

A U T H O R B I O



James Bryan Smith, author of
The Magnificent Story:
Uncovering a Gospel of Beauty,
Goodness, and Truth

Author of *The Good and Beautiful God*

James Bryan Smith (MDiv, Yale University Divinity School, DMin, Fuller Seminary) is a theology professor at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas, and a writer and speaker in the area of Christian spiritual formation. He also serves as the director of the Apprentice Institute for Christian Spiritual Formation at Friends University.

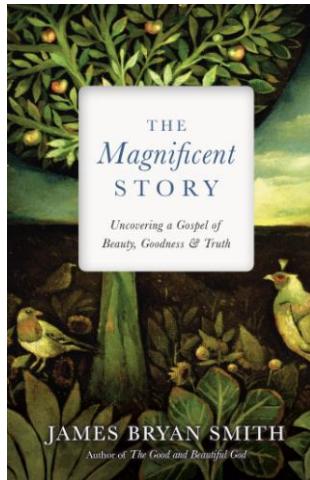
Smith was mentored by two great Christian writers, Richard J. Foster and Dallas Willard. Smith cotaught a course for Fuller Seminary titled “Spirituality and Ministry” with Willard for ten years. He was a student of Foster’s from 1981 to 1984 and is a founding member of Foster’s spiritual renewal ministry, Renovaré. Smith has spoken at over fifty regional and local Renovaré conferences.

Smith is an ordained United Methodist Church minister and has served in various capacities in local churches.

Books by James Bryan Smith

- *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* (HarperOne, 1999)
- *Embracing the Love of God* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 25,000 copies sold
- *Rich Mullins: An Arrow Pointing to Heaven* (Broadman and Holman, 2000), hit the *New York Times* bestseller list
- *Room of Marvels* (Broadman and Holman, 2004), won the Bronze medal in the category of Religious Fiction by the *Publishing Journal*, 2005
- *Devotional Classics*, Revised Edition, coeditor Richard Foster (HarperOne, 2005)
- *The Good and Beautiful God* (InterVarsity Press, 2009)
- *The Good and Beautiful Life* (InterVarsity Press, 2010)
- *The Good and Beautiful Community* (InterVarsity Press, 2010)
- *The Kingdom and the Cross* (InterVarsity Press, 2010)
- *Hidden in Christ* (InterVarsity Press, 2013)

Visit apprenticeinstitute.org for more information about Smith, his books, and his ministry.



The Magnificent Story:

*Uncovering a Gospel of Beauty,
Goodness, and Truth*

Available August 8, 2017

\$22, 192 pages, hardcover
978-0-8308-4636-8

What Is Your Magnificent Story?

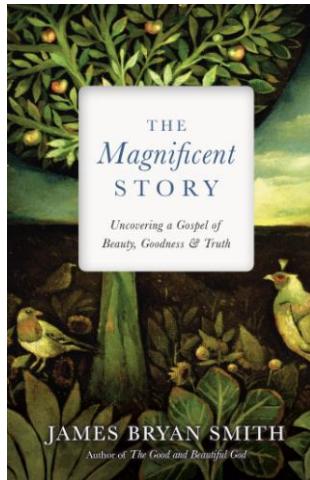
We are story-making people. We love reading stories — and we love hearing the personal stories of others. We need stories, or narratives, to make sense of our world. And those stories shape our lives.

- What is the story you have been told about the gospel?
- About God?
- About the Christian life?
- About Jesus?
- About the cross?
- About yourself?
- About heaven?

Your answers to these questions will form a story that will determine how your life will go. The answers reveal your ability to trust, to love, to hope — and even your capacity for joy. Any story worth giving the power to shape our lives must pass a simple test: is it beautiful, good, and true? If it is, then it is a magnificent story — and that is where transformation takes place.

From James Bryan Smith, author of the bestselling book *The Good and Beautiful God*, comes this spiritual formation resource meant to help both individuals and groups understand the magnificent story of Christ in their lives. Soon to be followed by *The Magnificent Journey: Living Deep in the Kingdom* (Fall 2018) and *The Magnificent Mission: Called and Sent by the Storyteller* (Fall 2019), the field-tested material within this first book includes spiritual practices at the end of each chapter and a group discussion guide.

"The distinctive contribution of *The Magnificent Story* is its attentiveness to the power of stories to destroy us, diminish us, and deprive us, or to free us, redeem us, and empower us," said Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary. "Spiritual formation teachers have rarely known the power of story, but none has it so central as James Bryan Smith. I consider *The Magnificent Story* to be a long leap into the deep graces of spiritual formation, not just for individuals but for small groups and churches."



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"What if the stories we tell and live are too small? What if the gospel story is truer, better, and more beautiful than we have ever imagined? As only a seasoned minister could, Smith asks and answers these questions with practicality and passion, theological lucidity and love. As he so importantly captures in these pages, the story of Jesus doesn't just prepare us for the moment of death, but for every breathing, pulsing minute of life."

— Jen Pollock Michel, award-winning author of *Teach Us to Want* and *Keeping Place*

We are, indeed, stories.

I met a man who watches *The Lord of the Rings* movies every night. When he told me this I pushed back, "Every night?" He said when he gets off work he goes home, fixes his dinner, and turns on the movie and watches until he gets sleepy. He stops the movie, and resumes in the same spot the next night. I was stunned by this, but in a way I understand. Great stories filled with adventure, with an epic battle of good versus evil, where tragedy ends in triumph, do something to our soul nothing else can.

We are creatures with a mystery in our heart that is bigger than ourselves. We may think we can find ultimate pleasure, satisfaction, and meaning in alcohol, sex, money, or power, but in reality those have never satisfied anyone. They are too small for our massive souls. We were designed to take part in a divine drama, an epic story. We were made not merely to hear it but *to be in it*. We are, indeed, stories. But in truth we are not the protagonist of the real story, the story we long to take part in. God is the hero of the only story that will satisfy us.

The thesis of this book is that there is a *magnificent story*, which is the most important thing happening on this earth. It is our only hope as individuals, communities, countries, and a species. But for a variety of reasons the gospel message we often hear, the story often told, is shrunken and distorted. This is why we see so many frustrated, disappointed Christians. It is not that they are bad people, but they have never heard the magnificent story in its fullness.

The good news of the gospel is similar to crying over the beauty of heavenly music. The good news of the gospel is similar to feeling glad when we see someone perform an unexpected act of kindness for a stranger. The greatest news is that this is what God is like. To discover this we need to look at the story—the gospel—through the lenses of beauty, goodness, and truth.

My friend Trevor stated it well: "In order to see beauty, goodness, and truth, I have to have humble eyes." Our eyes can be humble only when we get ourselves out of the way and focus on the beauty all around us. And we see God best when we learn to see and experience beauty, goodness, and truth. When we see them, we get a glimpse of God. We not only see them, we hear them, we smell them, we touch them, and we taste them. God gave us all of our senses—physical and spiritual—to feel God's love.

God sings his love to you in birdsong. God smiles at you in maple trees. God charms you with the color green. He gave you eyes to see sunsets, ears to hear rainfall, a nose to smell a rose. God's massive love appears in the small fragments. God is loving you in these moments, even if you don't know it.

— Taken from chapter one, "Longing for a Magnificent Story"