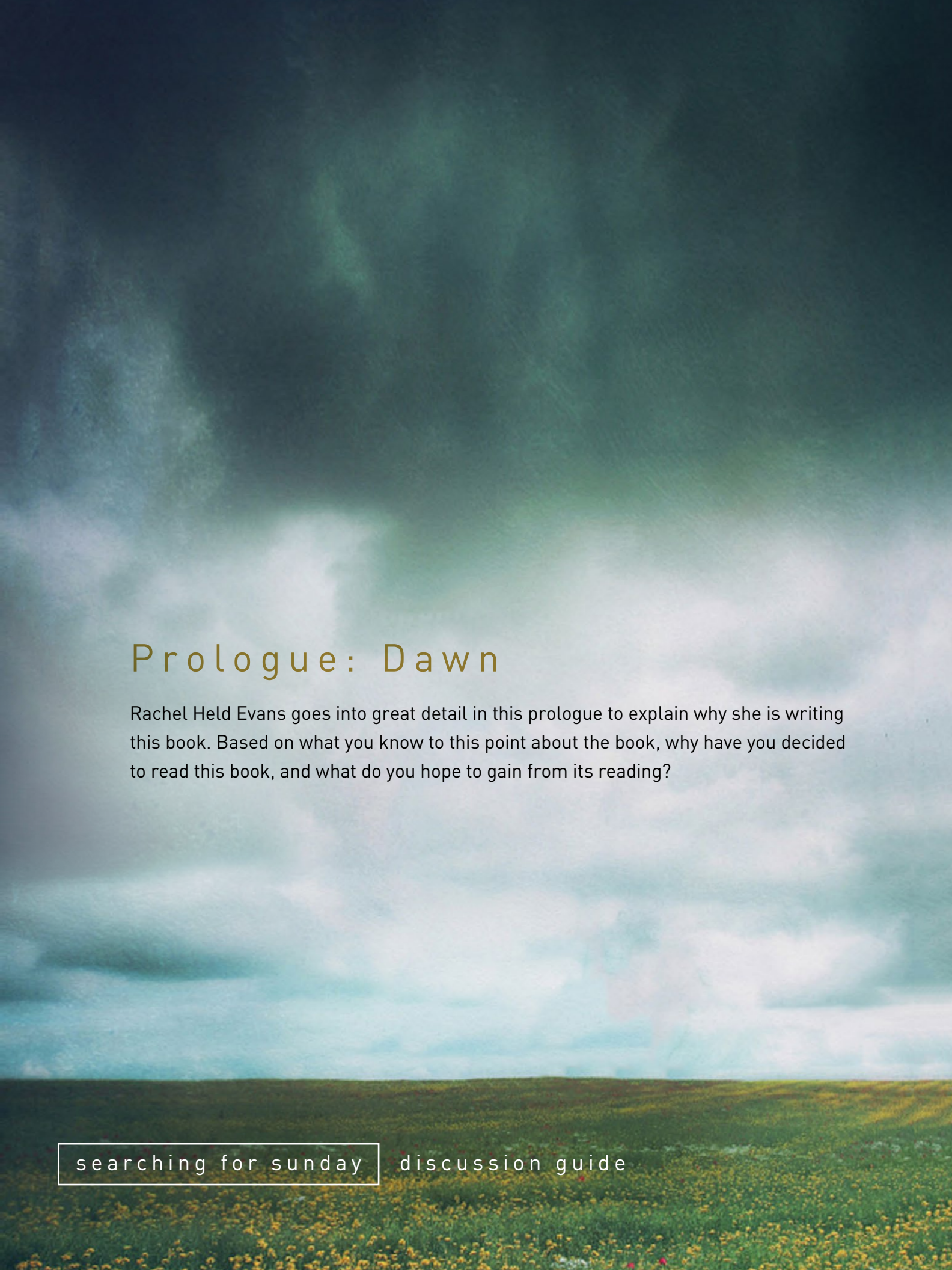


A photograph of a small, stone church with a tall, pointed steeple, situated in a vast field of yellow wildflowers. The sky is filled with heavy, dramatic clouds, with a bright light breaking through near the church, creating a lens flare effect. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

searching for sunday

discussion guide



Prologue: Dawn

Rachel Held Evans goes into great detail in this prologue to explain why she is writing this book. Based on what you know to this point about the book, why have you decided to read this book, and what do you hope to gain from its reading?

searching for sunday discussion guide

I Baptism

1. Water

Evans travels through the imagery of the Bible to show us how water is used repeatedly to symbolize life and the presence and hand of God. What are some of the ways in which water is critical to our lives today? Are there ways that we can relate those images of water symbolically to the work of God?

2. Believer's Baptism

By Evans' definition, we are "baptized" by all of the people who introduce us to Jesus. Looking back on your life, who would you list as the people who "baptized" you in this sense? In other words, who was responsible for introducing you to Jesus?

3. Naked on Easter

Evans quotes Romans 6:4: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." What are we celebrating the "death" of in baptism? What about us actually dies so that we may live that new life?

4. Chubby Bunny

This chapter is not a theological or doctrinal discussion, but simply an anecdotal background for a life view. Can you look back in your life to see times and church leaders in your life that shaped your early views toward church and religion?

5. Enough

Andrew says that he realizes that "baptism is done at the beginning of your faith journey, not the middle or the end." What do we need before we're ready to be baptized, and is that enough? Why or why not?

6. Rivers

Evans says that grace has gotten "out of hand"...out of control. And yet, who is in control? What are the best ways that we can "prepare the way" and "make clear the path" for the Lord to extend the grace that He is spreading forth to the world around us?



Confession

7. Ash

In the phrase “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” What do you think ashes represent (see Jeremiah 6:26)? What do you think dust represents (see Genesis 3:19)? Are ash and dust the same? How do we change from ash and dust with the death and resurrection of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 15:47-49?

8. Vote Yes On One

Do you identify with some of the issues that Evans has raised in this chapter? Have you ever had your own “crisis of faith”? Have you been through a time when your own belief system seemed to be in contradiction or contrast to what you’d been taught or what those around you held to be true or acceptable? If so, how did you deal with that difference?

9. Dirty Laundry

Would you consider going to a church where people are comfortable being uncomfortable, where dirty laundry is no longer hidden and people come just as they are? What about that would be difficult and what would be better than where you’ve been before?

10. What We Have Done

What thoughts or feelings does this chapter inspire? Do you think Christians are still making these mistakes now, or are we at risk of making them in the future? Why or why not?

11. Meet the Press

Evans writes, “Cynicism may seem a mild transgression, but it is a patient predator that suffocates hope, slowly, over many years . . .” What does this mean? Have you ever been cynical about a situation or lost your hope? Evans says that “many of our sins begin with fear” . . . did fear relate to your situation in any way? If so, fear of what?

12. Dust

Take a minute and imagine that you were with the religious leaders challenging Jesus with the question about stoning the woman caught in adultery. Picture Jesus responding with his words “Let any of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” How would you feel? Now imagine the same scene from the woman’s point of view. How do you feel when Jesus asks, “Where are they?”



Holy Orders

13. Hands

Have you ever had a friend come up behind you and put their hands over your eyes, and then recognized them just by touching their hands? What can we tell about a person simply by looking at their hands?

14. The Mission

After one year, the Mission closed its doors. Based on the account of events given by Evans, do you think it was not in God's will for this group of people to try to start this church in Dayton? Do you think they should have or could have done something differently over the course of the year from April 2010 to April 2011, and if so, what?

15. Epic Fail

Evans points out, "No one ever said the fruit of the Spirit is relevance or impact or even revival." What are the measures by which most churches judge "success"? What might be a better measure or method to determine if a church is succeeding in its mission?

16. Feet

Why is it a good idea to surrender "all cynicism and pride" before we "take up the basin and towel"?

IV Communion

17. Bread

Jesus was always teaching in parables, using similes, for example: “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” and then following with some object or practice that the people knew from their everyday lives. This culminated with the symbolism of the eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, where he said his body was the bread and his blood was the wine. What are some of the reasons that you think Jesus chose to teach the people and imprint his ministry through these methods?

18. The Meal

Evans says, “Certainly nonbelievers can care for one another and make one another food. But it is Christians who recognize this act as sacrament, as holy.” What are some other ordinary acts or aspects of life that might be made holy or sacred when they are done in response to the call of God on our lives?

19. Methodist Dance Party

The author delivers bread for communion at a teen camp and says, “This is Christ’s body, broken for you,” more than three hundred times. Paraphrase what effect she says this has on her.

20. Open Hands

Evans says that it’s scary to receive, “to say yes.” Why do you think it might be so scary?

21. Open Table

Rachel Held Evans has the courage to admit that she’s not entirely comfortable with the guest list of all the people who are invited to God’s banquet. Does it sometimes stretch your comfort level to consider all of the people who are included, despite their differing viewpoints and ideologies? What part does grace play in preparing us to welcome all those people whom we might otherwise disdain?

22. Wine

“This God knows his way around the world, so there’s no need to fear, no need to withhold, no need to stake a claim.” What are some of the things we tend to withhold, some areas in which we tend to stake a claim? (Our first response might be monetary, but try to think past the obvious and move to the deeper levels where we hold on in fear.) What difference does it make when we remember that, in God, “there’s always and ever enough”?

V Confirmation

23. Breath

List the specific images that Evans compares the Spirit to in this poetic chapter. Do any of these images seem contradictory? Does it surprise you that the Spirit can be compared to all of these images? Which of these paragraphs did you most directly connect with or receive the most truth from when you read it?

24. Wayside Shrines

Rachel talks about her spiritual journey in terms of the “wayside shrines” that have contributed to her growth along with the baggage and heartbreak she has experienced. What would some of the places or experiences in your life be that have contributed to your journey or helped to write your spiritual story?

25. Trembling Giant

Are you a member of a particular denomination? Do you have friends in other denominations, and have you ever been confronted by the conflicts created by the inherent differences between them? If so, what has helped you move past those differences?

26. Easter Doubt

As you read this chapter, did you connect with anything Evans said? Have you ever felt a deep-seated, nagging sense of doubt? How would you verbalize the questions or doubts you’ve had? Are they all in the past or do you still struggle with these questions?

27. With God's Help

The author has included in this chapter the words of the Apostles' Creed. Many churches around the world incorporate some form of this creed in their worship service or some part of their tradition.

The entire Apostles' Creed is given here; practice reading it aloud and think about the meaning of the various phrases.

Does it reflect your belief system or doctrine? Does it strengthen or empower your faith as you recite its words?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic [or entire] Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

28. Wind

Look back at the list of the effects of the Spirit according to Paul. Can you think of some places in your life where you have seen the Spirit at work, some instances where you saw these effects happening in your life or the lives around you?

VI Anointing of the Sick

29. Oil

Evans says, “We anoint not to cure, but to heal.” How would you describe the difference between “curing” and “healing”?

30. Healing

Does it take courage to be involved in the work of healing? If so, why? What else does it take to be part of “one of the most powerful and countercultural gifts the church has to offer the world”?

31. Evangelical Acedia

“Acedia” is defined as laziness or indifference in religious matters. Have you ever been through an experience or a series of experiences that have left you burnt out or bitter or, at the least, indifferent toward church? How did you respond? Have you recovered or are you still in that place in your feelings about church attendance and commitment?

32. This Whole Business with the Hearse

Barbara Brown Taylor writes about new life starting “in the dark.” If something new is happening in the church, what do you think that “new life” might look like? What do you think might be different about the Christian church twenty or thirty years from now?

33. Perfume

The author suggests that perhaps we should make the use of spikenard, the oil used by Mary to anoint Jesus, a part of our Eucharist. She says that perhaps, “with the help of the Spirit, the scent of it might trigger our collective memory.” What, specifically, would we be remembering?

VII Marriage

34. Crowns

Various cultures celebrate marriage in different ways. The author is describing a “mystery” happening at each of the various ceremonies described. What mystery do they all have in common?

35. Mystery

Why does the writer say that the “God of resurrection makes all things new” in the “everyday moments” like loading a dishwasher or working through a disagreement? How is this “paying attention to the divine”?

36. Body

We often speak of ships as metaphorically feminine. If you imagine the twenty-first century Christian Church as a ship, how might you describe her? (If it helps to describe the Church as a fleet of ships, go with that approach.)

37. Kingdom

Rachel says, “I can’t be a Christian on my own.” Why has she come to that conclusion?



Epilogue: Dark

Rachel Held Evans believes that “God is busy making all things new.”
Do you agree? Why or why not?