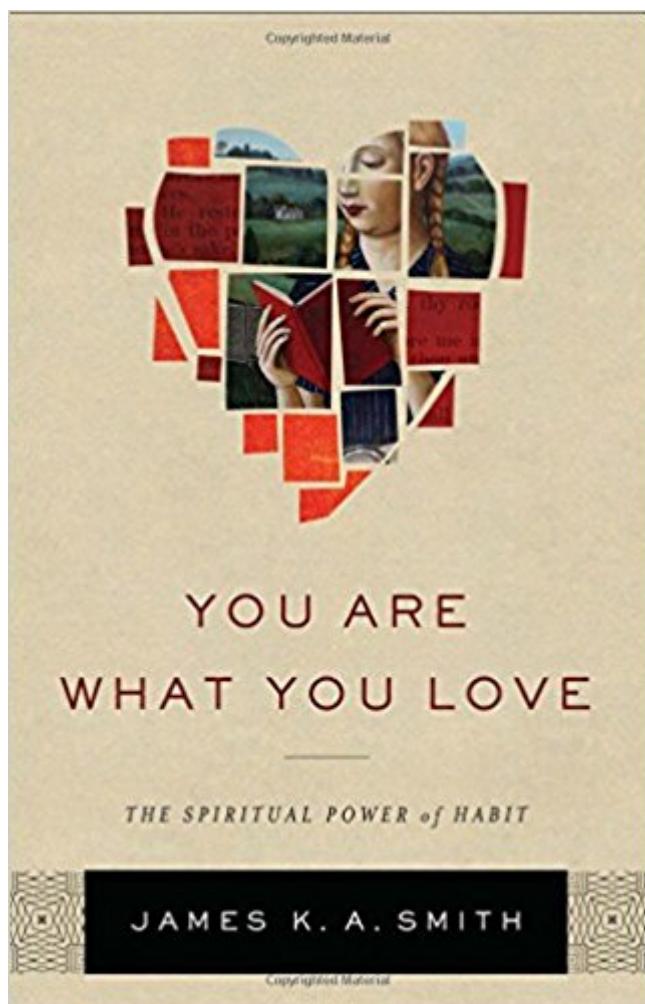


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# You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power Of Habit



## Synopsis

You are what you love. But you might not love what you think. In this book, award-winning author James K. A. Smith shows that who and what we worship fundamentally shape our hearts. And while we desire to shape culture, we are not often aware of how culture shapes us. We might not realize the ways our hearts are being taught to love rival gods instead of the One for whom we were made. Smith helps readers recognize the formative power of culture and the transformative possibilities of Christian practices. He explains that worship is the "imagination station" that incubates our loves and longings so that our cultural endeavors are indexed toward God and his kingdom. This is why the church and worshiping in a local community of believers should be the hub and heart of Christian formation and discipleship. Following the publication of his influential work *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith received numerous requests from pastors and leaders for a more accessible version of that book's content. No mere abridgment, this new book draws on years of Smith's popular presentations on the ideas in *Desiring the Kingdom* to offer a fresh, bottom-up rearticulation. The author creatively uses film, literature, and music illustrations to engage readers and includes new material on marriage, family, youth ministry, and faith and work. He also suggests individual and communal practices for shaping the Christian life.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Brazos Press; First Ed First Printing edition (April 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 158743380X

ISBN-13: 978-1587433801

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 113 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #3,561 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church Institutions & Organizations #25 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology #31 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Theology

## Customer Reviews

"Smith has an exceptional gift for disentangling things. Here again his efforts disentangle our minds and our hearts so our imaginations can be set free to be captured by and reflective of the

kingdom of God.Â In these ways, Smith gives us a profound gift so we can seek and find what we need most."--Mark Labberton, president, Fuller Theological Seminary"Attention, all 'general readers'--not academics or specialists (though they're welcome too), but people who are tired of shoddy thinking and trendy slogans: this is the kind of book you've been hungering for. It's a bit like one of those 'Great Courses.' An inspired teacher, a compelling subject, and you. What are you waiting for?"--John Wilson, editor, Books & Culture"Informed by the insights of St. Augustine, You Are What You Love explores the substance of Christian discipleship as total life transformation through worship and liturgy. More than any other contemporary writer, Smith has helped me to understand how belief is embodied in us primarily through our habits of desire, and that God himself is the true satisfaction of our hungry hearts. This book should be read by every follower of Jesus."--Sandra McCracken, singer and songwriter"Jamie Smith writes with enormous understanding, authority, and warmth. Masterful!"--Cornelius PlantingaÂ Jr., president emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary; author of *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists*

You are what you love. But you might not love what you think. Who and what we worship fundamentally shape our hearts. We may not realize, however, the ways our hearts are taught to love rival gods instead of the One for whom we were made. And while we desire to shape culture, we are not often aware of how culture shapes us. In You Are What You Love, popular speaker and award-winning author JamesÂ K.Â A. Smith helps us recognize the formative power of culture and the transformative possibilities of Christian practices."A user-friendly introduction to the sweeping Augustinian insight that we are shaped most by what we love most, more so than by what we think or do.Â If sin and virtue are disordered and rightly ordered love, respectively, and if the only way to change is to change what we worship, then this will lead us to rethink how we conduct Christian work and ministry.Â Jamie gives some foundational ideas on how this affects our corporate worship, our Christian education and formation, and our vocations in the world. An important, provocative volume!"--Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City"What do you love? is the most important question of our lives. With his characteristic ease, energy, and insightfulness, Smith explores in this compelling book not only what it is that we should love but also how we can learn to love what we should."--Miroslav Volf, Yale Divinity School; author of *A Public Faith and Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*"In this wise and provocative book, Jamie Smith has the audacity to ask the question: Do we love what we think we love? It is not a comfortable question if we strive to answer it honestly. Smith presses us to do so and then shows us the renewed and

abundant life that awaits Christians whose habits and practices--whose liturgies of living--work to open our hearts to our God and our neighbors."--Alan Jacobs, Honors College, Baylor University"Desiring the Kingdom influenced me more than any single book of the past decade. I--and the rest of the church--owe a great debt to Smith's scholarship, now made particularly accessible in *You Are What You Love*. As a means for reimagining the task of discipleship, this book should be required reading for every pastor, lay leader, and parent."--Jen Pollock Michel, author of Christianity Today's 2015 Book of the Year, *Teach Us to Want*

*You Are What You Love* by James K. A. Smith is a small book with large ambitions. It aims to reshape the way evangelical Christians understand discipleship, replacing their emphasis on thought with an emphasis on desire. Rather than saying, "You are what you think," Smith urges Christians to say, "You are what you love." For Smith, this reshaping of discipleship is not something new, but something old. Both the Bible and the pre-Enlightenment Christian tradition taught that the center of the human person is located not in the intellect but in the heart. For example, consider Jesus' words in Matthew 15:19: "out of the heart come evil thoughts--murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Or consider Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Jesus' words reveal that the heart orients us toward evil thoughts and evil deeds. Change the heart, and the thoughts and actions will follow. Augustine's words remind us that our heart is oriented toward a telos, an end or goal, a vision of human flourishing. Because God made the heart, only the heart that seeks His telos--"the kingdom"--finds rest. Every other kingdom leaves our hearts weary and restless. The problem is, how do you disciple the heart? How do you properly form human desire? Through practice, which develops habits. A cousin of mine likes to say that practice makes permanent. That's as true for playing the piano as for developing moral character. What we do repeatedly shapes who we are. According to Smith, the practices that shape our hearts can be called "liturgies," a churchy term for the order of worship. Martin Luther said, "Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your god." There is a liturgy, then, that develops a good heart for the true God. There are also liturgies that develop bad hearts for false gods such as consumerism. Smith urges us to take a liturgical audit of our lives to make sure our practice is oriented toward the proper telos, God and His kingdom, not some lesser goal. Smith uses the term liturgies expansively. In the final three chapters of the book, he uses it to describe Christian practices in the home, at school, and in one's vocation. The

heart of his book concerns the worship practices of the gathered church, however. It is here that the Christian heart is most formed. Smith states that his book *“articulates a spirituality for culture-makers, showing why discipleship needs to be centered in and fueled by our immersion in the body of Christ. Worship is the ‘imagination station’ that incubates our loves and longings so that our cultural endeavors are indexed toward God and his kingdom.”* For him, worship is about *“formation more than expression.”* It is God himself meeting us to shape us into the kind of people who do His will, not just an outpouring of our sincere feelings about Him. (Pentecostals might be tagged as *“expressivists”* because of their exuberant services, but it seems to me that their theology of spiritual gifts aligns with the notion that God is the agent of worship, not just its audience.) Seen this way, and mindful that practice is repetitious, Smith urges Christians to hew closely to the traditional *“narrative arc of worship”* which consists of gathering, listening, communing, and sending and to eschew *“novelty.”* (He’s not talking about the *“worship wars”* by the way. This has to do with the structure of the worship service, not the style of its music.) That liturgy *“characterizes us,”* meaning, it shows us that we are *“characters in God’s story and then forms the appropriate character in us.”* Interestingly, Smith argues that Christian cultural innovators need to be rooted in Christian liturgical tradition: *“the innovative, restorative work of culture-making needs to be primed by those liturgical traditions that orient our imagination to kingdom come. In order to foster a Christian imagination, we don’t need to invent; we need to remember. We cannot hope to re-create the world if we are constantly reinventing the church.”* because we will reinvent ourselves right out of the Story. Liturgical tradition is the platform for imaginative innovation.*“I hope I have accurately and adequately communicated the gist of You Are What You Love. It is a thoughtful, thought-provoking book that I would encourage pastors, church leaders, and interested laypeople to read. Having said that, though, I want to make two *“yeses,”* but points. First, yes desire, but also thought. In other words, I agree with Smith that the heart is the heart of discipleship. This is a point on which evangelicals should unite, whether they are heirs to Jonathan (*“religious affections”*) Edwards or John (*“heart strangely warmed”*) Wesley. I am concerned, however, that Smith has swung the pendulum too far toward a discipleship of desire in order to compensate for the tendency in evangelicalism to swing the pendulum too far toward a discipleship of thought. This is, admittedly, an impressionistic critique. Smith is a philosopher and theologian in the Reformed tradition, after all, and the Reformed are known to be punctilious about doctrine. Still, I*

wouldâ€ve liked to see more on the discipleship of the mind in the book. Second, yes process, but also crisis. A process-orientation in discipleship focuses, as Smith does, on the development of spiritual habits. A crisis-orientation focuses on the necessity of decision. The characteristic forms of process-oriented discipleship are stable liturgies, the sacraments, and spiritual disciplines. The characteristic form of crisis-oriented discipleship, at least among evangelicals, is the altar call. As a Pentecostal, I would also add the call to come forward for Spirit-baptism or healing. There is little place for crisis in Smithâ€s book. Perhaps this is an overreaction to the crisis-orientation of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, which often leave little room for process. Still, it seems to me that both are necessary to discipleship. Wesley was no slouch when it came to process. His followers werenâ€t called â€œMethodistsâ€ for nothing, after all. But he still stood outside the mines and called miners to repentance and faith. I didnâ€t see that in Smithâ€s book. These two â€œyes, butsâ€ notwithstanding, I intend to re-read and meditate further on Smithâ€s book. As a Pentecostal, I disagree with certain aspects of Smithâ€s Reformed liturgical heritage (infant baptism, for example), even as I am challenged by the overall thrust of the book. The heart is the heart of the matter. Any discipleship that fails to take that truth into account fails to achieve its aim.

I loved the analysis and critique that too often we make discipleship all about knowledge and not about the desires of our hearts. As a PCA ruling elder it was a great reminder that we are driven by our loves as much as our beliefs and the church has to be as much about reorienting our loves as much as gaining more facts. Great balance between head and heart.

The big takeaway I got from *You Are What You Love* is that our habits (called "liturgies" in the book) don't just reveal what we love but they actively form and influence our affections. This has big implications for how churches disciple believers and also structure their worship services. It does sometimes feel like Smith overestimates the effectiveness of more traditional liturgical practices in church; I know plenty of people who left more liturgical churches because all the "bells and smells" did nothing to move their affections. It works for some people but not for others. I do think the key point is that contemporary churches need to be more intentional about everything they do and evaluate the implications of their practices. Definitely a lot to think about and process from this book.

If you only read one book this year, it should be this. Smith excavates your heart and offers true hope of the Gospel in a way that only such deep, piercing realities of sin can bring about.

Smith's insight into the heart with respect to how it is molded and how it exerts its influence on the total self was very good. His focus adjusting our daily liturgy as a means of refocusing the heart is on point. His dichotomy between traditional christian liturgy and consumerism was interesting but does not address he as framed at the root level. We are bombarded, moment by moment, with the experiences of daily living. Each of these experiences is seen through one of two world view. The secular world view reinforces the naturalistic narrative that all is random. The biblical world view reinforces the narrative that God is sustaining the world on a real time basis, and that all is providence. Every experience that we encounter is a liturgical event that reinforces a world picture in the heart. Western christianity has lost its influence over the hearts of many by incorporating naturalistic concepts into its metaphysics. It is not malls of America that are stealing the souls from christendom, it is the naturalistic dogma within physics text books. If this trend is to be reversed it would take a reworking of christian metaphysics from the bottom up. For those who are interested in such things the place to start is a triune theory of matter.

This book made me think about how worship shapes and forms us. My intelligence has always been one of the characteristics that most defines me, but I have learned through experience that head knowledge is not enough to change myself. This book offered welcomed insights into how we are formed through habits (liturgies) both secular and religious. It is an enjoyable read. And while it does not promise or offer any life changing strategies, it helped me see church differently and encouraged me to value the gift of the church's liturgy.

This book evolves out of and yet builds on Desiring the Kingdom. A colleague and I at our Episcopal Church are using it in Adult Christian Formation to help parishioners reclaim their part in God's great story and to re-member themselves into the co-mission God has given all God's people. It has drawn 60-70 participants each Sunday and is helping them grasp the significance and the wonder of liturgy and ministry in their daily walk in home, workplace, neighborhood, and church. Thanks be to God.

This is probably the best, most life-changing book I've read this year. What we love, what we worship, DOES matter. It informs every area of our life. I have highlighted and underlined much of this book, and I'm sure I will return to it over and over again.

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