



## **Soul Survivor: How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church**

*Philip Yancey*

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# **Soul Survivor: How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church**

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**Soul Survivor: How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church** Philip Yancey Philip Yancey, whose explorations of faith have made him a guide for millions of readers, feels no need to defend the church. "When someone tells me yet another horror story about the church, I respond, 'Oh, it's even worse than that. Let me tell you my story.' I have spent most of my life in recovery from the church."

Yancey acknowledges that many spiritual seekers find few answers and little solace in the institutional church. "I have met many people, and heard from many more, who have gone through a similar process of mining truth from their religious past: Roman Catholics who flinch whenever they see a nun or priest, former Seventh Day Adventists who cannot drink a cup of coffee without a stab of guilt, Mennonites who worry whether wedding rings give evidence of worldliness."

How did Yancey manage to survive spiritually despite early encounters with a racist, legalistic church that he now views as almost cultic? In this, his most soul-searching book yet, he probes that very question. He tells the story of his own struggle to reclaim belief, interwoven with inspiring portraits of notable people from all walks of life, whom he calls his spiritual directors. **Soul Survivor** is his tribute to thirteen remarkable individuals, mentors who transformed his life and work.

Besides recalling their effect on him, Yancey also provides fresh glimpses of the lives and faith journeys of each one. From the scatterbrained journalist G. K. Chesterton to the tortured novelists Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, to contemporaries such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Annie Dillard, and Robert Coles, Yancey gives inspiring portraits of those who modeled for him a life-enhancing rather than a life-constricting faith.

"I became a writer, I now believe, to sort out and reclaim words used and misused by the Christians of my youth," Yancey says. "These are the people who ushered me into the Kingdom. In many ways they are why I remain a Christian today, and I want to introduce them to other spiritual seekers."

**Soul Survivor** offers illuminating insights that will enrich the lives of veteran believers and cautious seekers alike. Yancey's own story, unveiled here as never before, is a beacon for those who seek to rejuvenate their faith, and for those who are still longing for something to have faith in.

## **Soul Survivor: How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church Details**

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Author : Philip Yancey

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## **From Reader Review Soul Survivor: How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church for online ebook**

## Ben Zajdel says

It is rare when you find a book that can change your whole perception on life. *Soul Survivor* by Philip Yancey not only changed my perception, but did what a good book is supposed to do: inspire a person. I will point out that not everyone will find it to be so dramatically life-altering. But Yancey had a childhood similar to mine, and his perspective is unique. I know that I'm a little late in reading this book (it came out in 2001) but I couldn't help but spread the word about it.

The subtitle of *Soul Survivor* is "How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church." Yancey is someone who has endured a large amount of what he calls "church abuse." This book profiles thirteen people that taught him about grace and faith, but apart from the church. Like I said before, as someone coming from similar circumstances, I can appreciate what these people meant to Yancey.

Some of the more interesting profiles include Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, John Donne, Henri Nouwen, and Annie Dillard. Yancey gives a brief history of each person, then tells how each affected his life through their actions or their writings. Some of them Yancey knew personally through interviews he conducted for various magazines. Others he knew only through their works.

But each of these interesting people affected Yancey in some significant way. He shows through their lives and actions that true faith is acted out in real life, not written down and thought of as an abstract idea. A truly fascinating read.

## **Hany Adeeb says**

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**Tintinrulz says**

If you can count on Philip Yancey for one thing, that would be complete and utter honesty in his writings. That's a rare quality, especially amongst Christian writers. This book is a great read, if at times a little dull (personal preferences - some people are more interesting than others). Here Yancey explores the lives of 13 people who helped him to retain his Christian faith and live for God, despite the hypocrisy and hurt he experienced in the church. He praises them for teaching him valuable lessons but he never idolizes them. Somehow, Yancey strikes the balance between the two extremes. He recognises their strengths and vulnerabilities and how God helped lead him into having a genuine faith, not the puppies and rainbows understanding often perpetuated by modern Western Christianity (in this case, American Christianity).

Yancey explores the lives of these people:

(My thoughts on some of the chapters)

Martin Luther King Jr. (revolutionary)

G.K. Chesterton (fantastic - I would love to meet this man in Heaven)

Dr. Paul Brand

Dr. Robert Coles

Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky (an absolutely brilliant illustration of Law and Grace)

Mahatma Ghandhi (great, enlightening)

Dr. C. Everett Koop

### John Donne (humbling)

Annie Dillard

Frederick Buechner

Shusaku Endo (disturbing but wanted to know more)

Henri Nouwen

Overall, an extremely honest and enlightening look at the joys and trials of being a Christian. Highly recommended for people who've been hurt by the Church (that would be most people to different degrees) and wish to explore the faith, warts and all, to find healing in Christ alone.

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### **Renee says**

A book about the thinkers, writers, dreamers, doers & believers that Yancey has either known or read. People who have influenced his faith in some significant way. And helped him rediscover God after rejecting his southern fundamentalist, racist "Christian" upbringing.

This book provided a great introduction to some really amazing folks both historical and contemporary, whose works I was not familiar with. Like G.K. Chesterton, Dr. Paul Brand and Annie Dillard. And others I knew of but not in any detail. People like Martin Luther King Jr. (I'm Canadian after all, I'm excused for not knowing much about that time in US history), Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi.

I've been meaning to read his books for some time. I'm glad I finally did. I appreciate his writing. His honest criticisms, grace for differing opinions and willingness to accept there are no answers to some questions. And in spite of all that or maybe because of it, a solid faith in Jesus Christ.

Although my faith hasn't needed to survive the church, it does have to withstand the pitfalls and struggles of modern society - consumerism, despair, negativity, busyness, noise, overindulgence. And selfishness in general. Yancey's book gave fresh insight to persevering through those daily struggles.

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### **mirela Darau says**

I like yancey very much!! he's one of my favourite authors, and, together with Wurmbrand, my favourite author on "spiritual matters":) I found the title of this book intriguing and captivating at the same time, but when I opened it and saw it is about his mentors, I was thrilled. As far as it concerns me, nothing can influence and teach me more than a good living (or once living:P) example. So I'm excited to read it!

I read so far about Martin Luther King Jr., Chesterton and Dr. Paul Brand. Reading about MLK Jr. it struck me how devoted he was to the cause he believed in. This gave me a lot to think about:

"Ii iubim pe oameni nu pentru ca ne sunt dragi, nici pentru ca modul lor de a fi ni se pare agreeabil, si nici macar pentru ca am zari in ei vreo scanteie divina. Il iubim pe om, oricine ar fi el, intrucat pe el il iubeste, mai presus de toate, Dumnezeu." [imi aminteste asa de bine de atitudinea lui Wurmbrand!:]

M-a surprins Chesterton. Am dat de numele lui prin cartile lui Lewis, dar nu m-am pus vreodata problema sa il citesc sau sa citesc ceva despre el. Si totusi, felul lui de a fi, dupa cum il descrie Yancey este de-a dreptul "cute" (of! nu gasesc cuvinte potrivite!!). Mi-a atras atentia chiar o fraza de pe prima pagina a cap. dedicat lui:

"[Lewis si Chesterton:] aveau sa nasca in mine speranta ca exista, undeva, si crestini cu dorinta de a-si largi orizontul, dincolo de bigotismul lor ingust, de a contopi gusturile lor sofisticate cu osmerenie fireasca, fara a-i privi pe ceilalti de sus si de a-si trai, inainte de orice, viata cu Dumnezeu ca pe un izvor de bucurie, iar nu de inchisare."

"Sunt omul care, cu o indrazneala de nedescris, a descoperit ceea ce fusese deja descoperit", declama triumfator Chesterton. "M-am straduit indelung sa-mi inventez propria erenzie pentru ca, definitivandu-i coordonatele, sa constat ca era insasi ortodoxia (dreapta credinta)."

"Nici n-am intalnit vreun filosof care sa nu-si gaseasca linistea, nelamurit in privinta motivului pentru care

omul cunoaste experienta placerii." :)) [Yancey:]

"Sunt un om de rand in sensul corect al termenului, ceea ce presupune acceptul unei anume randuieli; un Creator si Creatia Sa, bunul simt al recunostintei pt aceasta creatie, viata si dragostea ca daruri vesnic bune, casatoria si curtoazia ca legi menite pe buna dreptate sa le randuiasca.. "[Chest.:]

Apoi am dat peste dr. Brand: "Cunostea presedinti, regi si numerosi oameni celebri, insa rareori aducea vorba despre ei, preferand, in schimb, sa-si aminteasca de unul sau de altul dintre bolnavii sai de lepra. Vorbea fara retinere despre propriile esecuri si cauta mereu sa-si puna succesele mai degraba pe seama asociatiilor..."

"Adevaratii prieteni se masoara in timp, prin inraurirea pozitiva pe care au avut-o asupra personalitatii tale." - o dreapta afirmatie despre prietenie!

"Este, dincolo de orice indoiala, posibil sa traiesti in societatea moderna, sa ai succes fara a renunta la smerenie ori sa te jertfesti in slujba celorlalti cu un sentiment nestirbit de bucurie si multumire. Ori de cate ori imi pierd speranta, nu-mi ramane decat sa ma intorc cu gandul la timpul petrecut alaturi de Paul Brand." Fascinat de creatie: "Am o biblioteca intreaga de studii chirurgicale in care se gasesc cele mai diverse interventii reparatorii ale unei maini suferinte [...] Insa nu cunosc nici una in masura sa imbunatateasca performantele unei maini normale":) "Nimeni n-a intrat vreodata in cabinetul meu pt a-si exprima multumirea in privinta superbei alcatuiri si functionari a vreunui rinichi sau plaman." :))

"Criticati-ma pe mine si nu calea pe care o urmez." Lev Tolstoi - ma gandeam pana unde suntem indreptatiti sa spunem asta...

"A-L urma pe Christos, am aflat, nu inseamna sa rezolvi fiecare problema omeneasca - Christos Insusi nu a incercat asta - ci a reactiona asemenea Lui, sa imparti impotriva tuturor ratiunilor, har si dragoste celor care merita cel putin." Ph Yancey

...Ceea ce am invatat de la Ghandi este motivul simplitatii, si nu nivelul ei. Ghandi a cautat simplitatea nu dintr-un sentiment de vina, ci din acela al necesitatii, pentru propria sanatate spirituala.

...Am observat ca unii crestini tind sa se infurie foarte tare pe cei care pacatuiesc altfel de cum o fac ei, mi-a spus o data un om care conduce o organizatie ce se ocupa cu bolnavii SIDA.

...lui Donne ii vine gandul incurajator ca, prin somnul zilnic, Dumnezeu ne-a daruit o cale prin care sa ne obisnuim cu ideea de moarte. Ne pierdem constiinta, dar ne trezim a doua zi dimineata inviorati si refacuti: nu este aceasta o imagine a ceea ce se va intampla cu noi dupa moarte?

Cred ca mi-e in general greu sa vorbesc despre si sa accept moartea... imi e pur si simplu nenatural. citind insa despre un om care a stat in fata ei pentru ceva timp si a luptat cu ideea asta, imi vine sa zambesc, poate nu o fi chiar asa de greu/rau/terifiant: "Desi unui slujitor atat de nesupus ca mine i-ar putea fi teama sa moara, la un stapanata de milostiv ca Tine nu mi-e teama sa vin"- John Donne

...Frederick Buechner imi aminteste ca Evanghelia nu este un strat exterior aplicat vietii, ci mai degraba un sumar a tot ce este mai adevarat despre ea. Viata este la fel de tragica precum ultima zi trista a Regelui Lear si a lui Isus; la fel de comica precum un tatu sau precum sarcina batranei mame de familie evreica Sara. Daca povestea lui Isus este cat de cat verosimila, viata este, si ea, un basm, o poveste cu un sfarsit prea frumos pentru a nu fi adevarata, o adiere a "bucuriei de dincolo de lume mult mai patrunzatoare decat durerea".

"Un crestin este cineva aflat pe drum, desi nu in mod necesar ajuns foarte departe, si care cel putin o idee confuza si incompleta despre cel caruia trebuie sa ii multumeasca."

"Desfraul inseaman dorinta de a manca sare a unui om care moare de sete."

"Dumnezeu nu explica. El explodeaza. Il intreaba pe Iov cine crede ca este El, la urma urmei. El spune ca a incerca sa ii explici lui Iov lucrurile pe care acesta vrea sa le afle ar fi ca si cum ai incerca sa ii explici ce gandeste Einstein unei moluste."

"Si in ce il priveste pe Imperatul Imperatilor Insusi, cine l-ar recunoaste vreodata? El nu are maniere si gratie. Hainele si le-a luat din piata de vechituri. Nu s-a barbierit de saptamani intregi. Miroase a moarte. Am idilizat starea lui jerpelita atata vreme incat nu putem prinde decat ecouri ale felului in care trebuie sa-si fi scandalizat cotemporanii...; in comedia neagra a semnului pe care l-au atarnat deasupra capului Lui gluma a fost scrisa in trei limbi, ca nimeni sa nu piarda poanta."

"Daca imi spui ca angajamentul crestin este un lucru care s-a intamplat o data pentru totdeauna, ca o operatie estetica spirituala, eu spun: hai, hai, fie te pacalesti pe tine, fie incerci sa ma pacalesti pe mine." si eu inclin sa cred la fel... dar inca invat ce inseamna sa crezi:) ma intreb voi fi vreodata invatata??..

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### **Karissa Boger says**

Some chapters inspire, others make you think- over all it was a very good read.

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### **Roshea says**

The book title says it all - particularly the emphasis on **unlikely** mentors. Philip Yancey witnessed, like many people, the injustices, such as slavery and racism, inflicted by the church in the name of **God**. Instead of walking away from the church, he journeys back in time and examines the life of 13 remarkable men who are not preached about as a fine Christian examples. However, on sorting through these **unlikely** men's lives he discovered God's handiwork. Mahatma Ghandi, India's 'Great Soul', led India to freedom from colonial rule through absolute nonviolent civil disobedience. Although he openly rejected Christianity he did not reject the teachings of Jesus. The British used Christianity to justify colonization, dominion, bigotry and segregation. It was against this backdrop that Ghandi epitomized Christ's teachings of love, equality and peace. The mentors he examined experienced varied reactions from the church. Truthfully and painfully it reveals the flaws and injustices ministered by the Church.

This book doesn't make you feel disenchanted with the church, it makes you aware that these flaws exist. Therefore, we are not to be apathetic or live a life of mediocrity. It is through adversity and the lives of imperfect people we can draw closer to God and see His handiwork in our own lives.

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### **Sarah says**

As a self-proclaimed wackadoo liberal Christian, I was a little wary of self-described evangelical Christian writer Philip Yancey and his 13 unlikely mentors. Turns out, I had nothing to fear from them.

Yancey's own experience growing up in a fundamentalist congregation is both disconcerting and grimly fascinating. Even more remarkable is the fact that he continued in the faith. The influence of his mentors is evident on every page and as I closed the book, I felt that many of my own deep spiritual wounds had been acknowledged and had begun to heal.

If you are weary of worship, feel disconnected from your faith, or resent the hijacking of Christianity by politics give this book a chance. It might be the refreshing you need. And be prepared to add to your TBR list.

The group of mentors is diverse, their life experiences and testimonies are engaging and inspiring, and neither Joyce Meyer nor Joel Osteen made the cut, PTL.

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### **Melanie says**

This is the most moving and encouraging book I have read in a long time. What I liked best about it was how Phillip Yancey doesn't just compile a "top ten" list of inspiring people and reproduce children's story idealizations of their lives. He interweaves his own journey of faith, growth, and repentance with stories of how each person challenged him to reexamine his life and values, while avoiding the temptation to whitewash them into saints. I was very touched by the second chapter, on Martin Luther King, Jr., in which Yancey talks about his own childhood and adolescence during the desegregation movement, which was spent in churches that actively resisted and slandered King's work in the South, and his own long, painful journey out of deeply (religiously) ingrained racism. But there wasn't a single chapter that I didn't find fascinating. Some introduced me for the first time to figures I had never considered--such as Dr. Paul Brand, Dr. Robert Coles, and Dr. C. Everett Koop--or read much of--such as Leo Tolstoy and Fedor Dostoevsky. Others re-introduced me to writers and thinkers I had encountered and enjoyed without knowing much about before, such as G.K. Chesterton, Gandhi, John Donne, Annie Dillard, Frederick Buechner, Shusaku Endo, and Henri Nouwen.

An easy, engaging read, and highly recommended as both a moving spiritual autobiography and a wonderful look at the complex lives and commitments of thirteen unique men and women.

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### **Kellie says**

It's not really this book that I like, but the books and lives it has introduced me to. My reading list has now expanded tenfold.

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### **Emmanuel Elkimos kolta says**

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Philip yancey the super writer.. you're the 14th person in this book.

**M. H. says**

## Modigliana Young says

Every few years I seem to come back to this book. I find it refreshing. The mini biographies are so interesting I get frustrated when Yancey turns to reflecting on himself - which is silly because he wrote the book as a type of spiritual autobiography. The reading recommendations at the end of each chapter are very enticing.

**Matthew says**

I read this book in one week, while doing a missions trip with my church to Guatemala.

I've long identified with Yancey, who comes from hardcore fundamentalist deep south segregationist Baptist roots; I too come from fundamentalism and the apocalyptic "low church". His earlier works cleverly slide in progressive, even liberal thought into a larger Christian context that paints a very different Jesus from the ugly model that (rightly) gets all the press.

But in this book he explores the people who helped him retain his faith, when all evidence seemed to show that path as one of ignorance and hate. Folks like MLK, Anne Dillard, and even Mahatma Gandhi, all who focus in on the very real person of Jesus and a living, plainspoken, non-frivolous example laid out by Jesus two millenia ago.

I needed to read this book. I needed this book at the time I did, helping the poor and least among us on the trip. His stories reminded me that Jesus stands with the downtrodden and defeated, as did most of these characters. And that these people actually living out their faith in sloppy, loose, and painfully human ways exhibit exactly the sort of faith that could very well transform the world.

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### **Walter says**

Highly recommend to anyone harboring frustrations with the Church!

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### **Heidi Petterson says**

After reading What's So Amazing About Grace? and loving it I picked this book up. It sat on my bookshelf for over a year before I finally read it. I didn't know what to expect with a subtitle like How My Faith Survived the Church but I definitely knew I would be able to relate to some degree. It is amazing how Yancey brings up so many brilliant points without ever being disparaging (I can't say I have that gift, myself). It is an excellent read for so many reasons, not the least of which are the mini history lessons and/or reminders. Like What's... it pushes the reader toward compassion (another thing I so lack) for all people no matter what. It reminds us that we are ALL flawed human beings in need of our Creator's redemption and grace. It reminds us that we have a choice to make in this life to accept it or not and showcases some great people who did and also some who did not. It also reminds us that we have a responsibility to live our life like we know it is a gift from Him and we are here to reveal His love and compassion despite or even because of our flaws.

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### **Kim Voss says**

This is the first book I read by Philip Yancey. His style is easy and he knows his audience includes both Christians and those who are searching. I've enjoyed everything I've read by him because of this.

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### **Donna Craig says**

This book was a little different than I expected, but I ended up truly enjoying it. It is a collection of essays about different people whose writings and lives inspired Yancey to keep his faith during spiritually dark times. I personally found it inspiring and enlightening. I recommend this book to anyone who has ever struggled with Jesus' teachings vs the way the church behaves.

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### **Carrie says**

love love love this book. yes it falls in the christian category, but it's simply about people who lived their lives in a way that's bound to inspire you. the 13 mini-biographies give you a good sense of these people and yancey helps you to learn more about them through suggested readings at the end of each chapter. i've read 3 other books already just based on what i learned from this book.

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## **Mike says**

Philip Yancey freely admits that he has "spent most of my life in recovery from the church." He grew up in a racist, cult like church in Georgia. He grew to reject most of that church's teaching but yet he still retained his faith. How? This book is his answer.

Yancey profiles 13 people who have influenced his faith. People who allowed that faith to flourish despite the damage he suffered from the religion of his youth. Some of these people he met but some he knows only through their lives and writings. Several died well before he was born. It's an interesting list. Not all are exactly orthodox in their Christianity. And one, Mahatma Gandhi, wasn't even a Christian. But they all impacted Yancey's life, often in ways that surprised him.

I first read this book years ago after it was first released. I decided to read it again this year for Lent. I'm glad I did. I didn't grow up with the same kind of toxic church upbringing that the author did but I often find myself wrestling with many of the same doubts. I also appreciate this book for introducing many of these people to me. I am now inspired to read more from each of them. Very worthwhile reading.

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