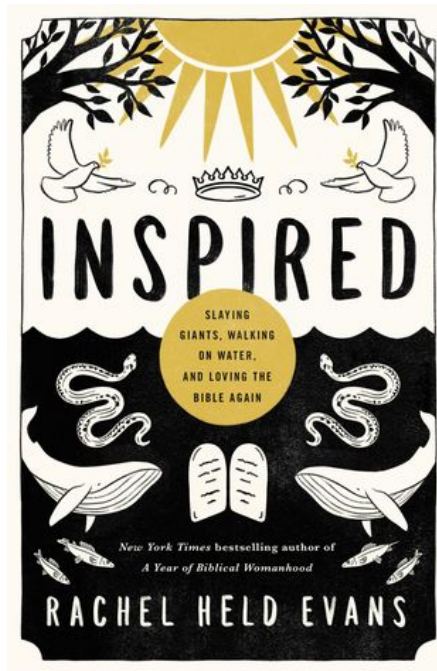




Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again

Rachel Held Evans

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One Woman's Journey Back to Loving the Bible

If the Bible isn't a science book or an instruction manual, then what is it? What do people mean when they say the Bible is *inspired*? When Rachel Held Evans found herself asking these questions, she began a quest to better understand what the Bible is and how it is meant to be read. What she discovered changed her—and it will change you too.

Drawing on the best in recent scholarship and using her well-honed literary expertise, Evans examines some of our favorite Bible stories and possible interpretations, retelling them through memoir, original poetry, short stories, soliloquies, and even a short screenplay. Undaunted by the Bible's most difficult passages, Evans wrestles through the process of doubting, imagining, and debating Scripture's mysteries. The Bible, she discovers, is not a static work but is a living, breathing, captivating, and confounding book that is able to equip us to join God's loving and redemptive work in the world.

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again Details

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From Reader Review Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again for online ebook

Pastor Matt says

I've read several of Rachel Held Evans' books. She is a talented writer but a poor biblical interpreter. She uncritically accepts "higher criticism" with liberal presuppositions as a way to "unlock an ancient text" even though this method is built on post-enlightenment fantasy and an implicit desire to accommodate the cultural whims of the day. She accepts theories such as Matthew Vines' discredited portrayal of same-sex relationships in the ancient world (which is just a summary of John Boswell's long discredited work even rejected by one of Evans' heroes, N.T. Wright). She dismisses the heart of the atonement, mocks other long held orthodox views without cogent arguments and champions every leftist cause as if it is found in Scripture (even though she does so via logical fallacies, anachronisms [especially in the area of economics] , etc.). Evans' Jesus is Bernie Sanders who happened to be nailed to cross and her scripture is a mess...except for the areas she likes and can translate into social justice causes...funny how that works out! Avoid.

Haley says

I love her. She approaches Scripture like a storyteller, and views Scripture as a collection of powerful stories that we've all been caught up with in some way - stories that can be used either to oppress or to liberate, stories that, even if divinely inspired, "have human fingerprints all over them."

I feel like I can't really write an adequate review because it's intended for a specific group of people - as one of the people it's clearly intended for, I highly recommend it to others in that group - current Christians who feel suffocated by the legalism and/or bigotry of your churches, Christians now without church homes, former Christians who left because your church and faith experiences didn't ultimately line up with the message you were fed that true religion in the sight of God is taking care of widows and orphans, is love and compassion.

Also an incredibly important reminder that Scripture - or the stories and letters that now make up Scripture - were subversive and transgressive in their time - disrupting national power and empire and social hierarchies. And that's a much more exciting Scripture to read about than the one that mostly seems intent on keeping women (among others) in our places and supporting politicians and policies who couldn't care less about the poor or marginalized.

Jeffrey Nelson says

I clearly remember the time--the first time, that is--when my faith began to fall apart. I was in my second semester of college as a Religion major and was enrolled in several Biblical Studies courses that spring, including one that dealt heavily with the concept of the "historical Jesus," a scholarly attempt to get behind the faith claims of the Gospels and see what definite things one could say about the real life person who lived in 1st Century Galilee.

I had a much more conservative-minded approach to scripture in those days, and largely was able to brush off most of what I'd been reading and learning. I believed not only in the truth of the Bible, but that it

presented factual accounts not just about Jesus but about other characters as well: Adam and Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jonah, the Apostles, and so on.

But on one fateful Tuesday evening during Bible study, it all seemed to crumble down at once. The claims of my classroom studies were causing more and more friction with the claims of the night's discussion, until finally near the end of our time together I thought to myself, "I don't know if I believe this any more."

The next few months--and really, the rest of my life so far--would feature a deep and abiding wrestling not just with the Bible's contents, but with what the Bible itself was to me. Is it a closed canon handed down and divinely dictated whole cloth for eternally-relevant application, or does its origins, gradual collection, authorial diversity of experience, and occasional historical, scientific, and literary dubiousness make it something still capable of communicating truth about God, life, and faith, yet in ways more nuanced than before?

This is one of the questions at the heart of *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans. Evans' journey has also been one of beginning steeped in a subculture that approached the Bible in a certain way, and when the questions and contradictions that came with her own study became too big to ignore, she began a transition to a different way of nurturing faith and discipleship and of reading the Bible.

Evans recounts this journey more thoroughly in her previous works, particularly *Faith Unraveled*, and in fact a read through that book may serve as a helpful background to some of what she shares here. But her self-identifying as a memoirist is appropriate, as she shares personal anecdotes in nearly every chapter to help flesh out some of her own experiences that led her to revisit her view of scripture and its meaning for her now.

However, her own story is far from the only element at work here. Evans pulls from a variety of trusted scholars both past and present. She was intentionally diverse in choosing the voices that helped inform her approach, pulling thoughts from thinkers such as Walter Brueggemann, William Barber, Peter Enns, Nyasha Junior, and Amy-Jill Levine, among many others, as she delves into the stories of the Bible and the stories behind the Bible.

Evans' basic approach is to separate the Bible into the unique genres that make up its pages, and her natural inclination toward telling, sharing, and examining stories provide the framework and lens through which she examines them. She looks at stories of origins such as the early chapters of Genesis, stories of liberation such as Exodus and some of the prophets, stories of war such as in Joshua, stories of wisdom such as Job and the Psalms, and stories of Jesus and the early church, among others. She treats each as part of an expression of a larger narrative the people behind its pages are trying to make sense of for themselves, but also connects those stories to modern life through her own experiences and parallels to contemporary events and issues.

As an additional aid to her overall presentation, each chapter is accompanied by a retelling of each scriptural portion, including first-person accounts from Hagar and the Samaritan woman at the well, a short play of Job and his friends, and the story of Peter stepping out of the boat to meet Jesus on the water cast as a Choose Your Own Adventure story. These are often cleverly done and help set the stage for the analysis to come. Evans' writing has always had a certain light touch even when exploring serious issues, and these preludes help present the scholarship to follow in accessible ways that many readers will appreciate.

Evans' awareness of how difficult questions related to the Bible can be serves her very well, and many will benefit from her sensitivity, her attentiveness to scholarship, and her ability to connect it to present-day experience. Whether one is nearing their own Tuesday evening crisis of faith or just wants to make better sense of how this strange collection of stories relates to a modern understanding of faith, *Inspired* provides an easy on-ramp to that conversation.

Tina says

It was comforting to hear someone say, "I get that you have questions and doubts and struggles." But it was also good to hear someone say, "Don't give up...here's a new way to love the Bible." Rachel Heald Evans never dissapoints.

Leah says

The introduction to this book hooked me and drew me in as I felt like I was reading my own story. Rachel describes her childhood and formative years in the evangelical church. All the familiar rites of passage - youth group, reading scripture, memorizing verses, leaning on the wisdom of youth leaders, and going back to the Word when times of crisis hit and questions arose - all of this was relatable. Even down to her name, Rachel, being taken from scripture. We might as well be sisters because my name is Leah.

And then as she grew older, questions began to arise about this magical book. Were the stories in it true? Science can disprove some, which would then make them more myth then truth. Is God truly loving in the face of the punishment he's doled out to humanity over the centuries? Her blog has been a source of affirmation for me - yes, you can be a liberal, feminist believer and not to go hell, if hell exists in the way I'd always been taught. Her books have honestly splayed open her heart and its wanderings away from evangelicalism, but always back to God. And now, here is a book that will discover the Bible in new and fascinating ways, as it is in all its dirty, gritty, confusing messiness. I'm so encouraged to see Amy Jill Levine and Pete Enns on her list of influencers while writing this book.

Rachel discusses our stories of origin and how some stories in the Bible were God's way of allowing peoples of ancient cultures to communicate. When we try to place our present day selves in the center of biblical stories, we are missing the original intent of the story and its purpose for communication. She goes on to explore the origins and intentional meaning behind many stories those of us who grew up in the church are familiar with. I wish I could share this book with so many of my friends, those of us who have left because the direction of the evangelical church has taken turns we no longer agree with or believe in. I think there are messages here we can all relate to that are inspiring and just might take us back to some of our spiritual roots.

Ben Wideman says

This is an incredible reflection on the purpose of the biblical narrative, written by weaving together humor, biblical study, various stylistic genres, and a lot of heart. I'm so grateful that RHE wrote this book, and that we get to read it.

J.R. Forasteros says

Rachel has given us a great gift... a book that invites us to rediscover the Bible as the book God gave us, not the book many of us were raised to expect.

She introduces each chapter with a fiction piece - these are pretty uneven, and I'm not sure they do much for the overall effect of the book. The non-fiction is much stronger, and where the real power of the book lies.

Overall, this is a great book that anyone who loves the Bible - or USED to love the Bible - will really enjoy.

Kat Coffin says

What can I say about this book?

I received an ARC, due to the special promotion early preorder customers received. I was one of the first 500 to provide proof. I received my copy on Ash Wednesday/Valentine's Day--and how appropriate!

The timing of this remarkable book is impeccable. Not long before, I started rereading Scripture again, to try and infuse daily Scripture into my morning routine. I read one chapter of the Old Testament and one chapter of the New. The first chapter of the Old Testament I read was from Numbers--the Israelites utterly annihilating the Midianites and being scolded for keeping the virgin women alive. The second was from Romans--a chapter I recognized as the verses that spurred Megan Phelps-Roper to leave Christianity. Paul's "some people were created to be vessels of destruction" bit.

Not a great place to start out. So thank God for this book. Thank God for a book that assured me that truth didn't have to be literal. Thank God for a book that captured the magic of Scripture and encouraged me to wrestle with the things that trouble me. Thank God for a book that doesn't explain away the genocide, that doesn't hand wave some of the more dick-ish things Paul had to say. Thank God for a book that actually helped me reconcile with Paul.

Thank God for this book. RHE's research is meticulous, she takes care to include theology from people who are not white straight men, and she even gets a little creative--with everything from short stories to screenplays to poetry. In that sense, she encourages me to be a little creative with my faith too.

I know mine is only the ARC and this book may go through some changes by June. But the post-Evangelical--the Exvangelicals, we might say--are in for a treat, especially if they're like me. Someone who misses the environment but not the suffocation of Evangelicalism. Someone who badly wants to love the Bible and God again, but doesn't know how to anymore.

Allison Sees says

I first came to Rachel Held Evans through her book "Searching for Sunday." At the time I had just finished a rough semester of Divinity school and I was burnt out in so many ways. There are not many books that I would describe as "healing" but that book was one of them. It reminded me WHY I was in Divinity school, why I was doing what I was doing - because I love God. And I love the Church and our rituals and sacraments. It renewed a part of me that greatly needed it.

And so I was very excited to receive an ARC of her new book, "Inspired." I knew it was about the Bible...and I knew I needed some healing there, so I went in with an open mind.

So at this point in my life I am a United Methodist minister, serving a church as a head pastor for about 8 months now. And I have a lot of baggage about the Bible. I love Scripture. I love delving into the Revised

Common Lectionary each week and figuring out what the Holy Spirit has to say to me and my community each week. I feel that preaching is one of my spiritual gifts and it greatly informed my call to ministry. So I love individual passages of Scripture. I love the Revised Command Lectionary. I even like all those weird and strange Bible stories that would NEVER show up in the lectionary (Rachel mentions a few in her book!)...but the Bible? This great big leather bound tome? This collection of stories and laws and letters and all that TOGETHER? That has done harm or can justify harm? That has been used and misused and people have been hit over the head with it and some people do the hitting with it...and yeah. When I think "Bible" I think BIG. HEAVY. Baggage. I'm much more comfortable with my little worship resource that just gives me the week's lectionary and some hymn suggestions rather than THE BOOK.

"Inspired" helped me work through and process a lot of those feelings and fears. I'm still processing - it's a journey. But like "Searching for Sunday" helped remind me that I love Church, "Inspired" helped remind me that I love the Bible. Her play of the book of Job & Aelia's telling of listening to one of Paul's letters particular struck me. All of her re-tellings or re-creations or imaginings of Biblical stories stirred something within me. I even think she (with the Spirit!) "inspired" my upcoming project toward ordination, working with some of the Biblical texts of violence against women. Because, deep down, underneath all the baggage, I love the Bible, I do. I think (at least by next Lent!) I'm even willing to pick up the whole leather bound, big book, and sit down and read it once again for myself, and to let the magic of the story wash over me.

So I don't describe many books as healing, but "Inspired" by Rachel Held Evans was definitely one.

Kaitlin Kline says

"The apostles remembered what many modern Christians tend to forget--that what makes the Gospel offensive isn't who it keeps out but who it lets in."

This book, like many that deal with Biblical interpretation, is probably going to piss some people off. But I think that's why it needs to be read. If a book is making you mad, or deeply uncomfortable or exposed, then it's doing its job; to stretch your current view of the world a little larger and deeper. There were a couple of points like that for me in Inspired. Like Rachel, I grew up in a very conservative home and spent my childhood and adolescence debating the Bible's reliability. We were both raised to believe that the Bible was always right, no matter the context. So it was a little jarring for me to hear Rachel tell me that, just maybe, Scripture isn't perfect all of the time--but that's okay, because it was written by imperfect people. It doesn't mean that the Bible isn't special and wonderful and dependable; it simply means we can remove it from the pedestal we have placed it on and engage with it as we are: imperfect sinners, just like the characters within. I actually find I can love the Bible more when I don't have such lofty expectations for it to tell me what to do (actually, that's how I feel about my husband after being married for three years). The Bible isn't just a history book or an instruction manual; it's a portable library of a thousand stories from differing genres. Never before have I asked, while reading a chapter, "Whose voice is this? Why does that matter?" Being able to differentiate Jewish storytelling from historical reports from practical letters means that we can appreciate the Bible for its variety while realizing that we are not the original audience. Yes, God's Word is for us, but it is not solely for us. To assume as much does this great literary and historic work a disservice; and it harms the people that we weaponize this great book against. The Bible, like any book, is an epic act of love, so if we use it as an excuse for hatred or violence, we have clearly missed the mark. I think any external writing that helps the Bible come alive has great value, and this is my favorite one so far. If you have questions about the Bible, or if you have never thought to question the Bible for fear of it letting you down, you should give Inspired a shot. I know it helped give me a healthier view of the book I have tried to love my whole life; it has given me more room to fall in love with the Word.

Amy says

Rachel Held Evans has been an important author for me in coming to understand liberation theology. Through her own stories of wrestling with Scripture, Evans offers insights on familiar stories that render them new. She reminds us that, above all, our interpretations should move us closer toward's the openness and inclusiveness that is God's love. What a wonderful read.

Stacy says

I often feel like Rachel Held Evans is telling my story but in better prose. Like Rachel, I grew up in a conservative evangelical church but eventually realized that sect doesn't match my view of the world or God. But having been taught that if you don't believe every word of the Bible is literally true, then you can't believe any of the Bible at all, it's now difficult to know how to approach it. It's so refreshing to see that there are other people who have wrestled with this and started to find some answers, even if we will always struggle. This book has inspired me to think about the Bible in new ways and do further reading and research on my own to better understand it.

Amy1N says

Reading this book was like sitting down with an old friend to talk through the Bible. I came away with a fresh desire to read passages I've yet to read and go back and read well remembered verses with fresh eyes. This is exactly the book I needed at exactly the right time. If you're struggling picking up the Bible every day, this book is for you. If there's nothing you enjoy more than starting or ending the day in scriptures, this book is for you. I'm so thankful for Rachel and her ability to somehow write the exact words I need to read.

Kristi Brokaw says

3 1/2 Stars (if Goodreads allowed it!)

First let me just say—this is a beautiful book. Whoever did the cover design gets a bunch of stars for making such a pretty book.

I loved this book. There are very few things which I didn't like and for which I did deduct stars. The things I didn't like were the "creative retellings" in the chapter openers. They felt unnatural and awkward to me. It was obvious the author was working with unfamiliar mediums. The screenplay version of Job was my least favorite. But these sections are short and only about half of them were truly awkward enough to take me out of the experience of reading.

What I loved: everything else. I love the author's honesty and her voice. I love how she mixes personal struggle and experience with research from other scholars. I love her obvious joy in the poetry and stories of the Bible and her angst and discomfort with the same parts I am anxious and uncomfortable with. Her take on Paul's epistles was utterly refreshing. Her acknowledgement of the abused women in the Bible felt like a friend acknowledging my feelings—I felt relieved and loved. Rachel Held Evans has written a book that

really does allow us to delight in the gift of the Bible while lamenting the ways it has been weaponized and misunderstood. I have already recommended it to several friends and would love to discuss it in a book club setting.

I also want to add that I appreciate that the author took time to include multiple perspectives and elevated the voices of the marginalized.

I received an advanced copy of this book for review purposes and these opinions are my own.

Chris Crosby says

note: I received an Advance Copy of the book from the publisher.

Short Version Review: if you have read Rachel's earlier books, you will love this. And you will be INSPIRED to reacquaint yourself with the Bible.

More In-depth Review:

This book is not an academic exercise in how to read the Bible. Rachel Held Evans has written a book that is deeply personal about how she learned to love the Bible all over again and why. The book is as much about how she grew up being taught certain things about what the Bible says, how she realized those teachings made no sense to get any longer, and how relearning the stories drew her back to a love of the content, even when she doesn't like it.

If that sounds impossible, well, it's the Bible! Lots of impossible things happen in there. But, if you don't give up on it, Rachel says, you can begin to ask questions and, "These questions loosened my grip on the text and gave me permission to love the Bible for what it is, not what I want it to be. And here's the surprising thing about that: When you stop trying to force the Bible to be something it's not—static, perspicacious, certain, absolute—then you're free to revel in what it is: living, breathing, confounding, surprising, and yes, perhaps even magic."(p. xx)

The basic premise is that we can read the Bible best if we understand that it's a series of stories and learn why the stories are written the way they are. Rachel breaks them up into literary styles to cover the easy, the obscure, the challenging, and the downright unbelievable. When you walk through all of the chapters with her, you see the complexities, but it's easy to stay on the path.

From millennia of Jewish rabbis, she learned how the stories are open to our interpretation with every reading. She learned about the power of telling the stories in between the facts in the text, and, in the time honored traditions, she wrote her own 'midrashim,' to illuminate particular dilemmas. She obviously delights in this discovery of interpretation, and these interludes are diverse and delicious. She notes, "In other words, Bible stories don't have to mean just one thing. Despite what you may have heard from a pastor or Sunday school teacher along the way, faithful engagement with Scripture isn't about uncovering a singular, moralistic point to every text and then sticking to it. Rather, the very nature of the biblical text invites us to consider the possibilities." (p 42)

If you've read any of her other memoirs, you will find this a delightful time of catching up with a best friend. If you are new to RHE, be prepared for a super treat. You will gain a terrific understanding of how humans relate to God, how God never gives up on humans, and how stories are the life lines to human relationships.

I learned a lot about RHE's upbringing in her earlier books. In this one, I learned even more about how

people raised in an evangelical environment interpret what I believe to be the INSPIRED word of God, written for our learning. For example, I also grew up knowing the Bible stories, but I never, ever, worried that looking in our car's rearview mirror might turn me into a pillar of salt. And, truth be told, Rachel is not the first evangelical woman I've known to confess this fear!

I feel this education was possibly most important for me, as I live in a progressive area, have mostly liberal Episcopalian friends, and study at an Episcopal seminary. In our incredibly divided nation, if I know more about how evangelicals approach scripture so very differently than I do, I hope I can be more compassionate when I run into disagreement. Rachel is very convincing on this point. She knows how to mark where her own upbringing fell far short of what she knows to be truth today.

"We're all selective. We all wrestle with how to interpret and apply the Bible to our lives. We all go to the text looking for something, and we all have a tendency to find it. So the question we have to ask ourselves is this: are we reading with the prejudice of love, with Christ as our model, or are we reading with the prejudices of judgment and power, self-interest and greed? Are we seeking to enslave or liberate, burden or set free?"

She closes out the book speaking of how she and her husband are raising their son (and almost born daughter, also!). They hope to instill in their children the same love of story that they know, along with the conviction that the stories speak to us all uniquely as we experience them. And to introduce their children to the God who never gives up on any of us.

The last line brought a lump to my throat: "We may wish for answers, but God rarely give us answers. Instead, God gathers us up into soft, familiar arms and says, "Let me tell you a story." "
