

Christian Book Summaries



Volume 3 . Issue 36
August 2007

The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion

COUNCIL OF REFERENCE

Dr. Richard Averbeck
Rev. D. Stuart Briscoe

Dr. Paul Cedar

Mr. Dave Coleman

Dr. & Mrs. Larry Crabb

Mr. Roger Cross

Rev. Samuel Farina

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel

Rev. & Mrs. Lud Golz

Dr. Howard G. Hendricks

Mr. Olan Hendrix

Dr. David Jeremiah

Rev. Knute Larson

Dr. John C. Maxwell

Dr. Bruce McNicol

Mr. Dean Merrill

Mrs. Elisa Morgan

Dr. Ray Ortlund

Dr. Luis Palau

Dr. Gilbert A. Peterson

Rev. Wes Roberts

Rev. & Mrs. Jamie
Rasmussen

Mr. Jim Warren

Dr. Rick Warren

Publishers

Catherine & David
Martin

Editors

Cheryl & Michael
Chiapperino

A Quick Focus

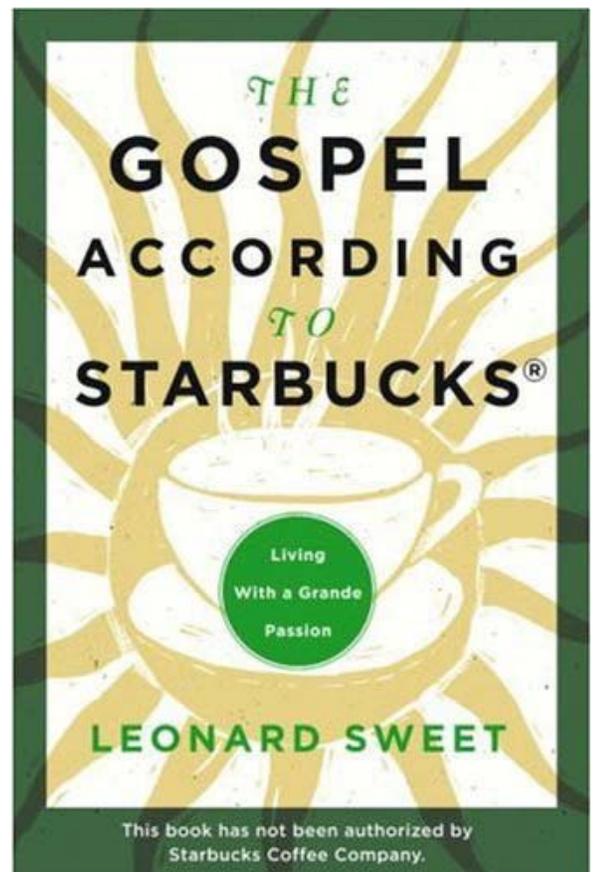
The Book's Purpose

- Probe the inner workings of the Starbucks experience to glean lessons for connecting the Gospel to today's world
- Encourage the Church to become more relevant and challenging to a rapidly changing culture
- Explore ways the Church can be known for building community and fostering authentic relationships
- Challenge believers to recapture a spiritual life that is experiential, participatory, image-rich, and connecting

The Book's Message

The experience-oriented Starbucks world we live in calls for an equally evolving perspective on how we do church. The Church has long called people to repentance and a Christ-like life, but it has failed to effectively live out that life passionately and wholeheartedly. People long for more than just the right ideas; they need to know the right person, through Jesus, and to be able to experience life in a way the world can only mimic.

Many people earnestly searching for passion and truth are finding it more easily at Starbucks coffee shops than at their local churches. As we examine the philosophy and practices of this successful coffee company, we can learn lessons about knowing God experientially; we can exchange the shallowness of religious duty for genuine spiritual passion; and we can become part of the spiritual journey of fellow believers.



by Leonard Sweet
Waterbrook Press
ISBN: 1578566495

Five Main Points

- Starbucks, Evangelism, and the EPIC Life 2
- EPIC Experience 3
- EPIC Participation 4
- EPIC Images 5
- EPIC Connection 6

Starbucks, Evangelism, and the EPIC life

The coffee industry can't really compete with the soft drink industry, but unlike most sodas, coffee can actually be healthy for you. On average, people who enjoy coffee confess to having 3.4 cups a day. As coffee goes, Starbucks isn't the cheapest, but people don't go to Starbucks to buy inexpensive coffee. They pay for the Starbucks experience.

“In a number of ways, Starbucks is a three-dollar sensory feast.”

Jesus came so that we could live life to the fullest. He has called us to an “EPIC life,” but with each study we find fewer and fewer Americans going to church. Theological arguments and doctrinal debates just aren't effective in connecting with people. We need a faith that can be lived out and experienced in practice; we do not need more intellectual ideas to debate. Starbucks has tapped into our human need for experiences, communication, symbols, and participation.

“There are few things I enjoy more in life than what I call soul cafés: sharing good stories over good coffee.”

We can learn a lot about our culture from Starbucks, but beyond that, it is also a window to understanding our faith. Too many Christians live their lives with a sense of impersonal obligation to God, often doing things out of a sense of shame or duty. Jesus' life was characterized by His passion for life and energetic interaction with the people around Him.

So where does a coffee chain fit into understanding how to live with God? Starbucks will never even come close to changing the world like Jesus did, but it has made a significant difference in our culture. Starbucks started out in a small way and has expanded exponentially in a short period of time—both in terms of the number of stores and in terms of market diversification. Starbucks is currently participating with music artists to produce and compile new CDs for their stores, and they recently contributed to the production

of the movie “Akeelah and the Bee.” With one of their unofficial slogans being “Live More Musically,” Starbucks is creating a complete Starbucks Experience that caters to every sense.

Starbucks' CEO, Howard Schultz, describes himself as a “coffee evangelist.” These days many Christians have found difficulty using words like evangelism because of the way it has sometimes been twisted to represent an “us-versus-them” mentality. But at the same time, while some Christians are pulling back from this Christian terminology of evangelism, it is becoming prevalent in the secular world in the form of unofficial titles such as, “Management Evangelist” and “Internet Evangelist.”

As Christians, we have far better news to share and Jesus is our primary example of what an evangelist should look like. While secular companies are promoting themselves, we need to be promoting Jesus. However, evangelism isn't as much about getting people to agree with a belief as it is getting people to engage in a way of life.

Though Jesus never went more than 80 miles from the place he grew up, even His most minor actions carried with them EPIC results. He demonstrated a life of “grande” passion.

Starbucks serves every cup of coffee with a detailed and vibrant experience. In the same way, the EPIC life is about living in the fullness of what God has for us. It's the refreshing open door of living in the way God created us to live, not following a set of rules. The EPIC life consists of Experience, Participation, Images that give a sense of value and purpose, and Connection.

People want reality, not surface talk and impersonal advertising. Starbucks doesn't just sell someone a cup of coffee and then kick him out the door. They provide a place for people to sit together and connect over a hot beverage. With the Internet pulling an ever-increasing

continued on page 3

STARBUCKS, EVANGELISM, AND THE EPIC LIFE

continued from page 2

number of people into a world of cyberspace stupor, there is a greater felt need for connection and sensory reality.

Every person entering a particular church service was given a coffee bean called Kopi Luwak in a small cup. After inviting the congregation to taste the bean, the pastor explained that this type of coffee bean is packaged and sold only after going through the digestive system of an Indonesian cat—to make the point that often the things that many would consider rubbish may also contain things of value. We know that in the gospel, Jesus turns everything we understand about the world on its head. The great ones are the servants. The ones who live are the ones who choose to die. The ones who give everything away gain the entire world.

In a Mississippi classroom during the days of the civil rights movement, an eight-year-old black girl wasn't allowed to sit down until every classmate had spit in her seat. Jesus used spit to heal a blind man. God continuously twists the things that we see as vile or worthless and makes them useful and beautiful. This is the EPIC life to which we are called. 

EPIC experience

People are willing to pay a premium price for Starbucks coffee because they are purchasing an entire experience. It's not a new kind of coffee; it's a new kind of coffee-drinking encounter. Instead of apologizing for coffee that may be scalding hot, Starbucks adds a warning label and a thermal jacket to help you enjoy the experience. In our spiritual lives, how often do we “apologize” for our lives by toning them down and making them more safe and comfortable for people? Jesus didn't call us to a faith built on comfort and safety. In fact, He says that those who are neither cold nor hot will be spit out of His mouth.

“Starbucks, more than most corporations, understands the irresistible attraction of authentic experience.”

In the same way that Starbucks strives to create the best experience for enjoying coffee, we need to step into the best experience of faith. It's not cheap to live the EPIC life, but it is rewarding. The culture we live in is more and more concerned with how we feel during an experience than the experience itself. On weather reports, instead of just a forecast of the outdoor temperature, we are given the feels-like temperature based on humidity, wind chill, and other factors. In the same way, companies like Starbucks are latching on to the feel-good phenomenon and creating experiences that customers can find only through those outlets.

Most of us have seen streets where there are two Starbucks across the street or less than a block away from each other. This practice began when Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz walked into the first Canadian Starbucks

in 1988 and saw long lines of people waiting for Starbucks coffee. To the surprise of the Starbucks execs with him, Howard responded to this sight with dismay. He told them, “Nobody is going to stand in long lines to pay big bucks for a luxury drink but once.”

The world is changing from middles to extremes. Being average isn't something we associate with success. The very idea of mass-production was to draw everyone into an even, equal-access, middle ground where needs could be met in similar ways. Today mass production isn't cutting it and people want bigger or smaller; they want customization. People aren't as interested anymore in the product itself; they're interested in the encounter that surrounds the product.

With Christianity, it often seems like we promote ideas and methodologies rather than inviting people to simply experience God. Is Christ merely a historical figure or is He a present, living force in our world today? Do we live and encounter Him in EPIC ways or do we merely live in intellectual agreement with the Bible? God has given us as His Church the task of being an authentic and living Body that represents Him.

When an expert in antiquities is deciding on the authenticity and value of an item, he uses three primary criteria to rate the piece: provenance, beauty, and rarity. When sharing the gospel, these attributes can attract those hostile to the cross far more easily than arguments regarding the truth of an idea.

Provenance is the evaluation of the source and history of the item. Many people want to know if being a Christian will make them better people. When we come to Christ, He sends us into the world to make a difference. We are made in His image and begin to reflect the likeness of Christ and express who He is. Becoming like Christ can be an experiential and emotional process. However, we don't disconnect mentally. Experiences can be doors to truth as much as rationalism is. We grow as we learn to experience things with all of our senses, includ-

EPIC EXPERIENCE

continued from page 3

ing our minds. Using the Word of God as our guidepost, we learn to discerningly process through experience to learn truth.

“Christianity promises a provenance that can be certifiably Jesus. Authenticity is not about being more relevant but about being more Jesus.”

Beauty is the second criteria for rating an antique. It’s easy to see why we enjoy beautiful things and so much time is spent trying to create beauty through art, music, and even through personal beautification such as plastic surgery or cosmetics. At one time the Church was also known for producing some of the most beautiful art and imagery in the world. But these days it seems that much of the Church has disengaged from the desire to produce beauty. The world needs to understand that beauty reveals the whole truth, imperfections and all. It is a complete picture of reality that can often magnify a deeper message. For instance, saying “I love you” is far easier than giving someone flowers; their scent, visual beauty, and texture will repeat that same message constantly over a period of days.

“Christian faith is designed to be lived in experiences of beauty, not well-structured thought experiments.”

Rarity is the third defining factor of authenticity. On our part, rarity requires being true to our individual nature and function in the body. Many are too easily swayed by the ease of mass appeal and, as a result, they live their lives in conformity and become lukewarm. A man once found a rare and valuable vase created by a famous craftsman. He worked until he was able to purchase it but then found it was too elegant for his humble home. He then began a process of redecorating and upgrading his home to complement the class and style of the vase. When we value genuine faith, it will transform us from the inside out.

CBS

EPIC participation

The best experiences are the ones we get to join in on. When we are participants in life, it takes on a more tangible reality than when we are simply observers. Many coffee shops have their own “dialect” of coffee language in order to describe their drinks. In the same way, we can express our faith in many dialects and increase our ability to interact with others from different walks of life.

Most consumer companies customize their products for the unique desires and tastes of the customer. This is becoming one of the major

ways corporations innovate with their products and create new expressions in their markets. The customer becomes the designer.

Websites called Wikis offer the general public opportunities to edit and create web pages and information. Millions of people watch and vote for *American Idol* winners~ And the number of people casting votes for these shows competes with the number participating in presidential elections. Professional sports are also on the decline, being replaced by participatory activities in which the average person can engage, such as snowboarding, skateboarding, or even the interactive video game equivalents of professional sports. Starbucks has recognized and taken advantage of the trend, giving us the interactive karaoke experience by letting us customize and choose the products they serve. It doesn’t have to be on the menu any more.

Jesus’ entrance into the world wasn’t just an event He used to represent God’s love for us. It was a chance for us to actively engage God as a human being, to participate in living with Him. The Bible says we “may participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). We must get outside the church walls and draw people into a place where life, beauty, and truth can be found. The joy of the gospel is that we get to become a part of God’s ongoing work for the redemption and renewal of the world.

“If I am talking to someone who is not immersed in the evangelical world, how can I communicate if I speak only one dialect, the in-house lexicon of formal religion?”

continued on page 5

EPIC PARTICIPATION

continued from page 4

Participating in a genuine way requires a bold willingness to be off-the-cuff, dynamic, and preemptive. Having a righteous daring to do what God asks can be difficult when the average Christian is too comfortable with structured and predictable systems. Jesus did many things in the moment as He led His disciples and taught the crowds.

In order to keep participating in fresh, inventive ways, we need to be willing to understand and walk through the paradoxes of our faith. Many churches feel a need to get rid of any ideas that might seem to contradict one other; they simply choose a side and stand firmly to defend it. But creativity requires a passion for the polar opposites. The Bible is full of these paradoxes, for example when we look at a perfect God becoming man and becoming sin for us. They are present in the diverse realms of our mind, spirit, and body and in the fact that through Christ we are both saints and sinners. Exploring the paradoxes of faith can enable us to find a deeper expression of God's heart and life for those who need it.

CBS

EPIC images

One of the things that doesn't really happen in dreams is reading. We don't sit down in our dream world and read a book because we are captured by sights and sounds and strange ideas and circumstances. We are drawn by visual things. When television first came out, people gathered around the front of stores just to watch the TVs in the windows. These days TV is so prevalent, we have to run commercials telling teens to go play outside. In fact, many disorders and societal issues are blamed on this form of media. In both television and movies, sound and speech are tied to images.

Starbucks uses signs and colors to tell customers what to do. It's not a process we consciously have to think about. Everything in the place is visually oriented. Even Starbucks cups show us not only the Starbucks logo, but also snippets of stories and words of wisdom from various authors.

God called Israel to many practices that could have been considered strange to the people around them and today we are still directed to live in ways that look abnormal to the culture around us. Some Christians have taken this to the extent of making us actually look scary to the world instead of refreshingly different. Starbucks uses imagery to invite people into the experience and the Church can learn how to do the same. Do we use our imagery to convey commands and information, or do we use it to accentuate truth and beauty?

Image and faith can be combined to create powerful metaphors for the truth of the Bible. The images and ideas of the Bible are the things that move people, not the words themselves. Moving people by imagination works a lot better when we present things in a poetic, image-rich way, rather than through dry philosophy or writing.

Jesus used a coin to explain the answer to the Pharisees' question about taxes. The coin was clearly identified with Caesar and that image was enough to make Jesus' point. In a similar way, Starbucks stores sell all kinds of coffee mugs and other products which offer customers a tangible way to see, touch, and remember Starbucks—even at home. We don't want to let our hearts become idolatrous about our things, but God can use our things to show us more about the life of faith. Various items can serve as reminders and object lessons regarding the path we're traveling.

Celebrity culture is often looked down on in the Church and for good reason. Our TV shows and movies are filled with actors who are placed on pedestals as icons and heroes—but in their personal lives we see little but corruption and chaos. However, instead of decrying the very concept of celebrity, why not redefine it? After all, Christianity is filled with its share of heroes who lead the faith and stand as icons for Christians worldwide. These days people are connecting all over the place through video diaries and personal websites that promote the average person as a celebrity. We can use celebrity power to give to people, instead of take; we need to let people see God through us, instead of making ourselves the center of attention.

CBS

"It's not either/or, image *or* words. It's both/and, image *and* words. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus was a man (image) living among us. He was also text (the Word became flesh).

EPIC connection

Even mundane experiences can take on new life and fun when they are shared with other people. When we drink our coffee in the morning, we get a great kick-start to the day. But when we talk about life with a friend over coffee, we enjoy our day even more. Coffee is a great people connector!

**“Forget *Cheers*
(‘where everybody knows your name’).
Remember Starbucks (‘where everybody
wants to know your soul’).”**

This final piece of the EPIC life is the culmination of what so many are seeking. People want to feel connected to something important, to have a place of meaning in relationship to other people. That’s why sites like MySpace and eHarmony are so popular. We can stay close to whomever we desire, whether people we’ve known for years or people we’ve just met.

Starbucks provides the experience of connection by giving customers a common ground on which to converse in a neutral place that also keeps things edgy and enjoyable. It’s a gathering place for regulars and newcomers alike and rarely does anyone feel less welcome than someone else.

The Church has become far less relational and far more focused on expositing or reaffirming truth. This has resulted in people coming on Sundays to relate more to ideas than to God or each other. Starbucks and many other places, including airports and hotels, are recognizing the cultural thirst for connection and they are scrambling to meet the need. The most common way is providing places that have a “stay as long as you like” feel—where people can have private conversations in public spaces.

**“The gospel of connection is the gospel
of relationship, and the gospel of
relationship leads us ultimately to God.”**

Another indicator of our increasing need for connection is the growing market of cell phones. Cell phones have given people the ability to instantly connect with someone anywhere in the world, from a place of seclusion or from the middle of a crowd. We crave connection on our cell phones or across from a cup of our favorite coffee because that’s what we were made to do. That hunger also draws us to God and reveals that He alone can make us complete in ourselves and our relationships with others.

One of the most important questions asked in business is whether or not a customer would recommend or refer someone else. That simple hypothetical question can show quite a bit about the future success of a company...or a church. There are many who began by picketing companies like Starbucks who now frequent them as customers instead. It provided a place for them to gather and discuss their concerns in an open environment. Providing a place for face-to-face conversations is a surefire way to let people feel like part of a community and keep them coming back.

The Church has an opportunity to open its doors to the public and invite people to find relationships that will be meaningful and fulfilling. People need a communal place that will offer them safety and connectedness. One church walked this idea out by genuinely putting their space at the disposal of the congregation. The church provided coffee and doughnuts for a break in the meeting and when people were hesitant to rejoin the meeting, the pastor finally said, “Bring your coffee and doughnuts, and add your stain to everyone else’s.” The carpet became a part of a greater message that the pastor was sending.

As we connect, there are four primary areas that we need to remember. The first and most important is our connection to God. God desires to be close to us. In-

continued on page 7

EPIC CONNECTION
continued from page 6

stead of servants, He calls us friends. Second, connecting with the biblical reality of who we are is also vital. We are His creation and, as such, created by His artistry and set apart for Him.

Third, from the time we're born, we are hardwired to connect with others. Human development and health from birth are inextricably tied to being nurtured and relating to others.

Finally, it's also becoming less common for people to truly understand and connect with God's creation. We deface the beauty that God has created with cookie cutter houses and strip malls. There is much we could do to care for and participate in the creation God has provided for us.

The Latin word for conversation includes the meaning "to live together." We are intrinsically made to live an EPIC life full of experiences, interactivity, visual creativity, and bonds with other people. This life is available as easily as getting out of bed in the morning. Find the life that God created you for with all of its passion, and jump in with both feet.

"All four EPIC elements, enlivened and intertwined, deliver grande passion, the life we're all thirsty for."

CBS



**Christian
Book
Summaries**

Volume 3, Number 36

Publisher

Catherine & David Martin

Editors

Cheryl & Michael Chiapperino

Published on the World Wide Web at
ChristianBookSummaries.com.

The mission of Christian Book Summaries is to enhance the ministry of thinking Christians by providing thorough and readable summaries of noteworthy books from Christian publishers.

The opinions expressed are those of the original writers and are not necessarily those of Christian Book Summaries or its Council of Reference.

The Gospel According to Starbucks by Leonard Sweet, copyright 2007 by Leonard Sweet. Summarized by permission of the publisher, WaterBrook Press, a division of Random House Inc. 12265 Oracle Boulevard, Colorado Springs, CO 80921. 210 pages. \$13.99. ISBN: 1578566495. Available at your favorite bookstore or online bookseller.

The author: Leonard Sweet is founder and president of Spirit-Venture Ministries and serves as the E. Stanley Jones professor of evangelism at Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey. He is also a visiting professor at George Fox University in Newburg, Oregon.

Summarized by: David Reyes is a freelance writer who serves on the staff of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he lives with his new wife, Catherine.