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Interview with Dr. Zhang Xu

By Joni Eareckson Tada
Joni: Before I say anything to my good, good friend Dr. Zhang Xu, you should know that Jasmine Tell, the woman that you saw in the video is here tonight. Are you here, Jasmine? Where are you? Would you stand up and wave, wherever you are? And Jasmine and her husband are still ministering in Thailand, bless their hearts. Dr. Zhang Xu, this is so exciting being with you.

Zhang Xu: Me too.

Joni: You friends need to know that he was one of the premiere orthopedic surgeons in Beijing, China. But, something happened that took you away from orthopedic surgery into a journey that you would have never anticipated. You want to tell us about that?

Zhang Xu: Okay. You know, I was a proud surgeon before my diving accident in 1997. And as an orthopedic surgeon, I know exactly what had happened to me and what my life would be like in the future. So, I was overwhelmed by the disaster and decided I just wanted to kill myself, because I don't want to live as a useless person and to be a burden to others.

Joni: Hm, as an orthopedic surgeon, you understood you had broken your neck.

Zhang Xu: Exactly.

Joni: And that you would be a quadriplegic.

Zhang Xu: Yeah, yeah.

Joni: Now, you've returned home from Yemen where you had broken your neck, and you were at the China Rehabilitation Research Center in Beijing.

Zhang Xu: Yes.

Joni: What happened there?

Zhang Xu: Oh there, you know in that time I was just totally despaired. Now a friend gave me a book, a Joni book. But, I didn't have any interest or anything at that time, so I just...
told my mom to put the book aside. And one day, suddenly I remembered the book and I asked my mom to find it for me. Now I believe it’s a reminder from the Holy Spirit.

Joni: Wow, so when you read that book…

Zhang Xu: Yeah.

Joni: Something changed in your heart.

Zhang Xu: Of course.

Joni: And you had an idea that more people in China, with disabilities especially, needed to hear this story. So what did you do?

Zhang Xu: You know, I was intrigued by the story when I read the first page of the book. I know this girl had a similar accident as mine. How this useless girl can write a book? I'm sorry. But at the time, that's what I think about that. How could this useless girl can write a book? What had happened to her? So just like that, the curiosity drove me to read the book page by page.

Joni: Wow.

Zhang Xu: You know, at that time I didn’t know God. And Jesus was only a name that occasionally appeared in movies or novels. But God had a special way to call my attention to Him. So, from the book I got to know that Jesus is the man who was called God and Savior by Christians.

Joni: Yes.

Zhang Xu: And He came from heaven to save us with His Blood and Life.

Joni: Wow.
Zhang Xu: And I read that many Christian friends come to you with love and support. Of course, I also read how you got angry with God from time to time for your incurable paralysis.

Joni: Yes. What impressed me was that you had a burden to make certain that that Joni book was in simplified Chinese text. And your mother sat by your bedside with a pencil and pad of paper.

Zhang Xu: Yes.

Joni: And you dictated, translated the book word by word to your mother, correct?

Zhang Xu: Exactly.

Joni: And then in the year 2000, I had a chance to go to Beijing and be part of a big press conference sponsored by the China Rehabilitation Research Center to initiate the first copy of the book. And it was a great celebration, wasn't it?

Zhang Xu: Yeah.

Joni: But it didn't stop there, because God grabbed your heart and broke it for the people with disabilities in China. What happened next?

Zhang Xu: Okay, after I got my conscious back and my condition became stable, I began to consider what I should do in the future.

Joni: 'Cause you didn't want to be useless.

Zhang Xu: I was still useless at that time. But I think, because I had learned from my experience in Beijing Rehab Center, and I got to know that intense therapies were important for disabled persons. So, I thought maybe I would start something in my hometown like a small Rehab Center. On the one hand, I can help other disabled people, on the other hand, I can make my life full and meaningful.

So, I began to study rehabilitation and I went to Hong Kong for several years to study rehabilitation and I even registered a distance learning program of San Diego
State University for Rehabilitation Counseling. But, the real turning point happened in 2004, and by the support of Joni and Friends I came here and spent three months for training in Disability Ministry.

Joni: Well, you must know, friends, that Dr. Zhang Xu is the only quadriplegic in China who has a Masters from San Diego State University in Rehab Counseling. Is that awesome or what?

Zhang Xu: Thank God, thank God, yeah. And here, I was touched and impressed by a Bible verse you would often quote, that is in Luke 14, chapter 14, Jesus said, "Why you give a feast? Send for the poor, the blind, and those whose body are broken and you will be blessed." So, I got to know it is an order from Jesus. And, it is also our responsibility for Christians to bring the poor disabled to His Kingdom to get comforted and saved.

Joni: Well, you established the Bethesda Rehab Ministry of Anshan, China.

Zhang Xu: Yeah.

Joni: And tell me what, tell us all, what does your ministry do?

Zhang Xu: Oh, we started the ministry in 2005, and now nine years have passed and we are, our ministry is, growing in God's grace. And now we have a program like Home Visits, to the disabled people and their families. And we also have a disabled children's learning program. And we also have an annual wheelchair donation with Joni and Friends.

Joni: So, you distribute wheelchairs, you have a children's learning program.

Zhang Xu: Yeah.

Joni: You have home visitation. You do your family retreat and day camps for children with disabilities.

Zhang Xu: Every year when the weather becomes warm, we bring children out with their families.
Joni: Oh, Zhang Xu, your life is far from useless. My goodness, I am so grateful for all of this. But do you have any closing or parting words for our friends here?

Zhang Xu: Yeah, that is God always makes impossible, possible.

Joni: Amen, it's where disabilities and possibilities meet. Thank you so much, Zhang Xu.

Zhang Xu: Thank you Joni, thank you. It's a pleasure.