

Rachel Held Evans, a Leading Figure on the Christian Left, Dies at 37

Rachel Held Evans, a leading figure in progressive Christianity, died Saturday. She was 37.

"This entire experience is surreal. I keep hoping it's a nightmare from which I'll awake. I feel like I'm telling someone else's story. I cannot express how much the support means to me and our kids. To everyone who has prayed, called, texted, driven, flown, given of themselves physically and financially to help ease this burden: Thank you. We are privileged. Rachel's presence in this world was a gift to us all and her work will long survive her," says her husband, Daniel.

Evans was hospitalized last month for an infection. Doctors kept her in a medically induced coma to prevent seizures for weeks.

"Rachel was slowly weaned from the coma medication. Her seizures returned but at a reduced rate. There were periods of time where she didn't have seizures at all. Rachel did not return to an alert state during this process. The hospital team worked to diagnose the primary cause of her seizures and proactively treated for some known possible causes for which diagnostics were not immediately available due to physical limitations," Daniel says on the health update blog.

"Early Thursday morning, May 2, Rachel experienced sudden and extreme changes in her vitals. The team at the hospital discovered extensive swelling of her brain and took emergency action to stabilize her. The team worked until Friday afternoon to the best of their ability to save her. This swelling event caused severe damage and ultimately was not

survivable,” Daniel says.

According to Religion News Service:

Evans is best known for her popular blog and best-selling books, including New York Times best-seller A Year of Biblical Womanhood, Searching for Sunday and, most recently, Inspired. She also served on President Barack Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

In her books and blog posts, she wrote openly about her faith journey, which led her from Bryan College – a conservative evangelical school known for promoting belief in a literal, six-day creation – to the mainline Episcopal Church. Along the way, she chronicled her faith, doubt, honest questions and evolving beliefs with a sense of humor.

That didn’t come without controversy, including pushback from more conservative Christians over “A Year of Biblical Womanhood,” which celebrated an egalitarian view of women’s roles in both marriage and the church.

Evans inspired Christian leaders across denominations. Here’s how many are reacting in the wake of her death:

Sobbing over @rachelheldevans’ death. My heart is broken for Dan and the children and for all of you who loved her so so much. I will spend the time I’ve been daily praying for her praying for all of you.

– Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM) May 4, 2019

Tremendous grief: My dear friend @rachelheldevans has died. My heart is shattered. She helped so many of us better recognize how expansive God’s love is. I am the writer I am, the speaker I am, the person I am, because of her generosity.

– Jeff Chu (@jeffchu) May 4, 2019

It is with a broken heart that I share that @rachelheldevans passed away early this morning. She was surrounded by her family and her close friends – we sang, prayed, held her always. Woman of valour, eshet chayil. Official update:

– Sarah Bessey (@sarahbessey) May 4, 2019

I am shocked and broken-hearted to hear of the death of @rachelheldevans . Please stop right now and pray for this young family.

– Russell Moore (@drmoore) May 4, 2019

I can't believe it. Rachel, thank you for your heart. Thank you for your courage, your wit, and your grace. Thank you for being my friend. I miss you terribly.

– Science Mike (@mikemchargue) May 4, 2019

Devastated by the passing of my friend @rachelheldevans'. I'm stunned, angry, confused. These are the kind of moments that try my faith. She was one of the bravest people I have known. A joy to be around. Unbelievably gracious and generous. God, be near to Dan and her family.

– Jonathan Merritt (@JonathanMerritt) May 4, 2019

So sad to hear this. Please join me in praying for the family and friends of @rachelheldevans and consider supporting her family through the link below.

– Nick Hall (@NickHall) May 4, 2019

Just hearing the heartbreaking news regarding the passing of @rachelheldevans. I was never privileged to meet her, her loving husband & precious children.

Prayers & support for them is needed in this time of ://

– D.A. Horton (@da_horton) May 4, 2019

We found each other at a time when she was just starting to weather attacks from fellow Christians. I offered meager advice from my own similar battles, but she soon blazed past me. I learned so much from her about gracious disagreement & fiery truth-telling.

– Amy Sullivan (@sullivanamy) May 4, 2019

God have mercy. Pray for Rachel's husband and children. We are all so fragile.

– . (@TheAlanNoble) May 4, 2019

Broken-hearted for the family and friends of @rachelheldevans. I never met her in person, but she was supportive of me and many other women of color in our various endeavors, which I deeply appreciated. Prayers for all who knew and loved her, especially her husband and children.

– Helen Lee (@HelenLeeBooks) May 4, 2019

Please pray for Evans' husband and children.