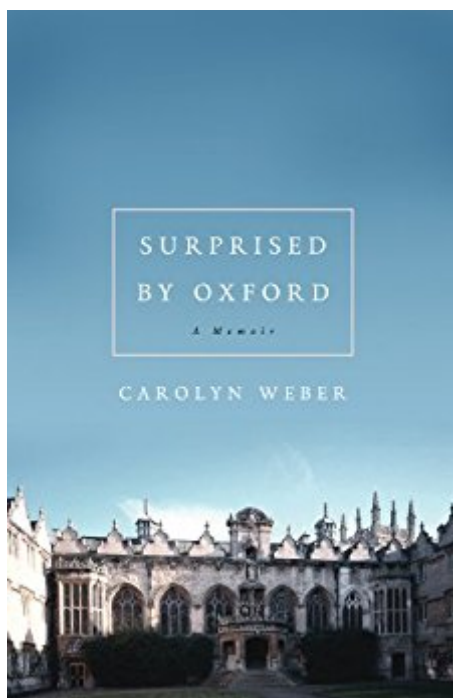


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# Surprised By Oxford: A Memoir



## Synopsis

"A hugely readable journey of cultural and spiritual discovery, sparkling with wit and wisdom." -- Alister McGrath, Author & Theologian "this charming book ...will take you willingly on a highly personal and revelatory odyssey." -Christopher Schoppa, Washington Post "...reads like a fast-paced novel. I loved the humor, skillful use of language... I was totally captivated from beginning to end." -- Marilyn Meberg, 'Women of Faith' ~ ECPA Christian Book Award Finalist ~ Winner of the Grace Irwin Prize, for the Christian book of the year by a Canadian Author ~ Recipient of the Logos Book Award ~ best book in Christian Living. BOOK SYNOPSIS Surprised by Oxford is the memoir of a skeptical agnostic who comes to a dynamic personal faith in God during graduate studies in literature at Oxford University. Carolyn Weber arrives at Oxford a feminist from a loving but broken family, suspicious of men and intellectually hostile to all things religious. As she grapples with her God-shaped void alongside the friends, classmates, and professors she meets, she tackles big questions in search of Truth, love, and a life that matters. From issues of fatherhood, feminism, doubt, doctrine, and love, Weber explores the intricacies of coming to faith with an aching honesty and insight echoing that of the poets and writers she studied. Rich with illustration and literary references, Surprised by Oxford is at once gritty and lyrical; both humorous and spiritually perceptive. This savvy, credible account of Christian conversion and its after-effects follows the Oxford liturgical calendar as it entertains, informs, and promises to engage even the most skeptical and unlikely reader. "...honest, entertaining and refreshingly free of superficial cant." -- Vaughan Roberts, Rector, St. Ebbe's Oxford " ...filled with prose that sings and paragraphs that beg to be read a second time. A delightful read." -- Trevin Wax, Christianity Today's "Books to Note"

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an outstanding book, and I am reviewing it although I have not yet finished it. It is not something that I could take in one big gulp. It is full of deep conversations, interesting and sometimes painful personal revelations, and insights into one's journey to find a personal relationship with God. So it is going to take me a while to finish the last half - and then I will probably go back and start it all over again. I would recommend this to anyone who is searching through the noise and confusion of today's world to find a pathway to the Infinite.

Surprised by Oxford is a memoir of Carolyn Weber's time at Oxford, where she enrolled to study the literature she loved. But while there, Carolyn fell in love with so much more. In a sense, this book is the interwoven picture of her three loves: Romantic literature; another student she calls Tall, Dark, and Handsome; and God. The latter two lend the "surprise" to the title, because Weber arrived in England with an entrenched agnosticism and a fiancé. Weber's story shares several themes with another excellent memoir, *A Severe Mercy*. Like Vanauken's book, *Surprised by Oxford* tracks the hound of heaven as it pursues a lost soul who thinks she can cautiously study Christianity from a distance. Instead, Weber finds herself falling deeply in love with the God she never knew, the God whose Son entered time to save humanity. Weber is now a professor of literature, and her warm familiarity with great writers fills the pages of this book. *Surprised by Oxford* is a coming-to-faith story that is at once both deeply intellectual and remarkably inviting. Weber writes well, and each chapter drew me in closer, wanting to see what happened next. She writes of highly educated conversations with professors, classmates, and friends in a way that even the most uneducated among us can enjoy. You will be in love by the time you finish *Surprised by Oxford*. You will close

the book with a renewed passion for God, who has graciously revealed Himself to the world and has astonishingly called us His children. Oxford, too, will gain a special place in your heart. The legendary university towers over this story, both in its impressive collection of great minds and its historic connections to Christianity, to say nothing of its surprising beauty. Finally, I must admit that you'll close the book with an admiration for Tall, Dark, and Handsome, the man who most doggedly presents Christ's reality and His call to Carolyn throughout her story.

Kafka said something like this: "Art is the ice axe that breaks up the frozen sea within us." I like that. I'm a man. I don't cry easily. And I especially don't get choked up just from someone telling me a story. Exceptions: the final scene of the film *Dead Poets Society* and the last chapter of the book *The Brothers Karamazov* (not the movie!) and the Gospel of John. That's it. Well until reading *Surprised by Oxford*, it's got an ice axe in every chapter! Buy it. Read it. Be transformed!

I love stories on how God changes hearts and lives. Little did Carolyn Weber nee Drake know when she showed up in Oxford, her life would be changed forever. She writes about two wooers. The first is the Divine wooer who brings her to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The second wooer is TDH whom she later marries. For those who are discouraged I would recommend this book to lift your spirit. In the words of the song, "God's not dead; He is surely alive."

*Surprised by Oxford, A Memoir*, chronicles the semesters spent in graduate studies at Oxford University for Carolyn Weber's graduate work in Romantic Literature. Along the journey, as the title hints, she is gently drawn to the same faith as C.S. Lewis. The story reels you in with snippets from the history of Oxford's hallowed halls, descriptions of England's jeweled beauty, stirring quotes caught from her studies, and her personal passage of heart. An eloquent love story of the most elemental nature, told in first-person prose, Carolyn weaves her history into 'His'-story to her. Beginning with an agnostic faith, Carolyn embodies the self-sufficient American as she completes undergraduate work, and finds herself the surprised recipient of a full scholarship to Oxford. Her interactions bring her into a vibrant group of students and professors, and as the Michaelmas, Christmastide, and Hilary terms unfold, so does her discovery of God in the midst of her simple life. Chapter 13 brought me tears as Carolyn re-thinks even the relationships dear to her, including fiance, mother, alcoholic father at Christmas, and her sister's unquestioning love. Finally, in Chapter 21 my breath is as ragged as a runner while following her final sprint from doubt to the grace of belief. Throughout, her vague romance with a truly faithful fellow student (TDH, as she

names him) bewitched me into an eager desire for the epilogue. Sadly, the ending is disjointed, hesitant and a misfit with the rest of the well-thought out pattern of the book. My theory is that she wrote it 14 years later, and had lost the flow of its writing whilst living life. Overall, I still give this book 5 stars, and have already bought it for a good friend of mine, who will appreciate the depth of faith, sparkling quotes and tender love of both Saviour and TDH found here. I highly recommend it then, and my hat is off to Carolyn for this valuable and tender story of God's hand, outstretched in our life. I was given a complimentary copy of this book in exchange for my review, as part of the Booksneeze review blogger group.

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