

Learning How To Live

Rob Bell's Book, "Velvet Elvis – Repainting the Christian Faith" is based on critical thinking. The book conveys the desperate need to continue to question and rethink the Christian faith. True faith is fully alive only when the questioning, thinking and examining continue. "Velvet Elvis" takes Christianity outside of the negative context in which many associate it with, presenting it in a way that is appealing and relative in today's culture. Bell captures the essence of true faith by sifting through the tragic actions that have been done in the name of religion and salvages what was truly intended. By doing this, Bell pieces together a faith that is deeply rooted in love. He paints a picture of what God intended true faith to consist of prior to the tainted image that has been created by the many who would exploit faith and religion for their own benefit.

Questioning is at the heart of Rob Bell's writing. He begs his readers to continue to question and formulate new ideas, instead of blindly accepting their beliefs without examination. Personally, the most frightening aspect of the Christian faith was not daring to question the God that I was raised to believe in, but in accepting to blindly serve a God without deep contemplation, examination, and questioning. If I cannot explain the reason behind my belief, then why should I continue to believe? The situations in my life and academics I have studied over the past several years have been exhilarating and challenging, causing me to think critically in every aspect, rethinking and questioning everything around me. The knowledge and truth I have gained has only succeeded to increase my wonder and awe of the complexity of a God who is not confined by organized religion. A God who, despite negative stereotypes, in truth is defined by peace and love. A God whose complexity and beauty I encounter on a daily basis through the

people and situations that surround my life. There is a beauty that is found in the selfless actions of many people in this world who are living in light of a greater cause, a beauty where true fulfillment is ultimately found in serving God through selflessly serving others. As Bell puts it, "This is what we are all dying for – something that demands we step up and become better, more focused people. Something that calls out the greatness that we hope is somewhere inside of us."

The essence of what it truly means to serve God has come alive after reading Velvet Elvis and the ideas expressed in the book continue to shape the core of who I am becoming. Rob Bell's writing has challenged my outlook on what it means to live in a way that truly reflects God. The book has not only challenged my outlook, it has challenged the ways in which I define my faith. I have a profound understanding that true faith is not defined through words but through the actions that are taken to demonstrate one's faith. I am beginning to understand what it means to live for a God who says the most important thing in life is to love. I am making room for the idea that there is much more going on than the issues that I face in my life. I am embracing a beauty that is found when I acknowledge that I am not the center of the universe, that everyday I encounter people who are in need, and I have the resources to help fulfill those needs. As Bell says, "It is the quiet, humble, stealth acts that change things" (168).

These aspects of Rob Bell's writing have had a truly significant impact upon my life. I have made a decision to let true faith and love govern the way in which I live my life. I want to live in light of the tragedy that comes when a faith that is true and pure is poorly misrepresented. I want the decisions I make and the actions I take part in to contribute to picking up the pieces of a faith that has been broken by centuries of

imperfections and misrepresentation. Essentially, I want my life to be driven by peace, love and compassion, through it all knowing that I am helping repaint over the negative, all the while bringing an awareness of the positive. In my life, true faith is fully alive when I am selflessly serving those whose needs exceed any petty want or desire that I have ever encountered. Rob Bell's writing has challenged me to question and embrace a life that is defined by love. Through it all I am coming alive. I am embracing truth, beauty, faith, pain, question, doubt, and love, knowing that these are simply different aspects of the painting that contribute to the entire picture.