

Book Club: "You Are What You Love" by James K.A. Smith

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- [0 : 0 0] It is a book. It's got seven chapters, and we've got an hour to cover me presenting some of the ideas to you and us discussing it.
- So I will only be able to hit some of the highlights. If you do read the book, it goes on and it applies these highlights into different fields. For example, teaching children and youth in church, our approach to the environment, and some issues like that.
- So I would encourage that what we'll have time to talk about today just talks on some of the key principles. What I would also like to start with is a couple of terms that James Smith covers in the text.
- Anybody who knows Greek, can you tell me what telos is? End. Purpose. End. End. Purpose. No. Outcome. Outcome.
- Well, the Wikipedia says... Yeah, see, there you go.
- [1 : 0 6] Like a telescope. Is an end or purpose in a fairly constrained sense used by philosophers such as Aristotle, it is the root of the term teleology, roughly the study of purposiveness, or the study of objects with a view to their aims, purposes, or intentions.
- So you get a sense of what he's thinking about in this book, and also cardio... Heart. Heart. Heart. All right. Heart.
- Heart. Heart. So Smith starts by... Oh, and here are our visuals for today. Woo! Woo! True confessions, I failed art in grade nine.
- It animates if I move it quickly. So Smith opens with a question, which is, what do you want?
- And he looks at the New Testament for this. John 1.38. Smith argues that a lot of Jesus' questions to the people that wanted to follow him were not about what do you want to know, but what do you want?
- [2 : 1 7] And so he presents in this book the principle that our longings and desires are at the core of our innermost well-springing, and that's where our actions and our behaviors flow.
- And he quotes Proverbs 23. So this is interesting, and I think especially in our society, in our city, in our church, he looks at the assumption that focuses on thinking.
- So Descartes said, I think, therefore I am. And Smith says, but is that true? He argues that if you think you are only what you think, it reduces people to brains on sticks.
- I couldn't do a brain on a stick, so I did a big-headed bobblehead on a stick. If you think it's only your brain, then you're limiting. And that intellectualist model has an impact when we translate into how learning is done.
- So if any of you are familiar, he quotes Paulo Freire, who I studied as an undergraduate, a Brazilian educator who had a model, which he didn't think was ideal, but he said we use a model in which we think that people are like safety deposit boxes, and we just input knowledge into those safety deposit boxes, and that's how we teach them.

- [3 : 53] And Freire argued that this is not effective. But it relies on the premise that how we act and behave is the basis of conscious thought processes.
- So we make intellectual choices about everything that we do. So that's what the big-headed model does, the intellectual model, the I think, therefore I am model. So is your, and this is my question for you, and I'll ask you a number of questions, and please do respond.
- Is your model of Christian formation just getting more facts and studying God's Word? What does Scripture say? So, I'm going to ask you, can you think of any, I'll give you one and see if you can come up with another.
- It's Psalms 1, is it 1-2, says delight in the law of the Lord. Can you think of anything else that says that we should focus on knowledge?
- As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Although I'm going to query, thinketh in his heart. I think that might be one for my side.
- [5 : 12] Proverbs says simply get knowledge. Get knowledge. Anybody else? How about, I don't know if I'm quoting Scripture, but taste and see that the Lord is good.
- I mean, taste would be experience. Yeah, see, experience. Another one for my side. What Romans does say doesn't be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- But, so, so, Smith doesn't say it's, it's, we're excluding thinking. Because Scripture does talk about thinking. But, he points out the difference between what we know and what we do.
- And here's a personal example from me. I know what a healthy diet is. And I know that donuts are not included in that healthy diet. However, you will still find me eating donuts.
- So, what I know doesn't necessarily translate into what I do. So, here's a pause for you to think.
- [6 : 25] Can you think of examples in your life when you resolved to do something differently or you knew something wasn't good? You wanted to be more disciplined studying the Bible or you didn't want to do something and yet you did it anyway.
- Sounds like Paul. Yes. There you go. Paul, exactly. Which he never quotes in the book. He never came, I didn't say, well, why do you say something about Paul?
- And Paul says, I want to do something and I still do it. Yes. Maybe you should do a study guide. No. So, he argues that that's because we don't just change through thinking.
- That it's not simply thinking. And he argues what he says is a more holistic biblical model of people. So, he quotes Paul's prayer to the Christians at Philippi.
- This is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ in the glory and praise of God.
- [7 : 37] So, Philippians 1, 9 to 11. But what he says here, what Smith points out is the first thing he says is love. That your love may abound and then more and more knowledge.
- So, he raises the issue and asks us to think about what if you are defined not by what you know, but by what you love.
- If that's who you truly are. So, Christians are made by and for the creator. And that is relational. Augustine emphasized when he talks about scripture, we love because he first loved us.
- So, it's not a question of whether you would love something. The ultimate question is what you will love. So, Smith spends a lot of time on the concept of telos, which is our goal, what we strive for.

What we imagine is important, what we think will complete us. And he gives an analogy. Has anybody read The Little Prince?

[8 : 52] Yes, The Little Prince by the author who I could attempt to. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Thank you. I only studied French for two or three years.

So, The Little Prince in the book says, if you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood. And don't assign them tasks and work.

But rather, teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea. So, if you create that passion, that desire in people, then they will seek it.

Not if you give them step-by-step instructions what they need to do. So, the longings of our heart both point us in the direction of our goal and propel us towards it.

A quote from Smith. You are what you love because you live towards that goal. So, that is my image that your heart actually sets your direction for where you want to go.

[9 : 54] Smith quotes Augustine. And he says, The body, by its weight, tends to move towards its proper place.

The weight's movement is not necessarily downwards, but to its appropriate position. So, fire tends to move upwards, a stone downwards.

They are acted on by their respective weights. They see their own place. Oil poured underwater is drawn up to the surface on top of the water.

My weight is my love, says Augustine. Wherever I am, wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me. So, Smith argues that the center of our gravity is located in our heart, in a gut level, with our desire.

Our cardia. So, sometimes love can be a choice, but often it's an inclination.

[11 : 14] And it's an... In the orientation of our inclination is the... The influences is what we choose.

Or our inclination influences what we choose. Love is a habit is a key principle in this text.

Colossians 3, 12 to 14 says, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds you all together in perfect unity.

So, this is an emphasis on what we do and how we love people. And manifesting God's Christ model for us.

[12 : 24] So, the book touches on the concept of virtues as good moral habits and vices as the opposite.

So, good habits, which are internalized, become character traits. So, the more virtuous that someone is, the more they have an internal discipline to do what is good.

And that comes from their very character. The less they need the external force of the law to compel them to do what is truly good. So, Smith says, To be virtuous is to internalize these values so that you act more or less automatically.

When you have developed these habits, which become second nature, you are the kind of person who does these good qualities and are expressing your character. Which leads us to Smith's question, How do you acquire these virtues?

And his question, Can you think yourself into a virtue? He argues that learning virtues is not like learning the Ten Commandments.

[13 : 44] It's more a kind of a formation or a training of your disposition. And he says, We live in virtues by imitating.

That we have examples. He also says, Secondly, We learn virtues through practice.

So, your character or your unconscious orientation is created by rituals and routines which were repeated over and over. over. And that this, he argues, has serious implications for how we approach Christian education and discipleship.

I want to leave lots of time for questions. I want to leave lots of time for questions. Everybody's.

Oh, just on an aside, because I couldn't, I blanked, but I'm going to ask you anyway. Can you think of a scripture verse that talks about imitating?

[14 : 50] Yes. The imitators of me, just as I am an imitator of Christ. Was that the one you had? Yeah, I think so. Okay. Thank you for being my researchers.

Smith carries on this analogy, this imagery, by talking about calibrating your heart.

And he says, if, if, what I am, if I am what I love, and my love is aimed at my telos, or purpose and goal, then the crucial question I need to ask myself is, how does my love get aimed and directed?

So, if God created us to, to find completion in him, let's look around us, and what we see instead within our world are models that are trying to sell other things, that have us craving other things, and may result in our heart not being directed in the right direction.

Directed in the right direction. We learn to love, not primarily by acquiring information, but what we should love through practice that forms habits of how we love. So, we need to be aware of the rituals that we participate in on a regular basis because they direct our desires.

[16 : 18] If we look around us, it's very clear that secular society tries to hook our desires. And that we end up doing things that do things to us.

So, there's that dynamic. What we do does something to us. What we do impacts us. It forms us. It changes us. So, you are fundamentally what you worship.

Smith quotes Martin Luther and says, whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God. And there's also a wonderful quote by David Foster Wallace that I wanted to share with you.

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships.

The only choice we get is what we worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God, a spiritual type of thing to worship, he argues, is...

[17 : 32] What he argues is if you don't choose a God-like thing to worship, anything else that you worship will eat you alive.

So, if you want to worship money and things, they are the things that give money meaning to you, then you will never have enough. If it's... If you worship your body and your beauty, then you will always feel ugly.

Anyway, he goes on. I'll skip the other examples. Those were rough enough. The insidious things about these forms of worship is that they're...

It's not that they're evil or sinful. It is that they are unconscious. So, Christian worship is in contrast to the rival loves that we are immersed in in our daily lives.

And learning how to love God takes practice. Another example... Another idea... Another idea that Smith has is that you may not love what you think you love.

[18 : 48] And this was an idea that resonated with me. But Smith asks you the question, are you confident what you think you love aligns with your innermost longings?

And he has a measure against that. He says, your desires are expressed by your daily life and habits. So, if you look at your daily life and habits, what is it that you spend your time and your energy on?

And now I'll step away from Smith and give you an example from my life. I knew a minister once who asked his congregation one week to keep a schedule of their week, what they spent time on.

And the next week, he asked them to write a list of their priorities and the things that were important in their life. And the third week, he asked them to compare the two. And I think that's very similar to what Smith is saying here.

Sometimes, as Christians, we need to face the fact that there is a gap between what we think we love and what we really do love. what we really love may be propelling us in the wrong direction.

[19 : 55] If we focus on the sole idea that thinking and conscious deliberation is what causes us to act, then we overestimate the mind. Instead, we need to consider the power, and this is a quote from Smith, consider the power of unconscious values or goals that influence our behavior in the world.

So, he gives the analogy of learning to drive, and I speak from that experience because learning to drive was quite traumatic for me.

It may take all of your concentration. So, for me, when I was learning how to drive, I could not listen to the radio. There was no way. I had to think, where was the stick? It was a manual.

Where was the indicator light? Which was the brake? I remember we used your right for both the brake and the gas. But now, and Smith also gives this example, often, coming home from work, you get in your car, and the next thing you know, you're almost home.

And it's because those skills and abilities have become so innate that we don't even think about them. We just do it by habit. We know it so well. So, he says, habits we have acquired shape how we perceive the world, and which in turn disposes us to act in certain ways.

[21 : 12] So, these abilities and understandings are ingrained in our unconscious. And he quotes David Brooks from *The Social Animal*, character is destiny. The virtues and vices that you've acquired work is automatically exposing you to act in certain ways.

So, the key premise, as I've mentioned, of this book is that we need to know how our love is inspired and how our direction of our love is acquired.

So, is it a conscious choice? We choose to practice conscious ways of embedding things into our mind, but we can also unintentionally, so we do, we consciously come to church. We make those choices sometimes.

We choose to have a devotional path to study. But it can also happen unconsciously. So, when we do repeated patterns, we don't recognize the impact that they have on us.

And that can have serious implications for Christians because we're everyday participating in cultural practices that develop loves. And Smith calls them liturgies. He says, we have daily liturgies and we effectively end up worshipping the things that we participate in the liturgies.

[22 : 23] He has a really great example of the shopping mall. And he goes into it. It's several pages long just talking about the architecture, etc. And I'll read you a little bit about it, but I found it fascinating.

So, he suggests that you learn to love your telos unconsciously in two different ways. We unconsciously learn to love rival kingdoms because we don't recognize that we're actually participating in a liturgy when we follow these cultural patterns.

and it's because we haven't thought about how people learn actions and behaviors. And when we are suspicious of things, we're suspicious of the messages that we're being told.

So, we question whether it's true or authentic message, but we don't necessarily look at what the messages that are catching our feelings or heart.

So, if our goal is to be effectively disciplined people in Christ, we need to be, in ourselves, we need to be aware of how things become ingrained in our unconscious and how they influence our actions and also the competing education that we're surrounded by.

[23 : 38] So, the messages and practices, and that's what I found quite interesting, the practices of our culture. And I just had to go, he did have a section on Revelations, which I found was really interesting.

He talks about the apocalyptic literature, and he says that it's, apocalyptic literature is not about foretelling the future, it's about, and we can debate this, I'm sure, maybe some, but it's about unveiling the reality around us for what it really is.

So, what did Revelation say about what Rome truly was? So, we are focused on looking for false teachings, but we need to think about the things that are co-opting our hearts, not just our minds, and we need to attend to and unpack the practices around us.

So, in the example of the shopping mall, he breaks down that liturgy. He talks about the architecture that draws you in once you're there, the windows that don't have you looking out, but focusing on what's inside, the banners, the flags, the symbols, the little chapels on the side that draw us into these spaces where we're greeted by someone who will guide us and allow us to explore on our own.

I found that really quite interesting. He even said that there's a, you know, a seasonal liturgy where the colors change and the banners change and the worship changes. So, let's see.

[25 : 11] He says, how do we learn to be consumerist not because someone comes along and offers us an argument for why stuff will make us happy? I don't think my way into consumerism.

Rather, I'm covertly conscripted into a way of life because I have been formed by cultural practices that are nothing less than secular liturgies. My loves have been automated by rituals I didn't even realize were liturgies.

These tangible, visceral, repeated practices carry a story about human flourishing that we learn in unconscious ways. We are surrounded by narratives and images about what it is to be a human and what are the norms for living well.

And we start to live these misunderstandings. We follow them. We want to fulfill them. So, Smith encourages Christians to take a liturgical audit of our own lives.

What are the practices that we do and what are the things that we are drawn towards? So, temptation isn't just about wrong ideas or wrong decisions. It's about what he calls a deformation and wrongly ordered habits.

[26 : 24] And overcoming them requires more than just knowledge. It requires re-habitation or a reformation of our loves. So, what do we do regularly?

What are the secular liturgies in your life? And you'll notice this is one of the questions I've given out to you. What vision of the good life is carried in these liturgies that we practice? What story is embedded? What kind of person do they want you to become?

So, if our hearts are like compasses, our loves direct us towards the way that our hearts have been calibrated. heart, we're going to be limited to the heart, Smith also throws into another biblical analogy which is the stomach.

And I'll read you Isaiah 55, 1 says, Come all those who are thirsty, come to the waters and you who have no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

So, can you think of another Bible verse that talks about being hungry for God? Didn't we have one at the beginning? Was that you guys?

[27 : 46] Well, as the deer panted for the waters and I said, that would be. Blessed are those who are hungry and blessed for righteousness. Blessed are those who are hungry and blessed for righteousness. Excellent.

You guys are such great students. But it's true. It's a repeated thing and it's not the thinking but it's the drawing, it's the hunger, it's the internal desire. So, to continue with this analogy of the gut or the stomach, we can be misdirected or misguided by considering what we eat.

What if we are hungry to learn? In our culture, our diets have been turned towards eating more sugar and more salt. And the more fast food and salt and sugar that we eat, the more that we want to eat it.

So, it actually develops our appetites. I've been to countries where they eat things that I have no desire to eat and they think it's wonderful. Spam or crickets.

And that really was an image for me that if you eat them, if you value them, you continue to grow the appetite for them. but if any of you are like me, what I want may be quite different from what what I want to want may be quite different from what I really want.

[29 : 05] I want to eat healthy, but do I buy and prepare salads? No. I am drawn towards grilled cheese sandwiches and nachos. Double cheese?

Double cheese, possibly. I actually signed up for a weekly basket from the organic farm store at work. It was such a challenge to actually eat it.

I was giving it away to the neighbors. They thought I was so generous. I was like, peppers, do you like peppers? Potatoes? Anyway. So, we can recognize that we can be convinced in our heads but it doesn't necessarily change our habits.

and Smith talks about a process for change. He says, first you make a commitment to be part of a community because truly reformatory practices are communal to encourage one another and to commit to rituals together.

Second, you have to commit to practices that you don't really want because you need to practice them for them to become disciplined. So, he talks about not wanting to run, not wanting to exercise, but doing it until one day when his wife asked him, did you enjoy that?

[30 : 17] He actually said, yes. I'm working on that one. So, to the end result, the end result of practicing these habits is that new cravings and new hungers are developed.

So, the practice of church should also be a workout that trains our heart and helps us develop habits and automatic responses to how we respond in the world. Rituals result in habits which develop hungers.

So, finally, he argues that we are not liberated from this, the old ways just by more information. But God, and this is again another quote, God gives us a different liturgy which inscribes the history into our hearts and our hearts is countered to the habit-forming power of competing liturgies.

So, the intention of communal rituals of worship are essential are essential to helping scriptures seep into us. And he talks quite a bit about the book of common prayer and the regularization of the calendar that gets people to read through the Bible regularly and the regular profession of prayers so that the language becomes a part of our prayer.

So, he says, Christian worship is through the body as well as the mind. Christian worship does not just teach us how to think, it teaches us how to love and it does so by inviting us into the Bible story and then planting that story in our bones.

[31 : 43] Christian worship is to tell a story that makes us want to long for the immensity of God. And he says that just hearing about it doesn't make it a part of you.

So, and these are my examples, imagine trying to describe, going to the beach and then trying to describe it to someone. They will never understand the beach the way that you have if you experience it.

One of the examples that I give to my students is learning how to write. It's like riding a bicycle. You're never going to learn how to do it well by reading about it. You have to practice it.

So, what are we here for? I'm going to close with a quote that he gives from N.T. Wright, from N.T. Wright's *After You Believe Why Christian Character Matters*. What are we here for in the first place?

The fundamental answer is that we're here for is to become genuine human beings reflecting the God in whose image we're made and doing so in worship on the one hand and in mission in its full and large sense on the other.

[33 : 02] And that we do this not least by following Jesus. The way this works out is that it produces through the work of the Holy Spirit a transformation of character. This transformation will mean that we do indeed keep the rules though not out of a sense of externally imposed duty but out of character that has been formed within us.

And it will mean that we do indeed follow our hearts and live authentically. But only when with a transformed character fully operative like an airline pilot with a lifetime's experience the hard work up front bears fruit in spontaneous decisions and actions that reflect what has been formed deep within.

And in the wider world the challenge we face is to grow and develop a fresh generation of leaders in all walks of life whose character has been formed in wisdom and public service not for greed power or money.