

# SUMMARY

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

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- Key Insights
- Best Quotes
- Study Questions

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Main Idea</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Insights</b>	
Key Insight 1	6
Key Insight 2	9
Key Insight 3	12
<b>Chapter Summaries</b>	
Chapter 1	16
Chapter 2	19
Chapter 3	23
Chapter 4	27
Chapter 5	31
Chapter 6	34
Chapter 7	38
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>About Accelerate</b>	<b>42</b>

# You Are What You Love



## MAIN IDEA

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**M**ost of us assume humans are shaped by what we think. We may not put it that way, but our approach to teaching young people, changing our own behaviour and habits, and most critically to discipleship, emphasizes information rather than formation.

It is as though punching the right things into a person's intellect results in a flourishing human. But pause and think for a moment. We actually know thinking isn't enough. Changing our thinking doesn't automatically change our doing. Remember the last time you thought about changing your diet or screen habits...and didn't!

That's because we aren't primarily thinking-beings. We're desiring-beings.

Which means, the key influences on who we are and how we live operate subconsciously, ‘under the hood’ of our lives. We’re constantly drawn towards some vision of the world ‘as it should be’ by our love for that vision.

But if love is so influential, what influences love?

Answer: Habit.

“Your love is a kind of automaticity” (p. 36). That is, love is learned subconsciously.

Some automaticities are intentional, gained through practice and repetition like learning to ride a bike. Others are acquired unintentionally. “Dispositions and habits can be inscribed into our unconscious if we regularly repeat routines and rituals that we fail to recognize as formative ‘practices’” (p. 37)

The repetitive habitual activities in which we are involved don’t just evidence love, they shape love. Our habits do things to us.

With repeated rituals and routines from mall or stadium, to school or college, the world immerses us in love-forming habits, pointing towards

rival deities.

Christian worship is the “imagination station” which recalibrates our hearts toward God whom we were made to love. Meeting with the body of Christ, we practice habits which immerse us in God’s story-line of the world and invite us to make that narrative our own.

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# How to Disciple Lovers

Discipleship must not stop at thinking, but embrace the nature of our disordered loves and retrain us to love rightly.

**O**ur definition of a human informs our practice of discipleship. “If we assume that people are primarily thinking things who are always ‘on,’ who think through every action and make a conscious decision before ever doing anything, then discipleship will focus on changing how we think” (p. 33).

Discipleship under this model becomes a matter of mere information transfer. We want people to know more about Jesus, to know more about themselves, to become ever more conscious of their motivations and actions.

But if the goal of discipleship is to become more like Christ, we can't stop here. If we want ourselves and others to become joyful, patient, kind,

gentle, self-controlled and so forth, we must recognize that a kind person isn't only someone who stops and consciously decides to be kind at every opportunity. They're someone who is kind.

A kind person is a habitually kind person. Period.

In other words, becoming like Christ means becoming a different sort of person. It means developing Christ-like subconscious virtues which drive what we do without necessarily thinking about it.

So how do you train a loving-being to become more like Christ?

Two things are needed. First, we need to help people become aware of the fact that they may not love what they think. "Some cultural practices will be effectively training your loves, automating a kind of orientation to the world that seeps into your unconscious way of being. That's why you might not love what you think" (p. 37).

So we do need to get thinking. The first step of discipleship requires that we go about uncovering the cultural influences, the routines, and rituals which are shaping our loves and causing us to run after rival deities without us even thinking about them.

The second step, though, is the need to retrain our loves. Having ‘stopped to think’, we mustn’t stop at thinking. If our loves are expressed and formed by the habitual practices we undertake, we need habitual practices which will point our hearts towards God.

We need to practice putting on Christ. And in discipleship we need to encourage others to practice putting on Christ. As people ‘try on’ the virtues and practices of Christian worship together, so their hearts will be steadily redirected towards the goal of their very existence: worship of--love of--the God who made them.

So, thoughtful reflection is vital, but not as an end in itself. Thoughtful conscious reflection is instead the catalyst to unconscious change as we look to acquire new desires for God and the world he is forming in Christ.

Worship is absolutely key to such discipleship because it “is the feast where we acquire new hungers--for God and what God desires--and are then sent out into his creation to act accordingly” (p 65).





# Becoming Cultural Exegetes

All Christians, and especially Christian leaders, need to become adept at cultural exegesis, understanding what culture is doing to our loves.

**T**he routines and rituals of the world are constantly going to work on our hearts, directing our loves towards rival deities of consumerism, materialism, individualism, comfort and more. Christians need to be alive to these cultural liturgies.

Most importantly, the values of cultural liturgies are “caught rather than taught; the ideals are carried in the practices, not disseminated through messages” (p. 54). As we live our everyday lives we go through everyday experiences which, if we have eyes to see, are intensely ritualistic and shape our subconscious lives of desire.

For example, we need to recognize that the issue may not only be the content of what we look at on our smartphones, but also the ritualistic manners of individualistic behaviour that they initiate into us as we spend time glued to their screens.

The thing is, these cultural liturgies are just that; cultural. They are embedded into varied contexts in various countries at varied times. They are subtly shifting and re-inventing themselves around us as cultural values are in flux over time.

This means that one person in one cultural setting at one time cannot be expected to uncover all of the cultural liturgies in a different place or time.

Instead, “pastors need to be ethnographers, helping their congregations name and ‘exegete’ their local liturgies” (p. 57). We need eyes to see the different practices around us and the way in which they shape us.

This also means that Christian leaders need to be more aware of the cultural liturgies that we might import through ‘the back door’ into church life. Because values and ideals are carried in ritual and practice even more than in verbal and visual messages, simply changing the content may not be enough.

We must pay attention to the form of our worship: both the narrative arc of worship and the concrete practices that enable us to enact that narrative.

A form of worship which has more in common with the shopping mall or concert, for example, may transmit unintended messages, pointing to a goal far removed from our Creator. We might be singing and hearing about Jesus, but be immersed in a story that reinforces consumerism, making Jesus just another commodity.

Sadly, much of what is called ‘worship’ in the church today is afflicted with this very problem. We have worship services and youth ministries which take their cues from the culture of entertainment which surrounds us, when all the while humans, perhaps unknowingly, yearn to encounter the God of the grand-narrative of biblical salvation.

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# Formation vs. Expression

Worship which recalibrates love for God is not so much expressive, where we are primary actors, as formative, where God acts to change us.

“**H**e who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn no other way” (Mark Twain). It doesn’t matter how well even the most masterful cat-tail-carrier explains it, really knowing the experience requires experiencing it.

So too, Christian worship.

“Carried in the practices of Christian worship is an understanding of God that we ‘know’ on a register deeper than the intellect, an understanding of the gospel on the level of imagination that changes how we comport ourselves in the world” (p. 86).

Which means that we have much to learn from history.

Since the cultural liturgies surrounding the early church were overtly anti-God and idolatrous, our forebears paid careful attention to the rituals and practices they engaged in to direct their love towards God, not idols.

Central to these historical forms of worship is the grand-narrative of God's dealings with his creation. Indeed, "Christian worship is the heart of discipleship just to the extent that it is a repertoire of practices shaped by the biblical story" (p. 78).

We are invited to meet God in worship, confess our sins, hear from his word, and commune together as body of Christ, before being sent out into the world to love and live for him.

To be human, to live a life in the world, is to live out of story. We can't figure out what we ought to do until we've answered, "of which story am I part?" Such stories reveal a goal of the world 'as it should be', directing our lives accordingly.

The principle behind worship which forms love is that we were designed to live out of God's grand-narrative. And it is vital that we recognize that this

starts with God.

All too often we settle for anaemic, expressive worship, in which we are primary actors showing how much God means to us. Authentic expression becomes the goal, and novelty in practice becomes important. Somehow if we're repeating the same old rituals our expression of devotion feels less... real.

Historic Christian worship never started with us though. Rather God is always the primary actor, inviting us into his story. We respond to a conversation he starts, and even that response is motivated by God.

Starting here makes worship formative rather than expressive, not something we do, but something in which God does something to us. As we are invited into his story, we are captivated by a vision of God himself.

The very acts of worship such as “the metaphors of the biblical story, the poetics of the Psalms, the meter of hymns and choruses, the tangible elements of bread and wine, the visions painted in stained glass...work on our imaginations” (p. 93). We are taught to want more of God--we are taught to love him.

This means that when leading Christian worship, the maxim must be “show don’t tell.” Instead of disseminating information about all God has done, demonstrate the wonder of God’s story and invite participation. That is worship which will recalibrate our hearts.

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CHAPTER

1

# You Are What You Love: To Worship Is Human

**W**e often assume we're thinking beings. Descartes told us so ("I think, therefore I am"). But we're not. We are more shaped by what we love.

That means that knowing more is not the key to discipleship. Instead, discipleship must ignite and direct love in the right direction. This is what being truly human means: living lives directed towards God as the goal for which we were designed.

So the question is not whether you love, but what you love. What we love dictates what vision of the 'ideal world' we paint. That vision then drives the way we live.



But how is our love shaped? It develops over time as a person imitates others and their practices. That means love is habitually shaped.

Love-shaping habits can appear small and easy to take for granted, but they are powerful heart-calibrators which can both (re)-orientate and mis-orientate the direction of our hearts.

The most formative repetitive habits are the everyday liturgies we take part in; cultural practices which we don't just do, but which do something to us at the level of our loves. Christian worship is a vital counterformation to these (de)formative cultural liturgies.

## KEY QUOTES

- “What do you want? That’s the question. It is the first, last and most important question of Christian discipleship.”  
(p. 1)
- “We treat human learners as if they are safe-deposit boxes for knowledge and ideas, mere intellectual receptacles for beliefs...So we assume that a disciples is a learner who

is acquiring more information about God through the Scriptures--that serious discipleship is really discipleship of the mind.” (p. 4)

- “Discipleship should set us on fire, should change the “weight” of our love.” (p. 14)
- “If you are what you love, and love is a virtue, then love is a habit. This means that our most fundamental orientation to the world--the longings and desires that orient us toward some version of the good life--is shaped and configured by imitation and practice.” (p. 19)

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What do you want? Really. How do you know?
- What repetitive habits are the most formative in your life?
- How can you imitate and practice the love of God in a way which recalibrates your heart towards him?

CHAPTER

2

# You Might Not Love What You Think: Learning to Read “Secular” Liturgies

If we are what we love...do we know what we really love? And how can we tell? It's an unsettling question. Perhaps we don't know ourselves as well as we think.

Our loves operate subconsciously, which means they are formed subconsciously. We can learn to love intentionally, taking on certain practices just as we learn to drive a car by conscious practice and repetition. But we can also learn unintentionally, being subconsciously shaped by the

things we do to love what we don't realize.

Discipleship rightly asks us to be more conscious of what we love, but it mustn't stop there. Becoming the 'kind of person' who loves God means unconsciously being that person, so that loving God becomes 'second nature'.

That means that becoming like Christ requires consciously "putting on Christ" until we become more unconsciously like him!

But first: we must 'stop and think'. It is vital to spot the love-shaping cultural liturgies that constantly influence us to love rival gods.

Pastors (and all Christians) need to become cultural exegetes who can recognise how culture -- from the temple of the shopping mall, with all its recognisable patterns and sacred spaces, to the smartphone -- is shaping us.

So the question is not whether you love, but what you love. What we love dictates what vision of the 'ideal world' we paint. That vision then drives the way we live.

## 66 KEY QUOTES

- “Your deepest desire is the one manifested by your daily life and habits.” (p. 29)
- “The body of Christ is that unique community of practice whose members own up to the fact that we don’t always love what we say we do--that the ‘devices and desires’ of our hearts outstrip our best intentions. The practices of Christian worship are a tangible, practiced, re-formative way to address this tension and gap.” (p. 30)
- “Our loves acquire direction and orientation because we are immersed over time in practices and rituals--what we have called “liturgies”--that affectively and viscerally train our desires. So just as our habits are unconscious--operating under the hood--it is also the case that the process of habituation can be unconscious and covert.” (p. 32)
- “We need to read the practices that surround us. We have to learn to exegete the rituals we’re immersed in.” (p. 40)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Look at your daily, weekly, monthly and annual routines. What are the things you do that do something to you?
- What rival deities are you being drawn towards through your habits in shopping, sport (both playing and supporting), using technology, learning, working, etc?

CHAPTER

3

# The Spirit Meets You Where You Are: Historic Worship for a Postmodern Age

**H**ow can loves be re-calibrated towards God? By liturgies! Hungers, apparently visceral and unlearned, are in fact learned. We can train ourselves off high-sugar processed foods. But we can't just think it. It requires conscious effort and counterformative eating habits!

If sanctification is the redirection of our heart-hungers towards God, it requires thoughtful reflection and counter-formative habits. The church is

the community of habituation in corporate worship. So the form of worship is vital.

Where worship is primarily expressive we become primary actors, expressing our devotion to God. Sincerity becomes the goal and cultural familiarity a means to that end. Worship services begin to resemble cultural liturgies (the mall, the concert), but these already have their own goal. Jesus inserted into the mall implicitly becomes another commodity under the rival deity of consumerism.

But Christian worship sees God as primary actor. He invites us to respond to him. The form of formational worship must draw us as characters into the narrative of God's dealings with the world.

In this way, repetition and practice in worship can be re-energized. It is no longer about showing commitment, but about submitting to God's formation of us.

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## 66 KEY QUOTES

- “Liturgies are calibration technologies. They train our loves by aiming them towards a certain telos.” (p. 57)
- “We learn to crave things that aren’t good for us because we are immersed in systems and environments that channel us into this sort of eating. Our hungers are being trained without us realising it. The same is true for our deepest existential hungers, our loves: we might not realise we’re being covertly trained to hunger and thirst for idols that can never satisfy. And here’s the real challenge: it turns out you can’t just think your way to new tastes.” (p. 59)
- “Worship isn’t just something we do; it is where God does something to us.” (p. 77)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Where do you need enact counter-formative measures to retrain the hungers of your heart?
- How does your view of the primary actor in worship need to change?
- How are you in danger of an understanding of worship being something you do for God?
- Do you have a negative reaction to weekly liturgical repetition which suggests a ‘showing’ rather than ‘submitting’ attitude?

CHAPTER

4

# What Story Are You In? The Narrative Arc of Formation

**H**istoric Christian worship embeds Scripture into worshippers. Worship re-forms us into Christ's image, the very image of God. To worship God, then, is to be authentically human.

Answering the human question 'what are we here for?' requires answering, 'of what story am I a part?' Christian worship immerses us in God's narrative, in which Jesus is goal.

This worship stirs imagination, captivating us with Christ, and a vision of the world as it is meant to be in Him.

Those leading worship, then, must show rather than just tell. There is a great difference between being told "the dead will rise" and being led to

the thrill of “He is Risen!” (He is risen indeed, Hallelujah!)

The poetry of traditional liturgy is designed to embed the gospel story into us as we gather in response to God’s invitation, listen to him and confess our sin in submission, commune with him through his word, and with one another through the Lord’s Supper and are sent out to live in light of this re-calibrating gospel story.

Sadly modern worship is often thin and disconnected from this narrative. We need to risk reconnecting with the arc of traditional Christian worship.

## KEY QUOTES

- “If we want to be people reorientated by a biblical worldview and guided by biblical wisdom, one of the best spiritual investments we can make is to mine the riches of historic Christian worship, which is rooted in the conviction that the Word is caught more than it is taught.”  
(p. 84)

- “Christian worship should tell us a story that makes us want to set sail for the immense sea that is the Triune God, birthing in us a longing ‘for a better country--a heavenly one’ that is the kingdom to come (Heb 11:16).” (p. 93)
- “The sending at the end of the worship service is a replay of the original commission of humanity as God’s image bearers because in Christ--and in the practices of Christian worship--we can finally be the humans we were made to be. So we are sent out to inhabit the sanctuary of God’s creation as living, breathing “images” of God. We bear his image by carrying out our mission to cultivate creation and invite others to find their humanity in this Story.” (p. 98)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What can you do to cultivate a greater love for the traditional ‘narrative arc’ of Christian Worship?
- As you are involved in Christian worship (whether in leading or participating) how can you show the greatness of God rather than just give or declare information?
- How can you better engage your whole self (emotion, heart, and intellect) in being immersed through worship into the story of God’s dealings with the world?

CHAPTER

5

# Guard Your Heart: The Liturgies of Home

**W**e love because God first loved. Any love (even disordered love) is only possible because God loved first. Like a mother's smile being responded to for the first time by a 6-week-old baby, true love (for God and others) is awakened in us by God's love in Christ. And just as that mother's love is so foundational, we do much of our learning to love at home.

Household and family liturgies are essential to love-formation and must be grounded in the corporate Christian household: the church.

Family itself becomes part of something much bigger in the household of God, challenging the idolatry of the insular family. Baptism reveals this by demonstrating God's activity towards us, in which the whole family of God

participates.

Similarly, weddings reveal a telos of family. Today's wedding industry idolises romance. Partners 'complete one another' (even tending towards self-love). Honeymoons and date-nights sustain marriage, work and children the enemies of maintaining romance. Contrast Christian marriage liturgy: an act of God giving marriage to a couple. Not so much expressive as receptive.

Our families must be rooted in this formative household of God, down to the unspoken, 'in the air' liturgies of how we 'do' family life with God.

## KEY QUOTES

- “Note that John’s remarkable, beautiful claim is not just that we love God because he first loved us, but that we love because he first loved us. Even our disordered loves bear a backhanded witness to the fact that we are made in God’s image.” (p. 111)



- “Our households--our “little kingdoms--need to be nourished by constant recentering in the body of Christ.” (p. 125)
- “Children are ritual animals who absorb the gospel in practices that speak to their imaginations.” (p. 129)

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does the ‘culture’ of your household shape the love of its members?
- How can you centralize the love of Christ in your household life?
- What do you assume the goal of marriage to be? What liturgies would help your view of marriage and family become Christ-exalting rather than self-serving?

CHAPTER

6

# Teach Your Children Well: Learning by Heart

**E**ducation is inherently formational. So how do we form young people so that they will love God and inhabit his good creation in right relationship with him?

We need to carefully think through not just the content of education, but also how it is framed and delivered. We must examine the ‘hidden curricula’ at work in our engagement with young people.

Youth ministry has too often become captive to ‘thinking-thingism’ which encourages us to entertain young people long enough to be able to deposit a ‘message’ into their intellectual receptacles.

This is a problem. Such entertainment is usually borrowed from culture and carries its own cultural liturgies which teach us to love rival gods.

Our young people need us to embrace the old ‘strange’ liturgical practices which form us. Such formative youth ministry will embrace the multi-generational nature of the body of Christ, invite young people to ‘try on’ Christ in and through spiritual disciplines, and shape corporate worship in a way that provokes service by young people, not just for them.

Education as a whole is similarly formative. Secular education prizes autonomy as its goal. Christian education must paint a vision of God as the Good, Beautiful and True.

## KEY QUOTES

- “Education is an inherently formational project, not just an informational endeavour.” (p. 139)

- “Instead of instruction in the faith that is centered on an abstract framework of doctrine lifted from the outline of systematic theology, liturgical catechesis is an induction into the faith that begins from what Christians do when we gather to pray around Word and Table. It is learning rooted in prayer. It is discipleship that bubbles up from worship. It is a pedagogy that is rooted in the conviction that we pray before we know, we worship before we “worldview.”” (p. 143)
- “Keeping young people entertained in our church buildings is not at all synonymous with forming them as dynamic members of the body of Christ.” (p. 145)
- “One of the most important parenting decisions we make is where we worship.” (p. 152)
- “A Christian education can never be merely a mastery of a field of knowledge or technical skills; learning is embedded in a wider vision of who I am called to be and what God is calling the world to be.” (p. 164)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What are your greatest ambitions for your (or others') children?
- How are you shaping them to love God in his good world?
- Where are you tempted to take the easier path of entertaining young people, rather than doing the hard work of Christian formation?
- Do you need to pay closer attention to that most important parenting question of where and how you worship together as a family?

CHAPTER

7

# You Make What You Want: Vocational Liturgies

**A**s images of God, we are sub-creators. We are commissioned in creation to represent God's good rule by unfolding creation, releasing the God-given potential in creation by culture-making.

Culture-making is not neutral, though. We make what we want. Our loves govern the way we 'unfold' creation's potential, for better or worse. 'Sub-creating' is driven by the unconscious story of human flourishing we tell ourselves.

Evangelicals are increasingly caught between two trends: acceptance of the 'cultural mandate' to go out and restore culture, and the desire to 're-invent' church.

However, these are mutually exclusive. Reforming and restoring culture requires imagination fueled by the ‘old story’ of God’s dealings with his creation. This means church is not the site of re-imagination, but the source -- the imagination-station which fuels our sub-creation work.

This doesn’t mean there isn’t room for innovation in church life, but it does mean that innovation must be constrained by the biblical traditions handed down through generations of Christians.

Our aim, then, should be innovative repetition, which fuels us to love rightly -- to praise God wholeheartedly and boldly in anything and everything we might do, in any and every vocation we might work in.

## KEY QUOTES

- “The biblical account of creation is not just about where we came from; it’s about where we are.” (p. 171)

- “If our cultural work is going to be restorative -- if it is going to put the world to rights -- then we need imaginations that have absorbed a vision for how things ought to be.” (p. 179)
- “We need pastors and worship leaders (and teachers and youth pastors and college professors) who appreciate that Christian worship is an imagination station -- and that the normativity of the Story needs to be effectively carried in our worship.” (p. 180)

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Where do you need a higher view of your work and ‘culture-making’ activity?
- How can your involvement in worship (leading or participating) be part of this ‘imagination station’ to fuel restorative culture-making?
- Take a ‘liturgical inventory’ of your life. What ‘liturgies’ are you immersed in, and how do they direct your loves?
- What new liturgies do you need to take on in order to be directed to love the Lover of your soul?





## CONCLUSION

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In *You Are What You Love*, James Smith wants us to recognise that what we love is the most fundamental influence on who we are. And we might not love what we think.

‘Loves’ are constantly at work in our lives, ‘under the hood’ at subconscious levels, and are constantly being shaped by the habits we are engaged in.

The world’s rituals and routines point us towards rival deities, which means we need Christian worship to fire our imaginations and re-calibrate the compass of our hearts God as our ‘true north’.

In this journey of desire, Smith has shown us the importance of:

### **1** How to Disciple Lovers

Discipleship must not stop at thinking, but embrace the nature of our disordered loves and retrain us to love rightly.

# 2

## Becoming Cultural Exegetes

All Christians, and especially Christian leaders, need to become adept at cultural exegesis, understanding what culture is doing to our loves.

# 3

## Formation vs. Expression

Worship which recalibrates love for God is not so much expressive, with us as primary actors, as formative, with God acting to change us.



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