

A book review of **‘Soul Survivor’**— by Philip Yancey

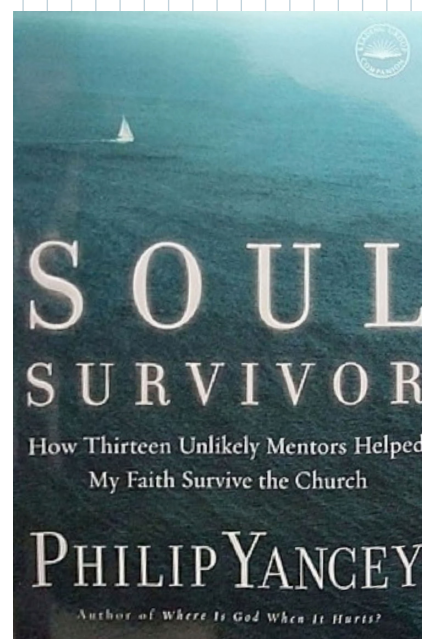
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Philip Yancey’s books never fail to appeal to me. But the few that I had read before were all translated versions. Though inspired by the accounts of his relationship with God, I missed the joy afforded by the originality of his thought presentation. So last Christmas when I happened to come by a Philip Yancey’s book named ‘Soul Survivor’, an original, I devoured all the 330 pages in four days! Of course, what I achieved was but a mere glimpse of the content. But I had jotted down some lines and marked the page numbers as focuses for more thorough reading later on.

Reading a Yancey’s original does give me the pleasure of communicating with him personally rather than depending on an interpreter. The literary beauty of his writing is a marvelous delight to me.

Of course, there is far more in this book than good writing skills. “It is an honest account of his spiritual journey, his struggle to reclaim belief, rendering his own experiences among those of several notable figures whom he calls his spiritual directors...” as the synopsis on the back cover puts it.

Among the thirteen mentors, there are a few names familiar to me. I have heard of Martin Luther King: His name was mentioned in Obama’s speech when he was sworn in as President. Mahatma Gandhi is another. I remember a movie about him. Both have left



indelible marks on history, but neither seemed to associate in any way with Christianity. It is thus fascinating to learn about Gandhi’s interest in the New Testament. Impressed by the austere lifestyle he advocated, I cannot help looking with shame on my own material pursuits. It is interesting, too, how the book describes the two sides of Martin Luther King’s character: ‘though accused of personal moral flaws, he was accepted as a powerful agent for equality and change’. Then there is Henri Nouwen, who abandoned a life of celebrity to literally take care of a profoundly disabled child-man.

It is not Yancey’s intention to impress the readers with these figures’ lofty ideals. Quite on the contrary, he repeatedly draws attention to their being fallible just like any of us. Even a saint that appears in one of the episodes had had a contemptible past. He lays particular stress on the need to hate sin but not the sinner for it is for sinners that God cherishes most of his love.

This is an amazing book for both Christians and non-believers. Though lacking in dramatic highlights, it is a good page-turner keeping the reader inspired by the experiences of Philip Yancey and those of his thirteen mentors. In brief, it is a book too good to miss.