

An Open Letter to Rachel Held Evans: 3 Ways to Keep Christianity Weird and Relevant

Dear Rachel,

I humbly present this letter to you, one millennial to another. This is not a rebuke or reprimand; this is a recognition of how your latest book, *Searching for Sunday*, and recent topics of focus, are encouraging a much-needed conversation in the church today. I am deeply concerned about the state of Christianity, just as you are. I do not believe the solution is being cooler, hipper or trendier; rather, it is a return to the supernatural foundations our faith was built on! For many, this concept is truly “weird.”

Why's It's Important for Christianity to Be WEIRD

You talk about how the church should maintain its weirdness. I wholeheartedly agree with you! In fact, I wrote an article about this, specifically addressing why we need supernatural manifestations in the church today (since many would classify such things as “weird”).

I want to do two things through this letter: encourage you to keep asking some of these critical questions, and also, provide you with some gentle guideposts along your personal quest in ‘*Searching for Sunday*.’ The way I see it, we are all taking this journey together and my prayer is that our generation would truly witness an authentic demonstration of Christianity.

The Christian faith must remain weird in order to be truly relevant. By definition, it is an otherworldly way of thinking

and living. To reduce the Christian life to methods, messages, music or ministries is to cheapen the glorious resurrected lifestyle Jesus made available to “whosoever will ...” follow Him.

Why Is a Generation Sleeping in On Sunday?

You wrote that “if early mornings indeed belong to the church, then my generation is sleeping in.” You present a staggering statistic, that in the United States, “59 percent of young people aged 18 to 29 with a Christian background have dropped out of church.”

Are millennials searching for something that, by and large, is not being offered? Yes! You then hit the nail on the head when you wrote, “millennials aren’t looking for a hipper Christianity. We’re looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity.” This begs the question, what is this truer, more authentic Christianity? What does it look like? Jesus. The book of Acts. The early church.

So what will bring an Internet generation back through the church doors? It’s not the information, as important as it may be. It’s not the music, either. They can get information and music by watching online church services. And many are “attending” online services at some of the leading congregations across the globe.

What will awaken a generation that’s sleeping in on Sunday? Weirdness. The supernatural. A kingdom that moves and advances in power. When Jesus enters in and turns over the tables of “church as usual,” all bets are off, and “decently and in order” looks more like the book of Acts than a tightly choreographed Broadway show. We would do well to remember the context Paul presented the concept of “decently and in order” in 1 Corinthians 14:40. It was not an environment that simply tolerated spiritual gifts, or was seeking to limit expressions of the supernatural. Far from it. Paul was providing

consultation into a context where it was assumed and encouraged that the church would flow in the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I am aware that such an environment needs to be regulated—a “free-for-all” is problematic, for sure. However, I am almost wondering what is more dangerous: a free-for-all where the Holy Spirit is welcomed and the responses of the people need to be lovingly pastored, or an environment where the Spirit of God is completely restricted. I am convinced a generation will continue to “sleep in on Sunday” to the degree that the raw power and presence of the Holy Spirit are denied entry and space in the context of the local church.

Some of contemporary church culture has become cookie cutter and sadly predictable. What happened to the days where the divine presence so permeated the atmosphere of the community of God that awe gripped the on-lookers ... and yet, multitudes were added to the church? Where is the world that Luke describes to us in Acts 5: “Many signs and wonders were performed among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Porch. No one else dared join them, but the people respected them. 14 Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, crowds of both men and women” (12-14).

We claim to want to a move of God. But really ... do we really want one? Christine Caine recently stated that “the only thing stopping a move of God on the earth is that the people of God are not willing to be interrupted or inconvenienced.” In other words, we seem content doing the same old thing, the same old way—and yet, we live deeply dissatisfied, hoping that there is more.

Is the prospect of such a culture weird in our modern context? Sure. But I agree with you, Rachel—we need to keep the church weird, because weird is normal according to what we see in Scripture.

In response to your thoughts on this topic, I want to propose **3 Ways We Can Keep Christianity Weird and Relevant!**

1. We must celebrate (not tolerate or reject) the supernatural: Signs, wonders, miracles, healings and unusual demonstrations of God's presence in our midst.

I heard about an interesting conversation that transpired between Thomas Aquinas and the pope of his day, Innocent II. The pope was showing Aquinas the glories of the Vatican and boasting, "No longer does the church say 'silver and gold have I none.'" Immediately, Aquinas replied: "Neither can she say, 'Rise up and walk.'"

What is the solution to a church standing at a crossroads? A community that once again: 1) embraces the expectation that anything is possible, 2) delights in the Holy Spirit being able to move freely, 3) celebrates miracles, signs and wonders (not simply tolerating them at best and rejecting them at worst), 4) upholds the presence of God as superior to Christian rhetoric, and 5) recognizes what we carry and what we truly offer to society—God dwelling within us. It's all supernatural! We don't carry political agendas; we carry the presence of God. If Christians need to hear any kind of sermon or message, one of the most urgent is a back-to-basics "reality check." The reality is that God Himself bled and died so that we could be indwelt by His presence, release His power, and see as much of earth impacted heaven as possible before we step off this planet and into eternity.

Everything in the New Testament church was weird by today's standards! You consider some of the essential doctrines of the faith, along with the sacraments, as examples of the "weirdness." I completely agree. Furthermore, I find the basic ministry activities of Jesus Himself rather odd—especially considering that He has invited us to participate with Him in these same supernatural demonstrations of the kingdom (see Matt. 10:8, Mk. 16:15-18, Jn. 14:12).

- Exorcism and Deliverance from Demons (Mk. 16:16-18, Lk. 10:17,19)
- Healing the Sick and Raising the Dead (Matt. 10:18)
- Miracles, Signs and Wonders (Acts 2:19-20)
- Prophecy, Speaking in Tongues and the Operation of Gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12, 14)

Overseas, there is no shortage of the supernatural (nor do they make apologies for it). Everything from radical freedom from demonic torment (as demonstrated in Darren Wilson's documentary *Finger of God*), to people receiving visions and dreams of Jesus, to people being raised from the dead in Mozambique under IRIS Ministries. The gospel is being preached with such anointing, that evangelists like Reinhard Bonnke are seeing people healed and touched by God, simply being gathered in an atmosphere where the good news thunders with power and compassion.

The idea of seeing God's power in action is not a "turn off" to me; it tells me that "there is more" than I am presently tasting and seeing of God. Likewise, I don't believe it's a turn off to people who are "searching for Sunday." In fact, for the first 300 or so years of Christianity, "Sunday" was—by and large—supernatural. The church's standard mode of operation was prophecy, healing, gifts of the Spirit, exorcism and the like. We must reclaim the weirdness if we are to be truly effective in the days in which we live.

2. We must exchange trendy gimmicks for the presence of God.

You rightly note that the solution is not hip gimmicks, where we substitute the Holy Spirit for smoke machines and exchange the divine presence for a coffee bar in the foyer. The key to reaching a generation for Jesus is not repackaging Christianity to suit current trends; it's restoring Christianity to its original design. It's not flashier lights,

cooler bands, and increased attempts to repackage “the world” in a Christian presentation.

Christianity must maintain its “otherness,” otherwise it betrays faithfulness to its founder and King, Jesus, who boldly declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Wasn’t it this same King who told us to pray in this manner: “Your kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven” (see Matt. 6:10). This “otherworldly kingdom” should be having an active influence in our world, rather than our world reshaping an otherworldly kingdom in order to make its message and mandate more palatable. If we want to see the Kingdom—the reign and rule of God—in our lives and in our midst, we must prize the presence of God above all else. Above form. Above protocol. Above personality. Above tightly scheduled and scripted services. While none of these things are inherently bad, if we decide to uphold anything above the will and agenda of Holy Spirit, we shut down the possibility of “kingdom come” ... because Holy Spirit is the very agent on earth who ushers in the kingdom.

Jesus recognized this, noting that when deliverance and healing took place, the kingdom had come upon them (Matt. 12:28). Paul noted this, explaining that the kingdom does not come through rhetoric or words, but in power (1 Cor. 4:20), and that the kingdom of God is in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). A generation aches for the movement of Holy Spirit, for only He can usher in the kingdom, changing our hearts, minds, emotions and even our bodies!

I encourage you to look up some of the stories that came out of the great revival movements of the 1990s—the Toronto Blessing and the Brownsville Revival. People traveled far distances from around the globe to attend these meetings, not because a building or celebrity preacher was the great solution, but because they heard “God was moving.” The kingdom was coming with power! And you simply cannot argue with the figures! Millions came to these meetings. From across the

earth, and throughout the denominational spectrum, men and women, young and old, pressed past criticism, controversy and stigma to visit places God where was visiting.

The great thrill of these revival meetings, be it of the 1990s or going back to Azusa Street (1906), the Welsh Revival (1904), or the Great Awakenings, was that there was a permeating Presence of God that people were deeply impacted by. Of course, every revival is marked by controversy—most often because desperate people challenge the spiritual status quo and press in to experience a God who will not be contained by religious boxes. And when He shows up, the unusual happens. One might even call it weird!

3. We must contend and cry out for what we are not yet seeing ...

A generation is searching—I'd dare say, contending—for something more, and instead of trying to be more like the culture, we (the church) need to return to and lovingly embrace our heritage.

My contribution to your conversation is this ... our heritage is undeniably and boldly supernatural. In using "supernatural," I am not calling a generation to embrace a Pentecostal or charismatic denomination. I am not endorsing charlatan televangelists or slimy snake oil salesmen. I am not promoting an environment where every question has a neat and tidy answer, where every sickness has its root in sin and bad choices, and miracles that don't happen are because of our "lack of faith." These are heinous and deplorable examples of supernatural community. To operate in the power of God, we don't need all of the answers; we just need hearts that posture themselves before the Lord that humbly say, "I want to walk in everything you made available. I know there is more than what I am currently seeing and experiencing ... and I want to taste and see everything that Jesus died for me to walk

in.”

Are we presently seeing a church culture where the sick are healed, the demonized are delivered, the dead are raised, the gifts of the Spirit are in full operation and the kingdom is advancing with great demonstrations of power? In some places, yes. In America? Yes and no. We are seeing traces. We are witnessing glimmers of hope. But this is no excuse to hunker down and write off the “weird” stuff as reserved for “the first-century church and nothing beyond that”; it is a call for us to contend for a greater expression of what Jesus said would be done on earth through a people indwelt by His divine presence: “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me will do the works that I do also. And he will do greater works than these, because I am going to My Father” (John 14:12).

Church leaders—lead with personal hunger. I believe the spirit of contending for the supernatural is often quenched in the church because leaders feel inadequate. They think they need to have it all together, and that power needs to be flowing in their lives, before they lead their congregations to cry out for this expression of the supernatural. No. Every revival of the supernatural was led by a man, woman or company of people who were hungry and unashamed to lead others with their personal hunger.

John Kilpatrick of the Brownsville Revival would visit the church in the dark hours of the night, lay across the pews, and cry out, “God, there has got to be more!” John and Carol Arnott of the Toronto Blessing traveled the world, seeking places where the Holy Spirit was moving and people through which the anointing was demonstrated. Bill Johnson of Bethel Church, to this day, remains a leader who humbly cries out to God for more, knowing that there is even more than what he and the church community at Redding are presently walking in.

We contend for what we are not yet seeing. What are we not seeing? What the church enjoyed for the first 300 years as

normative practice: the sick being healed, the demonized being delivered, the dead being raised and the kingdom of God pushing back spiritual darkness.

You Started a Most Urgent Conversation!

So Rachel, thank you for spearheading this timely conversation! I admire your quest for an authentic demonstration of Christianity—particularly, that it should be kept weird. After all, many key doctrines of the faith are, quite frankly, super weird (when measured next to what we consider to be cultural norms). They aren't cool or hip. The Cross. The blood of Jesus. Atonement. Taking up Jesus' Cross, dying to self and following the Messiah. A Holy Spirit who possesses us. Talk of drinking Jesus' blood and eating His body. I'm just saying ...

You make the case that our generation is not looking for more information about God; they want to know God and experience Him. You note that the sacraments are one way of doing this. I would agree, in part. These are places where we don't just hear about God; we tangibly interact with Him (and with one another in community). And yet, it's that ... and more.

I believe it is the Father's great desire for the Word to still dwell among us today. The words in Scripture are supposed to come off the page and become visible, incarnational realities in the world today. One way to interact with Scripture is through the liturgy; another way is through the demonstration of the Spirit's supernatural power through signs and wonders! The purpose of signs and wonders is simple. Signs point and wonders incite awe. Signs point to Jesus and the ever-increasing, in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, and wonders remind us that, well, God can do whatever He wants!

Do I agree with you on all points of theology and social issues? No. But I consider you a sister in Christ and want to

unite around what we DO agree upon—the urgent need of the hour is for an experiential, incarnational faith where God is not merely a concept to be discussed or a theology to be debated; He is a Person to be known and experienced.

A generation is crying out for something more than music, methods and even messages; they need a transformative encounter with the presence of God. Truth be told, I need such an encounter; I'm desperate for MORE, as I am sure you are, Rachel.

So let's pray for one another along this journey in searching for Sunday.

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