

+



VELVET ELVIS

Copyright © 2005 by Rob Bell

This title is also available as a Zondervan ebook. Visit www.zondervan.com/ebooks.

This title is also available in a Zondervan audio edition. Visit www.zondervan.fm.

Requests for information should be addressed to:
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

+

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bell, Rob.

Velvet Elvis: repainting the Christian faith / Rob Bell.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-310-26345-6

1. Christianity and culture. 2. Christian life. I. Title.

BR115.C8B395 2005

261–dc22

2005010352

+

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, Today's New International Version™*, TNIV®. Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers printed in this book are offered as a resource to you. These are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of Zondervan, nor do we vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other – except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

The story of Yvette on pages 90–91 is used with her permission.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com.

Interior design by FLANNEL

Printed in the United States of America

+

08 09 10 11 12 13 14 • 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

CONTENTS	+
WELCOME TO MY VELVET ELVIS	009
MOVEMENT ONE JUMP	017
MOVEMENT TWO YOKE	039
MOVEMENT THREE TRUE	071
MOVEMENT FOUR TASSELS	095
MOVEMENT FIVE DUST	123
MOVEMENT SIX NEW	137
MOVEMENT SEVEN GOOD	155
EPILOGUE	175
ENDNOTES	179

+

JUMP

VELVET ELVIS MOVEMENT ONE

+

+

+

MOVEMENT



Several years ago my parents and in-laws gave our boys a trampoline. A fifteen-footer with netting around the outside so kids don't end up headfirst in the flowers. Since then my boys and I have logged more hours on that trampoline than I could begin to count. When we first got it, my older son, who was five at the time, discovered that if he timed his bounce with mine, he could launch higher than if he was jumping on his own.

I remember the first time he called my wife, Kristen, out into the backyard to watch him jump off of my bounce. Now mind you, up until this point he was maybe getting a foot higher because of his new technique. But this one particular time, when my wife was watching for the first time, something freakish happened in the space-time continuum. When he jumped, there was this perfect convergence of his weight and my weight and his jump and my jump, and I'm sure barometric pressure and air temperature had something to do with it too, because he went really high.

I don't mean a few feet off the mat. I mean he went over my head. Forty pounds of boy, clawing the air like a cat thrown from a second-story window, and a man making eye contact with his wife and thinking, *This is not good.*

She told us she didn't think our new trick was very safe and we should be careful. Which we were.

Until she went inside the house.

It is on this trampoline that God has started to make more sense to me. Because when it comes to faith, everybody has it. People often tell me they could never have faith, that it is just too hard. The idea that some people have faith and others don't is a popular one. But it is not a true one. Everybody has faith. Everybody is following somebody. What often happens is that people with specific beliefs about God end up backed into a corner, defending their faith against the calm, cool rationality of others. As if they have faith and beliefs and others don't.

But that is not true. Let's take an example: Some people believe we were made by a creator who has plans and purposes for his creation, while others believe there is no greater meaning to life, no grand design, and we exist not because of some divine intention but because of random chance. This is not a discussion between people of faith and people who don't have faith. Both perspectives are faith perspectives, built on systems of belief. The person who says we are here by chance and there is no greater meaning has just as many beliefs as the person who says there's a creator. Maybe even more.

Think about some of the words that are used in these kinds of discussions, one of the most common being the phrase "open-minded". Often the person with spiritual convictions is seen as close-minded and others are seen as open-minded. What is fascinating to me is that at the center of the Christian faith is the assumption that this life isn't all there is. That there is more to life than the material. That existence is not limited to what we can see, touch, measure, taste, hear, and observe. One of the central assertions of the Christian worldview is that there is "more".¹ Those who oppose this insist that this is all there is, that only what we can measure and observe and see with our eyes is real. There is nothing else. Which perspective is more "closed-minded"? Which perspective is more "open"?

An atheist is a person of tremendous faith. In our discussions about the things that matter most then, we aren't talking about faith or no faith. Belief or no belief. We are talking about faith in what? Belief in what? The real question isn't whether we have it or not, but what we have put in it.

Everybody follows somebody. All of us make decisions every day about what is important, how to treat people, and what to do with our lives. These decisions come from what we believe about every aspect of our existence. And we got our beliefs from somewhere. We have been formed, every one of us, by this complicated mix of people and places and things. Parents and teachers and artists and scientists and mentors – we are each taking all of these influences

and living our lives according to which teachings we have made our own. Some insist that they aren't influenced by any person or any religion, that they think for themselves. And that's an honorable perspective. The problem is they got that perspective from . . . somebody. They're following somebody even if they insist it is themselves they are following.

Everybody is following somebody. Everybody has faith in something and somebody.

We are all believers.

WAY +

As a Christian, I am simply trying to orient myself around living a particular kind of way, the kind of way that Jesus taught is possible. And I think that the way of Jesus is the best possible way to live.

This isn't irrational or primitive or blind faith. It is merely being honest that we all are living a "way".

I'm convinced being generous is a better way to live.

I'm convinced forgiving people and not carrying around bitterness is a better way to live.

I'm convinced having compassion is a better way to live.

I'm convinced pursuing peace in every situation is a better way to live.

I'm convinced listening to the wisdom of others is a better way to live.

I'm convinced being honest with people is a better way to live.