



# Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality

*Rob Bell*

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## **Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality** Rob Bell

From Rob Bell, the author of the phenomenal New York Times bestseller *Love Wins* and a Christian pastor named by *Time* Magazine as one of the most influential people in 2011, comes *Sex God*, an enlightening exploration of sexuality and spirituality. With profound beauty and insight, Bell addresses the truism that we can't talk about ourselves as sexual beings without asking who made us that way. For progressive Christians and readers who enjoy the writings of Donald Miller, N.T. Wrighter, Brian McLaren and Timothy Keller, Rob Bell is a pioneer among those seeking a new kind of Christian teaching.

## **Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality Details**

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## From Reader Review Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality for online ebook

### Woowott says

I'm done. I'm so done. I went into reading 'Love Wins' excited, hoping for some cool ideas. I thought it was limp. Shallow. So what do I do? I decide to look into what he has to say about sex.

Oh for. GAH. I need to STOP doing this to myself, but I have one more aggravating book waiting for me at the library.

I wish for five seconds he would stop pretending to be all hip and trendy. He's like a freakin' conservative in sheep's clothing. 'OHHH, I'm gonna be all DARING and say the word SEX in the title, so I look all cool and edgy!'

Screw that. Stop pretending to be something you aren't, dude. And this one is STILL shallow and vague, as far as I'm concerned. But anyway...

Where to even start? I mean, his writing style. It makes me want to rip my eyeballs out. It's terrible. It's literary torture. Still reading like he's delivering a sermon. If I wanted a modern sermon, I would go to church. But I would go to a church where the pastor might actually KNOW about real life. Mr Bell, well, he seems to know some Greek and Hebrew, like a good little pastoral student. He can use his knowledge to interpret things, fine.

But when he talks about actuality? Real people? Addiction? HAH!

So, uh. Let's see. To start, he doesn't seem to have any real understanding of addictions. Smoking is all about the feel of the paper, the opening of a new pack. It's actually from my experience more about stress and reward, and feeling like you need some sweet, sweet nicotine to chill out after work.

And food? Of COURSE, his over-eater eating disorder example is a WOMAN, even though rates of eating disorders with men are growing. And its about her CONTEMPT for food? No, again, it's about stress and reward. And the fact that she has a psychological disorder, you twit. It's more like contempt for self and appreciate for food because it helps her deal with things. Fat shaming, yayz!

Alcoholics feel contempt for booze and don't care about taste? That isn't true either. Plenty of alcoholics LOVE the taste and get the good stuff. Because, y'know, RICH PEOPLE can have that problem too, y'know? And Ms. JoCo Housewife probably isn't gonna be swallowing Bellows vodka or Wild Irish Rose in a paper bag. It'll be Bombay Sapphire in her gin and tonic. For instance. Oh, yeah, and sometimes, it runs in families, dude.

Shopping is fun too, fella. It's not about the hangers and tags. It's about stress, reward, or even FUN. HOLY CRAP! Or the satisfaction of finding that book that you'd sought for simply AGES is now on sale, and you can walk out happily with it and read it and see it's beauty on your shelves. (By the bye, the DESIGN of the cover is the only good thing about this book. This time, Bell doesn't get ANY free passes for any little tidbits of information he gives, because I could find them elsewhere if I were so motivated.)

And then we have a complete and total lack of understanding about kink. Depression and contempt lead to whips and leather? \*facepalm\* Actually, many people in high stress occupations or with high strung personalities enjoy a little flogging. It's cathartic. And, frankly, it's only viewed as dangerous and scary by

someone who has NO clue what he's saying when he talks about it. A responsible kinkster is polite and aware of his or her partner and isn't disdainful, except by consent, like in roleplay, for example. I just can't even--!

And waaaaayyyy to slut shame, homeskillet. How is it MY responsibility as a woman to make sure some guy behaves responsibly toward me? It's HIS duty, frankly, to view me as a human being and not be a douche if, say, I show a little cleavage. No man EVER has the right to disdain a woman or think she's a slut based on what she's wearing. We don't complain when YOU lot take off your shirts when it's hot, do we? We don't comment or try to rape you. Give us that same respect. If a guy isn't worth a girl's time, he's not worth a girl's time. It's not our responsibility to make him a better man. He should be a big boy and do that on his own. If I wear a short skirt, I am NOT sharing my body with you. It's your problem if you lust in your heart. So go tear out your own eyeball; I'm not helping with that one, chum.

ALSO, this whole chastity thing? Guess what! It hasn't lessened rates of STDs, teen pregnancy, or the fact that KIDS STILL HAVE SEX. In fact, from everything I've read, abstinence sex ed just makes kids think condoms don't work, and then they try oral or anal sex, which can STILL GIVE YOU STIs. So, that's great. DON'T educate those kids. See how much worse we can make it for them. Kids in countries with actual sex ed have better chances of NOT getting pregnant (thereby lessening the need for abortions, yo). So Ab-Ed is actually harmful. Sex SHOULD be discussed. It SHOULD be studied. If people don't examine it and learn about it, they have unhealthy ideas about it. If it's repressed and narrowed to mean one thing, it harms an awful lot of people. So STUFF IT, pal, and don't talk about it until you've actually done some research. The problem in America is that sex is examined and discussed in unhealthy, uneducated ways.

And women apparently don't like it either? I guess not. This book makes it sound like girls should be chaste little clueless objects for MEN'S sexuality. I've read Ms. Shalit's book, thanks. Actually, NO thanks.

And, frankly, Mr Bell contradicts himself within one page at one point. We women are beautiful, he says. We're loved by our Creator. BUT we shouldn't dress inappropriately. And it's okay not to marry, the Bible says so. But a woman truly blooms and is loveliest when she is loved well. By a man.

So, I'm great, but in order to be really lovely and fully myself, some guy must love me.

So not only was I bored through most of this book, but Mr Bell went a step farther and began discussing things of which he knew nothing. Which, actually, makes this book less dull, but more ire-inducing. And this book is only nominally about sex. Most of this book is discussing relationships and claiming, basically that most relationships are...sexual? A rock concert in which everyone is getting along and on the same wavelength and one is...sexual? I've been to rock concerts. I've felt at one with everyone. But there is a massive difference between unity and sexuality. I was not having an intimate, romantic relationship with everyone there. That would be an orgy, dude.

And anyone outside the hetero-normative continuum doesn't exist. So any gay guys, lesbians, trans\* people, asexuals, queers--not even discussed. If you write a book purporting to be about SEX, you actually should probably tackle questions of gender and sexuality. Nope. Doesn't happen. If you don't want to come out and say you think it's wrong, you're a wimp.

I can only hope he's matured beyond this. But if he has, it's time to amend this book. If he hasn't, then he should maybe be a bit wiser and say less. Because this...this...is only one connection between the sexual and spiritual.

Needless to say, I will NOT be reading 'Velvet Elvis.'

## Andrea Zukewycz says

I just finished this book and it was amazing! The way Rob Bell put things into perspective was awesome! As I was reading, I was like "wow, I never thought of it like that". He has a ton of wisdom and insight and it's awesome reading what he shares with us. I just wanted to share one part of it that I extra highlighted :) This is mainly for the ladies, but good for the men too.

"You don't need a man by your side to validate you as a woman. You already are loved and valued. You're good enough exactly as you are. Do you believe this? Because it's true. You have limitless worth and value. If you embrace this truth, it will affect every area of life, especially your relationship with men. You are worthy dying for. Your worth does not come from your body, your mind, your work, what you produce, what you put out, how much money you make. your worth does not come from whether or not you have a man. Your worth does not come from whether or not men notice you. You have inestimable worth that comes from your creator. You will continue to be tempted in a thousand different ways not to believe this. The temptation will be to go searching for your worth and validity from places other than your creator. Especially from men. But you don't have to give yourself away to earn a man's love. You're better than that. You're already loved. When you give too much of yourself away too quickly, when you show too much skin, you're not being true to yourself. When you dress to show us everything, then in some sense we have all shared in it, or at least been exposed to it. There is a mystery to you, infinite depth and endless complexity. As the woman says in Song of Songs, "My own vineyard is mine to give". In the ancient Near East, a vineyard was a euphemism for sexuality. She is saying that she doesn't give herself to just anyone. She is fully in control of herself, and she is not cheap and she is not easy. Your strength is a beautiful thing. And when you live in it, when you carry yourself with the honor and dignity that are yours, it forces the men around you to relate to you on more than just a flesh level. You are worth dying for. If you're dating someone, what kind of man is he? Does he demonstrate that he's the kind of man who would die for you? What is his posture toward the world? Does he serve, or is he waiting to be served? Does he believe that he's owed something, that he's been shortchanged, that he's gotten the short end of the stick, that life owes him something? Or is he out to see what he can give? Does he see himself as being here to make the world a better place? These are the big questions that you need to ask yourself. Take him to a family reunion. Do some sort of service project with him. See how he interacts with people he doesn't like. Does he have liquid agape running through his veins?.....when a woman is loved well, she opens up like a flower.....What does he expect of you? Does he expect you to sleep with him when he hasn't committed to you forever? Does he want all of you without his having to give all of him? Can you tell him anything? Is he safe? Can he be trusted? Can you open up to him, allowing yourself to be vulnerable, knowing that he will protect, not exploit, that vulnerability? Are you opening up like a flower??"

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## Reed says

For those of us who read Velvet Elvis, we may expect almost too much from Sex God. Velvet Elvis, while not without its shortcomings, was a wealth of ideas in wide variety. But again, Bell was exploring the whole of faith as opposed to a specific aspect of it.

In Sex God, Bell confronts human sexuality from a unique perspective - neither justifying sexual tendencies nor analyzing sexual appetites. Rather, he strives to help us see sexuality as an essential element to our humanity. The cornerstone chapter for this thought is called "Animals and Angels," which is one of the finest discourses on spiritual humanity I've read in recent years. If you are curious about the book, don't start at the beginning - read this chapter first.

Some of the staples of Bell's writings are all here - the study of ancient language that colors modern interpretations of certain key phrases; stylistic writing that punctuates certain phrases over others by isolating them from the rest of the paragraph; and a poet's sentiment for profound moments of beauty in common things (after "Angels and Animals" read "Under the Chuppah." You'll buy the book based on those two chapters alone)

The only distinct criticism I have for the book is in its premise. The title seems to imply that we're about to have a discussion about sex, when really Bell is talking to us about human connectedness (and disconnectedness); human value (and ways we betray that value); and eventual divine reconciliation. Sexuality is more the vehicle for that larger message than the message itself. However, once this is grasped, the book has some wonderful moments of insight and leaves the reader with several new thoughts on how to view ourselves and those around us.

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## Mac says

How can you not love Rob Bell? The man has been given an incredible gift of insight and communication. He explains things so profoundly, yet, so simply. It's a solid combination.

Turns out this book is more about God and His love than sex, but it will get you thinking. A lot. A lot about what you really want, what you expect from a relationship, what you're willing to give, and what is the point of it to begin with?

I'd say for anyone who isn't a believer in Christ, and thinks Christians are prudes and virgin goofballs who don't know what they're missing out on...this book will be a reality check and enlighten you about why many Christians believe what they do about sex.

And for anyone who is a believer....this book will be a great encouragement, and will add a lot of depth to what it is you already believe. (I'm hoping to read through it again with the lucky lady who's fortunate enough to marry my rockhard body.)

(And by rockhard body, I clearly mean, not rockhard at all....but not too flabastic either.)

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## Mark says

A friend at work gave this to me to read. It is by an evangelical preacher and explores the connections between being human and sexuality. I suppose it is good in light of how our society exploits and degrades human sexuality and he does a good job in pointing out that we need more in a relationship than the physical. But I felt like he often jumped from one thought or story to another without much continuity or without reaching conclusions and I was often left thinking yea... and what's your point. I think it is probably more a book for women because he does address them more than the men. Anyway, not something I would have read on my own account so in that sense I'm glad he gave it to me, but I'm glad I'm finished also.

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## Brittany says

Before I get into the substance of the book, I would like to make a few notes about the composition.

One point I would like to make is that I now know why writers should not use one sentence paragraphs. They should not use one sentence paragraphs because it does not help with the flow of ideas or the point the author is trying to make (with my first paragraph of this review being an exception).

The other point or suggestion I would like to make is that the reader should make sure to read the author's end notes. The author puts some of his best commentary, points, ideas and stories in the footnote of this book. They definitely should not be skipped over or even skimmed.

In regards to the substance, this book really did not enlighten me much at all. I came out of this book feeling the same way about sex as I did going into it. This may have been because I had such high expectations for the book. However, I did rush to read it on the weekends, so part of the reason for my disappointment is that I did not take the book seriously enough, giving it time and thought.

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## Kelsey says

Rob Bell's communication style is--if nothing else--consistent.

He wants

to get

people to stop

and feel

every, little, detail

of what is being said.

And this is how he does that. For some, I know that this can almost feel manipulative and forced. If you are paying attention at all you know what he is trying to do to you. For me, I can both enjoy this and find it a bit annoying. I know many Christians are terribly offended and outraged by Rob Bell but I think that if they just stop screaming "heretic" for a moment, there might be some real gold that even the most anti-Bell fanatic could find within this book.

It is written about sexuality and what our sexuality really says about us as humans. I think this is a much more approachable topic and one that many Christians could likely come together on, if willing, and see it for what it really is. I could see this book being much less controversial than "Velvet Elvis" or "Love Wins" because Bell isn't addressing such weighty theological questions and is focusing on something so much more basic, something that none of us can escape from, and that is our sexuality.

The book introduces itself by saying that THIS is always about THAT. Bell talks about how if we were to go through our garage and find a trophy or a picture and identify why we have held on to this item throughout the years, it wouldn't really be about the trophy. It would be about what that trophy represented in your life.

Or how often in conflict within intimate relationships...we might outwardly be arguing about why the dishes

still aren't done but really the argument could be traced back to feeling ignored or devalued in some way. So, sexuality is the THIS and spirituality is the THAT.

I think Bell makes a compelling case that our sexuality is largely about connection and the physical act of sex is only one of the many ways that we try to channel our deep need to feel connected and known. That sex is not the search for something that is missing but rather the expression of something that has been found. I certainly didn't agree with everything he had to say but I think he contributed to the ongoing conversation about sexuality in a very meaningful way.

Some of my favorite quotes...

You can't talk about sexuality without talking about how we were made. And that will inevitably lead you to talk about who made us. At some point you have to talk about God.

Lust can drive us to do frightening things. It can own us. It can take up massive amounts of head space and make us feel miserable. Lust comes from a deep lack of satisfaction with life. Lust often starts with a thought somewhere in our head or heart: "If I just had that/him/her/it, then I'd be happy. When we're not at peace, when we aren't content, when we aren't in a good place, our radar gets turned on. We're looking. Searching. And we're sensory creatures so it won't be long before something or somebody catches our attention. The idea creeps into our head that we are lacking and that this craving in front of us is the answer. (Pg. 73)

If I want something to the point that I can't conceive of being content without it, it owns me. Lust is slavery.

Whatever it is that has its hooks in you, you will never be free of it until you find something you want more.

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### **Lori Watson says**

While this book did not impact me as much as *Love Wins* and *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*, there were a few chapters that made this a four star read. *Leather, Whips, and Fruit*; *She Ran Into the Girl's Bathroom*; *More Balloons, Please*. These were worth the price of the book to me.

*Leather, Whips, and Fruit*:

"We're addictive creatures. We try things, we experiment, we explore, and certain things hook us. They get their tentacles in us, and we can't get away from them. What started out as freedom can quickly become slavery. Often freedom is seen as the ability to do whatever you want. But freedom isn't being able to have whatever we crave. Freedom is going without whatever we crave and being fine with it."

"Whatever it is that has its hooks in you, you will never be free from it until you find something you want more. It's not about getting rid of desire. It's about giving ourselves to bigger and better and more powerful desires."

*She Ran Into the Girls' Bathroom*:

"Love is handing your heart to someone and taking the risk that they will hand it back because they don't want it. That's why it's such a crushing ache on the inside. We gave away a part of ourselves and it wasn't wanted.

Love is a giving away of power. When we love, we give the other person the power in the relationship. They can do what they choose. They can do what they like with our love. They can reject it, they can accept it, they can step toward us in gratitude and appreciation.

Love is a giving away. When we love, we put ourselves out there, we expose ourselves, we allow ourselves

to be vulnerable.

Love is giving up control. It's surrendering the desire to control the other person. The two – love and controlling power over the other person – are mutually exclusive. If we are serious about loving someone, we have to surrender all of the desires within us to manipulate the relationship."

"And who does Jesus identify with? The outcasts, the people of the land who aren't good enough, clean enough, wealthy enough, and pure enough to be a part of the establishment. He's invited to dine with the elite and the rich, which he does numerous times, but he also eats with the lowest of the low – and he enjoys it. He enjoys them.

He touches people with infectious skin diseases,<sup>88</sup> he lets questionable women touch him,<sup>89</sup> he lays his hands on dead bodies,<sup>90</sup> and he engages in conversation with promiscuous women alone in the middle of the day.<sup>91</sup>

His entire life is about the stripping away of power and control. Jesus always chooses the path of love, not power. Inclusion, not exclusion.

Connection and solidarity rather than rank and hierarchy. Touch rather than distance.

Compassion rather than control."

More Balloons, Please:

"But for others, all this subject does is bring up pain and regret. Relationships, mistakes, the endless breaking of the heart. All of the ways we've missed out on how things were meant to be. Perhaps this book has opened wounds you thought were healed years ago.

Several years ago, I conducted a wedding ceremony on a Saturday afternoon in June. The bride wore a white summer dress, the groom a white linen shirt. They insisted on the simplest ceremony possible. It was held in a park in a grove

of trees. Their family and friends stood in a circle, with the three of us in the middle. I began with a welcome, they exchanged vows and rings, I pronounced them husband and wife, they kissed, everybody clapped. The ceremony took seven minutes.

They were then each handed a cluster of helium balloons on strings. The balloons, I told everybody, were symbols of their past marriages, pregnancies they had chosen to terminate, people they had had affairs with when they were previously married, relationships that had not lasted. As a picture of starting over, together, they wanted their first act as a married couple to be letting the balloons go.

They walked out of the grove of trees into an adjoining field. Just the two of them, holding hands, standing in knee-high grass, exchanging words that only they could hear. Then they raised the balloons above their heads and let them go. We all stood there, watching those balloons float away until they drifted from sight.

There are moments you wonder if you'll ever forget. Events that sear themselves on your conscience. That moment was one of those for me.

A few years later their marriage imploded. She moved an hour away. He relocated to another part of the country. They divorced.

I finish with this story because life is messy. Gut wrenching. Risky. Things don't always turn out well. Sometimes they don't turn out at all. Sometimes everything falls apart and we wonder if there's any point to any of it. We're tempted to shut ourselves off, fortify the walls around our hearts, and forge ahead, promising ourselves that we will never open ourselves up like that again.

But I have to believe that we can recover from anything. I have to believe that God can put anything – anyone – back together. I have to believe that the God Jesus invites us to trust is as good as he says he is.

Loving.

Forgiving.

Merciful.

Full of grace.

And I have to believe that God does not run out of balloons."

## Apple says

This is possibly the most refreshingly accurate piece of work on sexuality by a Christian author I have ever encountered. But then again, Rob Bell is an exceptional observer of humanity and its spiritual side. If you have not read his first book, Velvet Elvis, I really suggest you visit that text before you jump into this; especially if you come from a background where everything biblical is hyper-literal (if you are recovering from that sort of situation, I completely empathize with you) or if you are rediscovering your own concept of Christianity. This book won't be as effective if you do not.

Sex really isn't a topic Christians like to discuss (see the Angels and Animals chapter), but Rob Bell is correct in his point he makes through the entire book that our sexuality is connected to everything and it needs to be dissected and examined. Being one with another human being is a direct representation of the oneness we strive for in God. The imagery of the chuppah and other fine points of traditional Jewish wedding ceremonies in relation to God is something that is explained throughout the Bible constantly, yet most readers and believers miss out on this point. Bell revisits and explains this relationship well; just as a couple enters an agreement into oneness, so has God with us. Every word, every story contained in this book builds upon this concept like a wonderfully layered cake.

I firmly believe every one, especially couples or anyone entwined in any sort of relationship, should read the Worth Dying For Chapter. Everyone needs to understand agape, which as Bell explains, is Greek for a giving type of love; the heart of every healthy relationship, including one with the divine.

More importantly, the last chapter is a confession that rings true for everyone; "Things don't always turn out well." They don't. No lies, no trickery here. Just hope in a divine being that can heal anything and everything with the agape kind of love.

And who cannot love a man who not only devotes a chapter to one of the most inspiring marriages of our time, but does take the time to make the obligatory Month Python and Star Wars reference? You will miss some of these gems if you do not read the notes and discussion at the end. If you have read through this book and did not complete the survey on page 199, you are truly missing something.

Can't wait for the next Bell piece.

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## Sharon says

I recently read Sex God by Rob Bell and was disappointed by the anticlimax.

I went in expecting a message that might offend me, shake me up a little, maybe even make me rethink my beliefs on some things. Sex God promised new thoughts on human sexuality in relation to God.

But there was so little actual thought posited that I came away with nothing.

Sex God claims that everything is about sex. And therefore it spent no time talking about sex and a lot of time talking about "everything".

Thanks Rob Bell for demonstrating yet another Christian who is terrified of actual sex.

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## Tim says

Revised Review: 3/5

I think I have probably shifted my stance slightly with this book. As you might notice I took it down a notch to 3 stars instead of 4. And I also removed it from my 'recommended' shelf.

I would say it is because on further reflection, it is much more of a dangerous book than I would have originally thought. It is a little reductionist towards a Hebrew-centric view on marriage, and while the old testament was written by the Israelites, marriage was instituted for mankind and not just for Israel. So while there are interesting tidbits about the meaning of various tradition, i'm not sure if it really serves as a holistic basis for sexual norms.

Secondarily, I think while it may be better than 'Velvet Elvis', this books till depends on an unwritten assumption that you know your basic christian doctrine. That is, it depends on you to bring in your knowledge to really Christianize what he writes. Looking objectively at the book again, I think it would be much more difficult to really read this and get a coherant understanding of how it all works.

In the end, interesting, but I am not sure I would recommend it now.

Take it or leave it, but don't depend on it.

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Original Review: 4/5

I don't characteristically like Rob Bell, but I did enjoy this book. In the current day where the meaning of sex has totally been lost through gross exploitation of sex in the media and culture, this book does do a great job of setting the scene of just what sex is, how it relates to our spirituality, and how our spirituality relates to our sex.

This book doesn't offer new information, but it does present old arguments to a new audience in a way that does seem simplistic nor over complex.

I enjoyed his discussion on lust, and fighting lust: "It's not about getting rid of desire. It's about giving ourselves to bigger and more powerful desires." (p. 82) This totally opens the door to other books like 'Desiring God' or 'Future Grace' by John Piper.

Also, the discussion on sex was really insightful for me:

"But sex is not the search for something that's missing. It's the expression of something that's been found. It's designed to be the overflow, the culmination of something a man and a woman have found in each other. It's a celebration of this living, breathing thing that's happening between the two of them." (p. 123)

Overall, I think this book is great. I would hesitate in recommending Rob Bell more generally because of some of his other works, but this is an insightful, scriptural, sound book as far as I can discern.

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## Joe says

This book is simple and easy to read, but enthralling. In fact, I enjoyed it so much that, having read a

borrowed copy, I'm going to buy it for myself (a much smarter approach than my usual, "buy it and sell it on Amazon if I don't want to keep it").

Moreover, contrary to the title, it's not just a book about sex and God, rather, it's a beautiful way to invite somebody who isn't all that familiar with the things of God to begin exploring how faith and life can connect, as it challenges many assumptions of our world in a relaxed and yet powerful way. I can see it being a great resource for a book club with lots of discussion over each chapter.

Specifically, the chapter on lust, "Leather, Whips, and Fruit" is fantastic!

I'll be reading it again, and using some of the ideas presented when I launch *the eLife* podcast in the near future.

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## David Meldrum says

Rob Bell. In the bizarre sub-culture of Christian media and church, there are few more polarising names. He's even been on the cover of Time magazine (US edition). To say you find his work valuable is equally likely to earn you opprobrium as it is welcome. It just depends on who you talk to. If this is new to you, just try googling his name.

'Sex God' was written before his fame was at the stratospheric, inflammatory levels it reached in 2011-2. It's his second book, but the one it's taken longest for me to get round to read. Like all his books, it's short - clocking in around 200 pages. It's not a difficult read - though his idiosyncratic style of short sentences, sometimes only 3 word paragraphs, can grate even if you're a Bell-believer.

This book explores the links between sexuality and spirituality; that might sound controversial enough, but he actually doesn't touch on the two areas of this that are most bound to inflame Christian debate - same-sex relationships and gender roles. No, this is more about sex itself; or rather, to paraphrase Bell's argument, how God's gift of sex to humanity is really a pointer both to the work of Jesus and our eternal destiny. It's heady, but quick-reading, stuff; and looking at it from this summary you might be led to think this isn't really for single people.

You'd be wrong, because Bell's approach is both appealing and inclusive - he wants to remove this discussion from the narrow confines of what we do with our bodies and who we do it with, to a far wider, more generous place. Those things matter - but they are signs, symbols, pointers to Something and Someone Else.

There are moments when you're tempted to say "Really, Rob?". But then you reflect on it a little more widely and deeply, and you think he may have a point. The last two chapters are brilliant; they are where this book really sings. They are where he moves gracefully to matters of eternity, and what Jesus is really on about when he says we won't have marriage in the new creation. It's stirring, thrilling stuff - and like much of Bell's work, it's actually more orthodox than we might expect. As always, in reading this it's wise to remember those who are his primary audience - those alienated by religion and those vaguely spiritual seekers who may see organised church as something to be suspicious of. Read it through that lens, with that language and hear what he does or doesn't say with those ears, and you find a deeper, more mainstream tradition remixed and repackaged with flair and the best kind of artistry.

He's well known for his desire to return to the Jewish roots of New Testament literature - and often that's what divides readers. For me, that's largely good stuff, but it's never bad to remember that at all times his

opinion, interpretation is just one. You don't have to buy it all to like some of it. Where there is much fruit to be harvested, in addition especially to the last 2 chapters, is in the footnotes. When they're not giving you a Bible reference, they're either witty asides, pointers and quotes to books that will quickly find their way on to your 'too read' list or little nuggets that are too good to miss. It's not often you can say that a book's footnotes - especially in such a short book - are essential and enjoyable reading. But that's Rob Bell. With his audience he doesn't need or want to 'show the working'. He just wants to give us a consistent, thoughtful but enjoyable take on a crucial subject - but to do so in a way that's going to leave us singing, not weeping.

Whatever you think of him, that's no bad thing.

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## Chairness says

I'm not a particularly "religious" person (and by that I mean not at all), but this book really got to me in terms of how sex and spirituality are more related than we ever would have thought. Bell does something refreshing in that he never says "sex before marriage is wrong" in fact, he doesn't feel that way at all. In this book he uses specific passages from scripture and key moments in his personal life to exemplify the ways in which sex is spiritual and should be respected as such. This does not mean waiting for marriage, it means being with someone for the right reasons - because you love them. I have always believed in that, but like many young people, have gotten sucked into the idea of using sex as a tool to satiate a physical need and rather than using it as a means to express my love for another person.

I'm about to go chat with the friend of mine who recommended it to me, and hopefully chatting with him about it will help me finish this review.

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## MAP says

I'm not a big huge fan of Rob Bell, mainly because I never feel like he actually says much of anything. But this book looked like it would be about something that a lot of Christian books aren't: human sexuality. Oh don't get me wrong, there's tons of Christian books on sex: married sex, unmarried sex, gay sex, straight sex, what sex is, what sex isn't, bla bla bla. But there's very little about the fact that human beings, no matter which of those above categories they fall into, are [in general] in fact sexual beings. I've always found this rather bizarre since the Bible itself seems to have no problem recognizing and talking about this.

...Unnnnnnfortunately that's not what this book was about. I'm not totally sure what this book WAS about. Like other Rob Bell books I've encountered, it doesn't seem to say much at all.

He just

makes entire

sentences

like this

as if

that will

create philosophical

and emotional depth

where there is none.

And it drove me CRAZY. So yeah, very little of the book says much at all, and a lot of it is in that super annoying pseudo-poetry format. And the few times he said stuff that I was like "Yeah, good point! I agree!" I'd look it up in the endnotes and discover these were ideas he'd borrowed from some OTHER book -- usually a book I'd already read.

Sooooooooo...yeah. No point. No point at all. And it was SUCH a good title.

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