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In Search of “The Thing”

When it comes to churches and adult formation settings, we all want “the thing” that will inspire and attract people, and spark the conversations that will, ultimately, lead to life-giving relationships and practices. The [Animate.Faith](#) DVD series from Sparkhouse media offers that illusive balance of style and substance. And if “the thing” does, in fact, exist, it probably looks a lot like Animate.

What is Animate?

You can visit [the store](#) to learn more. In a nutshell, each dvd features 6 or 7 short clips (about 8 to 10 minutes each) in which well-known theologians and church leaders reflect on relevant spiritual matters. Their words are variations on a theme. They are dressed simply, standing in front of a solid background...and as they talk, their words and images are illustrated in digital black and white. (Get it? Animate?)

It may sound cheesy, but watch it and you’ll see what I mean... I actually found it to be pretty engaging. Maybe because the images are simple, they draw attention back to the speaker. (Or maybe because me and my 2nd-grade attention span need cartoons to keep us focused).

In fact, I find this model to be far LOWER on the cheese-scale than other programs of its ilk. Remember NOOMA, with Rob Bell? Those were kind of good too, but... sometimes they were just a little too precious. Picture that same kind of model, without all the wandering around in the woods and having emotional ‘moments’ as RB recalls being lost in a thunderstorm with his small child.

Leading to Conversation

“Animate” has the potential to inspire meaningful conversation, without any prescriptive language. (i.e., no bullet points for salvation, etc). The speakers offer spiritual truths, spoken with clarity, and end with a question, challenge, or practice for the listeners to

process. Additional resources and leader guides are available. However, a good teacher or pastor with 30 minutes to put into the prep could just as easily facilitate for his or her context, without the aid of ‘The Thing’s’ pre-packaged guidelines.

I echo other reviewers in saying, this could all be made available online for download and streaming, eliminating the time (and cost) of processing, shipping, etc. Because it is a little pricey. In the grand scheme of things, \$70 doesn’t seem like much for a 6-week group study. But it sure seems like a lot for one DVD, which is basically what you get for your money.

Conclusion

Bottom line—there is no magic-bullet/wonder product that is going to solve all of our programming and faith formation woes... But if you lead in a place where thoughtful people want to talk about real life and faith, shape their community and world, and maybe get together for pie while they’re doing it, then “Animate” creates space for all of that to happen. Meanwhile, you get to bring people like Brian McLaren, Phyllis Tickle, and Shane Claiborne into your midst for a short while. And really, \$69.99 is way cheaper than a plane ticket and a hefty speaker fee.

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