

Suffering for the Sake Of

by Joni Eareckson Tada

Joni Eareckson Tada's sermon explores the transformative power of suffering through faith in Christ, emphasizing hope and joy amidst trials.

Duration: 49:53

Scripture: Luke 9:23, Acts 2:28, Romans 5:2, Romans 8:2, Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, James 1:2-4, James 4:6

Topics: "Suffering And Joy", "Eternal Hope"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finding joy and hope in God, even in the midst of suffering and trials. It shares powerful stories of individuals facing challenges, highlighting the need to lean on God's strength and find purpose in difficulties. The message encourages listeners to embrace suffering, persevere with joy, and look forward to the ultimate hope of being united with God in eternal joy and peace.

Transcript

O Lord Jesus, show us tonight your great fountain of joy for us, and how it is that we might come to meet your terms, might come to follow the example of your precious beloved Son. Show us some new insight, show me some new insight, and fill us with your joy, your joy eternal. This evening we would be so bold to ask.

In the precious name of your Son, Amen. You saw in that video perhaps an image or two of one of our family retreats. It is such fun to be at a family retreat.

Five days of hands down slam dunk, fun and inspiration from God's Word, wheelchair hiking, wheelchair square dancing, wheelchair rock climbing, you name it, we do it. It is such a blast. And one of the volunteers who has been volunteering at our family retreats for well over 11 years, maybe she has been volunteering at 28, 29, 30 of our family retreats these many times.

A week ago she broke her neck. She's 61 years old. She's lived a full life.

But lying in that hospital bed at Los Robles Hospital in Thousand Oaks, California, when I wheeled into the intensive care unit, I did not even recognize my friend Gracie Sutherland. Tubes in and out of her, picked lines everywhere, ventilator shoved down her throat, crutch field tongs screwed into her skull, 60 pounds of weight stretching her neck. She couldn't even breathe on her own, but she could open her eyes.

I sat there by her bed. I read scriptures to her. I quoted scripture to her.

I sang to her, be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side. Oh, Gracie, Gracie, remember, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and Gracie, no good thing ever dies. She blinked at that point.

I know she recognized the phrase. It's a line from a movie called The Shawshank Redemption. Now before you get shocked that Johnny Erickson Tata would ever watch The Shawshank Redemption, please remember, Jesus did not die a PG-13 death.

It is an R-rated world out there, and I'm not advocating R-rated movies. In fact, whenever Ken rents that movie, we fast forward all the way to the second half, because it is a horrid depiction of what prison life really is like. The wickedness, the evil, the sin, seething, fomenting.

There's a story about two men, Andy Dufresne, who was put into prison unjustly, and his old friend Red. Andy, after many years, escapes from that prison, but he opens up a path of promise for his friend Red when Red is paroled. He encourages Red, tells him to, when he is paroled, find a tree in a beautiful cornfield, and there, pushing aside rocks, he will find a little tin can, and in the can will be money to make it across the border to Mexico, to come to a little fishing village, and then Red opens up a letter, and in there are the words.

Red, never forget, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies. The next words that Red says are, get busy living, or get busy dying. Gracie, right now, I'm sorry to say, is pretty busy dying.

She is stuck at UCLA, waiting for surgery on her neck, but the infection is running rampant, and they're trying to get her white blood count down, but it doesn't look very promising, and when visitors come in to see her, she shuts her eyes against them now. I checked the website today to see if there was any change in her condition. No, but she is still busy dying.

Oh, Gracie, hold on to hope. It's a good thing, maybe the best of things. I thought about Gracie today in the midst of such news.

Even today, earthquakes in Pakistan and India, killing over 3,000 people, mudslides in Mexico and Guatemala, killing hundreds of children, and even in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, and busloads of seniors on a Houston highway who are consumed in flames, and another busload of other seniors on Lake George, New York, whose boat capsizes. So much suffering, so much bewilderment, so much hopelessness. I can identify.

I remember the time when I was once busy dying. It wasn't long after I had broken my neck in that diving accident, there was one hopeless week after I had snapped my neck. When I was in the hospital, I had lost a great deal of weight.

I had to go through long surgeries to shave down the bony prominences on my back, and it was a long recovery, and for almost three weeks, I was forced to lay face down on what's called a striker frame, a big, long, flat canvas sandwich, where they put your face up for three hours, and then strap another piece of canvas on you, and then flip your face down to lie there another three hours. My thoughts became so dark and hopeless. Facing down, staring at the floor, all I'm thinking is, great God, way to go.

I'm a brand new Christian. This is the way you treat your new Christians? I'm young in the faith. I prayed for a closer walk with you.

If this is your idea of an answer to prayer, I am never going to trust you with another prayer again. I can't believe that I've got to lie face down and do nothing but count the tiles on the floor on this stupid torture rack. I hate my existence, and I asked them to turn out the lights, close the blinds, close the door, and if anybody came in, visitor, parent, nurse, I just grunted.

I justified it all. To my way of thinking, God shouldn't mind that I would be bitter. I mean, after all, I was paralyzed, and I didn't care how much joy was set before me.

This was one cross I was not going to bear without a battle. My thoughts got darker, because no longer was my bitterness a tiny trickle. Now it had become a raging torrent, and I would imagine, in the middle of the night, God holding my sin up before my face and saying lovingly but firmly, Johnny, what are you going to do about this? What are you going to do about this attitude? It is wrong.

This sin is wrong. Get rid of it. My flesh did not like that, thank you.

I preferred my sins. I preferred my peevish, small-minded, mean-spirited, snide comments, grunting at people when they walked in or out, letting food drool out of my mouth I didn't even want to eat. Those were sins that I had made my own.

You know what it's like when you make sin your own. You housebreak it. You tame it.

You domesticate it. You shield it from the spirit's scrutiny. I did not want to let go of the sick and strange comfort of my own misery.

So, God gave me a little help. About one week into that three-week stint, lying face down on the floor, looking at the floor, waiting for my back to heal, during that first week, I got hit with a bad case of the flu. And I tell you what, suddenly not being able to move was peanuts compared to not being able to breathe.

I was so claustrophobic. I was suffering. I was gasping for breath.

I could not move. All was hopeless. All was gone.

I was falling backward emotionally, head over heels, turning backward, down for the count, decimated. And I broke. Just like Gracie this week at UCLA, lying there, waiting, her eyes shut.

I broke. I can't do this. I can't live this way.

I cannot do it. I would rather die than face this. Little did I realize it, but I was echoing the sentiments of an apostle, the apostle Paul, who, in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, felt the same way.

Because we're told there that he faced great pressure far beyond his ability to endure, so that he despaired even of life. Indeed, he even had in his heart the sentence of death. Oh God, I'd rather die than face this.

That was my prayer. That was my anguish. I can't do this.

God, help me. That week, a friend came to that hospital while I was still face down, counting the tiles, and put on a little stool a Bible and stuck my mouth stick in my mouth so that I could flip its pages. And he told

me to turn to Psalm 18, verse 6, and to read there that, in my distress, I called to the Lord.

I cried to my God for help. And from his temple, he heard my voice. My cry came before him.

Into his ears, the earth trembled and quaked. Smoke rose. He parted the heavens and came down.

He mounted. He soared on the wings of the wind. The Lord thundered from heaven.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me. He rescued me. And here's the best part.

Because he delighted in me. Oh God, I need you. That was my simple prayer.

Little did I realize that God was parting heaven and earth, striking bolts of lightning, thundering the foundations of the planet to reach down and rescue me because he delighted in me. And he showed me the very next verse in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 9. Johnny, all this has happened that you might not rely on yourself, but on God who raises the dead. And it's all God was looking for.

That's all he was looking for. All he was looking for was for me to reckon myself dead, dead to sin, because if God can raise the dead, you better believe he could have raised, he could raise me out of my hopelessness. He would take it from there.

And he has been doing the same for the last 38 years. Happy day, happy day when Jesus washed my sins away. Now don't you be there thinking that that was an isolated incident, friends.

It's not like I left that desperation back there in the hospital. No, no, no. It's the way.

A quadriplegic lives each and every day. These things have happened. This has happened.

The fact that I'm turning 56 next week has happened that I might not rely on myself, but on God who raises the dead. Suffering for me is still that jackhammer every day, breaking apart my rocks of resistance. It's still the chisel that God is using to chip away at my self-sufficiency and my self-motivation and my self-consumption.

Suffering is still that sheepdog snapping and barking at my heels, driving me down the road to Calvary where otherwise I just do not want to go. My human nature, that Romans chapter 7 tug of war, my human nature does not want to endure hardship like a good soldier or follow Christ's example or welcome a trial as friend. No, my human nature does not want to rejoice in suffering or be holy as he is holy, but it is at Calvary.

It is only at the cross where I meet suffering on God's terms. And it happens almost every morning. Don't be thinking that I'm an expert at this wheelchair.

Don't be thinking I'm a veteran. I'm no professional at being a quadriplegic. I haven't got this thing all figured out.

There are so many mornings when I wake up and I can hear my girlfriend come through the front door. She goes to the kitchen, turns on the water. I know she's making coffee and I know that in a couple of minutes she's going to come waltzing into our bedroom and she'll greet me with a happy good morning and a sweet hello.

And I am lying there with my eyes closed thinking, oh God, I can't do this. I am so tired. I don't know how I'm going to make it to lunchtime.

Oh God, I'm already thinking about how good it's going to feel when I get back to bed tonight and put my head on this pillow. Have you ever felt that way? But Psalm 107 says, you hear, oh Lord, the desire of the afflicted. You encourage them and you listen to their cry, oh God.

I often pray every morning, God, I cannot do this. I cannot do this thing called quadriplegia. I have no resources for this.

I have no strength for this. But you do. You've got resources.

You've got strength. I can't do quadriplegia, but I can do all things through you as you strengthen me. I have no smile for this woman who's going to walk into my bedroom in a moment.

She could be having Starbucks coffee with her friend, but she's chosen to come here and help me get up. Oh God, please may I borrow your smile. And he hears the cry of the afflicted.

And before it's hardly 7 30 a.m. he already sends joy sent straight from heaven. And sure enough, when my girlfriend comes through the door with that cup of coffee, I can greet her with a happy hello. To this you were called, to this you were called.

Because Christ suffered for you, leaving you this kind of an example that you should follow in his steps. He endured the cross for the joy that was set before him. Should we expect to do less? So then friends, join me.

Won't you boast in your afflictions, delight in your infirmities, glory in your weaknesses, for then you know that Christ's power rests on you. You might be handicapped on all sides, but you're not crushed. You might be perplexed, but you're not in despair.

You might be knocked down, but you're not knocked out. Because it says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 7 to 12, and I love that 12th verse, every day we experience something of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that in turn we might experience the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours. You know who the really handicapped people are? They are the ones, and many of them are Christians, believers.

They are the ones who, when their alarm clock goes off at 7 30 in the morning, they throw back the covers, jump out of bed, take a quick shower, scarf down breakfast, and then zoom out the front door on automatic cruise control. Christian, if you live that way, do you know that James chapter 4 verse 6 says God opposes you? He resists the proud. He is against the proud.

He opposes the proud, but he gives grace. Grace upon grace to the humble. And who are the humble? People who are humiliated by their weaknesses.

People whose leg bags a spring leaks on somebody else's brand new carpet. People who sometimes are just weary of what it means to live in a body with aches and pains. God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

So then submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil who loves nothing more than to discourage you and corrode your joy. Resist him, and he will flee you.

Come near to God in your affliction, and he will draw near to you. Take up your cross daily, it says in Luke chapter 9 verse 23. Take up your cross daily and follow the Lord Jesus.

But please, let me qualify that. Please know that when I take up my cross every day, I am not talking about this wheelchair. No, no, this wheelchair is not my cross to bear.

Neither is your cane or walker. Neither is your dead-end job or your irksome in-laws. Your cross to bear is not your migraine headaches, and it's not your sinus infection or your stiff joints.

Your cross to bear is not your acid reflux after you had greasy spaghetti. That is not your cross to bear. My cross is not my wheelchair.

It is my attitude. It is your attitude about your in-laws and your dead-end job. It is your attitude about your aches and pains, any complaints, any grumblings, any disputings, or murmurings, any anxieties, any worries, any resentments, or anything that hints of a raging torrent of bitterness.

These are the things God calls me to die to daily. For when I do, I not only become like him in his death, that is taking up my cross and dying to the sin that he died for on his cross, I not only become like him in his death, but I get the power of the resurrection to put to death doubts and fears of the future and grumblings and disputings, and I get to become like him in his life, his life, the intimate, sweet melding of hearts and the union of fellowshiping and sharing in his sufferings, the sweetness and the preciousness of the Savior. I become holy as he is holy.

Oh God, you fill me with joy in your presence, it says in Acts chapter 2 verse 28, and to be in God's presence is to be holy. Not to be sinless, but to sin less, to let suffering, your afflictions, perhaps you are crippled by your life circumstances, you feel handicapped by your situation at home, you feel disabled by some other rude interruption, to let suffering sandblast you to the core, revealing the stuff of which you are made, and it's never pretty, is it? The sins that we housebreak and domesticate and try to tame and make our own, no, suffering sandblast that stuff, leaving us bare and head over heels, falling emotionally backward down for the calc-decimated we are, but when suffering lob a hand grenade your way, I tell you what, your soul may be blasted bare, you may feel raw and come undone, but you then can be better bonded to the Savior. And then we not only meet suffering on God's terms, we meet joy on God's terms, and then God, happily, as he does every morning, 7.30 a.m., when I cry to him out of my affliction, he happily shares his gladness, his joy flooding over heaven's walls, filling your heart in a waterfall of delight, which then, in turn, always streams out to others in a flood of encouragement, and then he rips back to God in an ecstatic fountain of praise, he gets your heart pumping for heaven, he syringes his peace, power, and perspective into your spiritual veins, he imparts a new way of looking at your hardships, he puts a song in your heart, I tell you, there's not a day I go by, there's within my heart a melody.

Jesus always whispers it, sweet and low, fear not, I am with you, peace be still in all of life's ebb and flow. I tell you what, I experience that kind of elation, often in this wheelchair, driving me to God, the sheepdog of suffering it is, I experienced last year especially, when I was in Thailand, I'm the senior disability representative with the Lausanne committee on world evangelization, do not let that impress you, please, but what I hope impresses you is that we were able to gather at the Lausanne conference in Thailand last year, 36 disability ministry workers from around the world, most of them disabled themselves, there was Paul, a beautiful African from Cameroon, a polio survivor who makes it her life ambition to rescue other disabled infants who are left on riverbanks to starve to death because a disability is viewed as a curse from local witch doctors or bad omens from the animist spirits in the forest, she was there, and Pastor

Noel Fernandez, blind, using his white cane, came all the way from Cuba, Therese Swinters, another polio survivor in a wheelchair, all the way from Belgium, Carmina Spears, walking with her Canadian crutches from Portugal, there they came, from Brazil, from Morocco, from around the world, 36 of us, and we were having a blast, celebrating the kinds of things I've just been talking about for the last couple of minutes, how when we boast in our affliction and glory in our weaknesses, God's power is poured out upon us. Well, I tell you what, by the end of the week, there at that conference, us happy people, us ragtag group of disabled individuals, we look around at this conference and nobody else seemed to be having fun.

This conference was a bit stuffy, a little intellectual, a little inbred as conferences can be when we rehearse theology at one another rather than live it with one another, right? Well, I'll tell you what, our group of 36 at that convention were having so much fun praising the Lord, our joy just spilled out of our workshop room, it flooded down the hallway, it spilled over the hotel mezzanine level, and before you know it, there we were in this fancy resort hotel lobby, it was a procession of praise, we are marching in the light of God, we are marching in the light of God. Oh, I hope you heard me singing over there and saw me dancing, I could not not dance to something like that. We are marching, marching, we are marching, whoa, we are marching in the light of God.

And I tell you what, our procession of praise was an audio visual of 2 Corinthians 2 verse 14 to 15, for we sang thanks to God, thanks to God who always leads us, get this, in triumphal procession. He always leads us in a triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the aroma, the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. We are to God the aroma of Christ.

Oh friend, what a privilege to fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, that I might have that privilege. The world can't see Jesus endure suffering with grace, He's not here on earth but you and I are, we are, and we can fill up in our flesh what is still lacking in regard to His afflictions and in so doing become that sweet smelling savor, that fragrance, that perfume, that aroma of Christ to God. What a blessing, what a privilege, what an honor, what elation.

And if I am to remind the Father of His precious Son who suffered, the apple of His eye turning brown with the rot of my sin, if I am to follow in His steps, then it is a privilege, it is a gift to suffer alongside Him daily, take up my cross and follow Him. Believe me, he who has suffered in the flesh should cease from sin. I'm so glad the Apostle Peter included that because the world would look at suffering and think that that gives them cause for bitterness, that God owes me at least five hours of worry this week, Lord.

No, no, no, do not use your affliction as an excuse to sin, rather he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. So we can endure hardship like a good soldier, we can welcome a trial as a friend, we can see the fiery ordeal which is about to try us as not strange or uncomely, we can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we can rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance.

Tomorrow morning, I will wake up and I guarantee you I'm going to be tired, my neck is going to hurt, my back is going to ache, and I'm going to say, oh Lord God, I just cannot fly all the way across the ocean. Oh Lord, 16 hours on a plane, I can't do that. Jesus, I can't do that.

But friends, suffering produces perseverance, I will do it, because perseverance produces character, and character comes from being honed and shaped like Jesus Christ, and his character produces hope, and hope never, ever, ever disappoints us. Nothing can disappoint us, nothing can rob his joy in us, that is his joy in us, watching us, and nothing can rob our joy in him, neither height nor depth, nor things to come, nor

things past, nor muscular dystrophy, nor osteogenesis imperfecta, not spinal cord injury, or multiple sclerosis, for all things are yours, for you are of Christ, and Christ is of God, therefore you can be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. You can have nothing, and yet possess everything.

We possess everything. I know you must have thought about that when Steve spoke this afternoon. We're so rich, we've been given so much insight, so much knowledge, we've been given wisdom, we possess so much, and to whom much is given, much shall be required.

To whom much is entrusted, much shall be demanded. I may have a wheelchair, but there are a need for 18 million wheelchairs around the world. I cannot sit here in America on my backside and be content, no, no.

Ken and I are heading out to Africa right after England to go with our Wheels for the World team to deliver not only terrain-appropriate wheelchairs, but Bibles, and to give the good news, and to teach disability ministry training in churches, and to let people there know that cerebral palsy is not a curse from a local witch doctor. We will shed the light, the light of Jesus, who always tells the truth, not only about redemption, but about rickets, not only about the atonement, but about autism. We will shine his light.

I've been given so much, we must pass on the blessing. We simply must, must pass on the hope to others, to people like Gracie, still with her eyes shut in UCLA, at this point perhaps not even waiting for her operation, at this point perhaps hoping that God will take her home before that operation. So much hopelessness to people like her, and to people like, um, earlier this summer I got this email.

Talk about a hopeless person and situation. The correspondence department of Johnny and Friends forwarded it to me on the road, and rather than tell you the story, let me read this email, because this is the kind of person to whom we must minister. It was from a woman named Beverly in Texas, and this is what she wrote.

This is a quote. Dear Johnny, I'm out of hope, and I am hoping you might be able to help my husband Ron, who was in an accident last year. My husband is a pastor.

The accident left him a quadriplegic. When he came home from the hospital, he continued to pastor from his wheelchair, but then two months later he was back in the hospital with an infection, and there have been many infections since then, and many visits to the hospital. My husband Ron began to become depressed.

He has now resigned from his church, and he does not get out of bed. He does not talk, and if he answers a question, he only says, I don't know. I am at a loss.

He does not want the lights on in his room, and no TV. He does not want to live, and he does not care about our family. We have no medical insurance.

We all seem to be falling through the cracks. My husband feels useless and hopeless. We need help.

Well, what do you do? Well, I knew one thing I could do. I dialed 411 and tracked down this guy's phone number and gave him a call. Didn't get to talk to him at first, but I did get a hold of Beverly on the phone, and I shared with her that I had received her email.

I prayed with her on the phone, talked with her. Finally, I said, any chance that your husband Ron might want to talk to a fellow quadriplegic? She was delighted that I was even interested. She knocked on his door.

He said, okay. She must have turned on the lights. She tucked the phone receiver underneath his ear, and although he would not speak with me, I talked a little bit of shop about quadriplegia.

I talked about urinary infections and bowel programs and difficulties breathing, and he kind of heard of a grunt on the other end. I wanted to bridge that, however, and get to spiritual things. This man's a pastor.

Surely he knows the word of God. So I started to share with him several favorite scriptures which have sustained me through the toughest of times, James chapter 1, Romans chapter 8. Still, silence on the other end. I even sang to him.

Be not dismayed, what e'er be t'wixt, Ron, God will take care of you. Nothing. Finally, I did the only thing I knew to do.

Ron, did you ever see a movie called The Shawshank Redemption? Well, yes, I have. I knew what he was thinking when you were thinking this earlier. What's that woman doing looking at The Shawshank Redemption? That's an awful movie.

But he responded. I couldn't believe it. He responded.

So I decided to paraphrase Romans chapter 5, verse 2, and say, well, Ron, remember when old Red had Andy Dufresne's letter? Do you remember what he said? I think so. Hope is a very good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies. Ron, there are 10,000 other quadriplegics like you and me across America, not to mention who knows how many beyond the borders of this country, and all of them are lying in bed this morning wondering whether or not they should get busy dying or get busy living.

Ron, I'm going to make the choice to get busy living. You want to join me today? Huh? Yes, ma'am. Yes, I do.

Good on you, Ron, because now you're in the fellowship of sharing not only my suffering, but Christ's sufferings, and he'll give you the grace one day at a time, one day at a time. Sufficient unto this day is the evil and the trials and the troubles that you're going to face. He put his wife back on the phone, and I proceeded to tell his wife all about our family retreats.

We run 16 of them every summer. Next year, there'll be 18 across the country, and I said, Beverly, do you think you could get your husband, Ron, to one of our family retreats? Why, sure, she thought she could. I promised her that our office would provide scholarship money, which we always do to families who are struggling with medical expenses.

They came to that family retreat in Texas, and I want to read you the email that I got just a few weeks ago from Beverly. She and her husband had just returned from family retreat, and this is what she wrote. Dear Johnny, Ron asked me to be sure and write you because this past month has been wonderful.

Camp was a huge blessing, and I don't think we realized how much of a blessing it was until we got home. We have made new friends for a lifetime. Ron wants to find things that he can do which will get him out of the house more.

I told him that whenever he's ready, we can hook up our camper to our truck and go minister so we can share his testimony all over the United States. Oh, I laughed when I read that, and then she concludes, for the first time in a year, he did not say no. He grinned.

Thank you. We have hope. Hope is a good thing.

Maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies, but I tell you what, it's a dark planet. It is a diseased world. It is reeling under the curse.

Sin kills. Hell is real, and God owes this utterly rebellious planet absolutely nothing, but aren't you glad that simultaneously he is a God of love, and he is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, and he is out to convince this unbelieving, sarcastic, skeptical world of his power to save, his abilities to sustain, and his desire to share his hope. We have been given so much, you and me.

Jesus said the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to you. This conference has only added to that wealth of the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Little wonder God mandates us.

He does not merely suggest it. He mandates us that we go out into the streets, and the alleys, and the highways, and the byways. We find the poor.

We find the blind, the disabled, the lame, and we help them get busy living, because misery might love company, but you know what? Joy craves a crowd, and friend, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit crave a crowd of joy. Joy spilling over, and splashing, and filling the hearts of thirsty people in this world who are absolutely dehydrated from a lack of hope. They need help from God on high.

The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit's plan is to rescue humans, not only for their sake, but here's the best part. It's all sovereignty for God's sake. It's all for his sake.

The Father is gathering a crowd, an inheritance that is pure, and perfect, and blameless, to join him in the river of joy, and the whirlwind of pleasure, and he is heaven bent on gathering glad and happy souls who will make it their eternal ambition to worship his Son in the joy of the Holy Spirit. God is love, and the wish of love is to drench with delight those who stepped into the fellowship of sharing in his Son's suffering. And I tell you what, soon and very soon, I'm so excited.

Perhaps sooner than we think, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are going to get their wish. I am so excited for the Trinity. Soon, I'm excited for us, but you know, I mean we're just invitees to their party.

What a party it's going to be. Perhaps sooner than we think, God will close the curtain on sin, and suffering, and disease, and death, and we are going to step into the Niagara Falls. It'll be thunderous joy that is the Trinity.

No more sin, no more pain. In fact, no more let sin and sorrow reign, nor thorns infest the ground. Oh, sing it with me, come on.

He comes to make his blessings known, far as the person is found, far as the person is found, far as, far as the person. And one day I'm going to leave this wheelchair behind. I cannot wait.

I may have suffered with him on earth, but one day in heaven I'm going to reign with him. I may have tasted the pains of living on this planet, but one day I'm going to eat from the tree of life in the pleasure of

heaven, and it's all going to happen in a twinkling of an eye. The Lord's overcoming of this world will be the lifting of the curtain on our five senses, and we shall see him, and we shall be like him, and we shall see the whole universe in plain sight.

I think at first the shock of the joy of just relishing in the waterfall of love and pleasure that is the Trinity, the shock of joy may burn with a brilliant newness of being glorified, but in the next instant we will be at peace. We will be drenched with delight. We will feel at home as though it were always this way, as though we were born for such a place.

I will look up, and walking toward me will be my husband Ken. Oh, I know he loved me on earth, but I was just a hint, an omen, a foreshadowing of Johnny that I'll be in heaven, and when he sees me he'll say, so this is what I loved about you all those years on earth, and I will see Ron, and I will see Beverly striding toward me, their soul's capacity stretched because of suffering, their capacity stretched for joy, and pleasure, and worship, and service in heaven. Their souls will be large, and spacious, and roomy because they boasted in their affliction, and they traveled across the country in little trailers sharing their testimony.

Jesus will look at Gracie. It is my prayer. It is my prayer that he will look at Gracie, and he will say to her, I know you.

You came to me hemorrhaging human strength, and I felt my power go out of me, and I touched you and gave you grace upon grace upon grace. Romans 8 18 says that we can consider our present sufferings not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. I have shared this before, but I just got to say it again.

Some of you are going to get very tired of hearing me say this, but I sure hope in heaven I can bring this wheelchair. I know it's not theologically correct. John Piper would not agree with that.

Ain't going to be no wheelchairs in heaven, but if I could, I would love to bring this one. I would put it right over here, and then in my new perfect glorified body, standing on grateful glorified legs, I'd be right here, standing next to my Savior, holding his hands, nail print hands. I can say thank you, Jesus, and I know that he knows it.

I mean it, because he knows me. He'll recognize me from the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, and I will say, Jesus, do you see that wheelchair? You were right when you said that in this world we would have trouble, because that thing was a lot of trouble, but the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you, and the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. It never would have happened had you not given me the bruising of the blessing of that wheelchair, and now you can send it to hell if you'd like.

You won't find that in the Bible either, but I tell you what, then the real ticker tape of praise will begin, and all of earth will join in the party. We'll go out with joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth before you.

There'll be shouts of joy, and all the trees of the field will clap, will clap their hands, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. The trees of the field will clap their hands. The trees of the field will clap their hands as we go out with joy, and at that point, Christ will open up our eyes to the great fountain of joy in his heart for us beyond all that we ever experienced on earth, and most poignantly, when we're able to stop laughing and crying, the Lord Jesus really will wipe away our tears.

I find it so poignant, but finally at the point when I do get a chance to wipe away my own tears, I won't have to, because God will. Hope is not only the best of things, it maybe will be the greatest of things, because Romans chapter 5 verse 2 says, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. I get so excited thinking about how excited Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit are, anticipating on tiptoe that wonderful day when we, the bride of Christ, spotless and pure and blameless, will join them in their river of pleasure.

I rejoice in that hope, the hope of God's being glorified in himself, and we getting a chance to join him. I tell you what, the hope we wait for is our only hope, the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is Jesus for whom we have prevailed through all of this suffering, and oh, the sweetness of melding one heart into his, in that intimacy that is so precious.

Our hope is for the desire of the nations. Our hope is the healer of broken hearts, the friend of sinners, the God of all encouragement, the Father of all comfort, the Lord of all hope, and it is my prayer that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened so that you might know this hope to which he has called you. We're going to leave this conference tomorrow, and we're going to go out into a dark, diseased world where so many people are busy dying.

Please, to whom much is given, much is entrusted, much is demanded and required. Please join me in helping hurting people get busy living in the biblical way of get busy living. Would you, and as you do, may the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of his spirit.

Let's do something a little unusual in closing. I want to sing a hymn for the pleasure of the Lord Jesus. It's just between us, and I would love for you to hum a harmony, would you? I know there must be some altos out there.

I know there must be some tenors or some basses, but let's just create a beautiful sound for his listening pleasure, kind of a sneak preview of that moment when we are united with him after the closing of the curtain on sin and Satan and suffering. So hum with me, would you? My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but only lean on Jesus' name.

Sing the chorus with me. On Christ the Son. On Christ the Son.

All I live seeking is him.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/GIJADzaNj8k.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/joni-eareckson-tada/suffering-for-the-sake-of/>

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