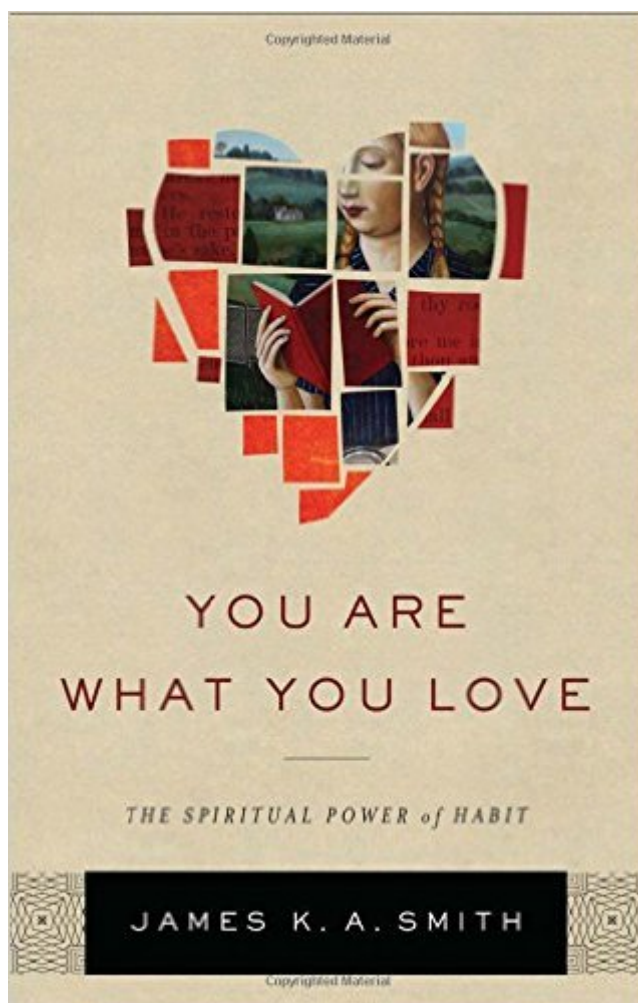


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You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power Of Habit



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.

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Customer Reviews

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."

I have been influenced by James KA Smith over the past several years more than almost any other author. In the last three years I have read five books and a number of shorter articles, not to mention watching at least a dozen lectures. And I do not think I am alone. I was in a private Facebook theology discussion yesterday when in 110 comments, Smith was referenced at least 8 times with no less than four of his books directly mentioned or hinted at. There is a reason Smith is becoming influential. He is speaking to several issues that are important and prominent. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* is the latest attempt both to deal with the issues and the first book to really attempt to speak to a lay audience about them. There are three real points being made in the book. First, we are not solely intellectual beings. God created us with intellects and brains, but also emotions and unconscious bias. We are not, to use his common phrase, "Brains on a stick." We are fully human, and we are intended to be that way by God. That may not seem like a big deal, but much of Christian culture has understood us to be Brains on a Stick. Our evangelism, discipleship and spiritual growth are often primarily oriented toward the intellect. There is also the anti-intellectual parts of Christianity. But they are in many ways just as oriented toward the Brain on a Stick idea, just using the insight in a different method. The second point is that because we are not brains on a stick, we need to take into account the various ways that we are

influenced and shaped. Jamie Smith uses the term 'liturgies' to describe the shaping activities that are all around us. Going to the mall is a consumerist liturgy. The bright airy buildings give us comfort and place.

A friend suggested I read *Desiring the Kingdom*. Disappointed, I left a rather extensive two-star review. That same friend recommended I read *You Are What You Love*. Given the title I assumed Smith had left his intellectual schizophrenia behind. Nope. Smith still cannot decide whether the heart causes rituals or if rituals cause the heart. And trust me, I was hoping he had because as cerebral as I am, I know scripture gives greater weight to the heart: as a man thinks in his HEART so he is; out of the abundance of the HEART the mouth speaks; Mary (et al) contemplated these things in her HEART. So in other words, I agree with Smith's basic premise that worldview training or teaching to the head as though men are brains on sticks is insufficient. Yes, ideas have consequences but people often adopt a worldview as a justification for their wants. In fact, I would argue that your reason provides you with a reason why you "follow your heart". This is why it is so important for born again believers to renew their minds. Suppose you see an iPhone on the desk. You get an urge to steal it followed by a check in your heart/spirit. Your reason can either provide you with a reason to obey the urge "Jackie is wealthy and I am not" or with a reason to obey the check "thou shall not covet/steal. Now that head and heart are in agreement, the body is more likely to obey. Regenerated heart and renewed mind gang up to overcome the other law at work in my members. But this is where I depart. I cannot accept Smith's subsequent conclusion that rituals or practices fundamentally change the heart. Take two examples he provides. Smith adopts new eating habits until he develops new hungers.

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