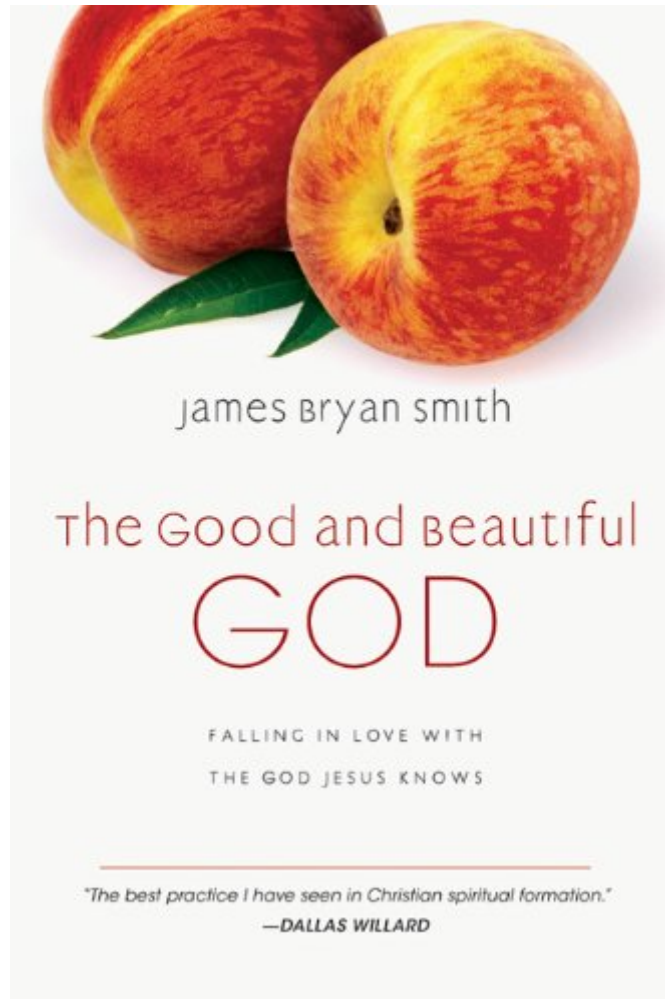


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The Good And Beautiful God: Falling In Love With The God Jesus Knows (The Apprentice Series Book 1)



Synopsis

"God wants me to try harder." "God blesses me when I'm good and punishes me when I'm bad." "God is angry with me." We all have ideas that we tell ourselves about God and how he works in our lives. Some are true--but many are false. James Bryan Smith believes those thoughts determine not only who we are, but how we live. In fact, Smith declares, the most important thing about a person is what they think about God. The path to spiritual transformation begins here. Turning to the Gospels, Smith invites you to put your ideas to the test to see if they match up with what Jesus himself reveals about God. Once you've discovered the truth in Scripture, Smith leads you through a process of spiritual formation that includes specific activities aimed at making these new narratives real in your body and soul as well as your mind. At the end of each chapter you'll find an opportunity for soul training, engaging in spiritual practices that reinforce the biblical messages on your mind and heart. Because the best way to make a complete and lasting change is to go through the material in community, small group discussion questions also accompany each chapter. This deep, loving and transformative book will help you discover the narratives that Jesus lived by--to know the Lord he knew and the kingdom he proclaimed--and to practice spiritual exercises that will help you grow in the knowledge of our good and beautiful God.

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Customer Reviews

I was very interested in reading this book after hearing James Bryan Smith speak at the Divine Conspiracy Conference. Upon reading the first few pages, I learned that his mentors were none other than Richard Foster and Dallas Willard! I was even more interested and fortunately I was not disappointed. If you are familiar with Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, this book has similar imprints of these writing, but Smith has his own distinct style. His style of writing draws you in, entices you to let down defenses, and shares his life experiences with you. The book is laden with stories about his life and others. How real people are being conformed to the image of God. He talks about trust, by comparing the trust his son has in him. He affirms the Goodness of God even while talking about how he suffered through the loss of his daughter. The book is good, not only because of its content, but because it is utterly realistic. The book has 229 pages, which consists of 9 Chapters. Each chapter has an addition with a spiritual discipline that should be practiced that week. Furthermore, the book has questions associated with each chapter at the back. Which is very useful seeing that one of the purposes of the book is to be used in a group! How is the content of the book? Here is an excerpt below: "God loves us so much that he longs for us to be pure and works tirelessly to make us pure. MacDonald points out how God is against sin and thus for humans: 'He is always against sin; in so far as, and while, they and sin are one, he is against them-- against their desires, their aims, their fears, and their hopes; and thus he is altogether for them.' God is against my sin because he is for me.

In *The Good and Beautiful God*, James Bryan Smith addresses many of the "false narratives" that Christians believe about themselves and God. These narratives (such as "I change by my own willpower", "God is angry with me" or "God blesses me when I'm good and punishes me when I'm bad") shape the way believers live their Christian life and can quickly lead to failure and disillusionment. Speaking of Jesus' teachings and parables, Smith suggests "If we adopt Jesus' narratives about God, we will know God properly and right actions will follow". In other words, orthodoxy in the believer will lead to orthopraxy. I liked the premise of the book and more than a few of his corrective narratives (I hope you can tolerate that word, by the way, he uses it a lot). I think he

pinpointed many of the imbalanced views that many Christians have of God and made some good arguments from a counter-narrative. However, I was disappointed at a couple of points with the seeming lack of balance in his counter arguments. While the false narratives he addresses are caricatures of God (exaggerations that are popular because they are at least somewhat true) it seems his corrective narratives could also be caricatures on the opposite end of the spectrum. If you are turning the magnifying glass on the bad theology (and thus bad orthopraxy) of some Christians, you better be ready to have the magnifying glass turned on your theology as well. I noticed this particularly in the area of mankind's sin. As I hear more about the idea of "therapeutic moralistic deism", I see more of its influence in the way people talk about their sin. For instance: "God does not want us to sin, and God does want us to do well."

With *The Good and Beautiful God*, James Bryan Smith inaugurates a three-volume "curriculum for Christlikeness. Volume 2, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, will focus on "inward character, dealing specifically with the vices that cause ruin." Volume 3, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, will focus on learning "how to live as apprentices of Jesus in our ordinary, everyday lives." Volume 1, reviewed here, focuses on "the character of God and how we move into a life of intimacy with God." The nexus between who God is, how we live, and to whom we relate lies at the heart of what Smith believes is "a reliable method for changing our hearts." All of us--whether Christians or not--desire to become better people. But we rely on willpower to do this, when the real problem lies in our hearts. If change is to happen, our hearts must change, but we cannot do this directly. Rather, as Bryan puts it, "we change by indirection." Or, put another way: "We do what we can in order to enable us to do what we can't do directly." But even this way of stating the matter places too much emphasis on what "we can do." In reality, as Bryan points out, is the Holy Spirit who is at work in us, directing our changed narratives, practices and relationships. "Everything that happens to us in our Christian lives," he writes, "is the work of the Holy Spirit." The fruit of the Spirit in our lives is becoming what God created us to be and what Jesus re-created us to be. *The Good and Beautiful God* examines the stories we tell about God, contrasting them with the stories Jesus told about him. It turns out that our narratives about God lie at the root of our soul-sickness and inability to change.

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