

This study guide is intended for the use in personal or small group study of VELVET ELVIS: REPAINTING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH by Rob Bell. In no way has it been authorized by Mr. Bell or Zondervan books. Feel free to use it, but do not charge any funds for its use.

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1. In Genesis, God first created something, and then those things He created (land, sky, birds, trees, etc.) are shown as producing new things of their own. All of these things He created, God called "good" – not perfect or complete – "good". What does He expect of us, in terms of responsibility and stewardship? How did the choices of Adam and Eve derail this plan? Is it God's intention that His creation will always remain fractured?

*When God created humans, He gave them not only the ability to create and produce, but also the responsibility of care. As caretakers, our responsibility is a double-edged sword. On one hand, we are to use it in a responsible manner that preserves it. On the other hand, if we don't do anything with it, we are telling God He made something that is of no use to us.*

*When Adam and Eve sinned, they threw a wrench into the entire plan. They were expelled from the Garden, and all of creation was left broken. God later began working in Abraham, completing his plan with Jesus to reconcile all things to Him.*

Related Scripture(s): [Colossians 1:15-20](#); [Genesis 3](#); [Matthew 19:28-30](#); [Romans 8:19-23](#);

2. Bell notes several ways in which the church became counter-cultural in the years after Jesus' death and resurrection. The declaration that "Jesus is Lord" was in direct conflict with the Roman slogan "Caesar is Lord", and Christians called their communities *ekklesias* (churches) which was the same word Romans used to describe cities which accepted Caesar as Lord. Without violence, they were able to transform their culture. What similar challenges do we face today? How are these similar or different than the ones faced by early Christians?

*In our postmodern society, people are willing to allow others to have their own beliefs for themselves. However, suggesting that there is an absolute truth in Jesus is counter-cultural. While we don't fear death for our beliefs, ostracism is a possibility. Another challenge we face is being no different from the culture we are in and making no impact on the people in it.*

*Answers to this question may go several directions, but the challenges of effecting culture without being corrupted by it have been constant throughout the life of the church.*

For additional Reading:

<http://www.followtherabbi.com/Brix?pageID=5578>

Related Scripture(s): [Acts 4:12](#); [Acts 4:32-35](#); [Galatians 3:26-29](#);

3. Who is Lord in our world? Who orders our society? Who provides for us, and for the poor? Who brings peace to the world? Is it Jesus, or have we let someone or something take his place? Where is the church in all of this? Where are we in all of this?

*Jesus is the Lord of all. In modern American society, it is primarily the government which orders society, provides for the people, and gives money for the poor. It has taken on the role of peacemaker, and – to some – it has become the god of this world. Since the government took over the welfare system, the church's role in caring for the poor has significantly diminished.*

*God provides for us, everything we need. We are to pass that blessing on. Where is your church, and what is its role in the community around it?*

For additional Reading:

[\*The Externally-Focused Church\*](#) by Rick Rusaw & Eric Swanson

Related Scripture(s): [Romans 10:8-13](#); [James 1:27](#);

4. What is the purpose of the church? Why did God bless Abraham? Why does God bless the church? In turn, who is it the church is supposed to bless? Who does Jesus say is the greatest in the kingdom? What traps do some churches fall into when they miss this? What does Bell mean when he says "Why blame the dark for being dark? It is far more helpful to ask why the light isn't as bright as it could be." (166)

*The purpose of the church is to be a servant to others – not just those who belong to the church – to be Christ to the world around us. God blessed Abraham and his decedents so that they could pass on His blessings to the whole world. In turn, as God has now blessed the church, it is the role of the church to pass God's blessing on.*

*The greatest in the kingdom are those who serve. The first will be last and the last will be first. Some churches find their mission in seclusion from the world, or focusing its energy internally to serve its own members, or attacking the world for the ills in its culture. Rather than complain about the sickness in a culture without Christ, it is the mission of the church to be Christ to the world around it.*

Related Scripture(s): [Genesis 17:1-17](#); [John 13:1-17](#); [Matthew 19:28-30](#);

5. Bell states "If the gospel isn't good news for everybody, then it isn't good news for anybody." (167) How can the gospel be good news to people who do not accept its message? Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Who are our neighbors and how do we love them? How do we make that love unconditional? Bell states "Oftentimes the Christian community has sent the message that we love people and build relationships in order to convert them to the Christian faith. So there is an agenda. And when there is an agenda, it really isn't love, is it? [...] We have to surrender our agendas." (167) What does he mean by this, and why is this difficult for us? Where does faith come in?

*The gospel is the good news to the whole world. To those who don't accept its message, Christians should be living examples of the gospel, who pass on the blessings given them by God.*

*Our neighbors are all other people, including those who don't currently – and may never – accept the gospel. If we make our love conditional on their acceptance of the gospel, it is no longer the gospel. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Loving "without an agenda" is difficult because of our command to spread the gospel. While we should always be ready to give the message, the purpose of serving others isn't to 'convert' them – the purpose is to show our love for them out of our love for God. When we do this, God will provide the right opportunity when their hearts are ready to be drawn to Him.*

*Forcing the issue may actually show a lack of faith in God to provide for that person. If we surrender our agendas, we are giving God control over the situation, rather than trying to take control, ourselves.*

Related Scripture(s): [Romans 5:6-8](#); [Titus 3:1-2](#); [Matthew 22:35-40](#);

6. Jesus' call isn't one to make our lives easier, and, chances are, following him may lead us into suffering. How is this to our advantage?

*When we serve, we are passing on blessings given to us by God. When we refuse to check-out of the world, we open ourselves to hurt, but we also put ourselves in a position to serve those who are hurting.*

*Jesus message was not an easy one, and many people deserted him when he didn't meet their expectations of what the Messiah should be. When we suffer with each other over the experiences of life, we give them (and they give us) strength to carry on through difficult times. God has provided the church to help people during these times. Ultimately, through God, we provide hope for those around us to carry on.*

Related Scripture(s): [Matthew 7:13-14](#); [John 6](#); [Romans 12:9-21](#); [Matthew 5:3-12](#);

7. Bell comments that “[a]s Christians, it is our duty to master the art of the long meal”. (171) What do you think he means by this? How can this help us in our walk and in our witness?

*Most of the Jewish festivals were accompanied by great feasts, and it was a custom that you only ate with strangers (as hospitality) or with those who were very close to. This is because people tend to spend hours talking and sharing and fellowshiping when they gather to eat. In doing so, they become much closer.*

*Thus, when Jesus chose to eat with sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes, it was a statement that he was choosing to fellowship with them in a way that other religious people did not. When we find opportunities to take long meals with our neighbors, we find ways to get close to them and to serve them as Christ has served us. We are given an opportunity to love without agenda.*

Related Scripture(s): [Matthew 9:10-13](#);

8. In multiple places in the Bible, the God's people and/or the church are compared to a bride. Rich Mullins once commented that “What I think is scary about God is that He didn't come up with any ‘Plan B’; that He left the church here, and the church is the only institution in the world that can bring about a change.” What do you find inspiring and/or scary about the church? What did Jesus say about her?

*This discussion can go a number of directions. The church has wonderful examples of service in the world, and it also has horrible examples of how to bring hell to earth. The church, though, is the bride of Christ, and God has provided no other way of instituting the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. As such, he will always care for her, and she will endure.*

*In the book of Revelation, we see Jesus coming back for his bride – though we do not know the day or the hour. She is present when God comes down to judge the world and all is made anew.*

Related Scripture(s): [John 3:29](#); [Revelation 21:1-5](#); [Revelation 22:17](#);