

Book review_The Apprentice Series

James Bryan Smith writes on spiritual formation.

By Kevin Jackson, Major

In the Commissioning spiritual life seminar (see story p. 8), James Bryan Smith presented workshops based on his Apprentice Series: “The Good and Beautiful God,” “The Good and Beautiful Life” and “The Good and Beautiful Community.”

Upon analyzing each book, then synthesizing the three books into a systematic approach to Spiritual Formation, the reader uncovers Smith’s attempts and accomplishments in this work as something special for any believer looking for such a resource.

All too often, faith-based literature simply informs the reader. Instead, in these works Smith provides a powerful tool concerning the believer’s transformation into Christ’s likeness. Honestly, I appreciate spiritual formation resources, yet often after reading such works, I walk away with the nagging sense that the authors are just sharing the “same old-same old” principles that have been shared time and time again, just presented in a more up-to-date package. Too often spiritual formation writing takes the reader back thousands of years, and shares ancient spiritual disciplines, but leaves the reader in that ancient world. There is little or no context presented, and often simply all too much repetition.

Not so for this series. Smith masterfully created a dynamic and relevant tool for the daily life of the believer. The thesis of Smith’s works first focuses on the notion of “change” in the mind of the individual, and next on the change in the community (the Body of Christ) of the believer. The Apprentice Series utilizes the postmodern paradigm of small “power narratives.” The first narrative is portrayed in the statement that as a believer (individual) “I am one in whom Christ dwells and delights.” The second narrative provides the context of living in the Christian Community (the Body of Christ) as illustrated in the statement “I live in the unshakable Kingdom of God.”

Smith dismisses false narratives regarding our faith while promoting change in the mind of the believer through spiritual practices. I favor Smith’s approach as he doesn’t imply that the person of faith needs to take on an almost monkish lifestyle, espoused by many other spiritual formation books. Rather, he presents a superior model seeking spiritual practices that foster the transformation of both the individual as well as the Body of Christ, providing a platform to effectively change the world.

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Smith's work challenges some traditional methods and Christian worldviews, so be prepared, as he offers a positive and loving approach that may negate some from effectively implementing this model.

The Apprentice Series offers a real and dynamic approach to spiritual formation for the individual and the community who seek change for the good and beautiful life God desires for his creation.