

## When Andy Met God

*Ester deBoer*

Nobody told him that God isn't supposed to appear in human form, dressed like any other man, and talk in plain simple speech, so it didn't occur to him to not accept it. He'd been intellectually disabled since birth, born to two disabled parents. The parents tried their best in their limited capacity, but Andy was a wild thing — aggressive and delinquent.

But then Andy had changed. Suddenly and seemingly without reason. One afternoon at an after-school program, it came up in staff conversation. A few had theories. Overall, though, the consensus was a shrug – *weird, but thank god*. God the expression, not the person. God, it seemed, was part of the shrug.

So, they asked him, 'Hey, Andy, how come you're not bad anymore?'

It was Andy's turn to shrug, not because *he* was confused – it was just a casual gesture. 'God helps me now.'

'Say *what?*' mocked the workplace bully. 'Andy's got religion! Hey Andy, does he wear a robe and sandals?' Andy had no clue what 'religion' meant. If he did, he would have realised that he was breaking the rules and shut the whole thing down.

Neither did he understand sarcasm, so he continued.

'He came to me one day when I was really angry and said, "Andy, I can help you if you want."'

'Just like that!' scoffed the bully, with a click of the fingers. 'Some churchy people have been talking to him.'

'Well, it's worked,' muttered the shift supervisor, then asked the kid, 'You been going to church, Andy?'

‘No,’ replied Andy. ‘He just came into my room one day and now he comes with me everywhere.’ The bully attempted a crude joke, but no one was listening. They were all having a ‘hairs up on the back of the neck’ moment. They’d worked with Andy for years. They knew him well. They knew when he was lying – he wasn’t smart enough to hide it.

Andy continued. ‘You know how I walk away now when I’m angry? Well, that’s ‘cause he says, “Hey, Andy, lets let’s go for a walk and talk about it.” I tell him how I’m feeling...’ Another shrug – it was all perfectly natural to Andy. That’s what was so *unnatural* to those listening. ‘Then he says it’s gonna be okay ... and calms me down.’ Andy looked at them like *they* were a bit slow, as if to say ‘Duh! What else would God do?’

There was a sacred silence for a moment. Andy was distracted and had wandered off. The supervisor commented in a baffled tone, ‘Well, maybe people like Andy are able to have experiences like that because...’ *Shrug* — the paradigm-shattered variety ‘...because he doesn’t know it’s not *meant* to happen.’

Work resumed, the conversation petered out, the paperwork done, rituals observed. Each surrendered, with a shrug, to the comfort of rules.

And Andy? It takes simple faith to see God. I hope he’s none the wiser.

