinner tonight? Am I gonna be able to do that? And how will I handle that? I fear that because I can't do a lot, but I can feed myself. So losing that ability. I fear that, how will I handle that? You're gonna think this is silly, but, you know, Ken and I do not have children and, so it's just us.

And so we, uh, I think we both,[00:23:00] look at the future and we've got a big question mark scratching our heads who will take care of us. Uh, caregiving help is expensive. And secondly, it's just hard to find good caregivers. I mean, I've got a group of people who help me, but, one is transitioning out of the state.

Uh, another is just finishing up her degree program. She'll be, uh, moving on. So, I mean, there's a constant changeover and will there be somebody to help who's skilled and careful and compassionate? So I think my fears are, uh, more loss, more questions about the future. Yeah, but you know what, Vaneetha, I've got a good friend who just died of als.

Oh my goodness. I said to his wife, I just wanna die like your husband. Oh, how? Look how he handled his ALS. Look how he just persevered and trusted God with every bit of loss, with all the questions about his own future. And he left his [00:24:00] wife. In fact, you know, you know Dale

Vaneetha: Dale. Yes.

Joni: Metter. Yeah. Dale Meador.

Uh, uh, for those of you who are listening and might not know this, Vaneetha and I are in a little group of what we call our pain pals. And one of those pain pals is Nancy Meador. And she deals with terrible cranial facial occipital pain. and her husband, her main caregiver, uh, just died of als and what a champion, what... the way he passed away was just, awesome.

And yeah, he had fears, but he tackled 'em one by one. So that's what I wanna do. I wanna die like Dale. I wanna live like Dale. Yeah. Amen.

Vaneetha: He, uh, yeah, blew me away from the day he got his diagnosis all the way to the end. Just his trust in Jesus

Joni: yeah. Well, I'm gonna turn that question around on you. What do you fear, Vaneetha.

Vaneetha: I fear a lot of the same things Joni. I fear sometimes... I do fear. yeah, things getting worse. I fear not feeding myself. I [00:25:00] fear even technical things like doing this podcast. Realizing, hey, I, my hands don't exactly work. I can't type things in or do those things, and I fear. Things getting worse and not being able to do that. And I do fear something happening to Joel. Like we have four kids between us. I have two kids, biological kids, and they're wonderful, but at the same time, they all have their own lives. And I think if something happens to Joel, what will I do? and so very similar. Fear is like, it's hard now. But if it gets worse,

Joni: Yeah.

Vaneetha: you know, what will I do? And yet kind of reminding myself that God it is gonna be there and I know when I first got my diagnosis of post polio, which means eventually I will be a quadriplegic and I'm sort of slowly working that way. You were really my example, Joni.

I remember thinking. If Joni can have joy and can have a [00:26:00] life that she really enjoys people and enjoys the things of this world in a different way, then I can do that. and I remember thinking that I didn't know you, I had just read your books, but thought, okay, that's what I have to remember, because it felt overwhelming.

I mean, I cried for days thinking, I can't do this. I cannot do this.

Joni: And probably you feel like I do. Uh, we're both married, uh, to wonderful men. I've been married 40 year, a little over 40 years, and. I'm just fearful that it'll get too much for Ken,

Vaneetha: Yes.

Joni: that there's gonna be, and there'll be one more thing I have to ask him for, and I already asked him for enough, and the guy is so sweet and so, uh, encouraging.

yeah. I fear that I just, I want to be able to serve my husband and support him. Actually, to be honest, uh, he would tell you he's in the kitchen over there. He would tell you that the way I serve him the best is to cheer him on, to [00:27:00] pray for him, to encourage him to make space in my life, uh, and provide for my own help.

Go find some caregivers so he can go fishing

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Joni: Go out with his, uh, buddies for lunch. And I do that. Oh my goodness. Vaneetha, I just bear down double duty to make it possible for my husband to get as much free time as he wants, uh, away from my disability. And, uh, I think it keeps our marriage good, but I don't want things to get harder on him, so, yeah.

I figure that a little bit. So, enough about fear

Vaneetha: yeah, but what a great word. I would think there's a lot of people here who need care or are caregivers and. Just recognizing one, being a cheerleader, praying for them, and finding ways to give them time for themselves and to do the things that they love, rather than feeling like, well, my life is harder than yours.

You know, which is the tendency to feel like, well, so I'd love for you to be here all the time, which really is, it's so wise of you and so loving of you to step out of your [00:28:00] own needs and say, wow, I see what Ken needs.

Joni: Yeah, I've got this new, uh, overnight caregiver. I, we've got a, I've got a couple of overnight caregivers who once in a while give Ken Tada a break, and one of them is brand new. Her name is Tanisha. And, she doesn't know Jesus. I'm thinking, Jesus, this lady's not doing things exactly as I would hope she might. She's not turning me quite as I should be turned, but that's okay 'cause she doesn't know you and you've put her in my life on Wednesday night so that I can share Your love, gently point her to you, Lord Jesus. Uh, last week I gave her a Kevin DeYoung's big thick, uh, Bible story, uh, story book. And she's never read the Bible, so she doesn't know anything about the Bible. So last week we, I said, "you know what, Tanisha, let's read a Bible story. Every night that we're together, they're only like three pages long."

And, uh, I'm so excited for her. And so I think that's our mission in life, is not to get our [00:29:00] needs met. Like, okay, Tanisha, you're not doing things exactly like I want you to do 'em.

That's not the point. The point is this woman's name gonna be written in the Lamb's book of life? and what can I do to partner with the Holy Spirit to bring her into the kingdom? That's more important, than whether or not I'm positioned. Exactly like I might want to be positioned at night before I go to sleep.

So that's, the way Jesus lived and that's the way we all should live. it's about, uh, looking out for others' interests. You know, Philippians chapter 2 verse, uh, 4 looking out for others' interest before your own. I gotta help God with getting her saved.

Vaneetha: Well, what a great, outlook for people who are helping us, that God is calling us into their lives, to pray for them, to minister to them rather than seeing care as sort of a. A one way thing. and I love the way you see your whole life as ministry. And I remember talking to you a few years ago when I did, when I interviewed you for my book launch, and [00:30:00] you had mentioned

your neighbor, was sick and you and Ken just kind of wheeled down there and you know, I think it was during Covid, so you just sort of stood at the door and just offered something and just seeing that everybody in your life that God brings to you.

Is an opportunity to share the gospel and to pray for them and love them.

Joni: And ultimately, God's the big one. Who's gonna fill all my needs? I often think of myself as a football bethe. sometimes I'm handed off from one person to the next. Uh, you know, when Ken goes fishing, it's no easy feat to arrange this patchwork quilt grouping of girls who can help me. Some who can really help me, well, some others, or a real novices.

But I always say, you know what, God's not gonna drop the football. He will not drop. Somehow we will stumble and bumble and fumble away to the end zone. But I'll get there. I will get there. I'll cross the finish line of this life. And, uh, God's [00:31:00] everlasting arms, according to Deuteronomy, will be underneath me.

He will not let me fall. He will catch me. He will not drop the football. I always say when it comes to, uh, the multiple, uh, ways I'm passed off from one person to the neck. It's kind of funny. It's a funny analogy.

Vaneetha: Yeah, just, yeah, remembering, you know, you underneath are His Everlasting Arms is such a, wow, such a comfort for

Joni: Okay. Real quick, I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna say something here too, Vaneetha. I want you to comment on other people inspire us, don't they? and I'm thinking of Rika Theron, who is, uh, we, you and I have never met her, have we? And maybe you've talked about her on the podcast. I don't know. But she's a woman who lives in South Africa, uh, with her aging parents.

And her brother who's got his own disability, they live in a very small little house on the coast of South Africa, south of Cape Town, and, uh, she has nobody and she's pretty much bedridden and doesn't she inspire and encourage us?

Vaneetha: I mean, [00:32:00] if I had to pick the one person who inspires me to love Jesus more, it would probably be Rika. Like she has so little, and yet she pours out for other people and reads and loves the Lord with every free second she has. Which literally sometimes is just a few hours a day, a few minutes, because she's in bed in a dark room most of the time.

Joni: She's got Myalgic, Encephalomyelitis, and it's, uh, people know it as M.E. if your listeners wanna see what she deals with. They can look that, uh, chronic condition up. But, uh, but she's an inspiration. Barbara Bran who deals with multiple sclerosis and migraine headaches, I mean, there's so many people God puts in our lives, your life and mine.

Cause I think God knows we got challenges. I mean, He's, He's good that way. He knows we got challenges and so he is gonna put people around us. Who persevere even better than we do, and, uh, that they can, uh, be the good soldiers on the front lines to call us forth and say, you could do [00:33:00] this. By the grace of God this is possible.

And, the body of Christ. And so it's so funny that you and I have never met Rika and yet she encourages us. So

Vaneetha: Oh my word. Every time she writes something and is praying for somebody, you can feel the Holy Spirit through her words, that she really is praying and yeah, loves the Lord with everything she has. So she inspires me. And, just her faith is so strong in the midst of very little between, you know, what her everyday life is like, but she's waiting for heaven.

And the promises of that. And you have written a lot about heaven. I feel like when I think about someone who is looking forward to heaven, I think about you. How does the promise of heaven bring you comfort, in your day-to-day life?

Joni: I think that whole, uh, the book of Hebrew is that Sabbath rest. We're gonna enter that Sabbath rest, that, that shalom, [00:34:00] that pervasive piece. With my disability, Vaneetha, I'm constantly on. It never goes away, even in the middle of the night. I'm got the external ventilator, got my lymphatic sleep, got the mastectomy thing I'm still dealing with, got a cancer drug I still have to take.

I deal with chronic pain. I multi, you know, balancing those medications, sit in the wheelchair. I'm just to so many, it's constant and I'm so looking forward to rest. Just resting from all this. And so, Isaiah 35 to me is such a wonderful promise, your God will come and rescue you, so strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

For then the eyes of the blind will be open. The ears of the deaf un stopped and the tongues of those who can't speak will shout for joy. And, hello, the lame shall leap like deer.

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Joni: oh my goodness, sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The anointing of the Lord shall obtain joy and gladness. We will enter Zion with singing.

Woo everlasting [00:35:00] joy crowning our heads. I cannot wait for that day. I often say Vaneetha that, I feel like when I get to heaven, I'm gonna be like a marathoner who breaks the tape and then just collapses on this soft sand of the celestial shore, and I'm gonna be heavin', I'm breathing. I made it. I made it.

How did I get here? But I made it. I'm so grateful. And then I imagine, I don't know, I just imagine I'm on a beach and I imagine that I'm gonna collapse on to the sand, roll over on my back with eyes closed, arms spread. Just hearin' the waves, feeling the sun, just closing my eyes. And then I will sense a person over top of me, above me.

I'll feel his shadow above me. And I'll open my eyes and there will be Jesus. And he'll be a bit of a, he'll be a bit backlit by this blazing sun behind his head and then He'll reach for my arm. [00:36:00] Pull me up. And hold me at a arms length distance and say, welcome home, sweetheart. It was hard, wasn't it?

But you're safe now. I'm here. I've always been here. And then he'll pull me to him and let, and pat, pat me on the back. They're there. It's okay. You're home, honey. It's all over. You're okay. You did it. You glorified me. You made me look so good. Hey everybody. You wanna see somebody who made me look good down there on Earth?

Come here, meet this girl. Look at her. Just look at her. That's how I see it. I just see it as, yeah.

Vaneetha: Wow,

Joni: I know that's not very biblical about, I mean, the whole seashore and the sand and the way Jesus will pull me up and brush the sand off me. But, uh, it's something I keep in my crosshairs

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Joni: The hope of heaven. Just picturing it like that. I like the part where he said, Hey, everybody, come look at her.

Look at, let me tell you about her story. We're gonna be telling her story for [00:37:00] ages to come. And it's just, it's a, it's just a, and all of us have that hope. All of our stories of redemption will be told and retold for countless ages if we would, but trust Jesus Christ in the midst of the worst of times.

Vaneetha: Amen. Yeah. To hear sort of well done, good and faithful servant. And, I love the way you see it, you know, just Jesus hugging you and saying, look, everybody, she made it, lemme tell you about her.

Joni: Well, you know, 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, you were bought with a price, therefore honor God with your bodies And your body, and my body is falling apart. Pretty frail, but oh, if we can just honor Him with our bodies because we were purchased at such a price. Whew.

Vaneetha: Amen.

Joni: What day that shall be. Oh, what a glorious day that shall be.

Vaneetha: Wow. Yes. Oh wow. So Joni, what would you say to listeners who maybe heaven feels far away right now and [00:38:00] they cannot handle the suffering they're dealing with right now? Who, maybe got a diagnosis that is, things are never gonna get better at this side of heaven. And what would you say to them? For someone who knows their pain isn't going away or their condition or whatever it is, what would you say?

Joni: You know what? I think the first thing you gotta do is just grieve your loss. Just grieve it. Oh my goodness. I mean, ugh. God doesn't, uh, expect us to dry our tears when there's some traumatic medical diagnosis. Or you know, you suffered a miscarriage or you,

you, you've gotta, you gotta grieve, don't you? You have to just take a deep breath and sit long and, uh, just let the reality of. Of it all. Just settle in. And then after you grieve, there's a Bible verse in Isaiah that says, come now. Let us reason together. I love that. We're [00:39:00] the Holy Spirit says, come now.

Let us reason together. Let's look at what I've said. let's look at what the promises are that can sustain you. And that's what I would suggest. Vaneetha. May our listening friends, uh, memorize bible promises, left, right, and center. that's just, you have to have anchors for your soul, like it says in Hebrews.

And those anchors are Bible promises, trusted promises, time tested promises that are gonna see you through the toughest seasons of your life. promises like,

uh, oh, I don't know. 2 Corinthians 4:8 though we are hard pressed on all sides, we're not crushed. Okay.

God promises. You will not be crushed. Your body might be crushed, but your soul will never be crushed. Every trial, every distress that God brings into your life is only designed to make your soul greater for grace [00:40:00] greater and bigger and larger, and roomier for God and his help. So, memorize those promises left, right, and center.

Like I mentioned from Deuteronomy underneath us are God's everlasting arms, uh, Jesus promises, I will never leave you, nor will I forsake you. He promises that His grace, that is the desire and the power to do His will, it'll be sufficient. it's gonna get you to the next step. And then my suggestion is just do the next thing.

That's the good words from Elisabeth Elliot, huh? Just do the next thing. Fold the laundry. Change that diaper, prepare that dinner. Sweep that carpet. Get lunch ready for your children. Whatever it is, just do get off the couch, get outta bed, get dressed, take a shower, do the next thing. And if you have enough energy, just find somebody who's hurting worse than you are and serve their needs.

So grieve.

Vaneetha: Mm-hmm.

Joni: Let God reason with you. Uh, and He'll do [00:41:00] that. As He shows you His promises and then finally do the next thing and learn to serve others who hurt. So that's kind of, I think what I would say and know that, know, just know that life is supposed to be difficult. God wired it that way.

We live in a utterly sinful, broken, bruised, beyond repair planet. And God's plan of redemption, uh, includes yes, our salvation. But until we go home to heaven, my goodness, in this world, we will have trouble. Jesus promised, that's a promise. In this world, you will have trouble. So don't be surprised, uh, at the fiery ordeals that try you, as the Apostle Peter said, just to see them as chances to, although you are being outwardly wasted away, inwardly, God's gonna renew you day by day.

Vaneetha: Wow. How do you hold all of these Bible verses, in your mind? Like every time we talk, you have so many verses and the verses [00:42:00] I've

memorized and then I mangled them, especially on camera. So I would love to know personally how you do that.

Joni: At night when I can't sleep because of pain, I always recite Bible verses back to God. My husband and I memorize scripture. Uh, we love to memorize scripture. We're in the van. First thing we do after we turn the key in the ignition pull out of the driveway, Ken might start reciting the sermon on the mount.

That's three chapters in the book of Matthew. Then he'll ask me what I've got stored. I'll maybe recite Psalm 84 or Psalm 16, or Psalm 63, or Psalm 51 or James one, or, I mean, just any number of different verses, but we keep 'em always right on the tip of our tongue because we really need 'em.

We just really need, I, you know, Vaneetha, I don't know how to say this, but I feel safe. Safe when I know God's word, when it's in my heart, when it's in my mind, when it's on my lips, I just feel safe in a [00:43:00] conversation. I just feel safe if the word of God somehow is mentioned. And if it's not, then gently I'll redirect the conversation so that it will be included.

It just, do you know what I mean? It just, you just feel safe in God's word.

Vaneetha: yes, I do. But it's also convicting me, like I have all these verses memorized, but I don't think I rehearse them enough, and so I sort of lose the edges of them a little bit. I get the gist of it, but what a great habit to just be rehearsing them

Joni: Oh yeah. Like you asked me about heaven and I could have responded to your question about heaven. I could have responded, uh, with Psalm 84, which is, uh, all about heaven. I mean, I will be at the front door and most often I'll say, oh Lord Almighty, how lovely is your dwelling place? My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. When can I go to see God? I mean, just. It's a beautiful day. Rehearse a Bible verse. Just there's some Bible verse for that day out there. So anyway, yeah, recite [00:44:00] them often. Because they have to be part of the whip and the wharf and the fabric of your life.

They just have to be ingrained in you, don't they?

Vaneetha: Yes.

Joni: If you're gonna have hope.

Vaneetha: Yes, they do. So I think a sense of humor is really important in suffering. Joni and I see that you love to laugh. What, what in your life makes you laugh?

Joni: My husband. Ken Tada, get out your bullhorn. Go. Go. Let's go show Vaneetha. Your bullhorn real quick. Bull. Yeah. Your bullhorn.

Vaneetha: Yeah, I wanna see it, Ken.

Joni: Grab, grab it real quick. Okay. My husband is so funny. he just keeps me, uh, he's a fun guy. He keeps it light. He keeps it a little silly. sometimes life can just get so.

Oh, as you know, it's so, it's, and you can flat line real fast emotionally, you just flat line. And so, uh, my husband just has a million little jokes and, uh, funny things. And anyway, let's hear it.[00:45:00] let's hear it. Hi, Vaneetha. Hope you're doing well. This is your friendly reminder for today. You must always, always, mind your manners.

Vaneetha: I love that. Thank you, Ken. Wow.

Joni: So he's in the other room and my girlfriend's getting me up and I hear from the other room. Are we happy in there? Are you happy today?

Vaneetha: Ah. Oh, I love that. What a

Joni: how embarrassing.

Vaneetha: Oh, not embarrassing. Fun. So I have just one last question. what would you say to the person listening right now who feels desperate, who isn't sure how they're gonna make it through the pain they're in? What would you say?

Joni: You will make it. You will make it if you trust the Lord Jesus. And it's why [00:46:00] Jesus in John 6:54, He says, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, he has eternal life. And I say that because that verse describes how close you need to get to Jesus. You need to eat his flesh, you need to drink his blood.

And when I, those are spiritual words. And he's not talking about cannibalism here, but he even told those words to his disciples, you wanna get through? Eat my flesh, drink my blood, swallow my words, ingest my promises. Just make every make 'em your own. Just don't put it out there in a distance, as if it were some far off goal.

You could have it now. You're gonna have it now, you will make it through. But it's gonna take a little bit of effort if we all want, uh, we all want the peace of the Apostle Paul's life without the discipline of his life. And so it's gonna take a little bit of discipline, [00:47:00] but you will make it through.

If you eat the promises of God. Drink scripture. Live on it. find some anchors and just hold onto 'em with all your heart and say, I will not let you go. Jesus, you promised me this. You promised me peace. You said, in this world you will have trouble. But you also said that you have overcome the world.

I need to know what that feels like. This instant show up in my life, Jesus. I mean, you gotta plead some. It's what it means to supplicate. Travail in prayer. you, this person that you described, Vaneetha, sounds like they, they pray, but they need to travail. And traving means you get your fingers around the foot of that cross and you dig in until your fingernails bleed, and you just will not let go until He blesses you.

You're like Jacob, wrestling with the angel of the Lord. You will not let go until I receive the blessing, the peace, the courage that I need, [00:48:00] the grace that I want. So, now in this dark, dangerous culture is not the time to trifle with God. it's no time to be casual. Jonathan Edwards had 70 resolutions for life.

Uh, maybe you know them, uh, Vaneetha, and number seven was "live life with all your might."

Vaneetha: Mm.

Joni: Don't be caught being mediocre. Or ordinary. Don't settle for that. Don't settle for being middle of the road. Don't walk the top of that fence. Don't try and walk the top of that fence 'cause the devil even owns the top of the fence.

You gotta get on the side of God. You gotta work hard and travail hold onto those promises. Do not let go until He blesses you. And He will. He will. Like I said in the beginning, you will make it. But you gotta do a little bit of trusting and obeying.

Vaneetha: Amen. Wow. Thank you. Thank you for that. what a great word. Just even after we were [00:49:00] talking about the importance of the word and you know, sort of the Jeremiah, your words were found and I ate them and they became the joy of my heart and really eating God's flesh and eating God's word is the way we do that.

Joni: Well, Jesus said, he who eats my flesh and drinks, my blood remains in me and I in him. That's the last part of, uh, that verse, John, chapter six. And so you want to remain in Jesus and have Him remain in you. You know, this analogy, this metaphor Vaneetha, too often we think of our relationship with Christ as, oh, I need my spiritual charge.

And so you go to a women's retreat. You do this special Bible study. you do something to get your spiritual energies, uh, your spiritual batteries re-energize. That's not the way the Christian life works. We don't plug into Jesus to get charged up. We are the branch. He is the vine, and there is no separation.

Vaneetha: Mm-hmm.

Joni: [00:50:00] Relax into that vine to which you are permanently attached if indeed you know Christ, and let his life-giving sap, fall flow through you. That's uh, okay. The sap analogy is very much like the flesh, uh, and blood analogy is his life flows through you. Because we are united with Him in his death.

If we know Christ and one day in his resurrection, it'll all be behind us. Can't wait for that day.

Vaneetha: Amen.