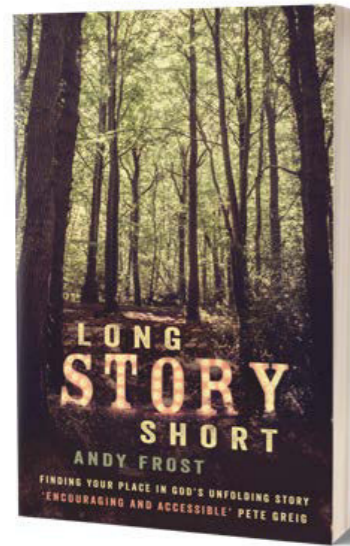


RESOURCE REVIEWS



LONG STORY SHORT *Andy Frost*

SPCK Publishing, 2018, £7.99, 9780281079315

Share Jesus' Andy Frost invites readers to question the stories society tells us to live for and instead explore what he believes is the only story big enough to frame our lives: the God story.

In this fresh exploration of the Christian faith, author Andy Frost starts with a fundamental truth: every life tells a story. He then takes readers on a journey through the three main narratives society tells us we should be living for: happiness, safety and significance. Taking each story in turn, he tactfully highlights the plot holes and unreliability of these common storylines, prompting the question: What if these stories are too small to really frame our lives?

In the second part of this book, Andy welcomes readers to explore a different narrative - the God story that lies at the heart of the Christian faith - and explains why for him this is now the only story he will live for. Andy's accessible look at God, the Bible and the person of Christ, coupled with his own personal journey, will encourage Christians of all ages and stages to better understand and share their story with others.

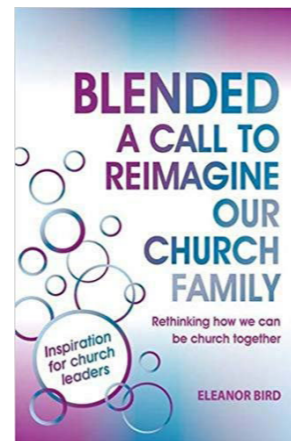
Long Story Short is age-old apologetics told in a fresh new way and will help readers find their place in God's unfolding story.

Andy Frost heads up Share Jesus International, an organisation that exists to help the Church share the life changing message of Jesus. He chairs the London Mission Collective; is a member of the Evangelical Alliance Council and an ambassador for Care for the Family. He is a regular speaker at Christian Summer Festivals, including Spring Harvest and Creation Fest. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Neep via: eneep@spck.org.uk

BLENDED: A CALL TO REIMAGINE OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Eleanor Bird

BRF, 2015, pp192, £7.49,
978-0857461124



In 'Blended,' Eleanor Bird invites us to reimagine a new way of being church together. A church that no longer divides by age lines, but instead embraces being a community of different generations. For too long she says, Christian communities have been separated: children, youth and adults each following their own programmes with diverse styles of worship and varying teaching themes. Her vision is one where the lines drawn between these groups become blurred, are rubbed away to become a more unified and connected body of believers.

The focus of Bird's book are the times when church communities gather for worship and her philosophy is built on four key values, outlined in the first six chapters of the book:

- Not calling church 'work'
- Giving everyone in church equal influence
- Training when apart for the times we gather as church
- Making the most of the times we gather to experiment and explain what's happening

These are 'building blocks' that underpin all that church is and does. They serve to create a community that thrives in worship when together and apart. So, the times when groups pursue their own programme are seen as vital opportunities to prepare and develop understanding for when all gather together. She advocates a model where style and content are gradually merged, helping worship times to become increasingly seamless.

This emphasis on worship (in the narrow sense of sung worship and teaching) is central in developing more cohesive church community. Bird makes the case for church to embrace its whole spectrum of family, yet the question remains what form this may take beyond Sunday services. What might the features of a blended church be outside these times is the next natural field to explore.

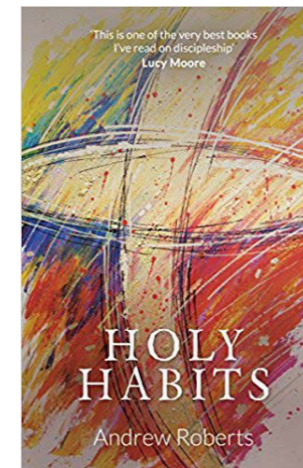
Bird's personal testimony and experience are threads throughout the book. This adds an authentic dimension when she recounts how her own faith and understanding developed. As readers we're urged to join her on this road of discovery that sees God's kingdom grow in our churches and beyond.

Gail Adcock, Church & Community Team, The Methodist Church.

HOLY HABITS

*Andrew
Roberts*

MALCOLM DOWN
PUBLISHING, 2015,
pp247, £8.99, 9781910786154



Holy Habits is more than a book on discipleship; it is a conversation on discipleship. Written in a conversational style, I felt I was listening to a friend sharing his thoughts, as Roberts draws on his own reading, tells real-life stories and gently stretches imaginations through his experience of Fresh Expressions. Readers are drawn into the conversation, particularly through the sections for 'further reflection and action' at the end of each chapter.

Holy Habits presents, through that conversation, a vision for whole life, full life, adventurous, big picture discipleship! Part 1, which deals with 'The Nature of Discipleship,' is broad in its scope; I particularly welcomed the chapter about 'the aims of discipleship,' making it clear that this is a focused journey, not an aimless wandering. Roberts strikes a healthy balance between the importance of corporate discipleship, when disciples meet together to 'practise the habits' and seek to be a community of transformation, and how discipleship is to be lived out when they are scattered.

Part 2 introduces the Holy Habits (Acts 2:42-47), with subsequent chapters dealing with each of the ten 'habits' in turn (Biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, giving, service, eating together, gladness & generosity, worship and the making of new disciples), keeping in readers' minds throughout, the broad vision and context of part 1. Taken together, both parts dare readers not just to dream of the Kingdom of God, but also to act in ways that will enable the Spirit to fulfil our prayers of seeing God's kingdom come on earth as in heaven. Thus, the book becomes more than just a conversation about discipleship, but also a practical handbook for disciples.

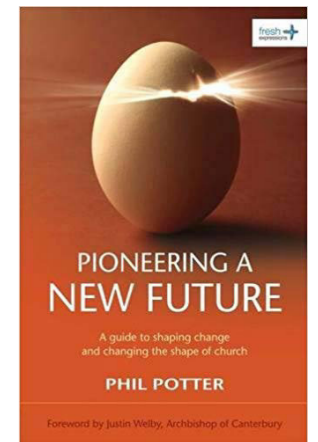
While longing for more depth of content, its great value is in its broad vision and in the drawing together and organisation of the content around Acts 2:42-47. This is the kind of book that I wish I had been given as a new Christian starting out on my journey of following Jesus.

The Revd Rachel Deigh is the Liverpool District Mission and Evangelism Enabler and Chair of the Cliff College Committee.

PIONEERING A NEW FUTURE

Phil Potter

BRF, 2015, pp208, £7.99, 978-0857464149



Phil Potter offers this book as a guide to assist with shaping change and changing the shape of church. What is particularly heartening, is that Potter unashamedly states that change should be about becoming more mission-shaped. Amongst other things, Potter encourages the asking of ruthless questions at least once a year, regarding the pattern of services, meetings, organisation and building. To support this, he offers a very helpful list of questions. He writes as both a pastor and a practitioner, and therefore has included many questions for practical reflection (for individuals or groups) at the end of each chapter.

It feels like a book of two halves - with the first half offering a practical guide. In many ways, he does not offer anything particularly new. However, he does offer it in a practical, realistic way. Having read this book, I have subsequently found myself using some of the questions and advice with some of the churches I visit as a District Evangelism Enabler.

The second half incorporates more theological reflection. To great affect Potter uses biblical principles and stories and at times offers new interpretations to some well-known passages about being church. He also recognises that humans don't always respond as we would hope. With this in mind, he spends time working through participation and inclusion - helpful to those of us who would want to rush ahead and get the job done.

Throughout the book, Potter offers many examples and stories. Much of these come from his time as Vicar at Haydock, Merseyside, where he recalls the church's journey through the stages of change. Potter uses his own experience in a very honest and affirming way; several times he acknowledges his own mistakes and failings yet gives testimony to the grace of God. Within his writing there is a wisdom that comes from this wealth of experience.

Whilst this book carries the Fresh Expressions logo, I think it would be most helpful to those leading inherited churches through change. Potter brings helpful insights from fresh expressions - particularly with regards to building church in new places and being connected to culture. The term 'pioneering' is often glamorised - this book does not do that, so do not be put off by the title. Potter gives a timely reminder to prune and not to just keep adding more and more things to existing heavy workloads. Whilst he offers much practical advice, he also encourages the reader to sacrifice common sense occasionally in the pursuit of following God.

This book encourages change through the addressing of values as opposed to following a process. This comes with the reminder that the heart of the 'change' problem is the problem of changing hearts.

The Revd Elaine Lindridge, District Evangelism Enabler, Newcastle Upon Tyne District.