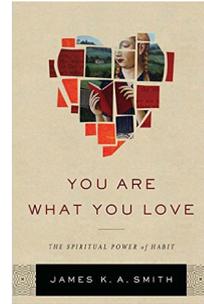


## Book Review

James K. A. Smith.

*You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*  
Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, Baker Publishing Group, 2016.  
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Reviewed by, Ashley Staggs-Kay.  
M.A. Government; M.A. Divinity,  
Regent University (Virginia Beach, Virginia, U.S.A.)



In James K. A. Smith's *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, habits unveil what people subconsciously value. Once a value has been identified, a person may be able to conclude whether the value derived from a Christian culture or a secular culture. Just to clarify, this book is not about cultural wars or the negative tensions between cultures; rather, it encourages readers to conduct an introspective assessment of how discipleship needs to reformulate our intellectual and habitual actions so they match our end goal, to be more like Christ. In essence, this is Smith's model of discipleship.

Smith guides his readers to understand that human beings are creatures of desire, mostly to be loved and to love others. He chooses to avoid confronting love as a "feeling" and focus on love as an action or a verb, something one does. In this case, those actions can become habits; but, more importantly, are the habits that have been made, consciously and subconsciously, truly reflective of a Christian lifestyle or have those habits been infiltrated by culture? By recognizing love as an action instead of a feeling, Smith then travels down the road of cultural habits known as 'cultural liturgies'—things like going to the mall, coffee shops, football games, and so on. Rather, engaging in cultural liturgies translates to defining a person by an action, by what he or

she does. These habitual actions become a form of worship.

Christian worship, however, provides a tangible solution to help re-align one's actions into habits of a healthy heart. Here, worship functions as participation in and with God, by revisiting the story of the Gospel in light of a liturgical tradition. Participation in the sacraments provides an opportunity for God to meet humanity in its broken condition. Additionally, Smith continues by identifying ways that households can create their own liturgies that complement those of the body of Christ—this can be as simple and having a family dinner that could resemble 'the last super,' praying before a meal, breaking bread together, or fellowshiping. In this way, households and youth ministries provide an optimal opportunity of aligning habits of desire so those habits remain true to the calling of the body of Christ.

As helpful as Smith's assessment is in approaching human beings as more than just intellectual creatures, he does a huge disservice to his audience by leaving out a key ingredient for a holistic approach: the emotions.

Society has done an incredible job at minimizing the emotive aspect of being human because emotions can be easily influenced and unpredictable. Men often recognize "emotions" or "being emotional" as a weakness, something to hid and suppress. If this is the case, then

we need to ask why. If culture is so bent on manipulating our emotions and distorting them, then maybe this part of humanity needs to be re-evaluated and re-imagined in light of what Smith proposes—for what it should be and how God sees it. Instead, it seems as though Smith’s approach leaves humanity in more of a robotic condition that just scratches the surface rather than a holistic one.

For instance, most people who struggle with addiction have created unhealthy habits that were informed by a life event that was attached to an emotion. A friend of my husband used to do drugs. He signed up for a rehab program and came to an interesting realization. His elementary school teacher used to belittle him in class and lock him in a closet as punishment. As a child, he did not know how to communicate to his parents what happened, how the teacher was treating him, let alone process his feelings. He felt like his parents never defended him or even tried to be objective when engaging his teacher. So, those repeated events triggered a feeling that produced a lashing out at his parents in the form of drug abuse. For him, no amount of information dumping, liturgical process, or confession could change his habit. Why? Because the habit was attached to a negative feeling that was attached to an event. He had to deal with the feelings and create a different life event (re-imagining his parents defending him) with a different feeling (forgiveness), and ultimately a new habit.

If discipleship is truly the goal, then Smith’s model needs to re-imagine emotions intelligently, and the re-imagination may be pursued in light of how God has designed them rather than following how society has manipulated them. For example, instead of turning off the news when I start to “feel” hopeless, afraid, overwhelmed, or angry, those

emotions could constructively tend to the body of Christ, whether that be volunteering at the Dream Center, serving meals for the homeless, creating a not-for-profit that gives back to a community (in the form of donating shoes, rebuilding houses, repairing broken fences), or buying supplies for a family who lost their belongings in a fire. Rather than turn a blind eye to a broken world, we can use our emotions to inform how we respond. We also need to look at examples of where God shows “emotions” (or showing emotions) in scripture. What must Christ have been feeling when he was on the cross, “*crying out* Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) or when Lazarus’ family told Christ, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died”—what was Christ feeling? “. . . He was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved (John 11:33). Then it says, “Jesus began to weep” (John 11:35). Is it possible that mourning with people who lost a loved one would be more appropriate than trying to be “strong” for them? If Smith proposes a method to create healthy habits that reflect a Christian lifestyle, then there may be a need for creating healthy, emotional habits that reflect the heart of God. The outcome will produce a balance of emotional intelligence and awareness that complements the intellect and habitual responses.

Basically, Smith does a wonderful job at making his argument very simple and understandable. If people truly want to understand what they love, then there has to be a point of introspection that highlights the shadows of the heart. Smith’s method of introspection is especially useful for children’s ministry, youth groups, and adults in any stage of life. Smith’s discipleship model also allows people to decide how and for whom they want to be shaped and whether the impact will be for

those outside the church or for themselves as well. His model has prompted an introspective search of the heart with hopes to align the deepest desires with that of the Creator so that our habits are healthy ones that build up ourselves, each other, and ultimately influence our culture in a positive way.

