

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *Velvet Elvis*

by  
Rob Bell

### WELCOME TO MY VELVET ELVIS

1. Rob Bell writes, “The Christian faith is alive only when it is listening, morphing, innovating, letting go of whatever has gotten in the way of Jesus and embracing whatever will help us be more and more the people God wants us to be” (p. ix). Why is this process so important? In what ways have you managed to morph and innovate in your faith? In what ways might your faith be frozen? What does it mean to you for your faith to be continually “reforming”?
2. Yet even as we are searching for fresh perspectives on faith, Bell also writes, “If it is true, then it isn’t new. I’m learning that what seems brand new is often the discovery of something that’s been there all along” (p. xiii).

What does he mean by that? How does this statement fit with your own experience?

### MOVEMENT 1: JUMP

1. Everybody is following somebody, whether we are aware of it or not. Who are some of the people you are following or have followed in your life? For Bell, following Jesus is about reality, “lining yourself up with how things are” (p. 6). How have you experienced the truth of this statement?
2. Bell describes the doctrines of the Christian faith as “springs”—things that move and flex and give shape and depth to our thoughts and ideas about God (pp. 6–8). He contrasts his “springs” approach with that of people who view their faith as a wall of bricks, each brick representing a separate doctrine. Once you take apart one brick, the entire wall starts to crumble. How does trampoline faith differ from “Brickianity”? Is your faith more like a trampoline or a brick wall?
3. Why is questioning God so important? How have you questioned God in your life?

### MOVEMENT 2: YOKE

1. Bell concludes that the reason why the Bible can cause such confusion is that it is open-ended. To put it into action, we must interpret it to the best of our ability. That is why Jesus gave us permission/authority to bind

and to loose—in other words, to make new interpretations of the Bible. What do you make of this ability to interpret? Do you find it scary? Liberating? When in your faith journey have you done this?

2. Reading the Bible alone is a relatively new trend. From before Jesus's time through relatively recent history, Bible study and interpretation were done communally. Do you prefer reading and studying the Bible alone or with others? Why? What are some of the reasons to study the Bible in community?
3. Bell admits that when he hears some people quote scripture in a way that he doesn't agree with, it makes him "want to throw up" (p. 28). Have you ever discussed scripture with someone who not only disagreed with your interpretation but insisted that his or her interpretation of the Bible was the only correct understanding? If so, how did it feel? How did you deal with it? Has such a discussion ever changed your mind? Explain.
4. How is the Bible *your* story? How have you seen the exodus or Adam and Eve's temptation or any other story in the Bible in your own life?
5. What is the difference between viewing the Bible as an owner's manual and viewing the Bible as "the wild, uncensored, passionate account . . . of people experiencing the living God" (p. 54)? Which interpretation have you tended toward in your life? How has your interpretation affected your faith?

### MOVEMENT 3: TRUE

1. When have you been caught up in a moment so powerful and transcendent that you felt God's presence and knew you were standing on holy ground?
2. How do you feel about the idea of claiming truth wherever you find it? Is your Jesus big enough for that? If so, was this always the case?
3. What do you think Bell means by saying, "I don't follow Jesus because I think Christianity is the best religion. I follow Jesus because he leads me into ultimate reality" (p. 78)? Do you agree with Bell that Jesus is "behind it all" (p. 78)? Why or why not?
4. Bell writes, "To be a Christian is to do whatever it is that you do with great passion and devotion. We throw ourselves into our work because everything is sacred" (pp. 80–81). Do you feel this way about your chosen work? Why or why not?
5. Bell describes missionaries as people with really good eyesight whose job is to point out the sacred that is already present. Who has performed this function in your life? Does understanding missionaries as "tour guides" change your understanding of mission work?

### MOVEMENT 4: TASSELS

1. Does the idea of salvation as "the entire universe being brought back to harmony with its maker" (p. 107) dif-

fer from how you now or at one time viewed salvation? If so, how? What does it mean to live in this holistic kind of salvation?

2. Bell's therapist told him that his job was "the relentless pursuit of who God has made you to be" and that everything else was sin (p. 113). If you apply this logic to your life, what in your life have you been misinterpreting as your job? What "superwhatever" (p. 115) do you have to kill?
3. If you take a Sabbath day, what is your practice and how has it benefited you? If you do not have a Sabbath practice, what are some ways you might be able to incorporate Sabbath into your life?

## MOVEMENT 5: DUST

1. Jesus, like other Jewish children of the time, would have been expected to memorize large sections of Torah. What has your experience been with memorization of scripture? If you have memorized scripture, how has it benefited you? If not, how might you be able to incorporate memorization into your spiritual practice?
2. In Jesus's time, rabbis chose only disciples whom they believed could be like them. What does it mean to you that Jesus believes in you this way, that he thinks you can be like him?

## MOVEMENT 6: NEW

1. Do you tend to think of yourself as a sinner (and Christianity as a form of “sin management” [p. 143]) or as a new creation in Christ? How do you believe God sees you? How has your view of yourself affected your life?
2. What does it mean to experience heaven now, in the present? Hell? How does it change things to view heaven and hell as present realities as well as eternal realities?

## MOVEMENT 7: GOOD

1. What are the implications for you, for the world, and for your faith that God pronounces creation “good” rather than “perfect” (p. 156)?
2. Bell writes, “It is when the church gives itself away in radical acts of service and compassion, expecting nothing in return, that the way of Jesus is most vividly put on display” (p. 168). How have you experienced this? When have you come closest to giving without expecting anything in return?
3. Bell calls on us to reclaim our innocence, insist that hope is real, and resolve that we can change the world. What might this look like for you?