



james bryan smith

the good and beautiful

YOU

DISCOVERING THE PERSON  
JESUS CREATED YOU TO BE

EXCERPT



## ***The Good and Beautiful You*** *Discovering the Person Jesus Created You to Be*

May 17, 2022 | \$25, 240 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4694-8

Christian faith is about more than belief and practices; it is also about the kind of people we become. The fourth book in the Good and Beautiful series addresses the self-narratives that hinder spiritual growth, reminding us how Scripture reveals the beauty and goodness of our own souls and serving as a welcome companion on your journey to discover who you truly are in Christ.

## The Missing Book in the Good and Beautiful Series

A few years after the first three books in the Good and Beautiful series (*The Good and Beautiful God*, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, and *The Good and Beautiful Community*) were published, I was in England speaking on the book series. My friend Joe Davis and I had dinner one evening. Joe said to me, "The book series has been one of the most helpful tools I have used in ministry. Thank you for your work."

I thanked him for saying this. Then he said, "But you are missing *one* book."

"What book is missing?" I asked.

"*The Good and Beautiful You*," Joe said.

"Why do you say this, Joe?"

"Because I have used the books with many groups, and while they have helped heal people's false *God narratives*—which is crucial—I have found that many Christians have very toxic *self-narratives*, which makes it difficult—even impossible—to progress in their lives."

I sat in silence for a while. In that moment I knew, intuitively, that Joe was right. I had assumed the *trilogy* was complete, but when he uttered those words, "the good and beautiful you," I knew there would come a day when I would need to write this book. But at the time Joe said this to me, I was not ready to write this book. There is an old saying I like: "When you are ready, the right book will find you." I think it is also true in writing: "When you are ready, the right book will emerge from you."

Over the next few years in my own journey, I would discover new, wonderful truths about my *identity*. Some of these truths were things I had known but had forgotten and suddenly they came to life again in my soul. David Brooks said that he writes, in part, "to remind myself of the kind of life I want to live." I suppose that is true of many of us who write. But in this case, it really happened. I was able, in writing this book, to rediscover the beauty and goodness of my own soul, and how my soul longs for things only God could provide. And I would learn that God, in Christ, has provided all of those things—for me, and for you. Writing this book has helped me to live the kind of life my soul has longed to live.

Before my mentor, Dallas Willard, passed over to glory, I asked him what he thought about the rapid rise of the Christian spiritual formation movement. He said, "It is a wonderful thing, but my fear is the Christian spiritual movement will continue to grow so rapidly that the difficult work of establishing an *anthropological foundation* will not happen." By "anthropological foundation," Dallas was referring to a clear sense of the nature of the human person.

I asked, "Without an anthropological foundation, what will happen as a result?"

Dallas said, "The spiritual formation movement will degenerate into *technique*. It will focus on practices, and not on the soul."



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*“Thank you, Jim, for patiently and carefully illuminating the path that leads to letting go of our common, neurotic need to create a self. And in letting go, to discover God’s creation of our soul—which is the good and beautiful me.”*

—Todd Hunter, Anglican bishop and author of *Deep Peace: Finding Calm in a World of Conflict and Anxiety*

My sense is that Dallas’s prophecy has come true. Much of the teaching and writing on Christian spiritual formation focuses primarily on the disciplines—on the practices. And of course, the spiritual disciplines are wonderful tools in our formation. But why do we need a solid understanding of who we are in the process of spiritual formation? We need this foundation because Christian spiritual formation is not primarily about practices or the feelings they might engender. It is about becoming who you are in Christ. Walking a labyrinth or engaging in lectio divina can be powerful practices, but the practices themselves are not the point. Christian spiritual formation is not primarily about helping you feel more spiritual, but it is about forming you in Christ.

In short, the Christian faith is not primarily about belief and practices; it is primarily about what kind of people Christians become. And who we are, who we become, is a deep longing in our embodied souls. God designed us with a deep longing in our souls to be wanted, loved, alive, and connected to God. In Christ, we are all of these and more. And when we live into this reality, we become the unique person God created us to be.

A writer who greatly influenced this book, Fr. Adrian van Kaam, once wrote, “I must become the unique person I am meant to be. The more I become what my Creator called me to be originally, the more I will be united with my divine origin. I must find my original self as hidden in God. The original life of a Christian, as St. Paul says, is hidden in Christ.”

Our true self—our original self—the one created by and for Christ, the one made in the image of Christ, is hidden in Christ. Christian spiritual formation, then, is the process of allowing that original Christ-created Christ image to emerge. The practices we engage in are important in that they are means God uses, through the Spirit, to shape and form us. But we must never mistake the means for the ends.

My hope for you as you read this book is that you will discover the good and beautiful you that Jesus created you to be. I pray that you will see yourself with wonder, see yourself as sacred—even though you are flawed and broken. I long for you to know that you are loved by God, forgiven for what you have done, and made alive by the power of Jesus’ resurrection. I have written this book in the hopes that you will see that you have a sacred story, a sacred body, and a sacred longing for God that is at your core. I hope and pray that you come to know your unique calling in this life and your divine destiny for glory in the next.

But there is one more desire I have for you as you read and engage with this book: that you will see your neighbor in the same way. I pray that you will look at those you interact with—your friends and coworkers and family members, as well as those people you disagree with politically or socially or culturally—as sacred beings, loved by God, who are worthy of your compassion and kindness because they, too, are of divine origin.

I wrote it because the series would not be complete without it. What was missing, as Joe pointed out, was a book that could help to correct the toxic self-narratives that are ruining so many lives. The true narrative about our identity, I discovered, cannot be disclosed by reason but only by revelation. God, through Christ, alone can reveal to us who we truly are. And in the end, what we discover—what I hope you discover—is that you are good and beautiful. In so doing, I pray that you will discover the person Jesus uniquely created you to be.

—Adapted from the introduction



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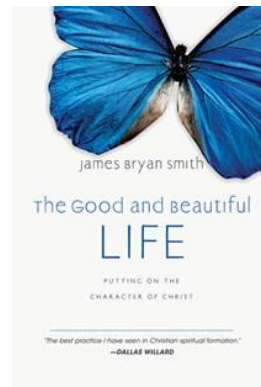
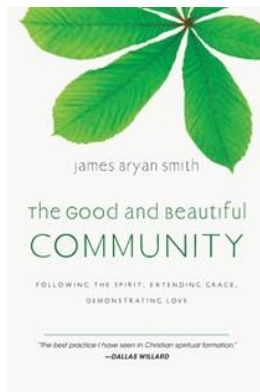
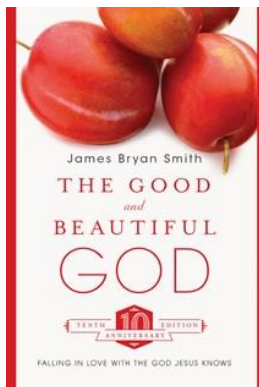
## James Bryan Smith, The Good and Beautiful Series

*“Cracking open the deep struggle of our human existence, Jim recovers the truth of our personhood—we are ensouled bodies seeking the transcendent. We long for God, and every false image we turn to erodes the truth of our being. Discover what false narratives have led you away from the truth of who you are in Christ—forgiven, redeemed, and holy—and follow the soul trainings for a deeper embrace of his love. Take care of your soul and allow Jim to guide you to the truth only found in Jesus.”*

—Kyle Strobel, coauthor of *Where Prayer Becomes Real* and *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*

**James Bryan Smith** is the author of *The Good and Beautiful God*, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, and other Apprentice resources. He earned his MDiv at Yale and his DMin at Fuller and is a theology professor at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas, where he also serves as the director of the Apprentice Institute for Spiritual Formation.

A founding member of Richard J. Foster’s spiritual renewal ministry, Renovaré, Smith is an ordained United Methodist Church minister and has served in various capacities in local churches. He is the editor of *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* and *Devotional Classics* (with Richard Foster), and the author of *Embracing the Love of God*, *Rich Mullins: An Arrow Pointing to Heaven*, *Room of Marvels*, *The Magnificent Story*, and *The Magnificent Journey*.



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