

SUSTAINABLE
Spirituality
GUIDEBOOK

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FOREWORD

I woke up just as the camp speaker was calling everyone forward to give their lives to Jesus. It's not clear to me just when I fell asleep. All I remember is hearing about how painful crucifixion was as a method of torture and execution. (Also, honestly how painful my butt was from sitting for so long on the hard floor.)

Three or four days into camp the schedule has a way of catching up to you. Late nights messing around in the cabin and early mornings singing in the chapel set up sleep deprived kids for exhaustion by the middle of the week. Team competitions during recreation time and endless adventures during free time tax the body. Deep talks at chapel times and late night discussions in small groups bring the emotional and mental fatigue in line with the physical.

On that night in the summer of 1982, an exhausted thirteen year old boy woke up at just the right time to receive Jesus. Though minutes before he was in dream land; though hours before he was more concerned about meeting girls; though days before he called his mom to come pick him up because he felt out of place and alone; at just the right time, he woke up and went forward. The course of my life was changed forever.

My heart was changed. I wanted to know God. The Bible came alive to me. My friend group changed. Priorities changed. Though I wasn't always good, at least now I wanted to be! My whole being wanted to know God and love God and serve God for the rest of my life. It's still funny to me that such a born again experience

can happen out of a dead sleep. But it did. It was supernatural and the beginning of a life calling that led me into ministry for all the years since.

As a youth pastor I led others on camps for many years and took part in programming these transformative experiences. We knew just how to move kids to the point of decision and how to set structures in place to follow up on their decisions. But each year I would notice a pattern. After camp, kids would be on fire for a few weeks or months and eventually cool off into complacency. So we would soon have another camp or mission trip to reignite the fire. Their spiritual lives depended on the schedule of our ministry year to keep them going.

The problem is that this kind of external stimulus can only be kept up for so long. Kids graduate. They go to college. Adults don't have time to go on three or four trips a year to keep the fire going. Something needs to be done to make people's relationship with God more sustainable in the long term.

In fact, something was needed in my own spirituality to make it sustainable. Sunday services, Bible studies and accountability groups were not enough. These outward supports were good for worship, learning and friendship, but if I was going to sustain my relationship with God, it would have to come from the inside out.

All sustainable spirituality is from the inside out. We don't have camp directors and speakers every day in our lives. It puts unattainable pressure on our churches to expect them to provide us all we need to sustain a life of faith. What we need is to learn to take responsibility for ourselves. We must be honest with where we are, build an intimate relationship with God, cultivate an actual (not forced) love for each person and have a vision that calls us to be part of the restoration God is

bringing on earth.

That is what I have developed personally and what I have worked to create at Mountain View Church for the last 20 years. This workbook is a guide to help people, both in and outside our church cultivate a sustainable spirituality. It can be used alone or in groups, but community is always the best context for sustained growth.

The community that helped me create this was made up of some amazing friends. My wife Traci Rodarmel added her years of experience in the classroom to many of the exercises. My son Zac Rodarmel brought his prophetic insights to bear in the writing and development of the ideas. Ryan Kirkland did a masterful job with the layout and publishing. Bob Mattson was an invaluable help with the editing. The whole project would not have happened without the writing, project management, and constant pushing forward of Drew Tilton. More than anyone else, he is the heart behind this project. I'm so thankful for the great team God has given me.

As the old African proverb goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." My prayer is that this guidebook goes far in helping you and your companions build a sustainable spirituality. Enjoy this guide as our gift to you and give us feedback about what is helpful and what is not. We are committed to improving this material to be useful for as many people as possible far into the future.

Hopeful,

Todd Rodarmel

intended.

So how does that work practically? In short, it starts with an honest look at yourself that leads to a genuine pursuit of intimacy with God. Then, as you love the people around you with his love, it eventually leads to the restoration of all things.

We will be exploring this process in depth over the next eight weeks. But first let's look at how this guidebook is designed to help you and your group.

HOW THIS GUIDEBOOK WORKS

Sustainable Spirituality is not just a book or curriculum. Rather, it is an eight week journey you will travel with God and others to cultivate a sustainable spirituality in your life. This book is designed to guide you around four core values that shaped the life of Jesus and define the process of spiritual transformation.

We will spend two weeks exploring each value in depth. The first meeting you spend exploring each value will be more conversation based, while the second meeting will be more experience based. Here is a breakdown of each value:

WEEK 1 & 2

AUTHENTICITY WITH SELF is the starting point. If you don't know where you are, you are lost. The honest assessment of your strengths and your shortcomings is the first step in your journey to the abundant life and a real, sustainable spirituality. If you can't be real with

GROUP EXPERIENCE: YOUR TIME TOGETHER

Each week you will meet with your group. There will be a short reading to introduce the topic with either questions to discuss or an activity to do together. Though some of your groups may have a facilitator, this guide is written so that you can learn together without one. You can simply take turns reading the introductions and asking the questions.

DEVOTIONS: YOUR PERSONAL TIME

Between meetings, there are personal readings, prayer exercises, and questions for reflection that we call devotions. Devotions will enhance your experience and help you dig further into the ideas discussed in your group. These devotions are short but important. If you want to get the most out of this experience, we recommend you engage with these personal readings and experiences. Give the prayer practices a try, look up the Bible verses, journal your reflections, be bold and allow God to stretch you. You'll be glad you did. Each devotion is short enough that you can complete it in ten minutes, but rich enough that you could make an hour out of it. It's up to you.

Ready? Let's go.

Authenticity

WITH SELF

WEEK 1 **GETTING REAL**

The starting point for true spirituality is authenticity with self. That's because you can only start where you are. So, where are you right now? *Honestly?*

Don't be afraid of the good and the bad of who you are. It's you. You have amazing gifts and ways that you reflect the image of God. You also have horrible ways you have distorted that image. Give up trying to fake it. Have the courage it takes to live honestly in the reality of your broken human experience.

Too many people spend their lives trying to appear to others as different than who they really are (or think they are). What if you chose to become the person Christ always designed you to be and stopped pretending and hiding? If you were completely accepted as you

are and you could do nothing to lose that acceptance, how would your life be different? *What if you already are that accepted?*

The Bible tells us we were created in the image of God, (Gen. 1:27) but we have all sinned and fallen short of that image. (Rom. 3:23) True spirituality admits that as a starting point. Creation in the image of God is our primary identity as humans. The reality that we have all sinned doesn't change that fact. Sin distorts the image. It doesn't erase it.

The beauty of the new covenant revealed in and inaugurated through Jesus is that by faith in him sinners become saints. This change of identity is central to your ability to live the abundant life. It will be impossible to live like a saint if you see yourself as a sinner. It will also be impossible to call out the best in others if you believe the truest thing about them is their sin and depravity.

Many Christians are stuck in patterns of sin because they believe they are and will always be sinners, that their hearts are wicked, and that there is nothing good in them. So they keep acting like sinners. They believe they are JUST forgiven sinners, covered with the righteousness of Jesus, but not truly good in any sense of the term. This view is based on a total misunderstanding of the Bible and the meaning of the new covenant.

The Bible says that we were created in the image of God with incredible value to him and capacity for good. (Gen. 1:26, Psalm 8:5-6, Eph. 2:10) Our sin doesn't change that. After all, Christ died for us *while* we were still sinners. However, the Bible also takes seriously the fact that we are all deeply flawed and in need of redemption. (Romans 3:23) We have all fallen short of the glory God intended for us to display as the bearers of

his image, but we are each so valuable to God that he leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one who is lost. (Luke 15)

God went after his lost son and daughter in the garden as soon as they sinned. (Gen.3:8-9) His question to them, “Where are you?” was not just a question about their location. God knew where they were, but did they? Their shame caused them to go into hiding. In one way or another, that is our story too. It’s what stops us from being truly authentic.

Authenticity with self means admitting where you are without shame or hiding, but realizing that *where* you are is not *who* you are. Where you are, where you have been, or what you have done does not define who you are. The fact you have sinned doesn’t mean your identity is framed in terms of your being a sinner. You are who and what God says you are.

When God created man and woman, he said his creation was very good. That is still true. You are immeasurably valuable to God. Your sin doesn’t change that. After all, it was sinners for whom Christ came and died. Every person, whether or not a Christian, has incredible value to God.

However, if you put your faith in Christ, there’s even better news: because of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection you have been given a new, permanent identity. You now are a son or daughter of God himself, adopted into his eternal family. (Gal. 4:5-7) You are a joint heir with Christ entitled to all the riches Jesus enjoys as God’s beloved Son. This means that when God looks at you, he doesn’t see your past or your sin; he sees only Jesus. And whether or not you feel like one, the New Testament says that since you are “in Christ” you are a saint, a person declared holy by God.

Your new identity in Christ, however, has nothing to do with how you have performed (i.e, what you have done or not done). Instead, it has everything to do with what Christ has done for you and to whom you now belong. You are now God's beloved child. He loves you not for what you have done but for who you are. You are his child. Get that through your head and into your heart. You belong to God. He loves you as his own son or daughter. You are incredibly valuable to him, and when he looks at you, he sees the spitting image of his son Jesus.

So authenticity means you can be open about where you have been and what you have done, because you are confident about whose you are. You have nothing to prove and nothing to lose. This is the most freeing position in all the world!

When you finally understand that there is nothing that you or anyone else can do or say about you that can change your identity or your value, you are free! You can stop hiding, pretending or trying to impress those around you and recognize that you now are free to live for an audience of one. When your identity is that of a child of God, you can look honestly at your weaknesses and failures and confess them openly without fear of judgement or condemnation on God's part. What a relief that is! No pretending. No proving. This really is the starting point for everything good in your life.

**Where you are is not who you are.
Whose you are makes you who you are.
You are God's child.**

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you in the reading?
2. What do you think makes it difficult for people to accept themselves where they are?
3. Where are you now in your relationship with God and your progress in becoming like Jesus?
4. Where would you like to be?
5. How does knowing who you are make it easier to be honest about where you are?

WEEK 1 DAILY DEVOTIONS

DAY ONE

WHY WE HIDE

Where are you? That was the first question God asked in the Bible. He came to meet with the man and woman in the garden as he always did in the cool of the day. But like small children ashamed of their poopy diaper, they were hiding. (Gen. 3:8-9)

“Where are you?” God asked. “I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid” came the ashamed reply. That has been the story of every one of Adam’s sons and daughters since. We are afraid. We feel exposed. Believing we will be rejected if we are truly known, we go into hiding.

The elaborate figleaf of your personality, accomplishments, clothes or whatever other face you put on is your attempt to hide your shame.

It doesn’t need to be hidden. It needs to be healed. Notice that in the story of Adam and Eve, God provides a better covering to replace the fig leaves. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, you no longer need to cover up your brokenness. Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf provides a permanent covering. When God looks at you, he sees only Jesus, not your brokenness, failures or sin.

Like many of us, you may still bear the scars and shame from what you’ve done or what has been done to you. However, that past doesn’t define you. Once you’re “in Christ, where you have been or what you have done no longer defines you. God alone defines who you are, and

he thinks you're wonderful. Who do you think you are?

What are some of the “fig leaves” you have hid behind? Write a prayer confessing them to God.

NOTES