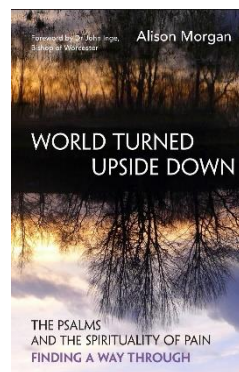


# *World Turned Upside Down: The Psalms and the Spirituality of Pain – finding a way through*

Alison Morgan

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## **Selected commendations**



'The Psalms take us on a journey; and they take us on foot... in a sense walking is the dominant theme of the entire Psalter.' So writes Alison Morgan in her highly perceptive, reflective and personal exploration of this great repository of timeless wisdom. Alison is the kind of guide who inspires confidence: she has trodden this path before, she reads the map, she knows the direction, she is not daunted by difficult terrain, scree or scramble, not held back by headwind, storm or fog. Anyone who follows Alison's guidance will be better equipped to return to the Psalms again and again and discover fresh insights of their own – and become a guide to others.'

From the Foreword by **Dr John Inge**, Bishop of Worcester

Written with great insight and compassion, this deep dive into the psalms is a much needed book, at a time when suffering has come home to so many. Alison Morgan deftly explores the many ways in which the ancient poetry of the psalms can speak into our own lives, so that we really understand what it means to say of these scriptures that 'deep calls unto deep'.

**Malcolm Guite**, Poet-priest, Life Fellow of Girton College Cambridge, and author of many books and poetry collections including *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*, Routledge 2010 and *David's Crown: Sounding the Psalms*, Canterbury Press 2021

'This book is stunningly *beautiful*: as filled with light and shadow, and with energy and life, as the Psalms that form its subject and have power – so Alison Morgan argues – to turn things on their heads. But this is a book that is also *felt*. Alison "sees and sings" these ancient biblical songs, by mapping them onto the here and now of her own and others' lived experience – and she does so with a visceral intensity, that invigorates the senses and discovers meaning in the sights, sounds and textures of places. This is a remarkable book, that brings memory, experience and theology into play with literature, art, music and even neuroscience, and does so with the lightest of touch and the sharpest of wit. It will surely inspire even those who have known the Psalms all their lives, as well as those for whom they are new or less familiar.'

**Prof. Clare A.P. Willsdon**, History of Art, School of Culture and Creative Arts, University of Glasgow

As ever, Alison Morgan manages to convey a wealth of academic study in a deeply personal and accessible way. In this hope-filled book she applies the Psalms to the reality of every-day life and shows how they can help us express our own thoughts and feelings to God as well as listen to his response. Along the way she tackles issues such as meaning, lament, identity – and especially pain which, like fire, can 'burn or refine'. In her own poetic language she illustrates the poetry of the psalms which 'demands to be felt more than thought about' and expresses what it feels like to be human.

*World Turned Upside Down* is practical as well as inspirational. It points to the way in which the Psalms can help us to grow through our suffering rather than be crushed by it, and includes moving and profound meditations on creation and death. This book is all about looking at life differently, and its message could hardly be more apt in today's culture: namely that, however hard it may sometimes be to believe, 'God is sovereign, and God is with us'.

**James Newcome**, Bishop of Carlisle

I found my journey through the psalms with Alison Morgan eye-opening, encouraging and challenging. It was as though God was inviting me into a deeper level of communication and intimacy with him as Alison shared her reflections. She has given me tools and a desire to engage with the psalms, and the God of the psalms, more deeply and honestly.

Alison shows how the psalms give me permission to share my deepest and most difficult emotions with God – and how they give me the language with which to do it.

**Martin Breytenbach**, Retired Bishop of St Mark the Evangelist, Limpopo, South Africa

There is so much to enjoy throughout the book. Each chapter offers a stimulating breadth of literature, history, geography, natural sciences etc easily woven into the narrative. There are many engaging stories that illumine the text and demonstrate what may be involved in real, visceral engagement with God. There is a catholicity of scholarly perspectives deftly presented without being showy or obtrusive. Alison's style is lucid and lyrical with occasional iridescence. There is evidence of substantial pastoral experience supporting people in different continents and cultures undergoing the common human condition of fiercely personal trials. This leads to realism in facing personal pain and the unreasonable reactions from others that can be so shocking in life's adverse episodes.

**Rodney Green** CBE, Former Chief Executive, Leicester City Council and author of *90,000 Hours: Managing the world of work*, Scripture Union 2002

Alison Morgan's *World Turned Upside Down* is for you if you want to build your confidence in God. This book is an excellent companion as you walk through the ups and downs of everyday life. It is a gentle yet deep reflection on personal and sometimes challenging experiences that can only strengthen and deepen one's faith in God. Alison's intercultural writing style will draw you in, whatever your cultural heritage or ethnicity. Her insights during this personal adventure through the psalms will keep you engaged and genuinely bless you. In this book, you will find something which is 'critically rigorous, helpfully informative, and personally meaningful' and that you can use as part of your pattern of prayer. I wholeheartedly commend it to you.

**Dr Timothy Wambunya**, Hon. Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Oxford and former Bishop of Butere in Kenya

This is a deeply personal book in which the author explores how the psalms, in all their shades of light and dark, have illuminated and given shape to her own journey of faith. A most engaging read, vividly written.

**Patrick Woodhouse**, former Canon of Wells Cathedral, and author of *Life in the Psalms* (Bloomsbury Continuum 2015)

Alison does not shrink either from the difficulties we face in life nor from the so-called difficult parts of the psalms. Indeed she brings these two together, first of all by talking openly about the bad things that happen, some of them from her own life story, and then using the words of the psalms to face, express and re-assess our experience with God. Taking us on a journey through the psalms, Alison shows us how they describe God's presence in the world and his relationship with us. This journey is thematic in approach, one which illuminates their poetic nature and shows how rooted they are in the landscape of creation and the history of God's people. Above all, they give us permission to be who we really are and show us the vital role of God's mercy and grace in our lives.

**Revd Dr Liz Hoare**, Tutor in spiritual formation, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

Like the psalms themselves, Alison's book is refreshingly honest, and abounds in insights from her extensive general knowledge and her own life experience. That makes it a very rich read. Alison draws the reader into their own journey of reflection on 'what it feels like to be human' with an understanding that we can only truly find

ourselves as we discover God in all his multi-faceted layers. I found this book immediately engaging, totally absorbing and ultimately healing and restorative.

**Canon Andrew Evans**, Rector of Broughton Gifford, Great Chalfield and Holt, and Rural Dean of Bradford, Diocese of Salisbury

A book focused on pain could be a daunting prospect - and this one does make demands, inviting us to engage emotionally with our experience as well as in our thinking. But it does so with a lightness of touch, bringing numerous stories from personal experience, laced with wise reflection and playful humour. In all this the Psalms provide lenses through which to explore life's hardest times and also words through which to express them. Inhabiting these ancient songs really can help turn our world the right way up.

**Revd Dr Bill Goodman**

Assistant Principal at St Peters College and Director of Ongoing Ministerial Development, Diocese of Sheffield