

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?

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?

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?

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)

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?

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?

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?

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?