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—LYSA TERKEURST, #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JEANNIE CUNNION

don't
miss out

DARING TO BELIEVE
LIFE IS BETTER
WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

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This is dedicated to Andre and the children at
Danita's Children in Haiti.

Your precious lives bear witness to the hope
that overflows by the power of the Holy Spirit.
His presence in you gave me an insatiable thirst
to experience more of His presence in me!

Romans 15:13



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Introduction

On a very ordinary day, I was invited to do an extraordinary thing. I signed the contract to write this book.

I'd asked my son Owen to get the mail for me, and when he came inside and dropped it on the counter, I noticed the manila envelope at the bottom of the stack, and I squealed. I knew the contract was coming, and I'd been eager to put my signature on the dotted line. It doesn't matter if it's your first or your fifteenth book contract, the gift of writing books that point to Jesus is something I will always celebrate. It's what I love to do, and I don't take the opportunity for granted.

Before Owen left the kitchen, I asked him to grab my phone and take a picture of me holding the contract. I wanted a photo to remember this special moment.

As Owen was positioning himself to take the photo from across the kitchen counter, Batman suddenly popped into the picture. Unbeknownst to me, my four-year-old son, Finn, had put on his Batman mask and was living his best life in the living room, but he'd come into the kitchen for a snack. And because he never misses a photo op, he asked, "Can I be in the picture, Mommy?"

I asked Owen to wait while I pulled up a stool so Batman could join me.

Owen took several pictures and handed the phone back to me. As I scrolled through the photos, the imagery wasn't lost on me. A superhero, with "supernatural ability," was with me. It felt like sweet assurance from Jesus that the Holy Spirit would guide me and give me wisdom as I wrote a book that I had fought writing. Yes, I fought this one hard.

In fact, if you'd told me even a year ago that I'd be writing a book about the Holy Spirit, I would have told you that you're precious but crazy. Only highly trained theologians with lots of letters after their name are qualified to write on the Spirit of God. And the topic is too divisive. And I have too much still to learn about the Holy Spirit's presence and power in my own life to be writing about how others can encounter and experience Him. Those are only three of the top ten reasons I offered to God in resistance to writing this book when He began disturbing me about the purpose of His Spirit. (And I mean disturbing in the best way.) But thankfully, God is persistent.

I want you to know I'm not writing this book as an expert who has sought to solve the mysteries of the Spirit, but as someone who stands in awe of the Three-In-One, and whose life has been (and continues to be) immensely bettered by growing in my relationship with the Spirit of God.

I also want you to know this book wasn't birthed from one big revelatory moment but from several small ones that, together, revealed something I absolutely didn't expect to discover: I've been settling for less than *all* of God by neglecting the supernatural power of the Spirit who lives in me.

But here's the thing: Neglecting the Holy Spirit wasn't an intentional decision. I simply didn't know very much about who He is, what He does, and why it matters so much. I think that's how it is for a lot of us. We just don't know.

Even though I have been following Jesus since I was eight years old, I know and believe the core doctrines of Christianity, and I

had plenty of exposure to the Holy Spirit's work as a preacher's kid in an evangelical church, I didn't know all of the benefits I was missing out on by not being more reliant on the Spirit's presence and power in my life.

But God, in His infinite kindness, heard my daily prayers for a fuller knowledge and experience of His love in Jesus. And He answered that prayer by reintroducing me to His Spirit.

I didn't know all of the benefits I was missing out on by not being more reliant on the Spirit's presence and power in my life.

Where It All Began

It all began about a year after my last book, *Mom Set Free*, was released. *Mom Set Free* is the story of how I was *finally* set free from the pressure to get it all right in my life and in my parenting, and I was set free to rest in God's sovereignty over my significance in my kids' lives. Ultimately, it's the story of how I learned to embrace and enjoy the freedom for which Christ has set us free as women and as moms.

But while I was busy speaking at conferences about our freedom in Christ, I began to struggle again at home with patterns and fears I'd been set free from. Yes, we are indeed forgetful people who never outgrow our need to hear the hope of the Gospel every single day, but it was more than that. What I ultimately realized through my struggles is that I was *set free* by Jesus, but I was trying to *live free* by Jeannie.

Around this same time, I was invited to speak to a lovely group of moms about relying on the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work in our kids' lives. When I finished speaking, we opened up the discussion for Q&A, and that was when one wise woman asked a significant question: "I know we are supposed to rely on the Holy Spirit, but how do we actually *do* that? How do we access

His power and teach it to our kids?” The truth is, I didn’t have a very helpful answer for her, beyond explaining how Scripture tells us to ask for His help and to trust He will show up.

That’s when I began to grapple with questions like,

Do I really rely on the power of God’s Spirit inside me, or am I mostly trying to do life in my own strength and supply?

What do I really know of Him?

How can I experience more of His presence?

Why do I keep struggling with things I’ve been set free from?

In search of answers, I opened my Bible to study the Holy Spirit’s work and, unsurprisingly, found Him in countless verses that I’ve read a hundred times but had failed to see Him at play in. I began to hear His name in worship songs I’ve sung a thousand times. I began to devour books about the Holy Spirit by theologians and teachers I respect.

Through my searching and learning, I began to see how I’d treated the Holy Spirit as though He were the optional part of the Trinity. As though God asks, “Would you like the Holy Spirit too?” when we put our trust in Jesus, just as a server at a restaurant asks, “Would you like ketchup too?” when we order fries. This discovery stirred in me a fear of missing out, but this wasn’t your typical fear of missing out—or what we call FOMO. It was a holy FOMO. I had *holy fear* that I was settling for less than *all* of God.

You should also know that as I studied and welcomed the Spirit to get in my business, I quickly realized that writing this book was going to hurt a bit. It became clear I had not fully surrendered areas in my life that the Spirit wanted full access to. (I’ll be telling you all about those areas in the pages to come. We’re going to get very honest here.) Yes, I knew that writing this book would come at a cost, but the more I learned about the beautiful person of the Holy Spirit and the more I got to know Him as my friend, the more I craved His presence and the more I knew I needed His power.

What became undeniable was that I was functioning mostly in my own power. I was trying to grow and bloom and love and witness in my own power rather than in the Spirit's power. All the while, God was inviting me into the *super-over-natural* life.

He wanted to infuse His super into my natural. That's what He wants to do in all of us!

Saying yes to God's invitation profoundly changed me and propelled me to write the book I'd been fighting, because it was too good to keep to myself. The Holy Spirit is so much better and so much bigger than I ever imagined.

I want each one of us to know this in our bones: Jesus' life set us free and the Spirit's power *keeps* us free! Free from settling for less than all that God wants to do in us and for us and through us. I am desperate for each one of us to love Him and welcome His supernatural work in our lives because He wants to draw us deeper into the life-giving, soul-satisfying, and utterly transforming love of Jesus, for the glory of the Father.

Jesus' life set us
free and the Spirit's
power *keeps* us free!

What Doesn't the Holy Spirit Do?

I also want you to know I am not attempting to answer all of our questions about the Holy Spirit in this book. The Holy Spirit is as mysterious as He is made-known, and questions will remain around the more complex conversations we could (but won't) have about the Holy Spirit. This is not an extensive theological treatise about the Holy Spirit but a personal invitation to better know and experience Him. This is not a comprehensive book, but an intimate look at His inexhaustive and incomparable role in our lives.

There are so many strong (and often divisive) opinions around the Holy Spirit that distract us and make Him seem not only confusing but intimidating, leading most of us to just dismiss Him

because He seems to be the hardest of the Trinity to grasp. What we tend to overlook is that there are things about the Holy Spirit that are made wonderfully and beautifully clear in Scripture, and that is where I will steer us in these pages. And while it is utterly impossible to encapsulate the third person of the Trinity, I do believe we will—with every turn of the page—feel like we’re getting to know better the friend above every other friend.

The extent to which we are willing to engage with the Spirit of God is the extent to which we will encounter the fullness of God. So, if you are willing to get really honest with yourself—and with God—about those things that are keeping you from enjoy-

ing His indwelling presence, experiencing His power, and exercising the gifts He’s given you, you can’t imagine what’s coming! It won’t always be easy (because few things worth having are), but it will be *so* worth it.

The extent to which we are willing to engage with the Spirit of God is the extent to which we will encounter the fullness of God.

My hope is that, at the end of this journey, our main question will no longer be, “What does the Holy Spirit do?” but rather, “What *doesn’t* the Holy Spirit do?” because He is working in so many ways that I don’t think

most of us even realize or take advantage of. He has so much to show us and to do in us and through us!

Oh, and here’s the other thing I trust will happen in you, because it’s happened in me, and it’s a precious gift. Through this journey, God has been showing me where I have, all along, been experiencing His power and provision and presence in ways I simply didn’t notice before. I’ve seen where He has been empowering me, molding me, convicting and comforting me, guiding and growing me, in ways I would have missed had I not accepted God’s call to write this book for *us*. It gave me a deep sense of gratitude for how He’s been working even when I didn’t see it. (Isn’t that crazy,

though? God doesn't pout and pull back when we aren't mindful of or grateful for His goodness. He patiently waits for us to be astonished by Him.)

But I don't want to miss it anymore. I don't want to overlook His presence and fail to celebrate His provision. I'm here for it! And that is why I finally stopped giving God all my excuses about being unworthy of writing a book about His Spirit.

I wrote this book, which I hope feels more like an invitation from a close friend, with the hope that none of us will miss out on experiencing the benefits of the **last-to-be-mentioned but not least-in-significance** person of the Trinity, the greatest benefit being hearts enlarged for Jesus. That is the Holy Spirit's priority, after all—to make much of Jesus!

Last but Not Least

At the end of each chapter you will find a “Last but Not Least” simple exercise to help you connect with the benefit of the Holy Spirit that was revealed in that chapter. “Last but Not Least” is meant to remind us that though the Holy Spirit is named last when we speak of the Trinity, it does not follow that He is least in significance. I kept the chapters shorter in length so we can pause at the end of each one to reflect on the benefit God wants us to experience through His Spirit. You can also download discussion questions for your group or book club at JeannieCunnion.com.

As personally as I can say this, I want you to know how happy I am that you are holding this book in your hands, because I believe the Three-In-One is about to blow us away.

one

He Is to Our Advantage

Much of my relationship with the Holy Spirit has been like the simultaneous gesturing we do using one hand to wave someone toward us with a “Come closer” motion while holding up our other hand at the end of our outstretched arm signaling “Stop right there.” Yes, it’s fair to say my posture with the Spirit of God was one of hesitation more than cooperation.

I can’t help but wonder what words you would use to describe your feelings about or experience with the Holy Spirit.

In conversations with Christian friends from varying walks of life, I’ve asked what words they would use to describe their feelings about the Holy Spirit. A few shared how He was crucial to their faith and how they felt very connected to Him, but by and large, most friends expressed feelings of uncertainty or disconnection.

Our uncertainty about the Holy Spirit isn’t surprising, considering the way He has been misused and misunderstood in the church and in culture. Most Christians are comfortable with God the Father and God the Son, but we assume that God the Spirit is reserved for the extremes: either the super-spiritual or the super-strange.

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The stigma is that if you speak freely of the Holy Spirit, you must be a very religious person who got so close to God that you got access to His Spirit, or you must be one of those slightly off people who behaves a bit dramatically while doing sensational things in the name of the Holy Spirit.

Because of this stigma, most Christians casually recite the seven words we often find in Scripture—“through the power of the Holy Spirit”—but rarely do we actually know what that means or welcome His transforming power in our lives. We settle for less than *all* of God. Let me make that more personal. *I* settled for less than all of God.

Have We Settled?

The irony is, if you had asked me to describe my faith life a couple years ago, I never would have thought to use the word *settling*, because I love my King Jesus and I know how desperately I need His mercy and grace. He is the lover of my soul. But as I began to awaken to the Holy Spirit’s presence and power inside me, what I discovered stunned me, because settling is—in many ways—exactly what I’d been doing by not relying more on the Holy Spirit’s supernatural presence, provision, and power dwelling in me.

I was settling
for far less
than all that
God offers us.

It’s not that I didn’t believe in and affirm the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I wholeheartedly did. I was just neglecting the extraordinary benefits of the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit. This discovery lit a fire in me because it revealed I was settling for far less than all that God offers us.

In fact, I vividly remember several mornings of sitting in my office chair, my Bible open on my desk and a very large hot coffee in my hand, reading chapters 14 through 16 in the gospel of John specifically in search of the Holy Spirit’s

presence on the pages, being utterly awestruck at what I've missed. The question that kept running through my mind was, *How have I been following Jesus since I was eight years old, faithfully attending church, and reading Scripture and attending more Bible studies than I can count, but somehow neglecting the very One Jesus said is to my advantage?*

Did you know that about the Holy Spirit? Did you know that Jesus said He is to your advantage? Read these words of Jesus slowly:

But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

John 16:5-7

The "Helper" Jesus is speaking about in verse 7 is, of course, the Holy Spirit. Jesus knows His disciples are deeply disappointed that His departure is imminent, so He lovingly assures them, "Trust me on this! It is *better* that I return to my Father *so that* the Holy Spirit will come" (my paraphrase). Other translations read "it is better for you," "for your good," and "for your benefit." Isn't it so interesting that Jesus didn't say it was "almost as good" or even "just as good" for them to have His Spirit *in them* rather than His physical presences *with them*. He said it was "better," and it was only going to happen if He ascended to His Father.

The twelve disciples weren't disappointed because they didn't want the Holy Spirit. They were disappointed because it meant Jesus was going to depart. This was devastating news for the men who'd just spent three years by His side and under His leadership. I'm guessing their sadness was also anchored in their inability to even begin to fathom what they would soon gain in the Helper.

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It is no small thing that Jesus' revelation to His disciples remains true for us more than two thousand years later. And yet, we might be tempted to respond to this news as the disciples did. "Better for us that you leave? No. How could it be better? How could anything be better than you right here beside us? We want *you*, Jesus, not just the Helper, your Spirit."

I can't help but wonder what Jesus would say to those of us feeling unsure, even now, about it being better to have His Spirit living in us over His physical presence beside us. I envision Jesus responding with tenderness, yet certainty, saying something like:

"But daughter, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are One. The Holy Spirit makes me even more real and beautiful to you. He takes up residence in your heart so you will never be alone and never be without what you need. He is making you more like me. And let me tell you what else He can do for you. Oh, just let me tell you how He is to your advantage!"

How the Holy Spirit is to our advantage, and all the benefits we enjoy by receiving His indwelling presence, is what we are about to discover together. And it's going to be so good!

How Is the Spirit to Our Advantage?

Jesus was "God with us." The Holy Spirit is "God in us."

See, the disciples thought they were losing closeness and connectivity with Jesus, when really He would be closer and more connected to them than ever before because His Spirit would now take up residence inside them. And that same closeness and connectivity is accessible to us today, through His Spirit!

Even more than that, knowing we have the Holy Spirit living inside us should give us extraordinary confidence. What is more empowering than knowing Almighty God indwells us?

When facing a frightening diagnosis, navigating financial hardship or crisis, fighting fear over an uncertain future, praying to better love a difficult spouse, feeling hopeless over foolish choices

our children are making, or struggling with the same old sins and strongholds, we can stand confidently on the power of the Holy Spirit, who is our divine Helper. This is not flimsy or false confidence. This is certified confidence. He is more than able!

I need you to know that whatever lies before you, it's not all on you! It's on the Spirit *in* you. And if His power can raise our Savior from the grave, He can handle whatever hardship or fear you face.

But there's more.

The Spirit gives us confidence that we can live out the call of the Gospel because He supplies the ability. We don't have to muster up heart motivation to worship God above all our other loves. The Spirit does that *in* us. And then He gives us the boldness to spread the Gospel to a world desperately in need of healing and hope.

This is all the work of the Spirit. This is why Jesus said it's to our advantage that the Holy Spirit comes. His work in our lives is so connected and crucial to experiencing the fullness of God.

His work in our lives is so connected and crucial to experiencing the fullness of God.

The Holy Spirit, our consummate Helper, guides us, comforts us, fills us with hope and joy, gives us life and peace, strengthens us in our inner being, communicates with us, prays for us, leads us in truth, empowers us to fight sin, illuminates Scripture, and advocates for us. He opens our hearts to the love of Jesus, makes us more like Jesus, and gives us supernatural gifts to build up the church and glorify God.

This, and so much more, is what we will unpack thoroughly in the chapters to come, as we discover how Jesus' ascension ushered in a new depth and dimension in our relationship with God. This is worthy of celebration.

I believe that the deeper we dig into Scripture, and the more we open ourselves up to experiencing the Spirit's presence and power in our daily doings, the more we'll find ourselves grateful

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that Christ ascended and the Holy Spirit descended. We'll discover Jesus was right all along. Why do we ever doubt?

Oh, how I want us to know Him and enjoy the benefits of being filled by Him. This is an invitation to discover how essential the Holy Spirit is to the full and flourishing Christian life. He can do more in you and through you than you ever thought possible. (And if you haven't put your trust in Jesus, please keep reading, as this is every bit as much for you! The very fact that you're holding this book in your hand tells me God is in passionate pursuit of you, patiently waiting for you to say yes to Jesus and receive His Spirit!)

It's time to stop settling for mere knowledge of His existence and start enjoying the many benefits of His presence.

last but not least

Reflect: Why is it difficult to believe that it is to our advantage to have His Spirit living *in* us over having His physical presence *beside* us?

Respond: Today, adopt a conscious awareness of God's Spirit in you. Have you felt comforted? Been empowered to do the right thing in a difficult situation? Used a spiritual gift to bless the life of another? Read a verse that suddenly made more sense than ever before? Friend, that's the Holy Spirit . . . *in you!*