

ALL I NEED IS

JESUS

& A GOOD PAIR OF JEANS

the tired supergirl's search for grace

susanna foth aughtmon



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Susanna Foth Aughtmon,
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introduction

It's always interesting to me to think about my real life versus the life I long for. I am pretty brilliant when it comes to imagining what my life should be. A life without distress. A life with perfect marital communication, obedient children, a clean house, a wealth of friends living on the same block sharing recipes and coffee over the back fence, a thriving growing relationship with Jesus, a conquering of all my weaknesses and struggles, and let's not forget, a good pair of jeans. You know, the type of jeans that give meaning to life. Jeans that suppress the upper thigh, lengthen the inseam, and let you reveal your inner rock star. Because they look that good.

These are a pair of pants that could lead us to believe there is some hope in the world. Hope for a slim leg and a new tomorrow. We tired supergirls tend to call these kind of jeans "forgiving." Because we need some forgiveness when it comes to our jeans. We need something to forgive the saddlebags that hitch up on the side of our legs. Some of us need some forgiveness in the extra girth around our middle. A few of us need some dark-wash forgiveness to camouflage the ripples and bumps hidden therein. Some of us need some forgiveness in flat areas to the rear. We need some lift

and extra curves where there are no curves. (I'm not sure who these people are, but I've heard there are some people who need more curves, and I would like to offer up some of mine on their behalf.) And then there are those of us who are deep in over our heads with the fight against cellulite, and nothing aids in this fight, nothing forgives like a nice full coverage denim with some stretch in the fabric. How we love the stretch.

But all of this is to say, some of us have been looking for years for the holy grail of jeans. That pair that will bring to life all that we hope and long to have happen in a pair of jeans. Because we know that there is a standard of what a good pair of jeans is supposed to look like. And then there is the reality of what we look like in our everyday jeans. And we are not wearing grandma-cover-the-belly-button kind of jeans. We have outdone ourselves searching for the most flattering pair of jeans available. We have searched high and low for a good pair of low-rise, easy on the eyes, sturdy on the thighs pair of jeans, and we have bought quite a few pairs, but we are still searching for *the* pair of jeans.

And it's the same when we look at the rest of our lives. What we desire is not necessarily what we have. The person we are is not the person we long to be. Just as the perfect jeans seem to elude us, so do the obedient children, the perfect marital communication, and the conquering of all of our weaknesses. In fact, last time I checked, it seemed like despite all the churchgoing and devotional reading, the weaknesses seemed to be conquering us. So not only have we not found the perfect pair of jeans, but we are still struggling with anxiety and pride and an incapacitating love for chocolate. It seems that we supergirls need some forgiveness in other areas of our lives besides jeans and outerwear. We need forgiveness for our lives in general. And what we really

need is some grace. An ever-present shower of grace that we can sit under and soak up and let pervade all the areas of our life that seem to fall short of the glory of God.

We need a whole lot of Jesus. Because there is this woman that we long to be and then there is the woman that we actually are. Right here. Right now. The woman who struggles but longs to be more. The woman who is empty who longs to be full. The dissatisfied woman who longs to be content. The woman who longs to be overflowing with goodness and peace and have her impulse spending under control. And the only thing that can bridge the gap between these two women is buckets of grace. Unending grace. And the only person who embodies this grace is Jesus.

And so the search begins. The search for the woman we were designed to be. The search for some measure of forgiveness as we recognize the person we are and move toward the person we long to become. The search for the One who can infiltrate our lives with his presence, his good sense, and his immeasurable grace that will surely come in handy. It will be quite a journey. That is for sure. But there is always the hope that along the way, we may stumble upon a good pair of jeans.



1

I AM OH SO TIRED

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I am wild-eyed. I have large eyes in general. I'm okay with that. It leaves a lot of room for eye shadow experimentation. It's the wildness that bothers me. It comes from the disparity of life. That space that lives between the expectation of how I thought life would be and the reality of how it is. Like how it hits you unawares that you are over thirty. Or how I can say the words "Put your underwear back on" seven times to my four-year-old in one half-hour period. How getting any semblance of work done requires a cosmic alignment of the planets. Or how I have loved Jesus since age five and still struggle with consistent devotions. How the busyness and anxiety of life choke out its joys and freedoms.

There is this tension between who I want to be and who I really am. Hence the wild big eyes that live in my head.

I called my mom the other day. "I've got to get myself together," I told her.

"Are you still trying that?" she asked.

I really am trying to gather up the pieces of my scattered self . . . on a daily basis. I start out my mornings shooting prayers at the four corners of my bedroom.

"God, I need you."

"God, help me be more like you."

"Please help me get more done."

"Where are my sweats?"

That's not so much a prayer as a request. Which I think God honors. Because of all the prayers, that one usually gets answered the quickest.

But the wildness ensues. It is the mayhem of everyday living that wears me down. I'm a pastor's wife. A mom of three. A housekeeper/organizer/errand runner/etc. A Sunday school teacher. A worship leader. A volunteer at my son's elementary school. On a good day I may squeeze in some exercise or a smattering of writing. And lo and behold, the heavy breathing begins. The chasing after life like a crazy-gaited chicken. And this craziness releases the screaming meemie within when life presses in too hard.

I bark at my children. "Hurry up!"

I nag my husband. "In some countries, people put away clean clothes instead of decorating with them."

I berate myself. "I cannot believe I forgot that appointment . . . again."

I am just a woman. One woman freaking out on a planet full of a lot of other women who, I think, are also freaking out. It's not just the ones with kids. Those of us who have kids are just laid bare more easily because our children know us for who we really are and they tell on us.

My friend Melissa gave me a pair of underwear that says "Supergirl" on the back, as a gag gift. I, however, wear them because new underwear is a novelty, and I'll never turn down a good pair of panties. One morning, my son Jack burst into my room as I was changing clothes and spied the back of my underwear. As I hurriedly hiked up my pants, he gave me a knowing look and said, "Mom, your secret identity has been revealed."

Too late. He knows who I long to be. I really would like to be Supergirl. I would love to leap tall laundry in a single bound. To see through the conundrums of life with X-ray vision or maneuver through the week with energy, compassion, and the extraterrestrial ability to finish my to-do list.

But my super life has gotten the kryptonite smackdown. I have run headlong into my nemesis. She is Tired Lady. She is loathsome and cruel, leaving those in her path lonely and full of self-pity. She zaps me with her Lazy Ray and trips me up with her Rope of Depression, leaving chaos in her wake. I know her well.

My friend Marie France claims that she appears right around 8:30. The children are in bed. A good two or three hours of free time loom before you. Time to clean. Time to think deep thoughts. Time to paint your toenails. Time to snuggle your husband. But Tired Lady sneaks in, crazy gluing your rear to the sofa, leaving your dishes unwashed, your man unsnuggled, your Bible reading undone. It is by no small act of God that you are able to drag yourself off to bed, promising that tomorrow will be a different day. You will vanquish Tired Lady to her Hole of Doom. You'll be the woman God designed you to be. Or at least knock out a load of laundry so your husband doesn't have to turn his underwear inside out anymore. You've got great plans . . . for tomorrow.

I walk the fine line of living between these two identities. I live in the tension of who I want to be and who I really am. It's exhausting, lonely, and wild-eyed.

It reminds me of Peter. He runs willy-nilly through the Gospels, trying to figure out who and where he is supposed to be. Despite Peter's inconsistencies, Jesus sees the space in between who he is and who he could be. He changes his name from Simon to Peter, "The Rock." He is going to be solid.

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to hang out with him. He just wants them to pray with him. Peter is ready to live up to his name. To hunker down and pray like crazy for this man who radically changed his life.

That's when Tired Lady, or maybe in this case, Sleepy Man, creeps in between the fig trees and fern, filling Peter's head with swirly dreams and the inability to process just one tiny prayer. He barely bows his head to pray before the crumbles of wine-dipped bread begin settling in his tummy.

Earlier, Peter had sworn he would never desert the Lord. Jesus tells him that before the rooster crows twice that he will deny him three times. Peter is serious about dying for Jesus. He really believes he is that committed. Or maybe he'll have a nap first and then die for him; it is better to die for someone when you are well rested. Peter's betrayal begins long before the crowing of the bird. It begins with the whiffling snores of deep sleep that break the stillness of Gethsemane. Jesus finds Peter snoozing instead of interceding.

Then he returned and found the disciples asleep. "Simon!" he said to Peter. "Are you asleep? Couldn't you stay awake and watch with me even one hour? Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak."

Mark 14:37–38

I wonder if Jesus calls him "Simon" because he just isn't cutting it as "the Rock." Jesus returns to his prayers and Simon goes back to sleep. In all, Jesus wakes him up three times that night. Poor Peter. I have to say that I *love love love* Peter. Like me, he just can't pull it together.

He had visions of being the Rock . . . which I imagine to be a fairly impressive Jewish superhero, comparable to my Supergirl. The Rock was going to rock Israel with his Jesus style, catch a ton of fish, lead a Torah study, bring a few pals to repentance, and squeeze in family time on the weekends, not to mention support Jesus, who simply asked him to stay awake, pray for him, and just be a good buddy the night

before he dies a horrible death. And he couldn't do it. And it gets worse after the nap.

When [Jesus] returned to them the third time, he said, "Still sleeping? Still resting? Enough! The time has come. I, the Son of Man, am betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let's be going. See, my betrayer is here!"

Mark 14:41–42

And why is it that during this whole sleepy ordeal, Judas, the betrayer, was wide awake?

Peter goes on to cut off a guard's ear, denies knowing Jesus three times, and deserts him as he hangs on the cross. That is a rough forty-eight-hour ride, from the euphoric heights of the triumphal entry to the crash and burn of Christ's crucifixion. Yep, it definitely gets worse after the nap.

So where does that leave us supergirls? Because we, too, in our heart of hearts long to be all that God created us to be. We are just so darn tired. We are kicked sideways by life, grounded by our expectations, and haunted by our dreams. Will we ever be who we were meant to be?

Well, by the time Acts rolls around, Peter is doing it. He is preaching to multitudes with authority. He has gotten it together. Or maybe, just maybe, he has gotten over himself. Peter could be the Rock because he let God be God.

So, here I am in this space. I am not rocking it. I am barely breathing after kids, work, church, disappointment, and weaknesses cloud my vision. But I have the hope that Peter has. That God knows who I am and who I am supposed to be, and even though I am frequently caught napping, Christ is not done with me.

So maybe I can say this prayer as I ride the edge of imperfection and am caught on the cusp of crazy living.

i am oh so tired

God, who knows me and keeps me,
Forgive me
Help me get over who I think I am
Help me let go of who I am not
Help me let you be who you are
Don't ever leave me
Amen.