

FORGOTTEN GOD

REVERSING OUR TRAGIC NEGLECT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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with Danae Yankoski

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TO RACHEL
MY DAUGHTER AND FRIEND
YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW HAPPY I AM TO SEE THE
SPIRIT ALIVE IN YOU.
LET'S FOLLOW HIM TOGETHER
FOREVER.

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INTRODUCTION

You might think that calling the Holy Spirit the “forgotten God” is a bit extreme. Maybe you agree that the church has focused too much attention elsewhere but feel it is an exaggeration to say we have *forgotten* about the Spirit. I don’t think so.

From my perspective, the Holy Spirit is tragically neglected and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. While no evangelical would deny His existence, I’m willing to bet there are millions of churchgoers across America who cannot confidently say they have experienced His presence or action in their lives over the past year. And many of them do not believe they can.

The benchmark of success in church services has become more about attendance than the movement of the Holy Spirit. The “entertainment” model of church was largely adopted in the 1980s and ’90s, and while it alleviated some of our boredom for a couple

of hours a week, it filled our churches with self-focused consumers rather than self-sacrificing servants attuned to the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we're too familiar and comfortable with the current state of the church to feel the weight of the problem. But what if you grew up on a desert island with nothing but the Bible to read? Imagine being rescued after twenty years and then attending a typical evangelical church. Chances are you'd be shocked (for a whole lot of reasons, but that is another story). Having read the Scriptures outside the context of contemporary church culture, you would be convinced that the Holy Spirit is as essential to a believer's existence as air is to staying alive. You would know that the Spirit led the first Christians to do unexplainable things, to live lives that didn't make sense to the culture around them, and ultimately to spread the story of God's grace around the world.

There is a big gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit and how most believers and churches operate today. In many modern churches, you would be stunned by the apparent absence of the Spirit in any manifest way. And this, I believe, is the crux of the problem.

If I were Satan and my ultimate goal was to thwart God's kingdom and purposes, one of my main strategies would be to get churchgoers to ignore the Holy Spirit. The degree to which this has happened (and I would argue that it is a prolific disease in the body of Christ) is directly connected to the dissatisfaction most of us feel with and in the church. We understand something very important is missing. The feeling is so strong that some have run away from the church and God's Word completely.

I believe that this missing *something* is actually a missing

Someone—namely, the Holy Spirit. Without Him, people operate in their own strength and only accomplish human-size results. The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.



As I wrote this book, the question that kept burning in my mind was, How can any human being write well on the sacred topic of the Holy Spirit of God? No subject intimidates me more, yet I can't think of anything more essential for God's church everywhere, and especially in the western hemisphere where it seems that the Holy Spirit is all but missing from most of our churches. I am most definitely writing from a western context, and I know that the body of Christ is vibrant and growing and the Holy Spirit active on continents like Africa, South America, and Asia. I also know that God works uniquely in various places and times, and I do think this explains part of the difference between here and there. However, I also believe that the Spirit is more obviously active in places where people are desperate for Him, humbled before Him, and not distracted by their pursuit of wealth or comforts (like we are).

The light of the American church is flickering and nearly extinguished, having largely sold out to the kingdoms and values of this world. While most people see that there is a problem, few

do anything about it, and most of those who do, run toward the wrong solutions. Instead of speaking meaningfully and insightfully into the culture, we have capitulated and in many cases look no different from the world. I'm not sure if it is a calling or a sense of pure urgency that leads me to write this. Maybe both. The fact is, I don't have the "right" to write this book, but I believe it is a book that needs to be written, so I have written it, trusting that God will use it for His glory.

The Holy Spirit is absolutely vital to our situation today. Of course, He is always vital; but perhaps especially now. After all, if the Holy Spirit moves, nothing can stop Him. If He doesn't move, we will not produce genuine fruit—no matter how much effort or money we expend. The church becomes irrelevant when it becomes purely a human creation. We are not all we were made to be when everything in our lives and churches can be explained apart from the work and presence of the Spirit of God.



Perhaps it's not theology we're missing, but rather theological *integrity*. Many have the knowledge but lack the courage to admit the discrepancy between what we know and how we live. Hundreds of scholarly theological books have been written on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity, et cetera. This book is not one of those. *Obvious*, *neglected*, and *crucial* are the adjectives I would use to describe the truths I will present.

In the following chapters, I will explore the fundamental knowledge most of us have about the Holy Spirit. We will delve

into some key Scriptures about the Holy Spirit and look at our own abuses, misconceptions, and even fears of Him. By journeying honestly, I hope we can go beyond our current understanding of the Holy Spirit and begin to commune openly ... that our experience with Him would be day by day, even moment by moment. That by keeping in step with the Spirit, we might regularly fellowship over what He's *doing* rather than what He *did* months or years ago. We'll be reminded of the strength and wisdom available to us in the Spirit and earnestly pray for more. As we trust in the promises of the Spirit, we will be led away from discouragement and into lives marked by confidence, power in the midst of our weakness, and the fruit of the Spirit.

My prayer is that your changed life would produce this kind of astonishment: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were *astounded*. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).



Reading this book probably won't be easy. No matter what religious tradition you come from, you likely carry baggage and harbor stereotypes when it comes to the Holy Spirit. It's going to require laying aside your baggage and stereotypes so you can be open to what God wants to teach you. Are you willing to do that?

Some of you hear the term *Holy Spirit* and automatically worry that I am going to get wildly charismatic on you. Others think of extreme conservatives who never acknowledge the Holy Spirit

in word or deed and hope I'm not going there. There are a lot of stereotypes (some of which are true) and a lot of abuses, and they don't come from just one side of this issue.

Some people talk a lot about—even boast of—the Spirit, but their lives do not bear His fruit. Others speak of the Holy Spirit in theoretical or scholarly terms, yet do not experience Him at work. Still others ignore Him for all practical purposes and, as you might expect, rarely experience relationship or intimacy with the Spirit. And then there is that rare person who *doesn't* talk frequently about the Spirit, yet whose life is a powerful display of His presence and activity.

Some of you would like it if I said we were going to find a healthy balance between unhealthy extremes. That's not what we're going to do. When we are referring to God, balance is a huge mistake. God is not just one thing we add to the mix called life. He wants an invitation from us to permeate everything and every part of us. In the same way, seeking a "healthy balance" of the Holy Spirit assumes that there are some who have too much Holy Spirit and others who have too little. I have yet to meet *anyone* with too much Holy Spirit. Granted, I've met many who talk about Him too much, but none who are actually overfilled with His presence.

Is it possible to get enough or even too much God? Is there a point when a person can be satisfied with the amount of intimacy, knowledge, and power of God he or she experiences? I don't see how there can be, because doesn't every encounter with God only cause us to thirst for Him more?

Let me be clear. This is not a call to misinformed extremism, but an acknowledgment that as believers we can never be "done" with

God. He is infinite and we are finite; there will always be more of His character to discover, more of His love to experience, and more of His power to use for His purposes.

I can't say exactly what will happen when you admit that you can never fully know or experience enough of the Holy Spirit yet choose to seek Him regardless. I know only that when you surrender fully to the Spirit, Christ will be magnified, not you (John 16:14).

And perhaps the core issue is really about our holding back from giving ourselves to God, rather than our getting “too much” of Him. Perhaps when a person says, “I'd just like a little God, thank you very much,” she or he is really saying, “I'd rather not give the parts of my life that I really care about over to God, so I'll just hold on to this, that, oh, and that, too...”

It doesn't work that way. When I read Scripture, I see the truth and necessity of a life wholly surrendered to and dependent upon the Holy Spirit.



Paul wrote to the Corinthians that his words were not “wise and persuasive” but rather a “demonstration of the Spirit's power” in order that their faith “might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power” (1 Cor. 2:4–5 NIV). Later in the same letter he reiterates that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” (4:20 NIV).

In most churches today I hear a lot of talk and the facade of human wisdom, but I don't see much of God's presence and power. Do you?

I am tired of merely talking about God. I want to see God move through me, through Cornerstone Church, and through the worldwide body of Christ. I know there's more. We all know there's more. That's why I wrote this book—to explore with you how God has called us to more, through the presence and strength of the Holy Spirit.

I refuse to live the remainder of my life where I am right now, stagnating at this point. Don't get me wrong: God has already done so much in my life, and I am grateful for it. I'm just convinced there's more. There's more of the Spirit and more of God than any of us is experiencing. I want to go there—not just intellectually, but in life, with everything that I am.

As we begin this book, may our desire to experience more of the Holy Spirit be our starting point. And may we open our hearts and lives to His presence and action more fully than we have ever done before. By the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, may we be different people when we finish from when we started.

ABOUT THE COVER

My friend Jim, who serves as one of the worship pastors at Cornerstone Church, designed the cover of this book after a message I gave about the difference between *exegesis* and *eisegesis*. It was one of the first lessons I learned in seminary.

Exegesis: an attempt to discover the meaning of the text objectively, starting with the text and moving out from there.

Eisegesis: to import a subjective, preconceived meaning into the text.

I was taught to interpret the Scriptures through exegesis alone. Start with God's Word; pray that the Spirit gives you clarity; then study to see what the text actually says. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible, so who better to help us as we seek to understand it? Scripture tells us that the Spirit not only inspired the Bible, but also illumines it for us today (1 Cor. 2:12–16 and 2 Tim. 3:16).

The word *exegesis* comes from a Greek word meaning “to lead out.” As I have said, you start with the text and draw out its meaning. Eisegesis, on the other hand, is when you start with an idea or conviction, then search for verses in the Bible to prove your point. I was warned against eisegesis, and rightly so. The danger in this is that we can take verses out of context to support just about any point of view. For years people have used this style of interpretation in order to justify greed, lust, divorce, and countless other sins. Cults also use eisegesis to justify their beliefs. After realizing this, we at Cornerstone began to question whether there were any areas in our lives where we did essentially the same thing.

The bottom line is that we can easily pursue just about any lifestyle we desire, then find Scriptures to show everyone it’s all right to live that way. But what would it look like to live *exegetically*? If we were to start with Scripture and allow it to dictate our actions, how would we live?

I believe many people have an eisegetically formed concept of the Holy Spirit. In essence, we have cut and pasted whatever verses and ideas work for us; this forms our understanding of the Holy Spirit. The last thing I want to do is cut and paste a little more by giving you *my* “version” of the Holy Spirit. In this book, I endeavor to present the core truths that have been revealed to believers about the Holy Spirit—the things a Spirit-filled believer would conclude if he or she started with the Scriptures and proceeded from there.

CHAPTER 1

I've Got Jesus. Why Do I Need the Spirit?

We may as well face it: the whole level of spirituality among us is low. We have measured ourselves by ourselves until the incentive to seek higher plateaus in the things of the Spirit is all but gone.... [We] have imitated the world, sought popular favor, manufactured delights to substitute for the joy of the Lord and produced a cheap and synthetic power to substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost.

-A. W. Tozer-

I am convinced there is a desperate need in the church for the Holy Spirit of God to be given room to have His way. I think we can agree that there is a problem in our churches, that something is wrong. But I don't think we can reach an agreement on what to do about it. Most

people do not connect what is missing or wrong with a particular need for the Holy Spirit.

A while back, our lack of openness to examining ourselves—especially in the area of the Holy Spirit—really hit me. Two Jehovah’s Witnesses knocked on my door and initiated conversation. I had a lot to do, so I prepared to send them on their way. But as they began their spiel, I decided to take a few minutes and engage them. I gently told them that I found their teachings about Jesus offensive because they taught that Jesus was the same person as Michael the archangel. I told them that I believe He is much more than one among many angels; that I believe He is God. My visitors replied, “No, Jesus/Michael is the *only* archangel. There are no other archangels.” So I asked them to open their Bibles to Daniel 10:13, which reads, “But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, *one of* the chief princes, came to help me” (NIV). I pointed out that this passage is clear: Michael is only “one of” the chief princes (or archangels).

This caught them off guard. They told me they’d never heard or read this before. Now that I had their attention, I said, “There’s no way you can look me in the eyes and tell me that you sat down one day seeking to find God, read the Bible, and came to the conclusion that Jesus is the same person as Michael the archangel. No one could come to that conclusion. You only believe it because that’s what you were told, and I don’t want to stand here and spoon-feed you something else.” With that, I challenged them to read the Bible for themselves, rather than simply accept what they’ve been told about it. They went away that day and said they would consider doing that.

I left that conversation feeling a bit proud of myself because I stumped them and got them to question their beliefs. Yet I couldn't help but wonder whether I was fair to them. Had I ever sat down with the Bible and sought after its self-evident truth? Or had I passively ingested what I heard from other people, much like my front-door visitors?

It was then that I began reading the Scriptures as though I had never read them before. I asked the Spirit to make them "living and active" to me, though I'd been reading them for years. I asked God to "penetrate" the wrong and ill-conceived notions I'd collected along the way (Heb. 4:12 NIV). It's a great exercise for those of us who have been immersed in church culture for years.

There are, of course, dangers in this, since the Bible is meant to be interpreted within the context and accountability of faithful community. Yet even with that qualification, there is still a need for those of us nestled deep within the Christian bubble to look beyond the status quo and critically assess the degree to which we are really living biblically.

Most of us assume that what we believe is right (of course we do—it is why we believe what we believe) but have never really studied for ourselves. We were simply told, "This is the way it is," and didn't question. The problem is much of what we believe is often based more on comfort or our culture's tradition than on the Bible.

I believe we need to reexamine our faith just as much as the Jehovah's Witnesses who came to my door need to reconsider theirs. Remember, the Bereans were lifted up as good examples because they questioned the things they were taught. They made sure that even the apostles' teachings were in line with what was written: "Now

the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11 NIV).

One of the areas we desperately need to examine is how we think about and relate to the Holy Spirit. As I said previously, if you or I had never been to a church and had read only the Old and New Testaments, we would have significant expectations of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Think about it. Upon foretelling His death, Jesus comforts the disciples by telling them that “another Counselor” is coming (John 14:16 NIV). In John 16:7 He goes so far as to say it is to their *advantage* that He leave so the Counselor can come. And in Acts 1:4–5, after His death and resurrection, He tells His disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. (The disciples obey because that’s what people do when someone rises from the dead and gives instructions.) Jesus’ disciples had no idea what or whom they were waiting for, or what it would be like. But they were expectant and trusting because Jesus had instructed them to wait for this good gift.

Then in Acts 2, we see the fulfillment of this promise in a way that must have shocked the disciples. The Holy Spirit’s power is unleashed like no one had ever seen or experienced before, and Peter shares the amazing promise that this Holy Spirit is available to anyone who believes. The Epistles tell us of the Holy Spirit’s amazing power at work in us, our Spirit-enabled ability to put our sin to death

through Him, and the supernatural gifts He gives us.

If we read and believed these accounts, we would expect a great deal of the Holy Spirit. He would not be a mostly forgotten member of the Godhead whom we occasionally give a nod of recognition to, which is what He has become in most American churches. We would expect our new life with the Holy Spirit to look radically different from our old life without Him.

Yet this is not the way it is for most people. We don't live this way. For some reason, we don't think we need the Holy Spirit. We don't expect the Holy Spirit to act. Or if we do, our expectations are often misguided or self-serving. Given our talent set, experience, and education, many of us are fairly capable of living rather successfully (according to the world's standards) without any strength from the Holy Spirit.

Even our church growth can happen without Him. Let's be honest: If you combine a charismatic speaker, a talented worship band, and some hip, creative events, people will attend your church. Yet this does not mean that the Holy Spirit of God is actively working and moving in the lives of the people who are coming. It simply means that you have created a space that is appealing enough to draw people in for an hour or two on Sunday.

It certainly does not mean that people walk out the doors moved to worship and in awe of God. People are more likely to describe the quality of the music or the appeal of the sermon than the One who is the reason people gather for "church" in the first place.



I think the worst part is when you get outside the church's walls and interact with believers and nonbelievers in the same sphere. Can you really tell a difference? If you didn't recognize their faces from church, would you know from their actions and lifestyle that they were followers of Jesus? Honestly, sometimes I am embarrassed by some of my "Christian" neighbors because my unbelieving neighbors seem *more* joyful, welcoming, and at peace. Why does this happen? And how is it even possible?

Romans 8:9 says, "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." According to this verse, if I am a believer, the Spirit of God dwells in me. Paul reiterates that truth in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (NIV). Our bodies are the Spirit's temple. Later we will delve more into what that means for us; but essentially, it's that the Holy Spirit makes His home in our bodies. We are His place of dwelling.

And this is the question I just can't get around: If it's true that the Spirit of God dwells in us and that our bodies are the Holy Spirit's temple, then shouldn't there be a huge difference between the person who has the Spirit of God living inside of him or her and the person who does not?

This may be a silly illustration, but if I told you I had an encounter with God where He entered my body and gave me a supernatural ability to play basketball, wouldn't you expect to see an amazing improvement in my jump shot, my defense, and my speed on the court? After all, this is God we're talking about. And if you saw no change in my athleticism, wouldn't you question the validity

of my “encounter”?

Churchgoers all across the nation say the Holy Spirit has entered them. They claim that God has given them a supernatural ability to follow Christ, put their sin to death, and serve the church. *Christians* talk about being *born again* and say that they were *dead* but now have come *to life*. We have become hardened to those words, but they are powerful words that have significant meaning. Yet when those outside the church see no difference in our lives, they begin to question our integrity, our sanity, or even worse, our God. And can you blame them?

It reminds me of James’s frustration when he writes about freshwater springs producing saltwater. You can almost hear his incredulity as he writes, “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?” (James 3:11). What he’s saying is that so-called Christians were doing something that should’ve been impossible—and this kind of doing the impossible is not a good thing!

He laments, “My brothers, these things ought to not be so” (James 3:10). I echo James’s exhortation to those of us in the church today: My brothers and sisters who have received the Holy Spirit, we often lack love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc., even while many of our unbelieving friends exhibit these traits—brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so! Just as I advised my Jehovah’s Witnesses visitors, we need to begin afresh by reexamining our preconceived ideas about the Holy Spirit and what it means to be a temple of the Spirit. There is much more to God and following in the Way of Jesus than getting a bunch of talented people together to hold a church service.

When Jesus was preparing to leave this earth, He comforted His disciples, telling them not to worry but instead to trust in Him (John 14:1). Hadn't He proven Himself faithful the past years that they had journeyed together? First, He comforted them by telling them that the separation would be only temporary and that He was going to "prepare a place" for them (14:2–3 NIV). Second, He told them that He was going to be with God the Father, and that even from there He could hear their prayers (14:12–14). Finally, Jesus gave the disciples the ultimate reassurance: Another Comforter would come. Jesus said that the Father would give the disciples "another Counselor to be with [them] forever" (14:16 NIV). In this case, the Greek word *another* means another that is just like the first (as opposed to another that is of a different sort or kind). So Jesus was saying that the One who would come would be just like Him!

Have you ever thought about the significance of having "another" Counselor who is "just like" Christ? Right now, imagine what it would be like to have Christ standing beside you in the flesh, functioning as your personal Counselor. Imagine the peace that would come from knowing you would always receive perfect truth and flawless direction from Him. That sounds amazing, and none of us could deny the benefit of having Jesus here physically, guiding and enabling us every step of the way.

Yet why do we assume that this would be any better than the literal presence of the Holy Spirit? Those of us who believe in Jesus would never deny the truth that we have the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, living inside of us. I'm just not convinced we've internalized this truth and enjoyed His blessings as He intends. It seems like this is mostly head knowledge

to us, and that we have not owned it. It has not really made much of a difference in our lives, to the degree that if we woke up tomorrow and discovered that it is not true the Holy Spirit lives inside of us, most likely our lives wouldn't look much different.

Jesus Himself said to His disciples, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7 NIV). So Jesus is basically telling His disciples, "Yes, I was with you for three and a half years, but it is better that I leave you and the Holy Spirit comes to you."

When the disciples heard that two thousand years ago, I'm sure it was hard for them to grasp. How could it be better to trade a human Jesus—a man they could talk and eat and laugh with—for a Spirit they couldn't physically see? Thousands of years later, I think most of us would also choose a physical Jesus over an invisible Spirit. But what do we do with the fact that Jesus says it is better for His followers to have the Holy Spirit? Do we believe Him? If so, do our lives reflect that belief?



My hunch is that most of you reading this book have basic knowledge *about* the Holy Spirit; but when it comes to experiencing the Spirit in your life, it's a different story. Take a moment and ask yourself this question: *When was the last time I undeniably saw the Spirit at work in or around me?* If it was recently, consider taking a few minutes to reflect on what the Spirit of God did and how you saw Him at work. Thank God for His active presence in your life, and praise Him for

the way He is leading you even now.

If you are having trouble recounting a time when the Spirit was at work in or around you, perhaps that is because you have been ignoring the Spirit. Perhaps it is because you have a lot of head knowledge about the Spirit, but not much of a relationship with Him.

The reality is that the early church knew less about the Holy Spirit than most of us in the church today, at least in the intellectual sense. But they came to know the Spirit intimately and powerfully as He worked in and through their lives. All throughout the New Testament, we read of the apostles whose lives were led by the Spirit and lived out by His power.

The goal of this book is not to completely explain the Spirit or to go back to the apostolic age. The goal is to learn to live faithfully today. First of all, it is impossible for us as finite humans to completely understand an infinite God. Second, many of us don't need more knowledge about the Spirit from a cerebral vantage point—what we need is experiential knowledge of His presence. And third, we can never “go back,” only forward, seeking what it means to live faithfully in the time and culture where God has placed us.

So while hopefully you will learn something new about the Holy Spirit in this book, my prayer is that it will draw you into deeper communion with the Spirit and greater experience of His power and presence in your life.



Years ago, when a random thought came into my head, I decided to

share it with my wife. “Have you ever wondered what caterpillars think about?” I asked.

Not surprisingly, she said, “No.”

I then proceeded to tell her about the confusion I imagined a caterpillar must experience. For all its caterpillar life, it crawls around a small patch of dirt and up and down a few plants. Then one day it takes a nap. A long nap. And then, what in the world must go through its head when it wakes up to discover it can *fly*? What happened to its dirty, plump little worm body? What does it think when it sees its tiny new body and gorgeous wings?

As believers, we ought to experience this same kind of astonishment when the Holy Spirit enters our bodies. We should be stunned in disbelief over becoming a “new creation” with the Spirit living in us. As the caterpillar finds its new ability to fly, we should be thrilled over our Spirit-empowered ability to live differently and faithfully. Isn't this what the Scriptures speak of? Isn't this what we've all been longing for?

It really is an astounding truth that the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. He lives in me. I do not know what the Spirit will do or where He'll lead me each time I invite Him to guide me. But I am tired of living in a way that looks exactly like people who do not have the Holy Spirit of God living in them. I want to consistently live with an awareness of His strength. I want to be different today from what I was yesterday as the fruit of the Spirit becomes more manifest in me.

I want to live so that I am truly submitted to the Spirit's leading on a daily basis. Christ said it is better for us that the Spirit came, and I want to live like I know that is true. I don't want to keep crawling

when I have the ability to fly.



Joni Eareckson Tada

Recently I was asked, “Who is the most Spirit-filled person you know?” My response: Joni Eareckson Tada.

A 1967 diving accident left then-seventeen-year-old Joni a quadriplegic. Lying in a hospital bed, she was filled with an overwhelming desire to end her life. The thought of spending the rest of her years paralyzed from the neck down and relying on others to care for her basic needs was staggering.

But Joni did not end her life that day. Instead, she chose to surrender it to God. Little did she know that the Spirit of God would transform her into one of the godliest women ever to grace this earth. God gave her a humility and a love that enables her to look beyond her own pain and to see others’ hurts. She is a person who consistently “in humility count[s] others more significant” than herself (an embodiment of Philippians 2:3).

I don’t even know where to begin with all that she has done.

While undergoing two years of rehabilitation after the accident, she spent many hours learning to paint with a brush held between her teeth. Her detailed paintings and prints are now highly sought after. Her international best-selling autobiography, *Joni*, was later made into a full-length feature film. She founded Joni and Friends in 1979 to increase Christian ministry to the disabled community throughout the world. The organization led to the establishment in 2007 of the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, which currently impacts thousands of families around the globe.

Over the course of each week, more than a million people listen to her daily five-minute radio program, *Joni and Friends*. The organization she started serves hundreds of special-needs families through family retreats across the nation. Through Wheels for the World, wheelchairs are collected nationwide, refurbished by inmates in several correctional facilities, and then shipped and donated to developing nations where, whenever possible, physical therapists fit each chair to a disabled child or adult who is in need. As of 2008, Wheels for the World had cumulatively distributed 52,342 wheelchairs to 102 countries and trained hundreds of ministry and community leaders, including people with disabilities.

In 2005, Joni Eareckson Tada was appointed to the Disability Advisory Committee of the U.S. State Department. She has worked with Dr. Condoleezza Rice on programs affecting disabled persons in the State Department and around the world. Joni has appeared twice on *Larry King Live*, sharing not only her Christian testimony but a biblical perspective on right-to-life issues that affect our nation's disabled population. And on top of all that, Joni has written more than thirty-five books.

Yet it is not because of these accomplishments that I consider her the most Spirit-filled person I know. Actually, it has nothing to do with all she's accomplished. It has to do with the fact that you can't spend ten minutes with Joni before she breaks out in song, quotes Scripture, or shares a touching and timely word of encouragement. I have never seen the fruit of the Spirit more obviously displayed in a person's life as when I am with Joni. I can't seem to have a conversation with Joni without shedding tears. It's because Joni is a person whose life, at every level, gives evidence of the Spirit's work in and through her.¹