

Barna Group's Jill Kinnaman Dies After Battle With Brain Cancer

Jill Kinnaman died Oct. 28, 2020, after 41 months of bravely fighting brain cancer. She was 46.

A memorial service was held Nov. 7, where Jill's life as a wife, mother, professional and Christian were celebrated.

"Jill was an absolutely amazing human being," said Doug Colby, who officiated the memorial. "She inspired and encouraged thousands and thousands of people."

About six weeks before her death, Jill and her family chose to stop treatments as the tumors continued to advance. They began comfort care and hospice.

Regardless of the years of battling and weeks of preparing, the Kinnaman family and friends weren't ready for goodbye.

A Life Well Lived

Jill and David Kinnaman met in high school, and they married five years later, on December 29, 1995. Amid traditional wedding vows, the couple included: "I will encourage you to develop the gifts God has given you so that you may better serve the world and Christ's Church."

"For me, of course, Jill has been an absolute gift. I don't think a person could have supported another human being more than Jill did in fulfilling that vow. In this, as in so much of life, Jill was so faithful," David said during his wife's memorial service.

"Jill has always been about nurturing the people and places, including the plants and pets, closest to her," he added.

“Homemaking was her gift, including meals, vacations, generosity, hospitality to others, taking pictures and, especially, ‘nurturing the sweet souls that God entrusted to us—Emily, Annika and Zack.’

A blog was kept throughout the journey. It begins with a 2017 surgery and includes the words David shared about Jill during her memorial service.

A Cherished Legacy

While few would question that her children, Emily, 21, Annika, 19 and Zach, 16, are Jill’s greatest legacy, she worked for years at Barna Group and had known Jesus Christ since she was in middle school.

Jill led Barna Group in Ventura, California with David. Throughout the battle with cancer, the couple mutually agreed that David would continue serving the church and Christian leaders. That service includes leading Barna as president.

“In many ways, my own suffering and loneliness have fostered more patience, empathy and trust in God as I’ve served leaders who are attempting to move forward faithfully amidst the cascading crises of 2020,” he said in a letter he distributed to the company’s friends and partners today.

With the memorial behind him, David is taking the next several months off “to grieve, to serve and love my children, to read and rest, to paint and work with wood and to allow God to fill me up in the many places I feel hollow and empty.”

He plans to return to Barna sometime in January. In the interim, Todd White, who has been Barna’s CFO for five years, will serve as interim president.

“To be honest, it feels weird stepping back, slowing down and resting when there’s so much at stake for the church,” David said. “Yet I’ve come to realize with startling clarity that

it's exactly for this reason that rest and renewal are critical to me as a leader and for the long-term health of the company."

"The depth of the grief we're experiencing is hard to put into words, though we are finding comfort in time together as a family and with friends. We are holding tightly to the ultimate hope that Jill is with Jesus.

"I am heartbroken at the loss of Jill. Beyond her investments in family, home, church and neighborhood, our marriage served as the foundation for 11 years of my leading Barna and 25 total years of my working here. Her death leaves a massive hole in that partnership.

"Despite all we've lost, I have deep confidence in the Lord. That today he's preparing the way for the future church. That he desires to take each of us even deeper toward himself. That Isaiah 61:3 can, indeed, be my portion and for all of us who have suffered much this year:

*To all who mourn in Israel,
he will give a crown of beauty for ashes,
a joyous blessing instead of mourning,
festive praise instead of despair.*

*In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks
that the Lord has planted for his own glory.*

The Lord has been comforting me with this Scripture since Jill's passing, and it's my prayer for you as well." {eo}