

Scott Morrison and The Book of Life

A review of

Plans For Your Good

A Prime Minister's Testimony of God's Faithfulness (2024)

This book has now been out for one year, and after yet another election, I thought it could be helpful to provide a further reflection since it initially prompted significant reaction, including in some Christian circles. There have of course been many reviews, naturally most appearing around the time of the publication. From my reading of reviews it would be an understatement to say that a good proportion, particularly in the secular media, were not appreciative of the former Prime Minister's book.¹

We all have a political bias even if we are not one of the party faithful, but it is helpful to put aside partisan views (as much as possible) in order to at least consider the perspective of someone you may not respect, or even loath.

For the Church, I highlight John Sandeman's coverage in an aptly entitled, reasonably lengthy [review](#) and then a follow-up in [Obadiah](#) related to a review in *The Australian* as good straight media observations for a Christian audience to consider. I also appreciated Rev. Dr Robyn Whitaker's extensive [review](#) and consideration, particularly of the personal theological focus of Morrison and the wider exploration of the key verse that I will highlight later.

One thing that many reviewers noted is that this is an unusual political memoir, and Morrison recognises this himself. He has not written the standard account using a linear approach focussed on his time in politics and particularly as Prime Minister.

¹ I avoided reading reviews before I finished reading the book as I wanted to keep relatively untainted, though I saw the occasional headline or comments, but have read reviews extensively since last year, finding it illuminating, and thinking an excel spreadsheet may have been the best way to keep track of condemnatory words and apoplectic phrases.

Personal history and personal devotional reflections are connected with major political decisions and events. The book is relatively short at 272 pages and is exceptionally easy to read with the design based around short chapters. It probably has an orientation to people who would not normally read political biographies, but more a combination of devotional and (Christian) biography.

It is clear to me that one of the reasons that many secular reviewers did not understand the style of the book is that they had not read American Pastor Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (2002). I view Morrison's book as a personal working through of this devotional style textbook. One of the bestselling Christian books ever, it had a particular impact in the USA and brought Warren to wider church and society attention. The book is referenced in the third chapter where Morrison writes about listening to one of Warren's sermons. And this American reference links to the main market Morrison was looking to, namely the USA. This connection is also evident given of the seven highlighted commendation remarks, four are from prominent Americans, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. One commendation is from the UK, and two from well-connected Australians, former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson AC and *The Australian* journalist and writer Greg Sheridan. The USA is of course a much bigger market, and Christian books rarely do well in Australia; combine it with politics, and there is probably less opportunity. There are also links between the three countries and political and geopolitical material discussed in the book, particularly the focus on issues related to AUKUS.

A further American connection is through the foreword, written by former USA Vice President, Mike Pence. There are references in the book highlighting Morrison's contact with him, including their prayer together, as well as with other Christians. The foreword needs a small edit as the mention of the American and Australian liberation of a French town from Nazi occupation in the First World War glaringly stands out.

The connection with Mike Pence is also clear if you have read Mike Pence's autobiography *So Help Me God* (2022). There are similarities in style and Christian context, though this is not surprising given their Christian background and experience.

It is important to note Mike Pence's use of Jeremiah 29: 11 as the introductory verse framing the start of his book (more on this verse later for Morrison). Pence also uses this as the verse illustration for Chapter 6, 'Time to Serve', the beginning of his time in federal politics. This verse is of course, an exceedingly popular verse, often reaching the top ten in online searches. In 2024 it was the seventh most searched verse on [Bible Gateway](#). (the others related to Psalm 23)

Morrison and Pence have a similar personal focus, illustrating the centrality of their wives and children in their life in general, and advice and direction in particular. I even noted the similarity in the influence of their pet dogs. Mike Pence's book is a fascinating read, and helpful for insight into noteworthy events in the first Trump presidency, particularly given Mike Pence is now so intimately framed by January 6. The chapters on this are well worth reading alone, even if you do not read the whole book. There is also clarification of other events the legacy media focussed on, helping to provide an alternate view.

Morrison's book itself is neatly divided into three parts. This links to a Christian teaching foundation with the often referenced three-part sermon.

The parts are:

Who am I?

I have wondered whether a tweak here may have been better; considering the question Jesus asked; Who do you say that I am?

How should I live?

This reminded me of Francis Schaeffer's influential book and video series, *How Should We Then Live* (1976), as the sections consider the cultural and moral context that has long been emerging, and the context confronting Christians increasingly today with the change in even nominal Christian affiliation.

What should I hope for?

Biblical verses abound here and as noted, *Jeremiah 29: 11* is the foundational verse for Scott Morrison.

For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. (NASB1995)

This obviously links to the title and the foundation for the whole thesis in the book. It is not meant to be a focussed political reference, though there are related elements, but rather an eschatological reference, as indicated by the third part of the book ‘What should I hope for?’ This is about the ultimate hope we have as Christians, and continues the evangelistic theme and personal challenge to readers that was introduced in the Preface.

The book is so packed with biblical stories, bible references, his sharing and prayer with pastors, and story parallels, that it not only illustrates Scott Morrison’s theological and preaching orientation, but connects an early mention of him having had a plan to study at Regent College [and presumably become a pastor]. There is an element of the ‘frustrated preacher’ in this book, and this also helps to shed a light on his time as Prime Minister and the rudiments of didactic preaching and pastoral sharing, including the use of personal illustrations whether in parliament or at a press conference.

Significant stories of personal connection abound, including two that many Australians would be familiar with now, namely their struggle to have children, and the impact of the challenging times during Covid on his mental health. There are the connections with Australians who have had major personal tragedies, notably with the now well-known Abdallah family who founded i4Give Day. The involvement of his wife Jenny in ongoing pastoral connection is particularly meaningful here, and provides insight into their mutual relationship, grounded in their common faith and church attendance.

Given that it is a relatively short book and its orientation, there are many political issues and happenings that are not mentioned. I was certainly still left with questions about why some decisions were made and stances taken, but understand they were not to be met in this book. It is not unusual for a politician to focus on those times that they deem are their legacy, and for Scott Morrison his legacy is intimately caught up in the Covid-dominated era.

So, there is still opportunity for a more typical political memoir and a fuller engagement with his theology and decision-making, particularly in the context of knowing God's will. Overall, I found this book by Scott Morrison more interesting than I thought I would, and particularly commend it to those people who gave it one star and then admitted they had never read the book.

I find political memoirs fascinating, as they often reveal more about the person, particularly in the style and context. I am looking forward to reading one from Morrison's 'successor' Anthony Albanese. In the meantime, the biography by Karen Middleton *Telling it Straight* is illuminating and helps to provide answers to some questions I have had about Albanese's cultural religious beliefs in the context of marriage. The centrality of marriage is something that Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese have in common, even if they have different religious and cultural understandings and involvement.

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