

THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE

A NEW FAMILY

THROWING OPEN THE DOORS OF THE SANCTUARY

Welcome to the film series: A New Family: Throwing Open the Doors of the Sanctuary with Rachel Held Evans. So glad you found your way here! It's a privilege to be your partner on this journey of listening, reflection, prayer and discernment.

Through her writing and speaking, Rachel's work opened a space for people to become involved with the evolution of their faith by example. Her books and gatherings created a safe space for people to allow and examine their beliefs and doubts. She was a voice of inclusion and social justice. She strived to be grace-full while admitting her imperfection. Her advocacy was for the heart of God which is for the people of God. All people, a diverse bunch of clumsy-yet-beautiful people of different races, cultures, beliefs, faiths, genders, and sexual orientations just doing our best to be human. She was a person who reached for the outsider and brought their voice and perspective into the fold. She inspired change and sometimes provoked resistance. But as she says in this series, her hope was to start more conversations than end them.

Tragically, Rachel died on May 4, 2019 at the young age of 37 (a few heartfelt articles about her death and life's work are in the Explore More section below). There really are no words to describe the heartbreak of losing Rachel. She took Jesus to heart, and became an active force of love that cannot be denied. Her death is a devastating loss. In the NY Times article linked below, her husband is quoted as saying what those who loved her and were loved by her have expressed: *"I keep hoping it's a nightmare from which I'll awake. Rachel's presence in this world was a gift to us all, and her work will long survive her."*

Many felt loved for the first time because of her words, many found courage and found liberation within the holding of that love. All because she braved following her calling even when systemic belief rose up against her. Where the church or culture closed the doors to the people of God because of their circumstance, she became a sanctuary herself.

We miss her voice, her love, her willingness, vulnerability, and strength. We miss her encouragement to work out our dysfunctional family dynamics—to share power and place not *just* because we are "called to serve and love those less fortunate" but because we recognize that our systems are creating separateness instead of oneness. Our hope is that bringing these films forward in a time such as now, is that we not only get to see and remember the friend we miss, but to honor her work in the world and continue to let her "conversation starters" to stir, awaken, and provoke those who find them.

Rachel was recently quoted as saying: “The folks you are shutting out of the church today will be leading it tomorrow. The future is in the margins.” If we are resurrection people, are we willing to let the ways of doing Church that do not serve God, ourselves, or our neighbors, die? If God throws open the doors of the church, who are we to monitor them, or worse, close them? When the doors are locked and requirements for inclusion are narrow are we willing to become sanctuaries ourselves?

Rachel, may you rest well in peace and presence, and may we tend well the love and legacy you leave behind.

In This Together

Like all of our work, our discussion guides are about creating space for deeper listening—to each other, our inner wisdom, and God’s call. We want the films to help you think carefully and critically, but ultimately the goal is one of personal discovery and transformation. Our questions orient you toward inner discernment and daily living rather than intellectual analysis and debate. It’s not about who has the right answer but where is God trying to lead each of us.

Who’s It For?

This guide is for groups and individuals. Everything—from the centering prompts to the spiritual practices to the questions—is designed to support both personal reflection and group discussion. When helpful, we offer particular tips to tailor the components toward individual or group discernment.

Whether using this guide alone or as a group, we encourage a “simple is best” approach. Over-structured models can douse the spark of creative exchange and intuitive response. We all know that rigid process can all too easily crowd out the stirrings of divine surprise. But we also know that some basic advice and strategies can enrich an individual’s experience and support healthy group dynamics.

Individuals - How do you listen best? What do you need? For deeper listening consider starting your time with getting into present, whatever method you use. It could be a mindful walk or a short sit focused on your breathing. Journaling thoughts as they rise up while listening through films, passages, prayers, and questions is a helpful way to experience the material. In our experience, creating a clear path to receptivity through simplicity is best.

Groups - If you’re working through this series as a new group, consider opening the first session by facilitating some sort of share that brings a cohesiveness to the group. You are in this together, for a bit, so perhaps this is also the time for sharing your own “rules for the road” and perhaps engage a simple breathing practice to center the room.

A word about sharing and responding to others in a group discussion: Be present as possible, and encourage deep listening. Avoid probing and/or trying to fix/advise one another when responding by sharing your own experience by using “I” statements. Check in with yourself often throughout the group to make sure you haven’t wandered in your thoughts and that you are feeling open to the topic and to group members. Be honest if you aren’t.

If possible, consider having participants take the session film and discernment questions in before the group meets. Living with the content a bit ahead of time creates the potential to make for a richer conversation since folks might be sharing and responding from a deeper, marinated voice.

Spiritual Practices

To cultivate receptivity, we suggest you consider introducing a practice of remembering as suggested by Rachel Held Evans. What reminds you of Jesus or God? Is it an aroma or a bite of bread? Is it a walk in the open air? Whatever it is, simply do one small act to set your intention of a sacred, teachable time.

Throughout the series we have included ideas for setting up and closing your time for a focus if that helps, but truly we are just offering to you the idea at the start as inspiration to find what works for you, something that is meaningful and not over complicated.

Series Session and Info

This series includes 5 sessions:

- Session One // With an Open Hand
- Session Two // Remembering Jesus
- Session Three // Gatekeeping
- Session Four // The God Who Sees You
- Session Five // Love is Biblical

Video transcripts included at the end of the guide.

Find the series on TWOTP here:

https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/film_series/a-new-family-film-series

Discover more of Rachel’s films through her author page at TWOTP:

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/person/rachel-held-evans>

Explore More

A few additional resources to consider exploring through out the series.

Articles about Rachel's impact:

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.vox.com/platform/amp/2019/5/7/18535272/rachel-held-evans-obit>

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lauraturner/rachel-held-evans-death-doubt-evangelical-christianity>

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/rachel-held-evans-death-is-a-poignant-reminder-of-how-to-live>

Visit more of Rachel's writing at her blog:

www.rachelheldevans.com

Evolving Faith Conference: an annual event Rachel helped start:

www.evolvingfaithconference.com

Read Rachel's books:

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again (2018)

Searching for Sunday (2015)

Faith Unraveled (2014)

A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband 'Master' (2012)

Listen to this NY Times podcast on the movement Rachel Held Evans inspired:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/24/podcasts/the-daily/rachel-held-evans.html>

Watch Fill This Land poetic blessing by Kelly Hall:

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/fill-this-land>

SESSION ONE // With an Open Hand

Shifting Into An Experience

It's time to show up. Ask yourself if you are in a posture of willingness and receptivity. Can you hear someone else's perspective right now? Consider spending the next few minutes orienting to your space and to your body. Let yourself fully arrive with some deep breathing, and just letting everything else go for this time. In addition to prayer or a time of silence, consider using the passage below from 2 Corinthians that Rachel mentions in this film. You can keep it simple and just lift up the quote to center yourself or you could expand this time of centering by inviting a brief moment of personal reflection after reading the quote.

Stop. Quiet yourself. Take in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Breathe again. Take in the following verse from 2 Corinthians. Listen for anything that sticks out to you. Consider journaling your way through. It nurtures focus, learning, listening, retention, attention span, and creativity.

**MY GRACE IS ENOUGH TO COVER AND SUSTAIN YOU.
MY POWER IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS.**

—2 CORINTHIANS 12:9, THE VOICE BIBLE

Preparing to Listen

Take some time to consider *how* you want to watch and listen to the film. For instance, you may decide that you want to listen for the particular word or phrase that pops out for you. In this case, you might want to grab a pen and paper to capture it when it grabs you. Don't overthink it. Just open yourself to whatever comes, and without judgment, write down whatever word or phrase is highlighted for you.

In addition to preparing to notice a particular word or phrase, you might also want to put yourself in the mode of allowing the film to take you back in time. Sometimes the way God speaks to us is not directly through the words of another but through a memory which those words reminded us of. So, yes, listen intently to Rachel's reasoning, but don't be afraid to let yourself drift a bit as you listen. Let her carry you back and reconnect you with a memory that echoes her content.

Another consideration, would be to watch for an image that moves you in some way. Perhaps you pause the film and sit with the image while letting it guide you to an underlying story, belief, or memory you carry.

Finally, you might also want to prepare by thinking ahead of time a little bit about some of the key themes you will encounter in the film. Perhaps ponder the following questions to stir your imagination before watching:

- When was the last time you invited God into the belief structure you have about your faith? What would having an open posture to the doubts you carry in regards to your faith be like?
- Do you have a community that understands the process of faith shifting that is willing to walk alongside you?

Inquisitiveness and questioning in regards to our faith walk are inevitable, the painful events of everyday life in the world almost demand it. Perhaps the simple act of initially acknowledging and allowing doubt is the first leap of faith. Asking questions takes humility, a willingness to be wrong, and an openness to letting God overhaul our beliefs. When we choose to enter into this level of dialogue with God, we risk losing a few things: the god of our understanding and the part of our identity attached to the belief are some of the things that often go last and loudly. But this is some of our most important work when it comes to family dynamics: letting go of the conditioning that creates us/them, in/out, exclusionary mentality. Letting God in on this process opens up the opportunity for us to let go of the construct of god we've inherited or manufactured and make room for the mysterious encounter of the God who remains and holds us as our faith undergoes transformational evolution.

Let's Watch the Film

Got everything you need? Time to take in the film. Instead of analyzing the film, let it do the discovery work in you. Practice noticing without judgment. If something someone says strikes you and you want to resonate with it more, jot it down. If there is an image that moves you, go back to it. Press pause and spend some time with it.

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/with-an-open-hand>

Engagement

Use these questions to guide your group discussion, or if you are an individual, use them as seeds for personal devotion and discernment. To honor the various dimensions of spiritual discernment, we've grouped the questions to help you engage the film from the perspectives of mind, memory and personal calling.

Don't push yourself to answer every question. Part of the discernment is about figuring out which questions call to you the most. Instead of going through each question in the three

sections, consider having group members (or yourself) pick and share about *the one* question from each section that engages them the most.

How Did the Film Expand or Alter Your Thinking?

- What phrase or idea engaged you the most?
- What were you taught about doubt and certainty in relation to faith? How did that shape your beliefs? What about that is still true for you?
- Rachel asks herself, “How am I creating and engaging and participating in and receiving the Kingdom of God in my day-to-day life, in the here in now?” and “How am I creating hell on earth? A hell for myself?” What are your answers to these questions?
- Are you willing to be wrong about God (or anything)?
- Where did the video or listening though the questions take you?

What Memories Did the Film Invite You to Revisit?

- What did your family of origin or church of your childhood teach you were “core, central, and certain” to the Christian faith?
- Which of these beliefs have become heartfelt and true for you?
- Did listening lead you back to an experience in your past?
- When did you first question your understanding of God?
- Who in your life allowed/disallowed you to explore your faith inquisitively?
- Was anything there that gave you a new lens to view a story of your past through?
- How did anything change the way you view the story to your life?

Where in the Film Do You Hear God’s Calling for Your Living and Loving?

- Did listening help you hear any call of your own inner voice?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you want to walk in the world?
- How does it shape how you view others who have questions? What about those who have absolute certitude?
- Who might need a fellow sojourner to walk with them in their questioning?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you want to walk in the world?

Carrying the Blessing

Use this time to bring closure to your reflection and remind yourself what you especially want to hold on to as you reenter your regular living and loving. There are many ways to do this, perhaps journaling or a group discussion, remember to keep it simple. What will you take with you?

Take one last moment to enjoy a few good, deep breaths. Read and ponder the following words, listening, again, to what is for you. Take these phrases and what you have heard throughout this session with you as you move forward from here.

**DOUBT IS THE MECHANISM BY WHICH FAITH EVOLVES.
DOUBT IS HOW YOU CULTIVATE A POSTURE OF HAVING AN OPEN HAND.**

**...I AM GRATEFUL FOR DOUBT IN MY LIFE BECAUSE IT HAS TAUGHT ME THAT I CAN
BE WRONG, EVEN IN MATTERS OF FAITH. IT HAS MADE ME MORE HUMBLE, MORE
DEPENDENT ON CHRIST.**

SO I AM GRATEFUL FOR DOUBT, IT KEEPS MY FAITH ALIVE.

— RACHEL HELD EVANS

If you're leading a group and have the time and interest, a more involved closing ritual is to have everyone in the circle briefly lift up appreciation for one particular thing that another person said during your time together; one thing they are especially grateful to be taking with them as they leave.

SESSION TWO // Remembering Jesus

Shifting Into an Experience

It's time to show up. Ask yourself if you are in a posture of willingness and receptivity. Can you hear someone else's perspective right now? Consider spending the next few minutes orienting to your space and to your body. Let yourself fully arrive with some deep breathing, and just letting everything else go for this time. In addition to prayer or a time of silence, consider using the passage below from the Gospel of Matthew that Rachel mentions in this film. You can keep it simple and just lift up the quote to center yourself or you could expand this time of centering by inviting a brief moment of personal reflection after reading the quote.

Stop. Quiet yourself. Take in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Breathe again. Take in the following verse from Matthew 5. Listen for anything that sticks out to you. Consider journaling your way through. It nurtures focus, learning, listening, retention, attention span, and creativity.

**YOU'RE BLESSED WHEN YOU'RE AT THE END OF YOUR ROPE.
WITH LESS OF YOU THERE IS MORE OF GOD AND HIS RULE.**

**YOU'RE BLESSED WHEN YOU FEEL YOU'VE LOST WHAT IS MOST DEAR TO YOU.
ONLY THEN CAN YOU BE EMBRACED BY THE ONE MOST DEAR TO YOU.**

— MATTHEW 5:3-4

Preparing to Listen

Take some time to consider *how* you want to watch and listen to the film. For instance, you may decide that you want to listen for the particular word or phrase that pops out for you. In this case, you might want to grab a pen and paper to capture it when it grabs you. Don't overthink it. Just open yourself to whatever comes, and without judgment, write down whatever word or phrase is highlighted for you.

In addition to preparing to notice a particular word or phrase, you might also want to put yourself in the mode of allowing the film to take you back in time. Sometimes the way God speaks to us is not directly through the words of another but through a memory which those words reminded us of. So, yes, listen intently to Rachel's reasoning, but don't be afraid to let yourself drift a bit as you listen. Let her carry you back and reconnect you with a memory that echoes her content.

Another consideration, would be to watch for an image that moves you in some way. Perhaps you pause the film and sit with the image while letting it guide you to an underlying story, belief, or memory you carry.

Finally, you might also want to prepare by thinking ahead of time a little bit about some of the key themes you will encounter in the film. Perhaps ponder the following questions to stir your imagination before watching:

- How do we remember Jesus? And, how does remembering Jesus re-member us?

Rachel Held Evans shares how her life has been shaped and held by the life and teaching of Jesus (someone more than the exemplar of how to live into our whole being and highest potential, but the embodiment of God). Rachel describes a cadence with Jesus, a long walk alongside that includes questions, answers, and intimacy with a wholehearted teacher.

In remembering Jesus, she remembers herself.

In remembering Jesus, even in the face of inherited systemic beliefs of a culture that tends to exclude, marginalize or try to *send home*, she is reminded of the one who moves towards and *welcomes people home*.

In following Jesus, our life begins to move counter-culturally to the empiric, top-down, profiting systems and structure. Where we find people that have been pushed out, we bring them in. Where we see the silenced, we make room for their voice. Where we notice people orphaned by society, we become their family. And, in all of this work that includes hard seeing we can easily get lost or fall into the great forgetting ourselves. Rachel reminds us in those times to orient our senses to Jesus, the one who re-members us.

Let's Watch the Film

Got everything you need? Time to take in the film. Instead of analyzing the film, let it do the discovery work in you. Practice noticing without judgment. If something someone says strikes you and you want to resonate with it more, jot it down. If there is an image that moves you, go back to it. Press pause and spend some time with it.

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/remembering-jesus>

Engagement

Use these questions to guide your group discussion, or if you are an individual, use them as seeds for personal devotion and discernment. To honor the various dimensions of spiritual discernment,

we've grouped the questions to help you engage the film from the perspectives of mind, memory and personal calling.

Don't push yourself to answer every question. Part of the discernment is about figuring out which questions call to you the most. Instead of going through each question in the three sections, consider having group members (or yourself) pick and share about *the one* question from each section that engages them the most.

How Did the Film Expand or Alter Your Thinking?

- What phrase or idea engaged you the most? What phrase or idea challenged you the most?
- What were you taught about Jesus?
- Who is Jesus to you?
- Where do you sense Jesus?
- How does what you were taught about Jesus inform how or who you are in the world?
- Where did the video or listening though the questions take you?

What Memories Did the Film Invite You to Revisit?

- Did listening lead you back to an experience in your past?
- What is a memory of resurrection in your life? Recall the death, recall the birth, recall the lesson.
- Where in life do/did you experience the effect of the "sin accounting business"?
- Was anything there that gave you a new lens to view a story of your past through?
- How did anything change the way you view the story to your life?

Where in the Film Do You Hear God's Calling for Your Living and Loving?

- Did listening help you hear any call of your own inner voice?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you see God's family?
- How does it help you re-member, to join in, to relate to others?
- What does the idea that we become the embodiment of God on earth inspire in you?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you want to walk in the world?

Carrying the Blessing

Use this time to bring closure to your reflection and remind yourself what you especially want to hold on to as you reenter your regular living and loving. There are many ways to do this, perhaps journaling or a group discussion, remember to keep it simple. What will you take with you?

Take one last moment to enjoy a few good, deep breaths. Read and ponder the following words from Matthew 11, listening, again, to what is for you. Take these phrases and what you have heard throughout this session with you as you move forward from here.

ARE YOU TIRED? WORN OUT? BURNED OUT ON RELIGION?

COME TO ME.

**GET AWAY WITH ME AND YOU'LL RECOVER YOUR LIFE.
I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO TAKE A REAL REST.
WALK WITH ME AND WORK WITH ME—WATCH HOW I DO IT.**

LEARN THE UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF GRACE.

**I WON'T LAY ANYTHING HEAVY OR ILL-FITTING ON YOU.
KEEP COMPANY WITH ME AND YOU'LL LEARN TO LIVE FREELY AND LIGHTLY.**

*—JESUS AS RECORDED IN MATTHEW 11:28-30
THE MESSAGE BIBLE*

SESSION THREE // Gatekeeping

Shifting Into an Experience

Consider spending the next few minutes orienting to your space and to your body. Let yourself fully arrive with some deep breathing, and just letting everything else go for this time. In addition to prayer or a time of silence, consider using the quote below from this film. You can keep it simple and just lift up the quote to center yourself or you could expand this time of centering by inviting a brief moment of personal reflection after reading the quote.

Stop. Quiet yourself. Take in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Breathe again. Take in the following statement. Listen for anything that sticks out to you. Consider journaling your way through. It nurtures focus, learning, listening, retention, attention span, and creativity.

**BEING PART OF THE FAMILY OF GOD
IS BEING CALLED AND NAMED BELOVED BY GOD.**

— RACHEL HELD EVANS

Preparing to Listen

Take some time to consider *how* you want to watch and listen to the film. For instance, you may decide that you want to listen for the particular word or phrase that pops out for you. In this case, you might want to grab a pen and paper to capture it when it grabs you. Don't overthink it. Just open yourself to whatever comes, and without judgment, write down whatever word or phrase is highlighted for you.

In addition to preparing to notice a particular word or phrase, you might also want to put yourself in the mode of allowing the film to take you back in time. Sometimes the way God speaks to us is not directly through the words of another but through a memory which those words reminded us of. So, yes, listen intently to Rachel's reasoning, but don't be afraid to let yourself drift a bit as you listen. Let her carry you back and reconnect you with a memory that echoes her content.

Another consideration, would be to watch for an image that moves you in some way. Perhaps you pause the film and sit with the image while letting it guide you to an underlying story, belief, or memory you carry.

Finally, you might also want to prepare by thinking ahead of time a little bit about some of the key themes you will encounter in the film. Perhaps ponder the following questions to stir your imagination before watching:

- What is the kingdom of God to you?
- What beliefs do you hold about heaven and hell and who goes where and how we get there?

In this film, Rachel warns against idolizing the American nuclear family, roles, stereotypes, and cultural expectations—any of the ways we use to judge and keep people on the outs, especially since Jesus came to bring people in. But, all too often, we use what little we think we know to promote ourselves into a job we were never asked to take on: manage the guest list.

Preoccupying ourselves with who is in or out, good or bad, worthy or not is more than a distraction from the real work there is to do when building a family, it creates problematic god complexes and turns sanctuaries into exclusive networking clubs.

The table is not for the worthy, it is for the hungry. It's for anyone hungering to belong, to be made whole. This is one place our faith practice and personal growth can make a difference. We are invited to walk alongside one another towards wholeness. We are invited into creating heaven on earth by allowing and creating spaces where we are reminded of our connectedness regardless of our differences. We are invited into our full humanity, and only by walking across the threshold into our true selves and all the grace and acceptance that comes with that process will we begin to understand the deep desires we all carry to be accepted and be able to grace such a gift as inclusion to one another.

Let's Watch the Film

Got everything you need? Time to take in the film. Instead of analyzing the film, let it do the discovery work in you. Practice noticing without judgment. If something someone says strikes you and you want to resonate with it more, jot it down. If there is an image that moves you, go back to it. Press pause and spend some time with it.

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/gatekeeping>

Engagement

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Don't push yourself to answer every question. Part of the discernment is about figuring out which questions call to you the most. Instead of going through each question in the three sections, consider having group members (or yourself) pick and share about *the one* question from each section that engages them the most.

How Did the Film Expand or Alter Your Thinking?

- What phrase or idea engaged you the most? What phrase or idea challenged you the most?
- What is your belief about Heaven and Hell?
- About the Kingdom of God?
- About how you get there?
- About who goes where?
- How does that belief effect who you allow into your life?
- Where did the video or listening though the questions take you?

What Memories Did the Film Invite You to Revisit?

- Did listening lead you back to an experience in your past?
- What is a memory you have of being invited by God?
- Where in life do/did you experience the effect of exclusion?
- Was anything there that gave you a new lens to view a story of your past through?
- How did anything change the way you view the story to your life?

Where in the Film Do You Hear God's Calling for Your Living and Loving?

- Did listening help you hear any call of your own inner voice?
- How does knowing that God invites, and that the table is for the hungry, effect your stigmas?
- How does it effect any "positioning" made on God's behalf?
- Where does it lead you to stand when love comes calling for us to act on our faith?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you want to walk in the world?

God invites. The table is for the hungry. These statements are deep. Sit with them for a while and let them turn over in you. Maybe a week or more. These teachings alone, have the power to disable and disarm some systemic programming that we all carry.

Carrying the Blessing

Use this time to bring closure to your reflection and remind yourself what you especially want to hold on to as you reenter your regular living and loving. There are many ways to do this, perhaps journaling or a group discussion, remember to keep it simple. What will you take with you?

Take one last moment to enjoy a few good, deep breaths. Read and ponder the following words from Luke 10, listening, again, to what is for you. Take these phrases and what you have heard throughout this session with you as you move forward from here.

**LOVE THE ETERNAL ONE YOUR GOD WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE:
ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL,
ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND ALL YOUR MIND,
AND, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**

—LUKE 10:27, THE VOICE BIBLE

SESSION FOUR // The God Who Sees You

Shifting Into an Experience

Consider spending the next few minutes orienting to your space and to your body. Let yourself fully arrive with some deep breathing, and just letting everything else go for this time. In addition to prayer or a time of silence, consider using the passage below from 2 Corinthians that Rachel mentions in this film. You can keep it simple and just lift up the quote to center yourself or you could expand this time of centering by inviting a brief moment of personal reflection after reading the quote.

Stop. Quiet yourself. Take in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Breathe again. Take in the following verse from Genesis 16. Listen for anything that sticks out to you. Consider journaling your way through. It nurtures focus, learning, listening, retention, attention span, and creativity.

AS A RESULT OF THIS ENCOUNTER, HAGAR DECIDED TO GIVE THE ETERNAL ONE WHO HAD SPOKEN TO HER A SPECIAL NAME BECAUSE HE HAD SEEN HER IN HER MISERY.

HAGAR: I'M GOING TO CALL YOU THE GOD OF SEEING BECAUSE IN THIS PLACE I HAVE SEEN THE ONE WHO WATCHES OVER ME.

— GENESIS 16:13

Preparing to Listen

Take some time to consider *how* you want to watch and listen to the film. For instance, you may decide that you want to listen for the particular word or phrase that pops out for you. In this case, you might want to grab a pen and paper to capture it when it grabs you. Don't overthink it. Just open yourself to whatever comes, and without judgment, write down whatever word or phrase is highlighted for you.

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Another consideration, would be to watch for an image that moves you in some way. Perhaps you pause the film and sit with the image while letting it guide you to an underlying story, belief, or memory you carry.

Finally, you might also want to prepare by thinking ahead of time a little bit about some of the key themes you will encounter in the film. Perhaps ponder the following questions to stir your imagination before watching:

- What were you taught to believe about the value of women leadership in the church? About women's roles in the world?
- What were you taught to believe about the value of different races or the LGBTQIA+ community?

We are a competitive, fearful people who are motivated by our insecurity, desire for/lack of affection, desire for/lack of control, and our ultimate inability to change certain situations. To relieve ourselves from this inner turmoil, we project our fears by way of judgment onto others. We use others to embody what we cannot get out of ourself, and we hope those bodies walk our issues away from us. We aren't sure if we are really "in" with God, so we start trying to identify who is in or out by playing out our fear with others that embody qualities or ways of being that aren't our ways of being, believing or experience. It is especially hard and true for those who are taught through their religion not to doubt, not to question, not to think or converse with God.

But like Rachel says, it's not Jesus who rejects women as teachers, it's us. It's not Jesus who separates us by race or culture or beliefs, it's us. It's not Jesus who sends people with sexual identifications we don't understand to the margins, it's us. We are responsible for our separateness and our judgments, and only we can go in there and work it out by allowing ourselves to journey through it with God. If we don't, we are going to miss out on the gift of God, of ourselves, and learning from others. We'll miss out on a well-rounded family. We'll be slanted towards or cater to the illusion of ideal rather than the real.

Let's Watch the Film

Got everything you need? Time to take in the film. Instead of analyzing the film, let it do the discovery work in you. Practice noticing without judgment. If something someone says strikes you and you want to resonate with it more, jot it down. If there is an image that moves you, go back to it. Press pause and spend some time with it.

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-god-who-sees-you>

Engagement

Use these questions to guide your group discussion, or if you are an individual, use them as seeds for personal devotion and discernment. To honor the various dimensions of spiritual discernment, we've grouped the questions to help you engage the film from the perspectives of mind, memory and personal calling.

Don't push yourself to answer every question. Part of the discernment is about figuring out which questions call to you the most. Instead of going through each question in the three sections, consider having group members (or yourself) pick and share about *the one* question from each section that engages them the most.

How Did the Film Expand or Alter Your Thinking?

- What phrase or idea engaged you the most? What phrase or idea challenged you the most?
- How does the parameters of a woman's role effect your life and/or the women in your life?
- What do you believe about the value of your race? Of other races?
- What do you believe about the value of people with non-heterosexual orientations?
- Think about your community, your circle of friends, that stack of books you have to read. How diverse are you?
- Where did the video or listening though the questions take you?

What Memories Did the Film Invite You to Revisit?

- Did listening lead you back to an experience in your past?
- Do you remember a woman (directly or systemically) being shut down to her calling?
- Do you remember someone of color (directly or systemically) being shut down to their calling?
- Do you know someone who has a non-heterosexual orientation who is afraid to fully be themselves?
- Was anything there that gave you a new lens to view a story of your past through?
- How did anything change the way you view the story to your life?

Where in the Film Do You Hear God's Calling for Your Living and Loving?

- Did listening help you hear any call of your own inner voice?
- Leaning further into becoming responsible for your beliefs, and seeing how our beliefs determine our actions in the world, do you feel the beliefs you hold are contributory to life and life abundant? Do you feel a call toward becoming love in action? How so?
- How can you be a voice of justice and equality? Of welcome to the family table?

- How does what Rachel speaks about effect the way you view your own calling and hold the calling of others?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you want to walk in the world?

Carrying the Blessing

Use this time to bring closure to your reflection and remind yourself what you especially want to hold on to as you reenter your regular living and loving. There are many ways to do this, perhaps journaling or a group discussion, remember to keep it simple. What will you take with you?

Take one last moment to enjoy a few good, deep breaths. Read and ponder the following words from Rachel, listening, again, to what is for you. Take these phrases and what you have heard throughout this session with you as you move forward from here.

**YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE RIGHT PATH,
AND NOBODY CAN TAKE IT AWAY FROM YOU.**

NOBODY CAN TAKE AWAY A CHRIST GIVEN CALL.

—RACHEL HELD EVANS

SESSION FIVE // Love is Biblical

Shifting Into an Experience

We're about to embark on a mini-journey together. Consider spending the next few minutes orienting to your space and to your body. Let yourself fully arrive with some deep breathing, and just letting everything else go for this time. In addition to prayer or a time of silence, consider using the passage below from 2 Corinthians that Rachel mentions in this film. You can keep it simple and just lift up the quote to center yourself or you could expand this time of centering by inviting a brief moment of personal reflection after reading the quote.

Stop. Quiet yourself. Take in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Breathe again. Take in the following statement from the film. Listen for anything that sticks out to you. Consider journaling your way through. It nurtures focus, learning, listening, retention, attention span, and creativity.

**IF LOVE IS CHRIST'S DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL,
MAYBE IT SHOULD BE OURS...**

**SO WHEN IN DOUBT, LOVE.
WHEN IN DOUBT, EXTEND GRACE.**

— RACHEL HELD EVANS

Preparing to Listen

Take some time to consider *how* you want to watch and listen to the film. For instance, you may decide that you want to listen for the particular word or phrase that pops out for you. In this case, you might want to grab a pen and paper to capture it when it grabs you. Don't overthink it. Just open yourself to whatever comes, and without judgment, write down whatever word or phrase is highlighted for you.

In addition to preparing to notice a particular word or phrase, you might also want to put yourself in the mode of allowing the film to take you back in time. Sometimes the way God speaks to us is not directly through the words of another but through a memory which those words reminded us of. So, yes, listen intently to Rachel's reasoning, but don't be afraid to let yourself drift a bit as you listen. Let her carry you back and reconnect you with a memory that echoes her content.

Another consideration, would be to watch for an image that moves you in some way. Perhaps you pause the film and sit with the image while letting it guide you to an underlying story, belief, or memory you carry.

Finally, you might also want to prepare by thinking ahead of time a little bit about some of the key themes you will encounter in the film. Perhaps ponder the following question to stir your imagination before watching:

- What is the role of the church?

The role of the Church, in many ways, has shifted beautifully to form around social issues and need at hand. In times of plague, famine, natural disasters, war, and so on, the Church has shown itself to become the hands and feet of God through its serving and sharing for the greater love and highest good of all. When the church body moves in sweeping, abundant love, the grace of God is known on earth healing becomes possible.

As we continue to become the new family of God, we are learning more and more the importance of relationship building and connection rather than a help that sweeps through in a transactional way. Unfortunately, the Church has shown itself to be polarizing, ostracizing, condemning, conditional and judgmental, hurting different populations of humankind. It seems to come when the church takes on the role of God instead of continuing to work as instruments of God. It is something we continue to work on, growing into our relationship with God allows more God and makes more of who we are available to share humanity. There is less of us/them and more us.

Rachel leans in to the hope that the Church can be willing and open to follow Jesus' path of transformation—living, dying, and rising—and get ourselves out of this rut of unhelpful, unwelcoming, unbecoming, hurtful empirical ways (disconnected humanity, really) and move with the Spirit of God for the love of God and play our human part in the reconnection and healing of the world.

Let's Watch the Film

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Engagement

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Don't push yourself to answer every question. Part of the discernment is about figuring out which questions call to you the most. Instead of going through each question in the three sections, consider having group members (or yourself) pick and share about *the one* question from each section that engages them the most.

How Did the Film Expand or Alter Your Thinking?

- What phrase or idea engaged you the most? What phrase or idea challenged you the most?
- What, if anything, have you/do you struggle with about the Church?
- What do you desire from the church?
- What do you notice the church is able to give?
- How have you been able to reconcile unmet expectations?
- Where did the video or listening though the questions take you?

What Memories Did the Film Invite You to Revisit?

- Did listening lead you back to an experience in your past?
- How does Rachel's experience align with your experience of the Church? What is your relationship to the church historically?
- What has been endearing to you about the Church?
- Have you experienced the Church as family?
- How has the Church loved you, or maybe a better way of asking that question is have you experienced Christ through the church?
- Was anything there that gave you a new lens to view a story of your past through?
- How did anything change the way you view the story to your life?

Where in the Film Do You Hear God's Calling for Your Living and Loving?

- Did listening help you hear any call of your own inner voice?
- What "old ways" are you willing to let die so that resurrection can come?
- Did anything leave you with a challenge for your life, possibly changing the way you want to walk in the world?

Carrying the Blessing

Use this time to bring closure to your reflection and remind yourself what you especially want to hold on to as you reenter your regular living and loving. There are many ways to do this, perhaps journaling or a group discussion, remember to keep it simple. What will you take with you?

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**IF YOU ARE HUNGRY, YOU ARE WELCOME.
IF YOU ARE SICK, YOU ARE WELCOME.
IF YOU NEED LOVE, YOU WILL FIND LOVE.**

LOVE IS BIBLICAL.

—RACHEL HELD EVANS

Video Transcripts

Session One // With an Open Hand

Rachael: When I was in college, it was right after nine-eleven and the press was airing all of this footage from Afghanistan, and much of it was sort of undercover footage about what life was like for women in Afghanistan. There was a documentary called Behind the Veil. And I was in college. I was a committed Christian. I was an apologetics expert. I had an answer for everything.

Rachael: But as I watched this footage, they kept showing this one scene of a woman covered in the full burka in Afghanistan, being brought out to the middle of a soccer stadium in front of a huge crowd of people and being executed, publicly executed, by a Taliban officer. And I remember watching that and seeing it over and over and over again. They kept showing it over and over again on TV, probably to make us feel better about going to war.

Rachael: And I kept thinking, everything I'd been taught up to that point was that this woman, who I later found out her name was Zarmina, after she was brutalized by the Taliban, went to hell because she was a Muslim. And I'd always been taught that all non-Christians, including Christians who never heard the gospel, who had no way of knowing the gospel, would go to hell for eternity for not being born at the right place at the right time.

Rachael: I mean, let's face it, I'm a Christian because I live in a Christian country, a predominantly Christian country. I was born to Christian parents, was raised in the church, and I had my born again experience certainly, but I could not have had that and would not have had that had I been born in Afghanistan in 1981. Or if I had been born in Outer Mongolia in 1580, I would have never had any idea who Jesus Christ was.

Rachael: So that was the first question that triggered a wave of other questions was, how is it fair that, and how is it good that a woman like that could suffer terribly in her time on earth, only to be tortured for eternity by an angry God after her death. Just didn't make sense. And so that was the first question and it was sort of the first little crack in the wall that I noticed.

Rachael: And before long, I was wondering if there was a foundational issue. If this was, if everything I'd been taught was wrong. But I'm glad I asked that question. And so many people told me, just don't let it, don't listen to your heart on this. You can't trust yourself. One pastor told me I was a humanist because I had assigned too

much value to that woman when I should have thought of her as a sinner, condemned by God.

Rachael: But I couldn't shut those questions up. I couldn't pretend like that didn't bother me. I couldn't pretend like that woman was anything other than a person created in the image of God. So I had these two conflicting ideas that this woman was created in the image of God, that God knew the number of hairs on her head, and then this idea that God had condemned her before she was even born to spend an eternity in hell. How can you hold those two things? I couldn't make sense of it. So that's what started the questioning.

Rachael: We don't even know really what we're made of as human beings. There's so much that we don't know. There's so much mystery. We can't see the outer edges of the universe and it's just constant. There's so much we don't know. Most things we don't know. So to presume, well, I know exactly who will be in heaven and who will be in hell, and if there's a hell and what that's like, and what heaven's like and what God is exactly like. That seems a little presumptuous.

Travis: But how should we think about heaven and hell? How is it helpful or hurtful to a person's faith?

Rachael: Let me think about that. Well, I think when Jesus spoke about the kingdom, which was his favorite topic, he wasn't talking about this palace you go to when you die. I mean he was saying the kingdom is among you. It's here, it's present, it's ... He inaugurated the kingdom with his resurrection. So, I think when we talk about heaven and hell, a lot of times we're making bad translations from Jesus' teachings, which are a lot more about the here and now than about some future after death.

Rachael: So I guess the question I find myself asking is, how am I creating and engaging and participating in and receiving the kingdom of God in my day-to-day life, in the here and now? And how am I creating hell on earth? How am I hurting people? How am I committing violence against my enemies, physical or verbal or even in my heart? How am I creating a hell for myself? Some of the people who speak and preach most loudly about how everyone else is going to hell seem to have ironically created a hell for themselves and isolating themselves from their neighbor.

Rachael: So how am I doing that? Or how am I bringing and participating in the kingdom now? You got a train.

Travis: Well, I guess those lives will be on your hands then.

Rachael: That's what a lot of people say. Mine. They're not in my hands, they're in God's anyway. Like if God were waiting on me to get this right? It's like, well, that person would have gone to heaven if you hadn't started talking about the kingdom.

Travis: Does God get what God wants?

Rachael: I think so. Which it says, God desires all men to be saved, and women.

Travis: Okay.

Rachael: Frederick Buechner says that doubt is the ants in the pants of faith, and I have found that to be true. Doubt is the mechanism by which faith evolves. Doubt is how you cultivate that posture of having an open hand. Doubt is what tells you that maybe this thing that you think is fundamental, that's non-negotiable, maybe it is. Maybe geocentrism is not central to the Christian faith. Maybe a young earth is not central to the Christian faith.

Rachael: So I'm grateful for doubt in my life, because it has taught me that I can get some stuff wrong. I can be wrong, even in matters of faith. It's made me more humble, more dependent on Christ. So I'm grateful for doubt. It keeps my faith alive and thinking and, where certainty sort of just freezes it, you know? So yeah, I think that plays an important role in faith. I don't think it's the opposite of faith. I think it's keeps faith awake, alive, thinking, movable, changeable.

Rachael: I just want to be yielded. I really do. I want, even as I've changed and I have new convictions, I want to stay open to the fact that I get stuff wrong, that the church has gotten stuff wrong in the past, and I want to have a tender yielded heart that can change when I'm wrong. And I don't see how else to do that unless I have a healthy place for doubt and second thoughts in my life. It makes faith a little more challenging. It makes it a little harder sometimes, but I've found that it makes it more real.

Rachael: I'm not willing ... I've heard from so many pastors who have told me, if you just take your emotions out of it, if you just take your intellectual struggles out of your faith, then you'll be a better obedient Christian. I'm not willing to do that. I'm not willing to be a robot on this journey. I want to follow Jesus with my head and my heart fully engaged, alive, awake. That's a bigger risk. It's a bigger risk to stay engaged, but not willing to be a Christian any other way. I don't know how to be a Christian any other way. And I don't think Jesus called me to be a Christian any other way.

Rachael: I hope that my faith is always adaptable to change. I hope that my faith is always adaptable to new information, new revelation, new insights, new people. We don't

want the kind of faith that's solid and frozen and can't be changed, that isn't yielded. I hope that my faith is yielded and that it's, as Christianity has evolved through the centuries, changing and adjusting on those peripheral issues when we're faced with new information. I hope that my faith is too.

Rachael: I mean, there was a time when a geocentric universe or a fixed earth was considered to be central to Christianity and anybody who disagreed with that didn't take the Bible seriously. Well, Christians for the most part, began to see that, well maybe a geocentric universe isn't a fundamental to the faith. In the same way, I think there are issues today that we think are fundamental to Christian faith, but just simply aren't. And so, I hope that my faith is yielded enough to let God slay all the false fundamentals in my life.

Rachael: We tend to do this. We tend to find doctrines or theologies or political positions, convictions that we think are fundamental to the Christian faith, but that turn out not to be. I hope that I'm yielded enough, willing to change enough to let some of those fundamentals go.

Rachael: I used to be more of a fundamentalist. And the way I describe it is, I was a fundamentalist, not because of the beliefs I held, but how I was holding them. And I was holding them with a death grip. I was holding them so tightly, I was leaving fingernail imprints on the palms of my hand. And I think what God is teaching me to do is to hold even my firmest convictions with an open hand in a posture of surrender, really.

Rachael: This is a posture of surrender, so that God can come along and change my mind if I'm wrong about something. It's a scary thing to do to hold your beliefs with an open hand, but I don't know how else to be yielded to the spirit, unless I'm willing to hold even what I believe to be fundamental with an open hand.

Session Two // Remembering Jesus

Rachael: I love that Jesus was such a partier. We forget this sometimes, and that's one reason why I support-

Travis: Cut!

Rachael: Jesus partied!

Travis: Jesus was a partier?

Rachael: Well, they accused him of being a drunkard and a partier, and it's funny the things people accuse Jesus of... hanging out with sinners, which is funny. The teachers of the law, the religious elites always accuse Jesus of hanging out with sinners, somehow forgetting the fact that he only had sinners to hang out with! That's kind of the deal! When you're here, you hang out with sinners, because that's who everybody is... which just goes to show this tendency we have of categorizing other people as sinners. It's the easiest way to make yourself feel holy, is to say somebody else is a sinner. But when Jesus said, "I came to hang out with the sick," that meant he came out to hang out with everybody. We're all sick. We're all sinners. We're all in need of a savior.

Rachael: How did I get on that? But it makes me crazy.

Travis: Because he was a partier.

Rachael: Oh, he's a partier! Yeah, the religious elite kind of criticized him as being a partier, and actually, this is one reason why I think Communion isn't just about receiving the bread and wine at sort of an altar; I think we need to bring Communion back to tables, supper tables where we're passing the mashed potatoes and the bread and the beans, and clinking glasses, and having arguments, and spilling stuff... real meals, because Jesus seemed to just love that.

Rachael: And I think part of remembering Jesus... we tend to focus our Communion on remembering his death, which I think is important. But I think Jesus also wanted us to remember his life, all the things he loved; the food he loved, the parties he loved, the people he loved. That's how we really feel a connection to someone who is no longer with us in the way they were once with us. We remember them through the things that they loved, the foods they loved, the sounds, the tastes, the smells.

Rachael: So when we bring Communion back to actual tables, and not just at an altar, I think our memories are triggered and we remember in a very mysterious way the real person of Jesus Christ.

Travis: Remember Him.

Rachael: Yeah, remember.

Rachael: Also, smell... that's another thing. Scent is the sense most tied to memory, and I think it's so interesting that the woman who anointed Jesus's feet... Jesus said, "Wherever the Gospel is preached, what this woman has done for me should be remembered." And yet, that's the kind of a story that we don't talk about regularly in our Easter services, or Lent, or in the Christian calendar, and I wonder if we had a practice of anointing and filling our sanctuaries with a powerful scent in remembrance of that story, if it would trigger our memory, in a way, and we would remember something about Jesus that we had forgotten, that Jesus told us to remember.

Rachael: So, that's an example of a sacrament that isn't officially recognized by anybody, but that I think ought to be, the sacrament of filling a room full of a sweet scent in remembrance of what that woman did to Jesus in anointing him for his burial. She practiced that sacrament of anointing someone before their death, and he recognized that, and said that's what she was doing. But at the time, the disciples gave her a hard time about it.

Travis: That's in the Bible?

Rachael: Yeah!

Travis: I'll have to read it.

Rachael: Yeah. It's a great story. They're all like, "Oh, that money could have been used for the poor," and Jesus is like, "Hey, she's anointing me for my burial. She's commissioning me." So then we have a woman playing the role of a priest there; usually, it was priests who did the anointing!

Travis: Cut!

Rachael: But a woman anointed Jesus before his burial; a woman got it before the guys got it. Women got it all the time before the guys got it, and I think it's because in that culture, women would have understood that a guy who hangs out with sinners, who heals the sick, even on the Sabbath, who upsets the religious leaders, who upsets the political leaders... women would understand better than men in that culture that that is a way that's going to lead to death, and so that's why we see women surrounding Jesus during his death.

Rachael: It was women at the foot of the cross. It was a woman who first anointed him before his burial. It was women who brought the spices. They weren't expecting a resurrected Jesus. They were bringing the oils and spices for his burial because he

was their friend, and they were rewarded with the first glimpse of the brand new Kingdom. They were rewarded with a glimpse of the Kingdom, and I find that really encouraging and inspiring as a woman, that in his darkest days, Jesus was surrounded by women, and at that first moment of resurrection, that first break of daylight on Easter Sunday morning, Jesus chose to introduce the new Kingdom to women, to the ones who stuck by him through death... were there to see resurrection. So, if you stick with someone through death, even when there's no light at the end of the tunnel, that's when you see resurrection, when you show up with the burial spices. That's when it happens.

Rachael: When I'm talking with atheists about why I'm still a Christian in spite of the fact that I've got a lot of intellectual questions and struggles with Christianity, what I usually tell them is just... I realize that I could be wrong, I really do. I realize that I might have this entire thing wrong. But the story of Jesus is just the story I'm willing to risk being wrong about. I see in Jesus something true and something real, and I have experienced that not just in the Bible; the notion that Jesus is somehow restricted to the Bible, or God's presence is restricted to the Bible is a false one. I have experienced and known Christ in Communion. I have experienced and known Christ when I'm hanging out with the least of these. I've experienced and known Christ in suffering.

Rachael: So, all of these experiences with Jesus have convinced me that this is just a person and a story that I'm willing to risk being wrong about. So maybe I've got it wrong; maybe none of this is real. But I can't stop following Jesus; I can't stop being compelled by the truth that he teaches, and the simple truth of loving God and loving your neighbors.

Travis: What's the Gospel? Is that a brand I hear everybody talking about?

Rachael: I mean, the Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Caesar is not. It's that Jesus is God's dream for the world, God's dream for all of us. Jesus is how God feels towards us. I mean, the good news is that when God became flesh, God suffered, too, just like the rest of us, and that when God became flesh, God hung on a cross and looked out at the people who put him there, and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Rachael: I mean, the good news is that Christ is died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. The good news is that we fellowship with Christ in suffering. The good news is that we meet God in the least of these. The good news is that there's hope, and the good news is that God looks like Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. I find that to be incredibly good news, especially when I'm fretting and worrying that maybe God hates all the same people I hate. Maybe God hates me. Maybe God hates the marginalized. Maybe God's against me. Maybe God's against this world.

Rachael: And then I look at Jesus, and I see God dying before holding our sins against us. I see God choosing to hang on the cross and choosing to forgive rather than hold our sins against us. Nadia Bolz-Weber says that Jesus says, "I would rather die than be in the sin accounting business anymore." That's really powerful. So, that's the good news, and it's good news for everyone, and if it's not good news for the poor, if it's not good news for the marginalized, if it's good news for the sick, the suffering... it's not good news for me. It's not good news. So, yeah... and I believe it... sometimes with a limp, and sometimes it's a struggle, but I believe it.

Travis: Did Jesus do something on a cross that we couldn't do for ourselves?

Rachael: Yeah, I mean, I think Jesus was obedient to the point of death. Jesus did not consider equality with God, the glory of God, the power... something to be grasped, but humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross. Yeah, I don't know that any of us are capable of that. I don't if any of us on our own, apart from the work of Christ, is capable of humbling ourselves to that point, to that level of dying for our enemies, of not fighting back. Jesus was faithful to his own teachings to the point of death, loving his enemies to the point of death.

Rachael: I know that on my own I'm not capable of that. I know on my own I wouldn't love my enemies. I know I certainly wouldn't die for my enemies. But Christ was willing to do that, and on my behalf, I think that can mean as an example to me. And I believe... and sometimes I'm scared to say this stuff, because I sure don't want to be tested on it... if I cultivate following Jesus and his teachings, if I pay attention to the Sermon on the Mount, Lord willing I'd be willing to do the same. But I sure hope I'm not asked to! I'm not particularly confident in myself, but I'm confident in Christ! He did it! So, yeah.

Travis: Was Jesus born to die?

Rachael: No. Well, a lot of times, people say that Jesus was born to die, but I think Jesus was also born to live. A lot of times, people talk about Jesus as though God is mad at mankind, so God sends Jesus to sort of save us from ourselves, and so the whole point was for Jesus to come and to die, and to save us from our sins so we could go to Heaven.

Rachael: And a lot of times, this leaves the whole story and Jesus's teachings completely out of the Christian faith, as though they're kind of inconsequential, backstory to the cross. But I think Jesus's teachings matter, because when Jesus is teaching, when he's responding to the needy, to the outcast, to the marginalized, to the sick... all of that is showing us what God looks like when God is among us, when God is wrapped in flesh and wearing sandals.

Rachael: So if we want to be like God, we need to imitate and follow the teachings of Jesus. So this notion that Jesus sort of just came to jump on the cross and to rise from the dead, I think leaves a lot of really important stuff out, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, which is as challenging for me as it is for anyone else. The other day, I was in a debate with somebody, and I was like, "Ha! I know what verse will put them in their place, one from the Sermon on the Mount," and I'm thumbing through, finding it, ready to prove them wrong.

Travis: As your sword tip [crosstalk 00:12:12]

Rachael: Exactly. I was pulling out my sword, and then I started reading the Sermon on the Mount, and I was like, "Oh! That's right! I haven't got this, either!"

Rachael: So, the teachings of Jesus are... I can't imagine anyone mastering these teachings. They're sort of new every morning, they're challenging every morning, they're powerful every morning. So, yeah, Jesus didn't just come to die, he came to live, to show us what God's like, to show us what it means to be like God... be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect, and that means forgiving enemies, turning the other cheek. I don't even want to get into it because it's so hard, and I struggle with it, too, but... yeah.

Travis: Why does God want to save us, or why does God need to save us?

Rachael: Well, I think as long as people think about saving us from sins as being God saving us from eternal damnation and sort of limiting it to that... but I need liberation from my sin today. I think Jesus came to save me from my sins today, to save me from my pride, my obsession with being right and putting people in their place, my self-importance, my selfishness in my relationship with my husband and my relationship with my family and my friends. I think Jesus saves us from our sin in the sense that Jesus shows us the way out of the grave. Jesus shows us death and resurrection. Jesus shows us loving our enemies to the point of death. Jesus liberates us from our sins, not just from an eternal perspective, but a now perspective.

Travis: What breaks your heart? What breaks it apart and what breaks it open?

Rachael: The thing that breaks my heart more than anything else is people suffering at the hands of Christians. It breaks my heart to see the door of the Kingdom slammed in people's faces. It breaks my heart to see stories about people who loved Jesus, followed Jesus, and then were told by someone that their sexuality, or whatever it may be, made them less than, and that they had to change in a way they couldn't change in order to be a follower of Jesus.

Rachael: So, what breaks my heart more than anything is just seeing people turned away from the Kingdom. It makes me angry. It hurts my heart. But I see Jesus running after those folks, full speed ahead, and just because the church gives up on somebody doesn't mean that Christ is giving up on somebody. And so, I'm really hopeful that God gets what God wants, and that that means all things reconciled to God, all things made new, all things resurrected.

Rachael: So, I'm hopeful... I'm hopeful even when I see people hurt by the church, because the church wounds, but the church can also heal. So I pray and hope and long for people to find churches that are in the healing business, not the wounding business, when we're really doing the work of Christ. But even when they don't find it, I think Jesus abandons the whole rest of the flock for the one sheep, and I think Jesus will pursue and find people.

Session Three // Gatekeeping

Travis Reed: What's the role of the church?

Rachael Evans: The role of the church. The role of the church is the same as it's always been. The role of the church is to preach death and resurrection, to teach that Christ has died, Christ is risen. Christ will come again. The role of the church is communion. Opening the table, sharing the table, remembering Jesus. The role of the church is confession, telling each other the truth. It's baptism. It's anointing of the sick. It's all these things we've been doing for 2000 years. It hasn't changed. The role of the church is to introduce people to Jesus.

Travis Reed: What gives you hope that it will still keep doing that?

Rachael Evans: Death and resurrection. I don't know what else. Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church and I take him at his word in that. I think if the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, it's going to survive the information age. It's going to survive the loss of cultural Christianity in the US. It will survive all of these things. Chesterton put it that the church has died and rose again a thousand times, because it knows a Savior who knows his way out of the grave. We know the church will survive, because the church is about death and resurrection. It may die, but Jesus will make something new of it.

Rachael Evans: So I don't worry about the future of the church. I think I used to. I used to worry that if we didn't get our act together, my generation would abandon ship and would leave. But for some reason I've stuck around and I think if we keep practicing the sacraments and we keep preaching the good news that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, then it'll survive, or at least be reborn, a few times over.

Rachael Evans: A lot of people are talking about the death of the church, like it's this big horrible thing that we're on the precipice of doom. There's a megachurch pastor who even did this stunt where he drove up to his church on a hearse and then gave a sermon about how will Christianity have a funeral, or a resurrection? And, we have this posture and a lot of Christianity that we see the numbers changing, at least in North America, and shifting, the demographics shifting. And people freak out and say, "Well, the church is dying, and unless we do all of this changed then it's going to die."

Rachael Evans: And I can't help but think to myself, maybe a little death and resurrection is exactly what the church needs right now. Maybe this means that for

Christians in North America, we're learning that Christianity isn't about empire. Maybe our empire building days are over. And maybe that's a good thing. Maybe the church isn't about power and money and numbers. Maybe being the church is about something else. And maybe dying to those old ways of doing things is exactly what needs to happen.

Rachael Evans: So in thinking about death and the death of the church, I'm not afraid of the church dying, death is something that empires worry about. It's not something gardeners worry about. It's not something resurrection people worry about. So if the church in North America needs to die to some of its old ways, then let it die. Maybe this is just God creating something new. That's what I'm optimistic about. So when I'm thinking about death, I'm thinking about resurrection.

Travis Reed: What does it mean to live "Biblically?"

Rachael Evans: Well, I think the word biblical gets tossed around a lot. And people put it in front of some other super loaded term to try and say, "Well, this is how God views a thing." So, "Oh, biblical politics, biblical economics, biblical marriage, biblical manhood, biblical womanhood." And I just think it's really unhelpful to reduce the Bible to an adjective when the Bible rarely says just one thing on a given topic. But if pressed, and I often am, to give a response to, "Well, what is biblical?" I always looked at, Jesus was asked this question. He was asked by an expert in scripture, "What's the most important element of the law? What is biblical?"

Rachael Evans: And Jesus, who normally responds to questions with another question, or with a story, answers pretty directly. And he says, "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. All the law, and all the prophets hang on those two commands." So if love is Christ's definition of biblical, maybe it should be ours. I think love is biblical, loving God and loving your neighbor. All the law, and all the profits, all of scripture hang on those two commands. So when in doubt, love, when in doubt extend grace. That is what I think it means to be biblical.

Rachael Evans: There's so many people who've been hurt by the church, so many people who've been hurt by Christian teaching, and each one of them has a different story. So how we respond that, I think the first thing to do is to really listen to that story and hold it in all of its brokenness and acknowledge it as wrong and acknowledge it as suffering, and anoint it as holy. But I still have hope. And I would want people to know that the church is a reflection of Christ, but it's not Christ. And that Christ will

pursue them to the ends of the earth. And that Jesus says, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest."

Rachael Evans: And Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translates that beautifully into, "Are you tired? Are you burned out on religion? Come with me, watch me, follow me. I will teach you the unforced rhythms of grace. Oh, the unforced rhythms of grace, that I may live and dance in that." And that's my prayer for all who have been burned by religion, is that they learn the unforced rhythms of grace and follow this Jesus, who doesn't place heavy teachings on people. Doesn't place a heavy yoke on people, but welcomes all. If you're hungry, you're welcome. If you're sick, you're welcome. If you need love, you will find love.

Travis Reed: That's good news.

Rachael Evans: It is good news. And we just have to remember that it's good news. It's not bad news. It's good news. The bad news is that we can't do it on our own. The bad news is that we're broken. But the good news is that we're broken and beloved, and that God doesn't give up.

Session Four // The God Who Sees You

- Rachael : [crosstalk 00:00:33] talk about feminism. I don't know. You got [Sarah Bessie 00:00:40] on that. Well, I guess feminism is the radical notion that women are human, so most people I know are actually feminist, whether or not they admit it or not. I think in ...
- Rachael : We see Jesus modeling this in so many ways. Jesus had a very high view of women. He treated women with respect and dignity. We see this from Mary Magdalene, to Mary of Bethany, to all the women who surrounded himself with, Martha.
- Rachael : One of my favorite stories is the story of Mary of Bethany, because a lot of times people tell me, "Rachael, what right do you have to speak? You're a woman. You don't have a PhD. You don't have the theological training. What right do you have to write about Christ, write about God, write about the church?"
- Rachael : I always think of Mary of Bethany, who sat at Jesus's feet when he was teaching, which meant he was her rabbi. That was a very radical thing for him to be doing. Some of Jesus's contemporaries said it would be better for the Torah to be burned than to be taught to a woman. So when Jesus is described as teaching Mary as she sits at his feet, he was making a statement, and she was making a statement, that she has the same value as a man in this new kingdom.
- Travis: Cut.
- Rachael : What I love is Jesus says to her, when she's challenged on that by her own sister a little bit, which Martha gets kind of a bad rap. She wasn't so bad, but she challenges Mary sitting at Jesus's feet. Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you're worried about so many things. But Mary has chosen the right path," and he says, "And it cannot be taken away from her."
- Rachael : So when women come to me and say, "I feel a call to be a pastor. I feel a call to preach, to teach, to lead, but the people in my community are telling me I can't because I'm a woman," I look at them, and I repeat those words of Jesus. "You have chosen the right path, and it cannot be taken away from you. Nobody can take away that call. Nobody, when it's a Christ given call." I hope that's an encouragement to them, because I know how hard can be to have your credentials challenged, not because you haven't earned them, but because you're a woman.
- Rachael : When I was in high school, I was asked by my youth leader to give my personal testimony in front of all my fellow high school students, which is a very evangelical thing to do. You got to learn how to give the public testimony. So I

did. I gave my testimony in front of all my fellow high school students, but I'll never forget, when I was finished giving the testimony, I sat down next to a guy I went to high school with, and he turned to me and he said, "Wow, Rachel. You're a really good preacher. Too bad you're a girl."

Rachael : What he meant was, what a waste of a gift, when women in my tradition were forbidden from teaching and leading. It breaks my heart to think of how many women have been told that. "Oh, you're gifted to teach and to lead and to illuminate scripture. Too bad you're a girl." I'm so glad I didn't believe that lie. It was one of the first little red flags in my mind that said, "Maybe, maybe this isn't the tradition for you. Maybe this isn't right." Yeah.

Rachael : I hear from women all the time who had similar experiences. I've heard from women who got up to speak at a Christian conference, and a row full of men stood up and walked away in protest. I've heard women in seminary who said when it was their turn in the preaching class to give the sermon, nobody showed up, because it was all men in the class and her, and only her professor showed up to hear her give the sermon.

Travis: Well, that was in the Bible though, right? Jesus came in when the woman was preaching, and he turned the tables over. [crosstalk 00:04:43]

Rachael : Something about money changers [crosstalk 00:04:47] It's frustrating and crazy that women can feel so demeaned when Jesus has a high view of them.

Rachael : Even the apostle Paul, who gets kind of a bad rap among a lot of people for not celebrating women, actually did celebrate women often. He had very high praise for Priscilla and Aquila, a husband and wife whose names rhymed. I mean, how cool is that? He had high praise for Priscilla, who was a teacher, high praise for Junia, who he describes as an apostle, high praise for Phoebe and Lydia, and all these other women who were clearly leading and teaching in the church.

Rachael : So for people to say that the apostle Paul forbade women from teaching and leading just isn't, that just isn't the case. We have him giving some instructions to the Ephesian church about not letting women seize complete authority, but we don't see him forbidding women from teaching and leading all the way around. We see him celebrating them for doing it.

Travis: As long as you get lower pay, I don't mind.

Rachael : Yeah. Oh, the wage gap.

Rachael : Mary Magdalene. I guess.

Travis: What is it about Mary that's [crosstalk 00:06:06].

- Rachael : Well, there's a lot of Marys. They can get confusing. [crosstalk 00:06:10].
- Rachael : Mary Magdalene is called, in many traditions, the apostle to the apostles, because she witnessed the resurrection, and then she runs to go tell the apostles, and they're like, "Yeah. You sound like a crazy lady." But then finally she convinces Peter to come along. They run out to the tomb and see it for themselves.
- Rachael : But Mary Magdalene's a great story, because there we have a woman at that critical moment of resurrection, and the first person to ever proclaim the gospel, and it's, "Christ has died. Christ is risen." Full truth was a woman. That's exciting to me as a woman. It makes me feel like, why should anyone tell me I can't preach the gospel? Mary certainly did a good job of it. Women have been doing a great job of it ever since then.
- Rachael : Throughout scripture, I think reexamining the lives of the women in scripture has been a really powerful and transformative and freeing and liberating experience for me, because I just see how God uses women, even in a very patriarchal culture like the one in which the Bible was written. We see God reaching and intervening and hearing women. That's encouraging to me.
- Rachael : There's still some rough parts. I'm not going to lie. There's parts of scripture where I'm like, "Oh my gosh. Not a lot of women's rights stuff going on here," but I see a God who values women and hears women.
- Rachael : The story of Hagar is another example of that, where Hagar has been banished from the house of Abraham and Isaac, with her young son, Ishmael. Being banished out in the desert, it's not a good deal at all. She's thirsty, and God provides for her with this well, and intervenes. She names God. She names God the God who sees.
- Rachael : I always think about God as the God who sees suffering, even the suffering of a forgotten, banished Egyptian slave woman. God has always had his ear bent towards suffering, or her ear bent towards suffering. I think I find that really powerful and transformative.
- Travis: Do you think God suffers?
- Rachael : Oh, that's a good question, because I do. I do think God suffers, but that's not ... There's a big word for what that is not. I got schooled the other day by some Calvinist.
- Travis: You should get a PhD so you have some credentials.

Rachael : So I've got a big word to describe how God ... Well, there's immutability, which I think, I don't know if I totally understand the concept, so don't get too critical of it.

Rachael : But there's some people who say that God doesn't suffer, that God's this emotionless force, but I can't look at the cross and for a second conclude that God doesn't suffer. God has suffered in the way that we suffer. That's incredible to me, that God knows pain, that God knows sorrow, that God knows rejection. God knows what it's like to be despised and rejected. That is a powerful teaching I'm not willing to let go of, and why the incarnation is so powerful.

Rachael : When Philip was talking to the Ethiopian eunuch, you know, there's a story where the Ethiopian eunuch is riding through the desert, reading scripture, and Philip just appears there and sees this happening. As a eunuch, this guy would've been forbidden from entering the temple grounds, forbidden from being baptized, forbidden from being part of the religious center in Jerusalem.

Rachael : But Philip has experienced Christ and this new kingdom, and so he starts this conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch. He explains to the eunuch, because the eunuch's reading through that Isaiah passage, that he will be despised and rejected, Philip explains, when God became flesh, God suffered too. God knows a thing or two about your suffering.

Rachael : The eunuch is so overwhelmed by this, so moved, he says, "Look. Here is water. What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Philip could have said, "Well, your anatomy, for one thing. That was supposed to keep you out of the kingdom. Your status as an outsider, your ethnic status, all of these things to keep you from the kingdom," but he didn't. He got out of the way. He let God move, and he baptized the eunuch in the first body of water that they could find.

Rachael : I think that's really, he was responding to that call from John the Baptist. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his path straight. Get out of the way. God's moving through. Yeah. I think the biggest, when Jesus said, "With faith, you can move mountains," I feel like some of the biggest mountains are those of our own making that we put in the way of God getting to people. I don't know what got me started on that, but God's suffers.

Travis: [inaudible 00:11:13]

Rachael : [inaudible 00:11:15] [crosstalk 00:11:14] Now I'm rambling.

Travis: No. That was great.

Session Five // Love is Biblical

- Rachael Evans: There's this tendency to elevate the nuclear family to this sort of godlike status. But, I mean, the whole New Testament, the whole thrust of the epistles and Jesus' teachings too is that we're creating a new family. It is for slaves and masters, men and women, Jew and Greek, all are part of this new family grafted into the family of God.
- Rachael Evans: So the notion that in order to be a good Christian, you have to be married with 2.5 children and your husband has to work, wife stays at home, these strict gender roles, that is a glorification of cultural values, American cultural values, the American Dream, that is not a biblical value.
- Rachael Evans: The New Testament emphasizes a new family in Christ, and Jesus says, "Who are my mother and brothers and sisters? It's the people who follow after me, it's a new family." So we have to be careful of sort of glorifying, idolizing the nuclear family above all else.
- Travis Reed: Are you saying the nuclear family won't save American communities?
- Rachael Evans: I don't think so, believe it or not. I mean, I think salvation is in Christ, not in getting married, not in procreation. Salvation is about being grafted into the family of God and welcomed into the family of God. So yeah, we have to be careful of idolizing the nuclear family, idolizing culturally-based gender roles and gender stereotypes. We have to be very careful of leaving people out of the family of God, turning them away from the family of God, because they don't fit into that idealized cultural expectation.
- Rachael Evans: We see this happening with LGBT people. What frustrates me most is seeing Christians slam the door of the kingdom in people's faces and saying, "In order to be part of the kingdom, you have to be straight. In order to be beloved by God, you have to have a family and procreate," and all these other things. When being part of the family of God is about being called and named, beloved by God, being grafted into this new family. It's not about conforming yourself into these culturally-based expectations about gender and sexuality.
- Rachael Evans: So a real tug on my heart lately has been the way in which, there's a lot of Christians who think of themselves as gatekeepers to the kingdom, it's their job to decide who's in and who's out. They like to farewell people and say, "So long." I've just kind of had it with that. It's not my table, it's not your table, it's not your denomination's table, it's Christ's table. Christ

makes the invitation list. You don't have the power to farewell anybody, that's God's call, who's invited into the kingdom, not yours.

Travis Reed: Have you seen the list?

Rachael Evans: Of who's in and who's out? I know people who think they've got the list. Which nothing frustrates me more than seeing the door to the kingdom slammed in people's faces. Nothing makes me angrier than seeing people use false fundamentals to keep people out. When you look at the first people who followed Jesus, when you look at the New Testament, it's hard to find what all those people had in common. There were poor, there were rich, there were prostitutes, there were even Pharisees, there were tax collectors, there were sick people.

Travis Reed: No gay people.

Rachael Evans: Well, they were outcasts. In our culture, I think a lot of LGBT people feel like outcasts. So Jesus surrounded himself with this completely unlikely mismatched group of people. The one thing they all had in common ... and they didn't all say the same prayer. You don't see them all walking down the Romans road or saying they sort of wrote Jesus, I asked you to come into my heart type of a prayer. You don't see them all confessing a creed or even agreeing on exactly who Jesus is. There was some discussion about that among his first followers.

Rachael Evans: The one thing all of them have in common is that they're hungry, they're sick. They know that when Jesus said, "I came for the sick," they know that means he came for me, they know that they need. So if people are hungry, if people are sick, if they know that they need, then they're in, they're welcome to the table. The table is not for the worthy, the table is for the hungry. I'm not worthy to come to the table, but I'm hungry. I'm desperately hungry. So if my neighbor's hungry, he's welcome too. I don't care if he's gay or straight or male or female or what.

Travis Reed: Somebody's going to pay for that food.

Rachael Evans: Right. Jesus prayed for it. Jesus paid it all, all to him. Well, see, my dad taught me not to sing that song. My dad always raised us to believe that God's grace is enough and so we don't owe God anything, that God has taken care of the debt of sin. So whenever he taught us to sing, Jesus Paid It All, all to him, I owed, past tense. So I'm very thankful I grew up in a family that taught me that I don't owe God anything, that Jesus is sufficient and has paid it all, truly, and that I don't owe God anything.

Rachael Evans: I was saturated with grace growing up and I'm grateful for that, I'm really grateful for that. I'm actually really grateful for my evangelical upbringing. I think a lot of people assume that because I'm sometimes critical of evangelicalism's tendency to focus on gatekeeping and keeping people out, that I must therefore hate evangelicalism or despise my upbringing.

Rachael Evans: But growing up, I always knew I was loved, I always knew I was a beloved child of God. My family taught me grace and modeled grace. The people in my church growing up were kind, good people, the first to show up at your door with a casserole if somebody's sick. I learned the Bible backwards and forwards and I'm grateful for that. I'm thankful of the people who introduced me to Jesus were evangelicals.

Rachael Evans: I mean, Jesus has this habit of using broken, imperfect people to introduce him to others. So it was broken, imperfect people who introduced me to Jesus. That's just how it goes, and I'm grateful for that. I can't change that and I don't want to change that. Even though I've changed some of my thinking and I don't always line up with how my parents think or how my old church thinks, they were the first people to introduce me to Jesus and I will always, always be grateful and always be thankful for that.

Travis Reed: Is there a Christian view of gender and sexuality?

Rachael Evans: Oh, I don't think there's a single Christian view on gender and sexuality. That's pretty complex and people are complicated and nobody fits into these sort of rigid molds that a lot of people try to make for all women like this and all men like that. Women are wired this way, men are wired that way. Well, we're not robots, we don't have wires. Not all men and women are the same, not all people's sexuality is the same. This is just God has created sexuality and gender to be pretty fluid and to manifest itself differently in different people.

Rachael Evans: So, the notion of a single Christian position on gender and sexuality makes me kind of laugh. I do think there's a single Christian position on how to treat people, love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. So if we're loving our neighbors as ourselves, we're not condemning them because their sexual orientation is not like ours.

Rachael Evans: So I do think there's a Christian position on how to treat people, I don't think there's a Christian way to be a man, a Christian way to be a woman. We're not called to be conformed to gender stereotypes, we're called to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. So to the degree that I am

imitating Jesus Christ, to the degree that I'm producing the fruit of the spirit in my life, I hope people judge my faith based on that, not based on how womanly or girly I may be or even my position on gender and sexuality or my views on gender and sexuality.

Travis Reed: Yeah, but the Scripture's clear and resolute. You sound like you're kind of beating around.

Rachael Evans: Oh.

Travis Reed: You don't believe the Bible?

Rachael Evans: I do believe the Bible. I believe the Bible is true, that doesn't mean I believe that every story in Scripture is historical or scientific, or that we can only learn through truths from science and history. I think stories can speak really powerful truths into our lives. So with the Bible, I think a lot of people approach the Bible as a conversation ender. You see the bumper stickers. The Bible said it, I believe it, that settles it. I think that the Bible with all of its tensions and conflicts and competing voices and perspectives, invites us into conversation with one another. I believe the Bible's meant to be a conversation starter, not a conversation ender.

