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Bestselling Author Rachel Held Evans Explores the Seven Sacraments in a Millennial's Quest for Church

New York Times bestselling author Rachel Held Evans, 33, prefers to sleep in on Sunday morning. Like many of her millennial peers, she is easily disillusioned with a church culture rife with hypocrisy, politics, and attempts to engage young people with flashy worship bands and hip coffeehouses. Yet in spite of it all, something keeps drawing her back to a community of faith. Her new book, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (Nelson Books, \$16.99 trade paper, April 14, 2015), is the story of her quest to learn what it means to be part of the Church, through the ancient tradition of the sacraments.

"Millennials aren't looking for a *hipper* Christianity," Evans writes. "We're looking for a *truer* Christianity."

The sacraments drew Evans back to the church after she'd given up on it. "When my faith had become little more than an abstraction, the sacraments invited me to touch, smell, taste, hear, and see God in the stuff of everyday life again. Christianity isn't meant to simply be believed; it's meant to be lived, shared, eaten, spoken, and enacted in the presence of other people."

The book is arranged in seven sections corresponding to the imagery of baptism, confession, holy orders, communion, confirmation, anointing of the sick, and marriage. These are the sacraments named by Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, but Evans says her aim is literary rather than theological. The sacraments have a universal quality; even in less liturgical churches, the truth of the sacraments is generally shared:

- **Baptism:** "In the ritual of baptism, our ancestors acted out the bizarre truth of the Christian identity: we are people who stand totally exposed before evil and death and declare them powerless against love."
- **Confession:** "Christianity names and addresses sin. It acknowledges the reality that the evil we observe in the world is also present within ourselves. It tells the truth about the human condition—that we're not okay."
- **Holy Orders:** "Ultimately, all are commissioned. All are called. All belong to the holy order of God's beloved."
- **Communion:** "Certainly nonbelievers can care for one another and make one another food. But it is Christians who recognize this act as sacrament. It is Christians who believe bread can satisfy not only physical hunger but spiritual and emotional hunger, and whose collective memory brings Jesus back to life in every breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine."

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- **Confirmation:** “The Holy Spirit is like a seal, impressing the supple heart with the power and prestige of God, and no one can take that identity away.”
- **Anointing the Sick:** “Anointing is an acknowledgement. It’s a way to speak to someone who is suffering, and without words or platitudes or empty solutions say this is a big deal, this matters. In a world of quick fixes, true healing may be one of the most powerful and countercultural gifts the church has to offer the world.”
- **Marriage:** “Marriage is made holy when it reflects the life-giving, self-sacrificing love of Jesus. All relationships and vocations—marriage, friendship, singleness, parenthood, partnership, ministry, monastic vows, adoption, neighborhoods, families, churches—give Christians the opportunity to reflect the grace and peace of the kingdom of God, however imperfectly.”

A memoir about the messiness of community and the power of grace, *Searching for Sunday* is about overcoming cynicism to find hope and, somehow, the Church. Evans says that it’s less about searching for a place to attend services on Sunday, “and more about searching for Sunday resurrection, and all the strange ways God brings dead things back to life again.”

Rachel Held Evans is an award-winning writer and the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* and *Faith Unraveled*. Her popular blog can be found at <http://rachelheldevans.com>. She lives in Dayton, TN.

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