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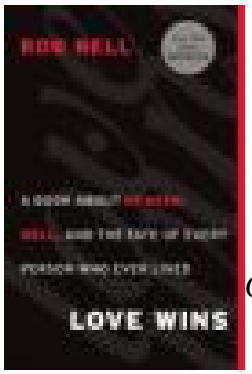
Why \"Love Wins\": Q & A

April Gutierrez | Jul. 28, 2011

For about 10 years I have been following the work of Rob Bell through his writings and NOOMA videos, and I have made the trek a few times to hear him preach in person. Of all his books, *Love Wins* is my favorite. He explores the scriptures with intrigue, accessibility and grace on the character of God and God's love.

I recently had the opportunity to talk with Brad Gray [1], former intern and mentee of Rob Bell, about *Love Wins* [2]. Along with leading biblical study trips, Brad serves as the Lead Teaching Pastor at Solomon's Porch [3]. Gray holds a master's of divinity from Western Seminary with extensive study in Jerusalem.

***Young Voices*: Rob Bell has mentioned that one of his spiritual directors is a Dominican sister, and he suggests reading Richard Rohr. How do you see Catholic theology influencing Rob Bell's work?**



Gray: I am not sure it's the theology, but rather [Catholicism's] spiritual disciplines and practices, such as introspection and silence. That transcends denominations; many who have positively influenced him recognize slowing down and digging deep and when we listen to our own story, that provides space to slow down and see life more clearly and critically. Spiritual disciplines do that.

Why do you think Rob Bell is so accessible across generations?
He has a real desire to connect people, to see religion connect people with their world and what they think is true. ... With *Velvet Elvis*, NOOMAS and *Love Wins*, he is a voice who is willing to speak in public [about] a lot of the questions people are not willing to take on. He recognizes who is influencing culture and responds to the gospel and Jesus' to culture -- making relevant a truth that has been true for thousands of years.

As a parent, something that stuck with me was, "My wife, Kristen, and I often talk about raising our kids in such a way that they have as little as possible to unlearn later on in life." (page 22) How do you think *Love Wins* is offering a theology that we can pass on to our children?

That's a great question. *Love Wins* was written to take seriously what the biblical witness is on heaven, on hell and the larger story on the love of God. What Rob is getting at there is [as] we study the text, many things we were taught are not there. Rob wants to help us understand what is actually in the biblical text.

Part of the process of unlearning is understanding that God is not waiting to blast us, but will uncover every

rock for His children so that they can experience and say yes to His love, both now and in the world to come. *Love Wins* brings about a space where questions can be asked about our gracious, loving God. If a child can know that first, then everything is put in its proper place and then we can recognize all the other aspects of God. The freedom to ask questions and the freedom to love can be passed on to our children.

The most powerful part of*Love Wins* for me was Bell saying "No matter how painful, brutal, oppressive, no matter how far people find themselves from home because of their sin, indifference, and rejection, there's always the assurance that it won't be this way forever." page 86

Mars Hill did a series on lamentations in the context of a culture of denial. One of the things we talked about was that if we don't acknowledge and speak the painful experiences in our lives, it has power over you and leaves you in a place of despair. If you can lament something you rob that thing of its power. If a friendship ends, lament it. We need to lament that which is not right and we have to have a recognition that it will not always be this way. Then we can also see judgment in light of God's love instead of wrath; it is shalom. Shalom is not just peace but a recognition that everything is as God intended it to be. God will reconcile, judge and make all things whole for shalom.

One of the most controversial themes that I think actually gives many Christians the courage to claim that title is: "What we have in common -- regardless of our tribe, language, customs, beliefs, or religion -- outweighs our differences. This is why God wants 'all people to be saved.'" page 99

So often in Christian circles we want to say who is in and who is out, you're not like us -- all sorts of labels so that we have control over them. Through our likeness we begin to recognize the grace and mercy of God to reconcile with one another and to display this love and mercy of God.
It's not that Rob Bell is advocating for universalism. If God demonstrates love now, it's part of God's character and God will not become uncharacteristic. God will be loving, even if His children do not love him back. God gives people the choice to love back. God offers a love without strings attached. Regardless if you accept that love or reject it, love will win.

"Love is why I've written this book, and love is what I want to leave you with.
May you experience this vast,
expansive, infinite, indestructible love
that has been yours all along.
May you discover that this love is as wide
as the sky and as small as the cracks in
your heart no one else knows about.
And may you know,
deep in your bones,
that love wins." (page 198)

[April Gutierrez is a guest columnist for Young Voices.]

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[1] http://www.walkingthetext.com/
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