

Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News?

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“Why does the church stir up such negative feelings?” Philip Yancey has been asking this all his life as a journalist. His perennial question is more relevant now than ever: in a twenty-year span starting in the mid-nineties, research shows that favorable opinions of Christianity have plummeted drastically—and opinions of Evangelicals have taken even deeper dives.

The end of the politics-oriented Evangelicalism that was so dominant in the second half of the 20th century is a strong example that we are living in a post-Christian culture.

Yet while the opinions about Christianity are dropping, interest in spirituality is rising. Why the disconnect? Why are so many asking, “What’s so good about the “Good News?”

Yancey’s writing has focused on the search for honest faith that makes a difference for a world in pain. In his landmark book *What’s So Amazing about Grace* he issued a call for Christians to be as grace-filled in their behavior as they are in declaring their beliefs.

But people inside and outside the church are still thirsty for grace. What the church lacked in its heyday is now exactly what it needs to recover to thrive. Grace can bring together Christianity and our post-Christian culture, inviting outsiders as well as insiders to take a deep second look at why our faith matters and about what could reignite its appeal to future generations.

How can Christians offer grace in a way that is compelling to a jaded society? And how can they make a difference in a world that cries out in need?

Yancey aims this book at Christian readers, showing them how Christians have lost respect, influence, and reputation in a newly post-Christian culture. “Why do they hate us so much?” mystified Americans ask about the rest of the world. A similar question applies to evangelicals in America.

Yancey explores what may have contributed to hostility toward Evangelicals, especially in their mixing of faith and politics instead of embracing more grace-filled ways of presenting the gospel. He offers illuminating stories of how faith can be expressed in ways that disarm even the most cynical critics. Then he explores what is Good News and what is worth preserving in a culture that thinks it has rejected Christian faith.

Vanishing Grace: What Ever Happened to the Good News? Details

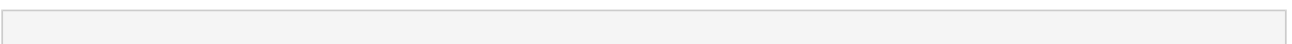
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Blyden says

The central question Yancey poses in this book is why "Christians" are viewed negatively by much of society. The answer to this question seems rather obvious -- that "Christian" has become identified with behavior that is very unlike that of Jesus -- but Yancey belabors trying to answer it. Despite himself offering numerous examples of so-called Christians acting in non-Christian ways, Yancey reaches a different answer: That Christians are relatively lacking in "grace". This answer is also peculiar in conflating the concept of God's grace with the concept of social grace, two very different ideas IMO.

Organizationally, Part One (Chapters 1-4) pose the core question, suggest the answer of grace, and note that non-Christians have a "thirst" that Christianity can satisfy, if presented with grace. Part Two offers one chapter each of Pilgrims, Activists, and Artists as three kinds of Christian that the larger public still admires and as "dispensers" of grace. Part Three addresses whether faith matters (Chap 8), what we should have faith in (Chap 9), the existential question (a.k.a. the meaning of life, in Chap 10), and the moral question of how we should live our lives (Chap 11). Although this is the only part of the book that I found interesting, Yancey's answers seem relatively underthought, over-written, and often contrary to my understanding of the world. In the last part of the book Yancey address what the role of Christians should be in politics in a democratic society.

While one certainly finds snippets of thought that I would identify as Christian, to a great extent I felt that Yancey's answers were not aligned with Jesus: that he suffers from the same problem of the so-called "Christians" who are his target audience. The most notably example of this is perhaps Chapter 11. If Jesus already offered a program on how we should live, shouldn't Yancey's chapter pretty much follow that program? It doesn't. Or, in Chapter 12, it is curious -- and contrary to virtually every other book on the matter that I've read -- that his vision of Jesus is one in which Jesus is posed as working somewhat hand-in-hand with the Roman empire. Despite his framing as moderating or speaking reason to the right-wing so-called Christians -- whose value system is not from Jesus but from conservative traditions of mainstream secular culture -- ultimately Yancey is himself one of that ilk.

Stylistically, the book is a ramble. The core points might fill a chapter if addressed directly. It requires extreme circumlocution to puff them up enough to fill a book! And much of the filler is rife with factual and historical inaccuracies and assumptions that seem obviously invalid.

I find little of value in this book, much confusion and error on the part of the author, and a very un-gracious writing style. My recommendation is that you not waste your time with it.

Rick says

There are so many "take-aways" from this book I don't know where to begin. One major theme that I like is that Christians do better when they influence from an outside position, as subversives in a kind of counterculture, rather than as power brokers trying to force the secular world to behave as we wish them to

behave. Of course, that involves lifestyles worthy of emulation, avoiding in-your-face hot button issues like gay marriage, abortion, and even gun control. Jesus never taught us to take over the government and make it into any kind of theocracy. Our grace vanishes when we try to do that.

Michael says

I'm still processing this book. It certainly gets many things right, but I'm not sure it balances them in the right way. I appreciate Yancey's disposition when he writes. He is honest about his struggles and skillfully draws us into those struggles even before we realize we should have been struggling with the same issues. More than other books I've read by Yancey, this one feels like the beginning of a struggle for understanding rather than the middle or end. Maybe that's what he intended.

Karen Wiser says

Vanishing Grace by Philip Yancey is a thought provoking work that dives deep into the heart of grace and questions whether Christians are accurately communicating the message of the cross to a hungry and hurting world. As with his previous work: What's So Amazing About Grace published in 1997, the reader should be prepared to have their toes stepped on...ouch!!

Vanishing Grace by Philip Yancey takes a purposeful look at the way the gospel is being presented in churches today. After reading this book, I have a greater awareness and appreciation for how I communicate the message of Christ. Philip Yancey presents the idea that a large percentage of churches in America have steered away from grace and veered toward a harsh and often judgmental presentation of the gospel. The question submitted is one for careful consideration. Has the church, as a whole, whether purposefully or inadvertently, turned our pews into more of an arena of arrogance and condemnation rather than a place of acceptance and healing? This question forms the foundation for the entire book. Yancey does a magnificent job of exploring the possibility that far too many churches are missing the one thing that matters most to effectively share the love of Christ. That "one thing" is simple the word- grace.

Vanishing Grace challenges the reader (especially the Christian reader) to consider the possibility that we have in many cases handled the message of Christ with an extreme amount of forceful theology and too little mercy and grace. Yancey identifies that there are a large number of people he labels "post Christians" (those who have at one time chosen Christianity and then chosen to leave it) in the population that have had a negative experience with the church setting due to an environment of critical perfectionism and useless pious attitudes.

Philip Yancey does not leave the reader with hopelessness, however. He does a phenomenal job of drafting ideas for how to live out grace in a more effective manner. He throws down the challenge that we **MUST** press on in the fight against injustice. He references early Christian movements that were paramount in ending human atrocities, such as the Roman time period when gladiatorial games and infanticide were rampant and including recent campaigns against abuses of slavery and sexual trafficking.

Vanishing Grace cautions that the Christian should choose battles wisely. He writes, “The more Christians focus on tangential issues, the less we will be heard on matters of true moral significance.” He asserts that we should keep priorities of the Bible as our focus. He encourages that a Christian should fight our battles carefully and with an abundance of grace. Yancey reminds us that the terms “illegal and immoral” are not the same and that our morality cannot be forced on a society. He warns Christians to keep church and state separate.

This is a very deeply moving book and requires time to fully absorb each of the ideas and challenges that Yancey proposes. It is not a quick read, as it engages a level of pondering that will bathe you in reflection. Vanishing Grace will encourage you to be a “grace dispenser” through that of a “pilgrim, activist, or artist” as identified by your calling to Christ.

Thank you to Zondervan Publishing for this Review Copy of Vanishing Grace by Philip Yancey through the BookLook Bloggers program. I was not required to write a favorable review of this work. The opinions within the review are strictly my own.

Sue says

This was a somewhat heavy book at times - hence over a month to read it, in short chunks! - but quite thought-provoking too. The premise of the book is that evangelicals (in the US, anyway) are seen in a negative light, usually defined by what they are against. Yancey wants to reclaim the word, with its original idea of offering good news to the poor, the hungry and the thirsty.

Divided into four main sections, there's plenty that's positive in this book. I hope it will make many re-think their aims. The author suggests that those outside the church are likely to take note of three broad categories of believers who show grace: the pilgrims who walk aside them, the activists who do something about their problems, and the artists who explain through metaphors and stories.

Recommended, though the book would probably not be of much interest to anyone who is not a believer.

Susan Barnes says

In, Vanishing Grace, Philip Yancey raises a lot of questions, but doesn't always give satisfactory answers. This may not be a deficiency on his part, but rather a reflection on human nature. It's difficult to understand why Christians are not more gracious. Some of the stories Yancey tells are disturbing. The stories don't just display Christians' lack of grace, sometimes they show blatant hostility towards those they disagree with. Yancey quotes four common complaints about Christians: “You don't listen to me, you judge me, your faith confuses me and you talk about what's wrong instead of making it right.” Christians are supposed to be known for their love, but often we are known for our judgemental attitude.

Yancey encourages his readers to be “Grace Dispensers” and suggests three ways to do this. As fellow pilgrims who don't appear to have it altogether, as activists who are concerned for social justice, and as artists who presented their message in subtle ways.

Yancey's central point is to urge Christians to realize that the gospel is “good news” and we are to be

dispensers of grace. It requires that we carefully consider how to present our message to the world so that it comes across as good news.

Vanishing Grace is a well written, thought provoking book, and though it doesn't provide easy answers, does direct Christians towards a more Christ-centred approach.

Overall, a good read.

Poiema says

I gave Yancey's book *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* five stars, but after much thought can only assign two to this read. Yes, I know I am in the minority with this rating but let me explain.

Yancey is an excellent writer: thoughtful, diplomatic, thorough, and draws from a wealth of multicultural experiences. He asks BIG questions such as: How can we reawaken souls who have written off Christianity? Do Christians deserve the bad press that we often receive (narrow minded, in-your-face, legalistic, etc.)? How can Christians make the gospel message more attractive to the masses? Do we practice what we preach? In what practical ways can we display grace in a world increasingly hostile to the evangelical message? All of these are great questions and I appreciated the opportunity to explore them.

The author has concluded that grace is dispensed to a thirsty world via good works---compassionate and sacrificial serving. In fact, I felt the line between grace and good works was a little fuzzy. No Bible believing Christian would argue against the need to be the hands and feet of our Master but I felt there was a little too much emphasis on works as summed up in the worn ditty, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." I have never agreed with that statement. I feel that good works can only give others a general idea of Christianity; in order to impart specific revelation WORDS ARE ESSENTIAL. Preaching is proclamation and it is mandated in the Great Commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel. . ." (Mark 16:15). The apostle Paul writes that "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message PREACHED to save those who believe." I Corinthians 1:21 [emphasis added]

Yancey zeroes in on three groups of people who make the gospel message more attractive to unbelievers: pilgrims, activists, and artists. These were fascinating chapters and I loved the anecdotes he recorded as illustrations. No doubt, God's earthly kingdom is carried forward by these gifted individuals. However, a quick look at the forerunner of Christ (John the Baptist) and the 12 unpolished and blustery disciples show us that the original gospel message that has worked its way around the globe in two millennia was not first carried by artists or activists. There was a plain spoken message of the cross of Christ, described as a fragrance that is perceived as a sweet aroma to some, but a deathly odor to others (2 Corinthians 4:14-16). I felt that Yancey focused solely on how the message was delivered without taking enough consideration for the fact that the human heart hardened by sin may declare "it stinks!" no matter how beautifully the gospel is presented.

Much as I love a pilgrim's story, an activist's efforts, or art that reflects faith----none of these can add adornment to the simple message of the cross of Jesus Christ. Amazingly, the gospel has great power even in the mouths of bumbling, uneducated fishermen who lack finesse and polish. Even the great apostle Paul did not seek to deliver the gospel message in persuasive words of human wisdom, but rather he approached his

fellow man with fear and trembling, setting forth nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2 Corinthians 2:1-5). That fear and trembling denotes humility, and I can agree with Yancey that this humility is infinitely more effective than "in-your-face" Bible assaults.

So, the long and the short of it is that yes, I agree with Yancey that we should deliver the gospel message with grace. Yes, we should practice what we preach so that the world sees the abundant life in living color. Yes, tell your story, be present to heal the wounds of the world, and enrich others via your art. But no---that is not enough. Use words. Use the Living Words that will never return void.

Mia Prasetya says

We have taller buildings but shorter tempers; wider freeways but narrower viewpoints; we spend more but have less; we buy more but enjoy it less; we have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, yet less time; we have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge but less judgment; more experts, yet more problems; we have more gadgets but less satisfaction; more medicine, yet less wellness; we take more vitamins but see fewer results. We drink too much; smoke too much; spend too recklessly; laugh too little; drive too fast, get too angry quickly; stay up too late; get up too tired; read too seldom; watch TV too much and pray too seldom. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values; we fly in faster planes to arrive there quicker, to do less and return sooner; we sign more contracts only to realize fewer profits; we talk too much; love too seldom, and lie too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years.

Tertohok bukan main dengan buku ini.

Phillip says

To my knowledge I have read every single book Philip Yancey has ever written. Most run about the middle of the pack on an average one-to-ten scale, with a select few on either extreme. This one is deserving of a higher mark. (Rumors of Another World is still his opus.) Kudos to you, Mr. Yancey. The author deals with the subject matter deftly and with aplomb. There were very few instances of re-using material from previous books, which is not a negative by any means; however, I often find experiencing completely new material quite refreshing. (If any of that made sense...good!) Anyway, I definitely recommend reading this book as an approach to re-centering our daily "walk" with our Lord and Savior.

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Tim Chavel says

I love to read Philip Yancey. He always makes me think. This book was no exception. I highly recommend this book to everyone. I have lots of quotes to share. I trust they will challenge you! Enjoy!

The Quakers have a saying: “An enemy is one whose story we have not heard.” To communicate to post-Christians, I must first listen to their stories for clues to how they view the world and how they view people like me. ~Philip Yancey

... the issue is not whether I agree with someone but rather how I treat someone with whom I profoundly disagree. We Christians are called to use the “weapons of grace,” which means treating even our opponents with love and respect. ~Philip Yancey

Often, it seems, we’re [Christians] perceived more as guilt dispensers than as grace dispensers. ~Philip Yancey

God, help me to see others not as enemies or as ungodly but rather as thirsty people. And give me the courage and compassion to offer your Living Water, which alone quenches deep thirst. ~Henri Nouwen

... the core problem with Christians communicating faith: we do not always do so in love. That is an indispensable point to presenting faith in a grace-full way. ~Philip Yancey

Christians fail to communicate to others because we ignore basic principles in relationship. When we make condescending judgments or proclaim lofty words that don’t translate into action, or simply speak without first listening, we fail to love – and thus deter a thirsty world from Living Water. The good news about God’s grace goes unheard. ~Philip Yancey

According to Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of Great Britain. “The Hebrew [Old Testament] in one verse commands, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ but in no fewer than 36 places commands us to ‘love the stranger.’” He adds, “The supreme religious challenge is to see God’s image in one who is not in our image.” ~Philip Yancey

Love has the power to win over the stranger. A news event in 1995 shocked both sides in the culture wars controversy. Norma Leah McCorvey, the “Jane Doe” of the famous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court case of 1973, converted to Christ, got baptized, and joined the pro-life campaign. Most astoundingly, it was the director of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue who influenced her. As she tells the story, the change occurred when that director stopped treating her like an antagonist. He apologized for publicly calling her “baby killer” and started spending time with her during her smoking breaks in the parking lot that, oddly enough, their offices shared. In time, McCorvey accepted an invitation to church from a seven-year-old girl, whose mother also worked at Operation Rescue. Pro-abortion forces had dismissed McCorvey – her dubious past of drug-dealing, alcohol, and promiscuity made bad public relations – but Christian leaders took the time to counsel her in the faith while keeping her out of the spotlight for some time. In a command found in no other religion, Jesus bids us to show love not only to strangers and sinners but also to our outright adversaries. ~Philip Yancey

The more we love, and the more unlikely people we love, the more we resemble God – who, after all, loves ornery creatures like us. ~Philip Yancey

... learning humility is a prerequisite for grace. ~Philip Yancey

Henri Nouwen says, “When we come to realize that ... only God saves, then we are free to serve, then we can live truly humble lives.” Nouwen changed his approach from “selling pearls,” or peddling the good news, to “hunting for the treasure” already present in those he was called to love – a shift from dispensing religion to dispensing grace. It makes all the difference in the world whether I view my neighbor as a

potential convert or as someone whom God already loves. ~Philip Yancey

... the approach of admitting our errors, besides being most true to a gospel of grace, is also most effective at expressing who we are. Propaganda turns people off; humbly admitting mistakes disarms. ~Philip Yancey

The uncommitted share many of our core values, but if we do not live out those values in a compelling way, we will not awaken a thirst for their ultimate Source. ~Philip Yancey

... we need to reclaim the “goodnewness” of the gospel, and the best place to start is to rediscover the good news ourselves. ~Philip Yancey

The Christian sees the world as a transitional home badly in need of rehab, and we are active agents in that project. ~Philip Yancey

We respond to healing grace by giving it away. ~Philip Yancey

An alcoholic friend once made this point by comparing church with AA, which had become for him a substitute church. “When I show up late to church, people turn and look at me. Some scowl, some smile a self-satisfied smile – See that person’s not as responsible as I am. In AA, if I show up late the meeting comes to a halt and everyone jumps up to greet me. They realize that my desperate need for them won out over my desperate need for alcohol.” ~Philip Yancey

Ignatius of Loyola defined sin as refusing to believe that God wants my happiness and fulfillment. Human rebellion began in the Garden of Eden when said in effect, “Trust me. I know what is best for you.” ~Philip Yancey

Unless we love natural goods – sex, alcohol, food, money, success, power – in the way God intended, we become their slaves, as any addict can attest. ~Philip Yancey

Eugene Peterson points out that “the root meaning in Hebrew of salvation is to be broad, to become spacious, to enlarge. It carries the sense of deliverance from an existence that has become compressed, confined and cramped.” God wants to set free, to make it possible for us to live open and loving lives with God and our neighbors. “I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free,” wrote the psalmist. ~Philip Yancey

Perhaps the most powerful thing Christians can do to communicate to a skeptical world is to live fulfilled lives, exhibiting proof that Jesus’ way truly leads to a life most abundant and most thirst-satisfying. ~Philip Yancey

I have come to think that the challenge confronting Christians is not that we do not believe what we say, though that can be a problem, but that what we say we believe does not seem to make any difference for either the church or the world. ~Stanley Hauerwas

I am convinced that if we lose kids to the culture of drugs and materialism, of violence and war, it’s because we don’t dare them, not because we don’t entertain them. It’s because we make the gospel too easy, not because we make it too difficult. Kids want to do something heroic with their lives, which is why they play video games and join the army. But what do they do with a church that teaches them to tiptoe through life so they can arrive safely at death? ~Shane Claiborne

We should live in such a way that our lives wouldn't make much sense if the gospel were not true. ~Dorothy Day

Jesus once asked His disciples, "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?" In that society, rife with slaves and servants, the question probably sounded rhetorical, if not ridiculous. No one envied a servant. Yet Jesus went on to say, "But I am among you as one who serves." By serving others we follow Jesus, building up His kingdom step-by-step. ~Philip Yancey

While discussing the growing antipathy toward Christians, a friend remarked to me, "There are three kinds of Christians that outsiders to the faith still respect: pilgrims, activists, and artists. The uncommitted will listen to them far sooner than to an evangelist or apologist." Although nonbelievers do not oppose a spiritual search, they will listen only to those Christians who present themselves as fellow pilgrims on the way rather than as part of a superior class who has already arrived. Activists express their faith in the most persuasive way of all, by their deeds. And art succeeds when it speaks most authentically to the human condition when believers do so with skill, again the world takes note. ~Philip Yancey

The church is, above all, a place to receive grace: it brings forgiven people together with the aim of equipping us to dispense grace to others. ~Philip Yancey

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" were the disciples' last words to Jesus, and it was left to the angels to provide an indirect answer: "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" Get moving – you're the main actors now. ~Philip Yancey

Again and again I tell God I need help, and God says, "Well isn't that fabulous? Because I need help too. So you go get that old woman over there some water, and I'll figure out what we're going to do about your stuff." ~Anne Lamott

Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. ~Eugene Peterson

Early in her career Mother Teresa of Calcutta was struck by Jesus' words on the cross: "I thirst." For her they came to symbolize not just physical thirst but God's own thirst to draw humanity close. She made "I thirst" the motto for the Sisters of Charity, ordering those words to be displayed in every chapel of the society. "We carry in our body and soul the love of an infinite thirsty God," she wrote one sister. "God thirsts. God thirsts for us and humanity thirsts for God." God thirsts not out of need but out of desire, for God's essence is love. ~Philip Yancey

We lead our lives well when we love God with our whole being and when we love neighbors as we (properly) love ourselves. ~Miroslav Volf

We, Jesus' followers, are the agents assigned to carry out God's will on earth. Too easily we expect God to do something for us when instead God wants to do it through us. ~Philip Yancey

We preach sermons, write books on apologetics, conduct city-wide evangelistic campaigns. For those alienated from the church, that approach no longer has the same drawing power. And for the truly needy, words alone don't satisfy; "A hungry person has no ears," as one relief worker told me. A skeptical world judges the truth of what we say by the proof of how we live. ~Philip Yancey

The church works best not as a power center, rather as a countercultural community – in the world but not of

it – that shows others how to live the most fulfilled and meaningful life on earth. In modern society that means rejecting the false gods of independence, success, and pleasure and replacing them with love for God and neighbor. ~Philip Yancey

One Harlem preacher likens us to the pink plastic spoons at Baskin Robbins: we give the world a foretaste of what lies ahead, the vision of the Biblical prophets. In a world gone astray we should be actively demonstrating here and now God's will for the planet. ~Philip Yancey

Sacred music called the classical composers to their highest artistic achievements. Of his hundreds of works Beethoven wrote only two masses, yet he judged one of them, Missa Solemnis, his greatest composition. In their oratorios Handel and Mendelssohn served almost as evangelists, presenting the Biblical stories and themes in colorfully staged epics. Mozart and Haydn drifted toward religious themes mainly for economic reasons, as commissions for church events made it worthwhile. Even so, Mozart was so obsessed with the Requiem Mass he was striving to finish before his death that his doctor tried to take the manuscript away from him to enforce rest. ~Philip Yancey

We cannot expect art always to uplift and inspire. In the words of Alan Paton, literature "will illuminate the road, but it will not lead the way with a lamp. It will expose the crevasse, but not provide the bridge. It will lance the boil, but not purify the blood. It cannot be expected to do more than this; and if we ask it to do more, we are asking too much. ~Philip Yancey

We have taller buildings but shorter tempers; wider freeways but narrower viewpoints; we spend more but have less; we buy more but enjoy it less; we have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, yet less time; we have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge but less judgment; more experts, yet more problems; we have more gadgets but less satisfaction; more medicine, yet less wellness; we take more vitamins but see fewer results. We drink too much; smoke too much; spend too recklessly; laugh too little; drive too fast; get too angry quickly; stay up too late; get up too tired; read too seldom; watch TV too much and pray too seldom. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values; we fly in faster planes to arrive there quicker, to do less and return sooner; we sign more contracts only to realize fewer profits; we talk too much; love too seldom, and lie too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years. ~"The Paradox of Our Time" by Dr. Bob Moorehead

Faith is not simply a private matter, or something we practice once a week at church. Rather, it should have a contagious effect on the broader world. Jesus used these images to illustrate His kingdom.: a sprinkle of yeast causing the whole loaf to rise, a pinch of salt preserving a slab of meat, the smallest seed in the garden growing into a great tree in which birds of the air come to nest. ~Philip Yancey

John Wesley taught that the gospel of Christ involved more than saving souls. It should have an impact on all of society, and his followers worked to accomplish just that. They were dispensing grace to the broader world, and in the process their spirit helped change a nation, saving it from the revolutionary chaos that had spread across Europe. ~Philip Yancey

The reason we fear to go out after dark is not that we may be set upon by bands of evangelicals and forced to read the New Testament, but that we may be set upon by gangs of feral young people who have been taught that nothing is superior to their own needs or feelings. ~David C. Stolinsky (Jewish medical educator)

In early 2014 Christianity Today published a cover story on a sociologist named Robert Woodberry, who had wondered why some countries take democracy so well while their next door neighbors wallow in corruption and bad government. Painstaking research led him to conclude that missionaries made the difference. They

taught people to read, built hospitals, and gave a biblical foundation for basic human rights. He concluded, “Areas where Protestant missionaries had a significant presence in the past are on average more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women), and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations. ~Philip Yancey

Matthew Parris, a journalist and former member of parliament in the U.K., grew up in Africa. In 2008 he returned to his childhood home after forty-five years and wrote an article for The Times of London with the subtitle, “Missionaries, Not Aid Money, Are the Solution to Africa’s Biggest Problem – The Crushing Passivity of the People’s Mindset.”

He wrote, “Now a confirmed atheist, I’ve become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people’s hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

I used to avoid this truth by applauding – as you can – the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It’s a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write; and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it. I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then, fine: but what counted was the help, not the faith.

But this doesn’t fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary; it is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely, and which I cannot help observing ...

The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, and engagement with the world – a directness in their dealings with others – that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.

Whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to: something in their eyes, the way they approached you direct, man-to-man, without looking down or away. They had not become more deferential towards strangers – in some ways less so – but more open. ...

What they were was, in turn, influenced by a conception of man’s place in the Universe that Christianity had taught.

Alexander Tsiaras, a professor at the Yale Department of Medicine, entranced a sophisticated crowd at a TED conference with a video of the fetal stages from conception to birth. The video compresses nine months of growth and development into a nine-minute film.

A friend who is a physicist and also a committed Christian wondered whether celebrating creation can be a form of worship, even by those who do not acknowledge the Creator. He told of a conversion with someone who praised one of his books while admitting he could not recall the author’s name – totally unaware he was speaking to the author. “The praise was strangely more genuine for its inarticulate anonymity. I suspect, C.S. Lewis once speculated, that God may have more connection with honest atheists than many think. ~Philip Yancey

As the quantum pioneer Erwin Schrodinger admitted, “The scientific picture of the world around me is very deficient. It gives me a lot of factual information, puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but is ghastly silent about all that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us. It cannot tell a word about the sensation of red and blue, bitter and sweet, feelings of delight and sorrow. It knows nothing of beauty and ugly, good or bad, God and eternity.” Another scientist expressed a similar thought: “Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

~Philip Yancey

Long before He laid down earth’s foundation he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of His love, to be made whole and holy by His love. Long, long ago He decided to adopt us into His family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure He took in planning this!)

It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, He had His eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone. ~The Message

I have more quotes on Tim's blog

Cindi P. says

Engaging Information on Culture, Politics, and Christianity

I enjoyed this book and appreciated the in-depth information Yancey shared in such an understandable way. It was a good reminder of the value of Christianity in society when there is grace and a true sense of the gospel lived each day. We have tended to lose that combination in recent times, as the author illustrates. This was an intelligent book, but easy to follow and well-researched. If the reader is more conservative and finds social justice to be threatening and irrelevant to the church, this book will possibly frustrate. But I found it an inspiration and encouragement.

Dan Curnutt says

First of all I want to thank Zondervan publishing for allowing me the chance to read an advance copy of this text. The book that I am reviewing will be released on October 21, 2014. You can pre-order it at Amazon, Barnes and Noble or your local Christian Book Store.

This new title from Philip Yancey is a follow-up book to his title, “What’s so Amazing about Grace?” which he released years ago. At that time the Christian Church read with great interest his premise and concerns regarding “Grace” and how we find it amazing that God would extend “Grace” to a sinful people.

In this book Yancey states that when he sat down to write it, “I began with a concern that the church is failing in its mission to dispense grace to a world thirsty for it. More and more, surveys show, outsiders view Christians as bearers of bad news, not good news.”

Yancey starts with a premise that the church today for the most part is preaching a gospel that expresses

doom and gloom. He feels that preaching is focused more on the condemnation of sinners and the travails of hell rather than expounding on the life changing aspect of grace in the lives of sinners.

He points out that when surveyed most Americans will say that they feel the church is filled with condemnation, intolerance and a set of moral values that are in contradiction to “the good life.” While all those items can be found in scripture and expounded upon to help a society see where it is failing it also needs to come with the message of hope, mercy and grace.

As a general point of his text he wants the church to learn ways to express the love of God to our culture in ways that can effect change to our views of moral depravity. As he stated above, the world is thirsty for grace! I would go so far as to say the world is thirsty for mercy as well.

As a society we know we are evil. We know that morally we are not the best that we can be. We know that we are failing. We don’t need to be punished week after week with concepts that we are dirty rotten sinners and deserve nothing but hell. All too often that is where sermons or evangelism in some churches stop. They don’t go on to extend the concept of mercy and grace, the concept of the forgiveness of sins.

Yancey believes that the society is hearing more often, you are unacceptable to a loving God who has no other desire than to extend judgment and condemn you to hell. But when we come with a message of God loves you and desires to see a change in your life for the better and to extend forgiveness and grace and mercy then people will respond because we give them a drink of what they are thirsty for. It doesn’t mean that we don’t express their need to put aside sin.

Jesus when he was with people would address very directly their sin. But then He would just as quickly provide healing for their illness, or a miracle of huge importance to a sinner such as restoring sight, or making the lame to walk. But in each case Jesus would also say to the individual, “Go and sin no more!”

Maybe the best way to sum up this book is to quote Yancey when he writes, “Our challenge as Jesus’ followers is to align ourselves with the true gospel, and to reclaim the force it has released to a world in desperate need.”

If you are curious about what Yancey believes is the “True Gospel” then you are going to want to pick up a copy of this book and give it a careful read. I know that you won’t be disappointed.

Sydney says

Let me start by declaring: I am not a Christian. My Lutheran Christian grandfather lent me this book about evangelical Christianity and its disconnection from the rest of secular society. While I have always enjoyed reading about religion, I have to admit I approached this text skeptically, in the very vein in which the Christian writer, Philip Yancey, from Christianity Today magazine, describes contemporary reactions to evangelism in our largely (and growingly) secular society.

In *Vanishing Grace*, Yancey takes on the relationship between Christian and non-Christian today, analyzing why former Christians and agnostics/atheists are so affronted by evangelical Christianity. Instead of toting an agenda and lambasting non-evangelicals, Yancey rather earnestly explores the weaknesses of modern-day evangelical Christianity, in search for honest answers as to why it seems to alienate more people rather than

enveloping them into the fold. He remarks also on the weaknesses of modern (American - predominantly) society and how such weaknesses (addiction, loneliness, depression, etc etc) may be overcome through joining a Christian community. I read Yancey as a philosophical writer, pondering life more than prescribing solutions. He is well-read and well-referenced (countering the anti-intellectual stigma of evangelical Christians), and rather inoffensive, especially when admitting his own "snobbish reflex" when perceiving secular society as only sex-crazed, drug-fuelled, wealth-obsessed. It seems particularly rare to find a writer, least of all a Christian writer, who is very forthcoming in admitting their narrow biases.

It seems rather fortuitous, looking back now, that I began reading *Vanishing Grace* in October 2016 and finished it a few weeks after the 2016 American election. In the first few chapters of Yancey's book, I found myself agreeing with some of what he commented upon, perhaps not his 'solutions,' but certainly some of his observations. Having grown up in a more leftist Christian church, I couldn't help but to recall how grounded and constant that community was for me, and how little I personally encountered judgment or even preaching (of course, it also was not an evangelical congregation.)

While Yancey's words began to slightly soften the bristling reaction I have to evangelical Christians, it was quickly challenged by the results of the American election, most frustratingly the overwhelming support of white evangelical Christians for Donald Trump. In voting for a man who absolutely defies most morality (as defined by Jesus and other tenets of Christianity), and additionally supporting his and the Republican's agenda to defund women's healthcare centres and Medicaid; supporting open racial and sexual discrimination and homophobia; supporting mass violence against Syrians; supporting less control of weapons of violence... evangelical Christians and their hypocrisy succeeded in astounding me again. And this is why I can't seem to fully get rid of that bristling feeling at the back of my neck when it comes to the "Good News."

As I read *Vanishing Grace* further, after the election, I discovered that Yancey also takes on the subject of political intersections with faith and the baffling intertwining of conservative politics with Christianity. He questions these political obsessions with guns, disenfranchising the poor from healthcare, disenfranchising people of colour (etc) and how far they stray from the Bible and, most importantly, the wisdom of Jesus. Again, coming down hard on Christians of today, rather than their secular neighbours.

While I reiterate again that I am not a Christian, least of all an evangelical Christian, I have to recommend this book to Christians and non-Christians alike because I am a huge believer in education and exposure. As the results of this most recent election reveal a very staunch and problematic divide between non-Christians and Christians, I do concede that it has become more important than ever to cross the divide and educate ourselves about people we do not understand. Yancey attempts to act as a bridge in this regard. While I am by no means "converted," he has proven to me that there are aspects still very salvageable in Christianity, aspects that can help us all grow and thrive and respect each other. And if evangelical Christians read more of the Bible and Yancey, and less of Breitbart, they too would understand how much there is that need not be dismissed or despised, but actually... loved.

Jeanette says

The quote I put into the progress on reading report of this book; that is the nugget of Christianity. You must treat others as you would be treated. That does not mean that you approve or celebrate their negative habits, hurtful acts, or condone injury to others. There are many aspects of living as a Christian to contemplate in this book. And much of what he discusses does nail the core to a Christian pattern of kind or gentle return

against adversity or harshness. Yet, he defines Grace differently than most American Christians (all brands) would, IMHO. And as much as he gets to the crux, I'm not sure his answers to behaviors of example or personal moral standards as a Christian individual are balanced ones at all. Especially not balanced to supplying "Good News" of Jesus's gospel. Not even in his three arbitrary categories of Christian behavior, did I feel he had balance in this book on those evaluations. Nor would assumptions he makes be totally compatible to Jesus's example in every case. There is a balance between faith and acts here, within the author's construct- that I'm not sure could completely be valid re Jesus's words, life, mission- His own stated (repeatedly) purpose. Christians are now and have often within past centuries been ridiculed, scorned, mocked and denigrated as "stupid" or "wing-nuts" or whatever the ditz names of the period happened to be. It is not always and at base because they try (or tried) to put their own standards on the entire society either. At certain periods, now being one of them, just being more structured or living a life that is visibly more faith centered than "me" centered can be enough for snarky reaction. So I have mixed feelings about this book- although he makes some wonderful thoughts and observations. It definitely was worth reading.
