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*On Holy Ground
You and Your Faith Story*

by I. Ross Bartlett

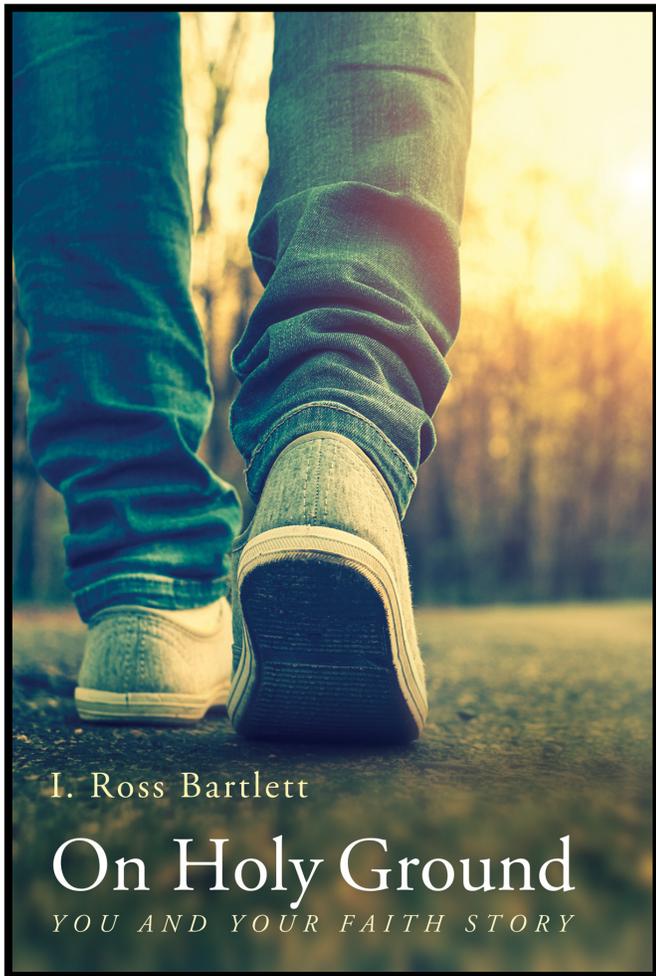
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New Title From I. Ross Bartlett

On Holy Ground You and Your Faith Story



You have a faith story. Has anyone ever asked you about it? Has anyone ever helped you share it? Have you wondered about how your faith relates to the things you see in the media? This small book is packed with tips and exercises to help you identify the key elements of your spiritual journey and to gain confidence in sharing it with others with grace and courage. It will also help you to listen in ways that will be a gift to others, setting them free to celebrate the Divine in their lives. Designed to be used by individuals, partners, or small groups, it invites the reader into a gently unfolding conversation of awareness and confidence and provides resources that you can use right now, regardless of whether you are part of a faith community or an individual searcher.

I. Ross Bartlett is the minister at Knox United Church and Adjunct Professor at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He is the author of *Whom Shall I Fear: Lenten Reflections on the Psalms of Lament* (2005).

Interview with I. Ross Bartlett

Why did you write this book?

For many years, I've watched people struggle with credible ways to share their faith. Most of the programs out there didn't fit them, but they were encountering times when speaking about their faith would have been helpful. This is meant to aid that.

Is faith the same as belief?

Not really, although the terms are often confused. Belief is formed by a series of items -- ideas, bible passages, other books, experience and so on -- that we say are "true." We think they reflect reality. Faith is about trust. Who or what would you stake your life on? That's where your faith is.

Why are faith stories so effective?

For one thing, they have instant credibility. You are speaking about something that is real in your life. It's not a bunch of facts and details disconnected from reality. So, when you have established a relationship with someone, your story has credibility with them.

Don't facts matter?

Of course they do! We want to ground our beliefs in the most accurate information possible. But facts need to come in their proper time. If someone is not interested, all the facts in the world are simply boring. People today are bombarded by "facts". Indeed we've been conditioned to doubt many of them. But a story from someone we trust can lead to curiosity about facts.

What is "theological reflection"?

There are several theological reflection exercises in the book, and they are based on my experience, as a pastor, with folk who believe their faith should inform their daily life but aren't always sure how to do that. They read a newspaper article or see a documentary and want to make the link to faith. The exercises share just a few possible tools to get started.

Who is this book for?

It's for any person of faith -- in other words anyone who trusts in someone or something -- and wants to feel more comfortable sharing that faith with others. It comes from a Christian perspective because that's the faith I know best. But I'd be incredibly excited if folks who don't identify as Christ-followers found it helpful! It's written for individuals, but it would be most effective, I believe, in pairs or small groups as people share the journey.

Why call it "On Holy Ground"?

In the bible, when Moses encounters God, he takes off his sandals because "the ground is holy." When we truly meet another person and get to know them, I think that is holy ground. In my experience, the times when people have shared their deep faith stories with me, are amongst the most humbling and awe-inspiring moments I can recall.

An Excerpt from *On Holy Ground*

There is a simple premise underlying this brief book: you have a faith story that is important. You may never have been told that before. Nonetheless it is true. There's a good chance that you've never been shown how to tell that story. You may feel intimidated or turned off by folk who "share faith" in easy, self-confident and sometimes glib ways. Perhaps you imagine that your life is not important enough or dramatic enough to be the basis for a story anyone cares about. I'm sorry to be blunt but: you're wrong. Your silence does no one any good: not you, or your neighbour or friend, or God. It's not true to who you are. As the ancient Christian wrote: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you — but do so with gentleness and respect." The purpose of this book is four-fold:

1. To help you clarify your faith and express that faith;
2. To think about the language you can use to express your faith;
3. To think about the everyday reality of your relationship to God and Jesus Christ; and
4. To consider ways in which you could feel more comfortable and confident in expressing these deep truths in conversation with others.

I promise you that there are some things this book will not do:

1. It will not presume to give you one right answer for your deep questions — those answers are for you to find;
2. It will not give you a sure-fire formula to convert your unbelieving friends or co-workers — no technique can replace your honest and respectful relationships;
3. It will not bolster the assumption that anyone who differs from you is wrong or, even worse, eternally condemned. It may even open you to the joyful risk of learning from others because I believe that the Spirit can speak to us from many places — including the most unexpected.

The underlying metaphor for this book is the pilgrimage. That may sound like a churchy word that has very little to do with the day to day of paying the bills, going to work, tending relationships and experiencing both joy and heartache. We may associate the term with journeys to special places or famous journeys. The Camino de Santiago in Spain is perhaps the most famous spiritual walk. Cathedrals at Lourdes and Chartres are famous for the pilgrims they draw. For Moslems, the great pilgrimage is the haj — a journey to the birthplace of the Prophet which each devout Moslem, whose circumstances allow, is expected to undertake once in a lifetime. In some traditional societies there is the practice of the "spirit quest". Sometimes there are family pilgrimages, where the next generation is taken "back home" to see the roots from which the family sprang. There can also be mental pilgrimages: those times you may recall when you spent five minutes labouring over a single sentence in a book and you'd swear you could feel your head expanding as the new knowledge moved in. Then there are situational pilgrimages when we volunteer to go outside our comfort zone and help in a new space: perhaps in another country or more locally in a soup kitchen, shelter or prison. From that very brief list it is probably obvious that pilgrimage can take many forms.

Praise for *On Holy Ground*

“Finally, a user-friendly workbook to help people become comfortable in telling their faith story. Focusing on personal experience of the Divine without all the theological jargon, it will be useful to all, regardless of where you find yourself on your spiritual journey.”

—**Phillip Kennedy, Minister, Woodlawn United Church, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia**

“With his trademark clarity of purpose and style, Bartlett offers this wonderful resource to all who have tasted the Bread of Life and are ready to explore how best to share it with others. The questions and exercises will broaden your insight and help you dig more deeply into the story of your faith, which you’ll be more prepared to pass along after reading this book.”

—**Robert C. Fennell, Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax, Nova Scotia**

“Many Christians find sharing their faith challenging. Writing with a lay audience in mind, Bartlett offers reasons why such faith-sharing is important and provides exercises to help people develop skill and confidence in doing so. His clues for good storytelling will also prove useful to preachers, for whom the hearing and telling of stories is a crucial tool of the trade.”

—**John H. Young, Executive Minister, Theological Leadership, The United Church of Canada**

“This is the book I have been waiting for! It’s accessible and thought-provoking. The exercises are engaging and inviting; appropriate for those who are comfortable talking about their faith and for whom it doesn’t come as easily. I look forward to engaging my congregations in exploring their faith through this book.”

—**Catherine MacDonald, Interim Minister, Elmsdale Pastoral Charge, United Church of Canada**

“Using humor and story, Bartlett offers the reader a practical process of encountering their personal spiritual practice. This is a book that the reader can revisit again and again!”

—**Ruth Noble, Mission and Service Engagement Coordinator, United Church of Canada**

