Study Guide
Leonard Sweet's
SO BEAUTIFUL

Notes and Questions
Journaling Spaces
PREFACE TO THIS GUIDE

As you begin your study of So Beautiful, a few guidelines may help focus your attention on the points that the author would probably most like for you to understand. Leonard Sweet is a brilliant, God-inspired writer and thinker; however, his glitch-y, candid, random style can be somewhat off-putting for those readers with a more structured constitution. I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage you to throw caution to the wind and just “go with the flow”. Anytime during your reading that you feel yourself being overwhelmed, STOP for the day. I've found that Len's thoughts are quite deep, come at you fast, and that there is much to ponder in quite a little writing. That being said, if you survive past the introduction, the reading gets much easier.

As per the introduction, don't skip it, but don't try to absorb everything he says either. Much of the rest of the book is dedicated to elaborating these points in very short essay style, making his concepts and ideas much easier to take in. Many you will find inspired, some may make you laugh, some may make you very sad. Some may even ruffle your feathers of disagreement. Write down any questions or concerns that occur to you during your reading and bring those with you to your group meeting. Others may have the same thoughts or may enjoy hearing your perspectives.

Following the introduction, the book is broken up into three Parts, with each Part broken into numbered sections. The format of this guide is ten weeks, each with five or six daily devotional lessons that will walk you through each of the three major sections of the book. Each lesson consists of a short scripture reading that relates to the day's thought, followed by the suggested reading sections from the book for that day. Following that, a few short questions help you collect your thoughts. At the end of the lesson you'll find a few lines to journal any random thoughts that have occurred to you during your reading. The last section of each week's study recaps the major theme for the week and gives you a “go be Jesus” challenge.

My goal with this guide is to see each of you grow into MRI people, integrated into an MRI church that in its turn can change the world. It all starts with a little “nudge” . . . more on that later! For right now, let's grow as Christ's disciples in the world. In Dr. Sweet's words, “Scram. Get out of here. Go BE Jesus.”

In His service
Vicki Kendall
Spring 2010
Lesson 1

Introduction

The format for the first week's reading will be slightly different from the following weeks. We are attempting to get an overview of the premise of the book as a jumping off point for the rest of the weeks' discussions. As the readings for this week, read through the introduction section. The suggested reading order is broken into 6 days; read a little further each day if you are not feeling overwhelmed. My suggestion for this section is that you read no more that 5-8 pages in any one sitting. Allow yourself time to reflect and write questions and reactions you may have to what you have read. In this section, Dr Sweet presents the basic premise of the entire book. He breaks the material into easier to absorb small layers as the book unfolds. Take your time and don't try to rush through.


Questions:

1. What’s the difference between an APC church and an MRI church? Which do you feel is the more biblical model?

2. What are some examples of things that can be good for you for a short while, but bad for you over a long term?
3. Do you agree that today's society does not see itself as sinners? Do you feel that needs to be changed? How would we do that?

**Day 2:** Read pages 21-end of first section on page 25. Scripture: Ecclesiastes 7:14

*Questions:*

1. What role does pain and suffering play in our growth as disciples?

2. What value do you see in placing the spiritual life in conjunction with the day to day life, rather than keeping them as separate? What can cause that separation? How do we restore wholeness?

**Day 3:** Read pages 25-end of first section page 29. Scripture: John 17: 20-26

*Questions:*

1. Can you think of examples of “3’s”, “three-ness” around you that speak of the Divine imprint?

2. Missional is the ________ of God.

3. Relational is the ________ of God.

4. Incarnational is ________ of God.
Day 4: Read pages 29-to “Googleys” section page 35. Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:3-4

*Questions:*

1. Do you consider yourself as a sort of minister? Should you?

2. Cantus Firmus translates literally as “firm song”. What is our “firm song” that defines our purpose?

3. What, in Sweet's words, is an E.P.I.C mentality? Do you agree that this is necessary for the 21st century Christian? Why or why not?

4. How important do you feel it is for Christians to reach out to an unchurched generation? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to enact that outreach?


1. Do you believe Christianity needs a “clean reboot” or do you think there is another way to survive?

2. Do you find paradoxes in faith?

1. Len states “The first arm of the cross is the vertical, our relationship to God. The second arm of the cross is the horizontal, our relationship with others, ourselves, and creation. If you pick up just one arm of the cross, it becomes a stick most often used to beat other people with.” What can Christians sometimes use as “sticks to beat with”, whether intentional or not? What are the effects of those actions?

2. How do we as Christians react and respond to cultural paradoxes (i.e., the Princess Diana example)?

Go be Jesus challenge: This week, show someone a better way of doing something. The trick is not to be critical in the process.
Lesson 2
The Missional Life
God's “GO”


Questions:

1. Do you think being mission-minded is necessary for being a Christian? Why or why not?

2. Define "mission".

3. Have you said "yes" to God's "GO"? If not, why?

4. What is your image of the word "missionary"?
5. Have you ever thought of yourself as a missionary?

6. What is meant by "the energies of Christianity are outward"? How do we redirect our efforts to match Christ's?


Questions:

1. "Doing the gospel is primary speech, talking about the gospel is secondary speech." Why is it easier for most of us to "talk" than to "do"?

2. What effect did the story of the "disaster" church picnic have on you?


Questions:

1. Have you thought of the Holy Spirit as a tool of the church or as the church a
tool of the Holy Spirit?

2. Do you agree that mission trumps order and structure? Why or why not?


Questions:

1. Len states that the two components of our idea of the Trinity are relationship and difference.
   a. What does relationship mean here?

   b. What does difference mean here?

   c. How is this a paradox?

2. Len quotes this statement referring to the decline of British Methodism: "Mission has not been high on the agenda." Have you seen evidence that the mission-minded church is more likely to thrive?

3. How does a church become mission-minded? How do we grow that area?

Questions:

1. What is a G.O.O.D. Christian?

2. How do we become G.O.O.D. Christians?

Day 6: Scripture: Using a concordance, search for passages containing the word "go".

Record your impressions of the importance of being missional. What do you believe you could do personally that would stretch you in this area?

Go be Jesus challenge: Consider yourself a "missionary for a day". Go about your usual work as if you were a missionary in a foreign land. How would your attitude toward your work be affected? Toward those you come in contact with?
Lesson 3
The Missional Life
God's "GO"

Day 1: Read section 9. Scripture readings: Genesis 25:24-26; Matthew 16:11-17

Questions:

1. What types of labels can be associated with a church?

2. Do you feel it is important for a church to have an identity within the community?

3. What is the importance of a church having a “reaching out/ outward focused” identity? Does this type of identity sometimes take the place of having a Christ-centered identity?

4. Do you feel denominational labels are important? Justify your answer.

Questions:

1. Is it easier for you to be missional working as part of a group or as an individual? Do you think Jesus intended for us to be one way or the other, or should we minister in both ways?

2. What is the difference in meaning of the subtle variations of the translation of the word for go: “go (there)” vs. “as you are going”?

3. Can you have “works salvation” without Christ? Can you have “Christ salvation” without works?


Questions:
1. How much faith does it take to follow Christ “without a map”?

2. Why does God seem to lead us the roundabout way through a situation sometimes? Which is more central to faith: belief or trust?

3. A very successful NFL running back was asked to what he credited his great pass-receiving record, to which he replied, “I just go where the ball is going to be and get in front of it.” How can his reply be compared to how we might connect with 21st century un-churched?


*Questions:*

1. Have you ever thought of your life-story as a pilgrimage? Are there spiritual markers you have collected?

2. How does an un-churched person search for:
   
a. recognition
b. healing

c. purpose

d. community

e. adventure


Questions:

1. What is the significance, during the Last Supper, of Christ’s referring to the elements as His body and blood, in light of the historical cultural importance of feasts and meal-sharing?

2. Why is it important for Christians to engage with culturally and religiously diverse members of society?


1. Using a thesaurus, record synonyms of “mercy”.
2. How have you received mercy from others?

*Go be Jesus challenge:* Look for opportunities to show mercy this week. Think of what your response will be when asked “why?”
Lesson 4
The Missional Life
God's “GO”


Questions:

1. Why is it important for the Church to remember and honor its roots as it moves into the new century? How do we look both forward and backward at the same time?

2. Given Sweet’s premise that the church has gotten away from its roots and must adjust to a changing culture, do you find the current environment of change threatening, or do you embrace it as an opportunity to extend God’s message in new ways?

3. Are you disheartened or hopeful? What could affect your outlook?

Questions:

1. What is the difference between “wisdom” and “knowledge”?

2. What is the value of being placed short-term in different lifestyle situations? (i.e., short-term mission work)? How could these situations help us see more clearly through Christ’s eyes?

3. How important do you think it is for these experiences to take place outside our own country? Why?

Day 3: Read section 20. Scripture: John 14: 1-21

Question:

1. What is the source of spiritual truth? Can spiritual truth be found outside of the
bible? Explain your answer.

2. If we are meant to live in community, do you believe that community has something to teach us?

3. How do we become able to discern spiritual truth?

**Day 4:** Read section 21: Scripture: Matthew 8:18-22; 10: 34-42.

*Questions:*

1. Does your attachment to the things of this world hinder your ability or desire to become “missional”?

2. Explain the statement: “Honesty requires that we not cart our culture with us, but inhabit the one that is there.”
3. Journeying through and living out a missional life requires abandoning control to God. What are some areas of control that God may ask us to surrender? What makes these areas hard to release?


1. “When a church is not on a journey, it becomes a relic.” Do you agree? If so, in what ways does it become a relic?

2. What is a church on a journey doing differently?

3. What’s the difference between a “trail” and a “trajectory”? How is God’s vision like our trajectory?


Questions:

1. Do you think it is important for a church to take risks?
2. What can happen to a church that becomes too “comfortable”?

3. What dangers can befall a church that does not take risks?

4. When a church focuses too much energy on how it appears or presents itself to its community, what happens to the picture we exhibit of living connectionally, of living out Christ’s command to love one another?

Go “be Jesus” challenge: Think about what small steps you could take to begin to focus more on being a “going” disciple. List several tasks that you could take on that would help you get past the “cautious” stage. Go do one of them this week.

Part 2
Lesson 5
The Relational Life
God's “YES”


Questions:

1. How would your attitudes and actions change if you were to see yourself not as “other than” Jesus, but as “other OF” Jesus (i.e., as a part of Jesus Himself rather than as a separated being?)

2. How does the need for forgiveness cause separation from God? How is relationship restored?


Questions:
4. Is there still isolation in a world that is connected 24/7 via media?

5. What are some things that can cause us to be separated from God? Who or what is to blame?

6. What would be different if the church’s attitude changed from
   a. Propositional: Believe, behave, belong
   to   b. Relational: Belong, behave, believe?


Questions:

1. Can we live in community (i.e., church family) yet still be without relationships?

2. How does a small group environment work within community to grow relationships? Why is this important?

Questions:

1. How would you introduce an unbeliever to Jesus Christ using only rational argument?

2. How would you introduce an unbeliever to Jesus using examples and relationships?


Questions:

1. Should the church isolate itself from its community or its culture?

2. In what ways might the church be doing so?


Questions:

1. How do we become so attune to God’s voice that we “channel” His Spirit at all
times so that others are aware of His presence in our lives?

2. How important is it to you to get to that state?

Go “be Jesus” challenge: Talk heart to heart with someone who is not involved in a small group about why it is important that they get involved in one.
Lesson 6
The Relational Life
God's “YES”


Questions:

3. Is it more important for our faith to identify who we are, or for our faith to define how we act? Why?

4. Do you believe it is possible for doctrine and propositions to sometimes cause us to lose sight of Christ? If so, how?


Questions:

7. If we embrace a set of rules to follow to be in right relationship to God, what
would be the consequences of following the list on:

a. Our understanding of grace?

b. Our feelings toward relationships?

c. People of other denominations or the unchurched?

d. Our understanding of Christ’s teachings of love?

8. Why is biblical truth in scripture written in narrative/story form?


*Questions:*

3. What is it about the Apostle’s Creed that changes its “propositional” beginning
4. What is your response to “Relationships require action; beliefs require only assent.” (p. 117) Is this statement always either true or false? Why?

5. What place do principles and propositions have in helping us find a relationship with Christ?


**Questions:**

1. What is the relational principle on which Christianity is based?

2. What are some relational bonds that join people together for a specific purpose? (see pg. 126 for help).


**Questions:**
3. Who do you say Jesus is? How do you know?

4. Jesus was educated and could both read and write. Why do you think He left no writings behind of His own hand?

3. What is the difference between “belief” and “faith”?


Questions:

2. Why is it important for a new Christian to begin his/her faith journey from a propositional base?

3. Which propositional beliefs do you think are necessary for faith to progress? Which propositional ideas might one view as dangerous to present to a new believer?

4. Define “God” without using a metaphor or “feeling” statement. Can God be defined in concrete terms?
Day 7: (optional)

Using a concordance, find and read examples of parables relating “the kingdom of heaven is like. . .”

What is your image of heaven?

Go Be Jesus challenge: Prepare your answer to an unbeliever’s query “How/why do you believe that stuff?”
Lesson 7
The Relational Life
God's “YES”

**Day 1:** Read section 17. Scripture reading: 1 Cor. 1: 18-28.

*Questions:*

1. Do relationships follow rules?

2. If faith is relational, why do we sometimes feel the need to define it by propositions and doctrine?

3. Is a faith defined in terms easier or harder to make sense of?

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**Day 2:** Read section 18. Scripture: Joshua 24: 11-16.

*Questions:*

9. Sweet gives a definition of sin as “any attempt we make to add meaning to our
lives apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ.” Comment?

10. What would be sin in your life if you were to adopt this definition?


Questions:

1. Do you feel it is harder to be relational with others or to avoid relationships?

2. What makes it worth the effort to sustain and grow relationships? Or do you feel that it is not worth the effort?


Questions:
1. Sweet commented about terrorists groups existing in “cyberspace”. How do you feel about the idea that relationships and groups can be built without material form?

2. Is the idea of church not being a concrete entity difficult for us to comprehend? Why or why not?


*Questions:*

1. From your scripture reading today: What “propositional rules” does Jesus break to engage the woman in conversation? What spiritual truth does Christ teach here?

2. How does this story convey spiritual truth better than a list of facts would?

3. What elements added to the “story of your church” would make it a more meaningful story?

Questions:

5. What is the primary role of doctrine in the church?

6. How can we as a church keep certain that doctrine supports rather than excludes Christ?

Day 7: (optional) Make a list of tenets of your denomination that your church adopts. Try to picture these in relational terms. How can you explain these tenets so that someone outside our faith could relate?

Go Be Jesus challenge: Seek to learn more about a person you know on a casual basis, either from church, work, or neighborhood.
Lesson 8
The Incarnational Life
God's “NO”


Questions:

4. God’s “Yes” sometimes requires us to first say “no” to something, often our unintentional attempts at “making over” people’s culture. How do we go about meeting people where they are and showing them where Jesus already is around them?

5. Name some ways in which God uses “the profane and ordinary to reveal the sacred and holy”. (i.e., how do we find Truth in the everyday?)


Questions:

11. Living incarnationally requires us to live and react within the framework of the
culture around us. Is this a “conflict of interests” for a Christian?

12. What happens if we try to live outside the culture of the day?


*Questions:*

3. Should Christians in the global mission field attempt to replace local lifestyles and cultures with Western cultural?

4. How could we share and serve Christ without devaluing other cultures and heritages?

**Day 4:** Read sections 4, 5. Scripture: Romans 14: 1-12; John 17.

*Questions:*

3. How do we live and present Christian values and Christ-centered living to the
4. If we live and interact in a Christ-like manner in today’s society, we are bound to be irritants to some people. What should be our response to those who would find fault with our choices?


Questions:

4. How is Christ both always changing and always the same?

5. Why is it important to consider the setting and context of a situation in order to convey the Truth about Christ?

3. Why were parables such an effective way of communicating God’s Truths?
Day 6: Read sections 7-8. Scripture: John 10: 22-42; Proverbs 27.

*Questions:*

7. What is it about Jesus’ essence that makes Him unique?

8. Is it wise for a Christian to distance himself from what is happening in society and politics?

*Go Be Jesus challenge: *Educate yourself about the doctrines that your church adheres to. Examine them next to what you believe and have learned is Truth. Know where you stand.
Lesson 9
The Incarnational Life
God's “NO”


Questions:

6. In what ways can the surrounding culture influence or color the theology of the day?

7. How do we ensure that the gospel is presented as Christ intended?

8. Do you believe the church should exist in the world as a separate, unchanging entity and seek to bring the world to it? Explain your answer.

Questions:

13. What is the difference between being “in touch” with the culture and being “enmeshed” in the culture?

14. Do you believe our culture is inherently evil? Do you believe the church should take a stand against our culture?

15. What is the best way to induce change in a culture—from within or from outside? Why?


Questions:

5. Sweet used a metaphor of our popular culture as “water.” If you use the
following metaphors for the church, what does Sweet say happens to each when placed within “water” (culture):

a. The church as ‘water’:

b. The church as a ‘stone’:

c. The church as a ‘fish’:

6. What areas of our doctrine of faith do you consider important to remain untouched or uninfluenced by our culture?


**Questions:**

5. Do you think cultural values need to be changed? Whose job is it?
6. To what extent do you believe a Christian should be involved?

3. How are cultural values influenced?

**Day 5:** Read sections 14,15. Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:15-26; Acts 8: 26-40.

**Questions:**

6. Why is it important to “meet people where they are” when speaking of matters of the Spirit or church?

7. Some terms and phrases used in church can be confusing or unclear to those outside the church experience. Name some of these and how you would translate the phrase to the unchurched.


**Questions:**

9. Which is more important: sowing or reaping?
10. Who is responsible for the harvest?

**Go Be Jesus challenge:** Think of at least one way in which your church could engage the surrounding culture that could potentially lead people to Christ. Share with a pastor your ideas. Bonus points for working with others to make it happen.
Lesson 10
The Incarnational Life
God's “NO”


Questions:

9. Why is it important to discern the true character of the community around us rather than minister to it through our perception of its identity?

10. Is it important for a congregation to feel unique while at the same time feeling connected to a global “whole” church? If so, in what ways can a church body emphasize its uniqueness?


Questions:
16. Translate the following gardening metaphors for church planting and growth into practical steps for growing Christ’s kingdom:

   a. Analyze your soil composition:

   b. Prepare the soil:

   c. Choose which type of seed to plant:

   d. Sow good seed:

   e. Water and fertilize regularly:


**Questions:**

1. What would be the difference between a life lived in imitation of Christ and one lived as “Christ in the world” (manifesting His presence in our lives)?

2. How adaptable are you to change? Would you be willing to change your attitudes or opinions if you believed it were necessary to advance God’s kingdom?
3. Are you willing to face opposition and criticism in order to make Christ accessible to a new generation?


*Questions:*

7. What is the difference in attitude between “saving the lost” and “saving the beloved”?

8. Which attitude do you believe Christ had when He stated “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”?

9. What can we learn about Christ from “tax collectors and sinners”? 

Questions:

1. What do you feel is more important in presenting the gospel to the Google generation: excellence in performance or excellence in participation? Why?

2. Many opponents of the movement of the church into a more relational focus view that movement as heresy. Do you agree with that or not? Justify your answer.


Questions:

What is our church’s MRI measurement?

1. Are we “telling a good news story” to the community?

2. Are our stories having a positive effect on the community?

3. Has our effect on the community grown in a positive way?

4. How many active disciples have we set loose from our church?

5. Are our efforts forced or do they occur naturally?
6. Are we reaching outside our walls to spread beauty, truth, and goodness?

7. How many “mercy” ministries are we producing?

8. Are we counting the numbers that matter to God?

9. How important is a relationship to Jesus Christ that involves time spent with Him to our congregation?

10. Are we successful or are we resonating within the community?

Sweet’s MRI checklist:

1. Identify with others—“where are you?”

2. Learn forgiveness. Better, don’t get mad in the first place.

3. Get over it—“let it go”; it’s adiaphora.


5. Step outside your comfort zone. Embrace difference and change.

6. And don’t forget to laugh.

GO BE JESUS. SCRAM.