

# **Soul Survivor: How My Faith Survived the Church**

*by Philip Yancey*

## ***Discussion Guide***

*Soul Survivor* (Doubleday & Company, 2001) is a spiritual survival story told in the form of thirteen faith journeys. Philip Yancey recalls his struggle to maintain his faith despite the church and describes how twelve notable individuals became his spiritual directors and empowered his faith. Yancey documents the spiritual lives of these remarkable people and tells how they served as mentors to him.

*Permission granted to reproduce this discussion guide*

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### **Chapter 1**

#### **Recovering From Church Abuse: Philip Yancey**

*This chapter traces the author's struggles to maintain his faith and recounts his healing process from his experiences with the church.*

1. In what ways can you identify with Yancey's viewpoints and struggles?
2. How have the teachings of the church influenced your perspectives of the world? How has the church helped you? How has it harmed you?
3. List what you see as several of the greatest weaknesses and greatest strengths of the church today.
4. What individuals, books, or authors have influenced your faith? Explain their influences.

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### **Chapter 2**

#### **A Long Night's Journey into Day: Martin Luther King Jr.**

*This chapter examines King's struggles and impact on our society.*

1. How did the life of Martin Luther King Jr. influence your faith?

2. Why did Martin Luther King Jr. profess and maintain a nonviolent stance? What difficulties did he face because of it?
3. What motivated King and what were his goals? What goals do you believe he achieved?
4. In what ways was King a prophet?

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### Chapter 3

#### **Relics Along the Seashore: G. K. Chesterton**

*This chapter examines the faith and life of this respected journalist.*

1. What impressed you about the faith journey of Chesterton?
2. What do you think are the most important contributions of Chesterton?
3. What did Chesterton believe and why? Where do you agree and disagree with him?
4. How did Chesterton influence Yancey? Has Chesterton had an impact on you? Explain why or why not.

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### Chapter 4

#### **Detours to Happiness: Dr. Paul Brand**

*This chapter explores how a medical doctor provided spiritual healing.*

1. Explain the title of this chapter and what you learned about happiness from reading about Brand.
2. What did you find of interest and importance in Yancey's conversations with Brand?
3. What influenced and molded the faith of Brand? Give some examples and list some of his beliefs.
4. What struggles did Brand face as he worked to bring healing to others? How did his faith help him in times of difficulty?

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### Chapter 5

#### **Tender Lives and the Assaults of the Universe: Dr. Robert Coles**

*This chapter examines the inherent dignity of human beings, as seen by Robert Coles.*

1. What two key moments of the 1960s changed Coles?
2. What did Coles gain from working and living with the poor and oppressed?
3. What impressed you about Coles from the face-to-face interviews that Yancey conducted?

4. What message is Robert Coles trying to get across to us in his writings?

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## **Chapter 6**

### **Chasing Grace: Leo Tolstoy and Feodor Dostoevsky**

*This chapter looks at stumbling blocks to faith from the perspective of two great Russian novelists and thinkers.*

1. Why does Yancey claim these two Russians as his spiritual guides?
  2. Explain why you think Yancey named this chapter “Chasing Grace.”
  3. How do Tolstoy and Dostoevsky help answer some of Yancey’s doubts?
  4. What impressed you about Tolstoy? What were some of the major influences on his life and beliefs?
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## **Chapter 7**

### **Echoes in a Strange Land: Mahatma Gandhi**

*This chapter spotlights the life and contributions of a very complex man.*

1. What is Ghandi’s relevance today?
  2. Contrast Ghandi’s Eastern values with our Western values.
  3. What do you believe was Ghandi’s greatest accomplishment? Did many of his accomplishments die with him? Explain your answer.
  4. In what ways did Ghandi work to identify with the poor?
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## **Chapter 8**

### **Serpents and Doves in the Public Square: Dr. C. Everett Koop**

*This chapter examines the values and beliefs of America’s most controversial surgeon general.*

1. In what ways did Koop show how to balance faith and politics?
2. How did Koop respond to the AIDS crisis?
3. How did Koop convince the public of his integrity? What did you learn from his experience?
4. Who were his critics and what did they say? What criticism, if any, was justified?

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## Chapter 9

### **As He Lay Dying: John Donne**

*This chapter examines life, death, pain, and suffering as seen through the writings of a remarkable man.*

1. How did Donne's questions change as his illness progressed?
2. What monuments live on through Donne's writing? What message did you find in it?
3. What insights into pain and suffering did you gain from reading this chapter?
4. Donne saw death as an enemy. Some people see it as a friend. Some fight it. Some accept it. What are your views?

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## Chapter 10

### **The Splendor of the Ordinary: Annie Dillard**

*This chapter explores the life and writings of Annie Dillard and her appeal to Christians and non-Christians.*

1. What people and experiences influenced Dillard's faith and her writing?
2. What characteristics do you feel set Dillard apart from other writers?
3. What qualities of Annie Dillard impressed Yancey?
4. Explain Dillard's appeal to Christians and non-Christians.

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## Chapter 11

### **Whispers from the Wings: Frederick Buechner**

*This chapter chronicles the life of Buechner, who shares stories of faith through fiction and nonfiction.*

1. What impressed you about Frederick Buechner from reading this chapter?
2. How is Buechner's faith reflected in his writing?
3. How is Buechner different from the other individuals profiled in this book? What makes him so unique?
4. How did Buechner's childhood and youth influence his writing?

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## Chapter 12

### **A Place for Traitors: Shusaku Endo**

*This chapter examines the life of a Japanese novelist and his words about fear, doubt, and faith.*

1. In what ways did Endo shed new light on the Christian faith?
2. Why did Endo believe that Christianity failed to make an impact in Japan?
3. What did Endo write about and why? What were his messages?
4. How does Endo portray Jesus? How has this portrayal been received?

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## Chapter 13

### **The Wounded Healer: Henri Nouwen**

*This chapter explores the struggles and faith of Henri Nouwen.*

1. Why is Nouwen called the wounded healer?
2. How did Nouwen feel about the church?
3. How did Nouwen influence Yancey? Why did Yancey include him in this book?
4. What struggles did Nouwen have, and how did these struggles influence his writing?