



The Jesus I Never Knew

Philip Yancey

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“There is no writer in the evangelical world that I admire and appreciate more.”

Billy Graham

Philip Yancey helps reveal what two thousand years of history covered up

What happens when a respected Christian journalist decides to put his preconceptions aside and take a long look at the Jesus described in the Gospels? How does the Jesus of the New Testament compare to the “new, rediscovered” Jesus—or even the Jesus we think we know so well?

Philip Yancey offers a new and different perspective on the life of Christ and his work—his teachings, his miracles, his death and resurrection—and ultimately, who he was and why he came. From the manger in Bethlehem to the cross in Jerusalem, Yancey presents a complex character who generates questions as well as answers; a disturbing and exhilarating Jesus who wants to radically transform your life and stretch your faith.

The Jesus I Never Knew uncovers a Jesus who is brilliant, creative, challenging, fearless, compassionate, unpredictable, and ultimately satisfying. “No one who meets Jesus ever stays the same,” says Yancey. “Jesus has rocked my own preconceptions and has made me ask hard questions about why those of us who bear his name don’t do a better job of following him.”

The Jesus I Never Knew Details

Date : Published (first published January 1st 1995)

ISBN :

Author : Philip Yancey

Format : Kindle Edition 304 pages

Genre : Christian, Nonfiction, Religion, Christianity, Theology, Faith

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From Reader Review The Jesus I Never Knew for online ebook

Marie says

Once again I enjoyed Yancey's thorough journalistic style combined with his ability to clearly communicate his opinion. However, I felt Yancey was talking above my knowledge on this one. My understanding and awareness of Jesus-including familiarity with Biblical history-remains at an elementary level, so many of the events and passages Yancey refers to are not crystal clear to me. In response to this I know that I need to read and study the Gospels soon. Even though I found myself tripping over many of the events, the book did give me a thorough re-introduction to Jesus and like the title indicates, I felt I was reading about the "Jesus I Never Knew."

The best thing this book did for me I found in the last chapter in which Yancey breaks down what he has learned about Jesus in several categories or impressions. Yancey points out that Jesus is a "portrait of God," and that is what ultimately intellectually turns him on to Christianity: "Books of theology tend to define God by what he is not: God is immortal, invisible, infinite. But what is God like, positively? For the Christian, Jesus answers such all-important questions. Jesus was God's exact replica."

Also, Yancey asks himself a bold question and answers boldly, "Why am I a Christian? I sometimes ask myself, and to be perfectly honest the reasons reduce to two: 1)the lack of good alternatives and 2)Jesus. Brilliant, untamed, tender, creative, slippery, irreducible, paradoxically humble-Jesus stands up to scrutiny. He is who I want my God to be."

After reading this book I have a clearer idea about who I want my God to be.

Nermine Hosni says

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האם תוכלו לומר לי מהו המושג "הפרדת גזים" ומהו המושג "הפרדת נוזלים"?

הפרדת גזים היא תהליך שבו גזים שונים נפרדים זה מזה. הפרדת נוזלים היא תהליך שבו נוזלים שונים נפרדים זה מזה.

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Bill says

A very fresh look at Jesus - that is, no sign of all the preconceptions we usually have. Informative historical context, insightful commentary on our culture's interaction with the Jesus of the gospels and quite a humble writing style - Yancey seems willing to let Jesus speak to himself, and thus to his readers. So many efforts are made to reinvent Jesus, but Jesus cannot & need not be reinvented - we just need to make the effort to come to grips with him.

Summer says

This book was phenomenal. Here's what my brother had to say when he recommended it.

"The author is a quote-unquote believer but refreshingly candid about his own fears, doubts about, and frustrations with God. It is a guileless book, without pretense, and I believe most anyone--"believer", "non-believer," Christian, Jew, Buddhist, or Muslim--(though they might not agree with everything said) would be pleasantly surprised by what they find in it. As it turns out, many of us raised-Christians have been handed down a "Jesus" that is decidedly distorted, cankered, and for many (I would say) untrue. Sometimes we either accept or reject Jesus based on a rather narrow experience and interpretation."

This book addresses these issues as the author takes an honest look at the life of Jesus. Remarkably beautiful and inspiring. This is one I will re-read again and again.

Ben Byler says

Throughout my time reading this book, I was overjoyed to finally see a Christian author talk about Christ. For too often I found Christian authors talk about "God," but make him whatever they want him to be. The Jesus of the Gospels, however, proves very hard to limit or fit into our agendas. And he's very different from the Jesus people see from hypocritical Christians.

Jesus is amazing.

However, as much as I enjoyed this book and was about to give it 5 stars, one chapter startled me and left me

very disappointed. The chapter was on the Ascension and what Jesus left behind. Instead of following the Gospel narrative as the author had done so throughout the book, he instead opted to leave out a vital part of the Christian Faith, and frankly, a part of God: the Holy Spirit.

You see, Jesus reveals the trinity, so if one focuses on Jesus, he cannot neglect the Father nor the Holy Spirit. But Yancey does just that, and partially quotes Jesus as saying, "it will be better when I leave," without then revealing the coming of the Advocate and Comforter.

This failure to mention the Holy Spirit then leads Yancey into a speculative mess about the church's dualistic history (being both great and bad) and the individual Christian's often sinful life. Yancey blissfully concludes that only God knows what pleases God, when clearly Jesus teaches us what is right and wrong and says a good tree can't bear bad fruit.

This is not to say that Christians must be utterly perfect right away, but it is to say that we should strive to be more like Christ every day. And, coming full circle, we can only become more like Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit, which I think would help Yancey's approach to life after the Ascension.

He used Peter and his denial of knowing Jesus as an example to build his case about God using messed up people for his church and kingdom, but once more, one must look at the difference the Holy Spirit made once it descended and entered into Peter. Was he perfect afterward? No, but he was definitely far better than he used to be. Likewise as Christians, we are not sinners saved by grace who still live in sin. Jesus didn't save us from death; he saved us from sin which leads to death. So therefore, once we are saved, we are sinners no more, but saints who embody God himself more and more as we love him and obey his commands.

This is the Gospel brought to life by Jesus himself, and for the most part, I highly enjoyed this book. If anything, I hope the book stirs people to discover who Jesus really is through the Gospels and encounter a love so great they drop everything to pursue him.

David Dennington says

I've just finished *THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW* by Philip Yancey. I do not read many religious books. I cannot really answer why that is. I did read *SEEKING ALLAH, FINDING JESUS* recently, and I enjoyed that. In that book I read that the author after extensive research and receiving visions, became a Christian. I found it interesting that he told of how Muslims around the world are receiving visions of Jesus.

THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW educated me about a lot that is in the New Testament. But of course, I am left with more questions than answers. Jesus' appearance is discussed and I found it is absolutely frustrating that He is not described at all in the Gospels. Perhaps there is a reason for that—a Divine reason perhaps?

I found it interesting how Yancey shows how Jesus was not really forceful, not on the surface at least. His power lay in His quiet confidence. He tells how the Sermon on the Mount and the words spoken by Jesus are impossible to live by—He set the bar very high. From it, I found that Jesus was perhaps setting us goals to live by, proving He was the Greatest Negotiator of all! These goals are out of our reach. They were targets to aim for and we shouldn't feel bad when we fail, Yancey says.

I learned from *THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW* that Russian writers Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, were both devout Christians. They were credited apparently with keeping Christianity alive throughout Communist rule

in the Soviet Bloc, though it was underground. Probably the government never read such books.

Yancey shows a new way of looking at Jesus and understanding Him. It made me want to carefully go through the Gospels and read them thoroughly. There are disbelievers, naturally. I look at things like this: The story of Jesus' life is a magnificent one. Even if you don't believe it happened. But then, who would have allowed himself to be flayed raw, then nailed to a cross just to make an impression that wasn't true? And would his disciples, (knowing he was a fraud and/or a madman) also allow themselves to be tortured and killed in gruesome ways when all they had to do was to deny him (yet again!). It's a worthwhile read, and yes, it makes you think.

Kim says

Book that seeks to discover Jesus in time and history--to observe him as he traveled and taught and ask: who Jesus was, why he came, and what he left behind complete with dusty details and descriptions that bite into what it was like to experience pursuit of God and pain, friendship and a fan-following in Galilee.

Following are my lessons learned

Why God does not force belief or display His power--

Goodness cannot be imposed externally, but most grow internally, bottom up. God's power is internal, non-coercive. He is not a Nazi. He does not force himself on those who are unwilling, haughty, skeptical.

When I want an unambiguous God for the sake of my doubting friends, I am asking Jesus to do what Satan asked in the Temptation. Jesus way is gentler, slower. In fact, he felt helpless as he and the disciples viewed the unrepentant cities, "if only". God insists on such restraint because no display of omnipotence will achieve a response of love. Only love can summon love. God bases his appeal on sacrificial love. That's how love is. God's love is "on the house."

However, restraint by God creates opportunity for those opposed to Him. And then He is blamed for things like the Holocaust. Why blame the Parent, not the kids. God states the consequences of wrong, then throws the decision back at us. Jesus un-manipulative invitation, "Take up your cross and follow me; count the cost; whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Jesus gives fair warning.

Miracles--Jesus never talked about people as though they deserved their sickness.

Jesus had not come primarily to heal bodies, but souls. When it came to miracles, Jesus priorities were different than ours. Miracles rarely encouraged long-term repentance, faith, obedience, but gawkers and sensation seekers. Messiah was not going to save the world by Band-aid solutions, but by a "deeper, darker, left-handed mystery, at the center of which lay his own death." (Written by ...). Jesus stressed the infrequency of miracles. Death, decay and entropy and destruction are the true suspension of God's laws; miracles are the early glimpses of the restoration...Jesus miracles are the only truly 'natural' things in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded.

If Jesus had publicly claimed to be Messiah, nothing could have stopped a useless floodtide of slaughter. William Barclay.

The God Who Came Near

Jesus learned about poverty, family squabbles, social rejection, verbal abuse, betrayal, pain, unanswered

prayer. Gethsemane is the story of an unanswered prayer.

God and Jesus probably both felt abandonment at the cross; sin separates.

Augustine, "You ascended from before our eyes, and we turned back grieving, only to find you in our hearts."

What is needed to get into the Kingdom and why few make it

Happy are the blasé for they never worry over their sins, said tongue-in-cheek. If there is no God, anything is permissible. See Rwanda. Instead, dependence, sorrow, repentance are the gates to the Kingdom. Strength, good looks, money, connections and competitive instinct are blockers. Blessed are the desperate. They might just turn to Jesus. When the poor hear the Good News it sounds good and not like a scolding. The proud and self-righteous are in danger. Those who live unclean lives are in no danger of finding life satisfactory.

Tolstoy's drive toward perfection never resulted in serenity. Do not look for human betterment, but for a vision of God penetrating a fallen world. From Tolstoy--looking to the kingdom of God, the high ideals. From Dostoevsky--the extent of Grace in the grim reality of ourselves; yet Christ himself dwells in me. I have not arrived, but there is no condemnation in Christ. There is a great distance between God and us, but we have nowhere else to land but in safety net of God's grace

Doctrine of salvation unappealing as it idealizes a God who chooses belief over action. Sometimes the God who looks down and says, "I wish they'd stop worrying if I exist and start obeying my commandments," seems more preferable.

It is Jesus, not his teachings that are the issue. In the end, he makes demands that only God can make. The thieves at the cross present the choice that all people in history have to make. Was the cross powerlessness or proof of God's love?

If you don't believe in the Resurrection, you are not a believer. Easter is how God treats those he loves; history is the contradiction. Let hope flow. The cross and resurrection give hope where there is none. We live out our days on Saturdays, the day with no name. Can God make something good out of ghettos and prisons. Sunday is coming.

How we then should live

Jesus chose disciples not as servants but as friends to share his joy and grief.

Purity is the condition for a higher love, to possess God.

Jesus started conversation with woman at the well by asking her for help.

When a person doesn't strike back, it decreases hatred and increases respect. Moral power can have a disarming effect.

Life to the full comes when we take a stand for justice, minister to the needy, pursue God, not self. But never to feel pity for the needy. For they seem to be more fully alive, not less.

"The worship of success is generally the form of idol worship which the devil cultivates most assiduously." (Thielicke). There is a compulsion to success using miracle and authority and mystery. The church often

borrow these tools.

Whatever activism I get involved in, it must not drive out love and humility. Whenever Church intermingles with State, the appeal of the faith suffers as well. Our mission is to communicate God's reconciling love, which is what Christ came to demonstrate.

Sinners often feel unloved by the church that keeps altering what sin is. Jesus did the opposite.

Jesus was always thinking about others. On the cross he forgave his killers, arranged care for his mother, welcomed the thief.

Tolstoy, "Attack me, I do this myself, but attack me rather than the path I follow and which I point out to anyone who asks me where I think it lies. If I know the way home and am walking along it drunkenly, is it any less the right way because I am staggering from side to side! ... Do not be glad that I have got lost, do not shout joyfully: "Look at him! He said he was going home, but there he is crawling into a bog!" No, do not gloat, but give me your help and support."

The departed Landlord will return and there will be hell to pay. However, in the meantime, God has not absconded. He is here as the poor, hungry, sick, prisoner. We cannot help God directly, so the poor are his 'receivers.' (Jonathan Edwards) Believing the poor to be Jesus, we would treat them with awe, respect, and love and tell them about our lives. (like in the movie, Whistle Down the Wind). God knew there'd be the poor. His long-term plan is to come back and straighten out planet earth. His short-range plan is for the church to continue the liberation until his return.

Do you ever just let God love you?

In Response to criticism of the Church

During the plagues, Christians helped the suffering, while the rest ran for their lives.

In our bodies, he begins again the life he lived on earth. Jesus healing, grace, good news can now be brought to all through the Church. The church can be ugly. But Jesus chose us. And we have brought some light. And in that the church is ugly, it is only a reflection of human nature individually. Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. He did not speak of the church as that in which to find hope.

What you seem actually to demand is that the Church put the kingdom of heaven on earth right here now... You are asking that man return at once to the state God created him in, you are leaving out the terrible radical human pride that causes death... The Church is founded on Peter who denied Christ three times and who couldn't walk on water by himself. You are expecting his successors to walk on water... All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful... To have the Church be what you want it to be would require the continuous miraculous meddling of God in human affairs. (Written by Flannery O' Connor)

MOST INFORMATION HERE PULLED DIRECTLY FROM THE BOOK

RE de Leon says

Every now and then, a book comes along that rightfully lays claim to the feat of changing your life. And this

one most certainly did. More specifically, it changed my devotional life, such that my bible reading experience has been richer ever since.

You see, I've been reading the Bible since before I even learned to read properly. So while I was very familiar with the facts of the gospel story by the time I'd read this book in 1997, I'd also grown into some very hardened preconceptions.

An example: when your first image of the Beatitudes (the first part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5) is through pop-up book images and the narration of a primary-school level Sunday School teacher, you tend not to have any sense of the provocative power behind Jesus' words. By painting the context of the listeners who first heard Jesus' words, you begin to understand why Jesus was so dangerous the priests of his time felt he had to be killed.

Yancey similarly re-enlightens you in every chapter of this book, from his portrayal of Christmas as a daring invasion of "enemy occupied territory" (Yancey quotes great Christian thinkers like Augustine, CS Lewis, and GK Chesterton a lot), to his portrayal of the second coming, to his chapter on the Church as the body of Christ, a reading of Yancey's book means picking up an idea of how action packed and full of resonance to modern life the Gospel books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) really are.

The benefits are greatest if you're already very familiar with the gospel story, though. This is a good book for beginners, but nothing beats reading the original texts first so you can get your own first impressions. If you haven't read the Gospel books through, do read through them before picking up this book. In fact, read those books before, after and while going through your copy of "The Jesus I Never Knew."

I started this review by saying this book changed my life. That's true, but indirectly so. It changed the way I see the story of the man they call Jesus, whom I acknowledge to be mankind's Messiah. Yancey's work here is like the work of an art restoration artist, brilliantly scraping away the dust and grime of modern misconceptions to show the original masterpiece.

I hope the result will make as big a difference in your life as it did mine.

RE de Leon

Agoo, La Union

5:50 PM January 2, 2011

Cindy Marsch says

I've been reading Philip Yancey since I thought of him and Stephen Lawhead as my wise older brothers or youth leaders when they wrote for Campus Life magazine in the 1970s. Yancey's work on prayer has been an occasional dip-in-and-contemplate book in my nightstand, and I love his friendly style and devotional approach to the things he writes about. He's solid on the fundamentals of the faith but openly curious beyond that.

This title fulfilled all my hopes and I enjoyed a couple of months of bedtime reading exploring his thoughts--and mine--about Jesus. Enjoy the extracts I've highlighted below this review on Goodreads.

Hany Adeeb says

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Brenda says

I really enjoy Philip Yancey's writing. There was nothing here that was particularly revealing or new information about Jesus, but the author seems to have a way of writing that gets your mind engaged and thinking about the topic in different ways. I'd definitely recommend this one.

Sawsana Ewieda says

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Dave Johnson says

a few weeks ago, i had a dream that profoundly impacted my book reading. without going into details, i was left with a desire to read about Jesus, a desire to know Jesus better. i had this book on my bookshelf already; i picked it up at a thrift store for a dollar, since i'll buy pretty much any book that looks half decent at a thrift store. i hadnt read anything about Phillip Yancey. i knew very little about him, other than his name is huge in the Christian book market. so i picked up the book.

at first, i wasnt impressed. for the first chapter or two, i thought it was a decent book. he has an obvious journalism background, and that really shapes his writing style. he interjects various quotes withing his chapters to broaden his points. he talked about the history behind Jesus. really, at first, i thought he needed to change this title to The Jesus I Kinda Already Knew Pretty Much. but then everything started changing gears. i thought this book was going to be more of a biographical story of how one man is changed by an encounter with Christ as opposed to his idea of who Jesus was and is. and, at first, i was disappointed to find

that he's just reporting his research of who Jesus is from an objective point of view (if there is one). but, i dont know when or where it happened in the book, precisely, but it morphed into what i first expected, while still retaining his objective reporting. as he started to research this Jesus, his life changed. and as i read his book on his findings, so did mine.

Yancey does a great job at going through Jesus' life chronologically, his message, grace, the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, the kingdom of God, and the difference Jesus makes. the book really sucked me in, as his chapters take on a different life than i thought they would, given the titles and sections of time in the chapters.

this is a fantastic book. there really is a certain anointing so to speak that leaps from the pages of his writing. maybe it has nothing to do with the author, but the subject matter. when i read about Jesus, it is hard to not be changed. reading this book, certain things about Jesus that we highlight--almost apart from the person of Jesus--jumped out in their clarity. things like grace and faith--these are things we teach about as ideas and not something in connection to Jesus. but when i read this book, i saw these things flowing out of the person of Jesus' nature. i could probably go on and on, but in summary, this book is amazing.

Randall Hartman says

It has taken me a long time to review this book because I had a hard time stomaching it - I could only read so much before I had to put it down so I could calm down - and because I wanted to let my thoughts and feelings settle a while, reconsider them, and be careful that what I am saying is truthful and not just an emotional reaction.

This review is rather long, but since it's serious and pointed, I thought it appropriate to give facts and not simply level accusations. First I'll give some bullet points that highlight what I saw in the book, and then I'll summarize my thoughts.

Highlights of the book:

- Occasional tidbits of truth - which makes it all the more dangerous and difficult in trying to find the safe places to land while avoiding the hidden mines
- Confusing and discouraging for those seeking to know the real Jesus
 - Celebrates doubt and questions as a virtue
 - Rarely declares truth clearly
 - Doesn't look to scripture for answers
- Degraded view of scripture
 - Essentially making the Old Testament and the epistles of lower authority than the gospels
 - Reliance on secular, even non-believing sources for interpretation of the Bible rather than the Bible itself
 - Significant amount of unsupported speculation, many times contradictory to scripture
- Extremely critical of other Christians
- Essentially a liberal form of legalism - the rules are different, but there are still rules
- Criticizes moral standards of holiness
- Makes social activism and charity the required "must dos" of faith

- While claiming to look at Jesus as if in the first century, actually significantly interprets him by 20th century liberal theology

- Profoundly selfish – even the title is based on how he knows Jesus
 - What HE thinks God should be
 - What HIS doubts and questions are
 - Over emphasis on supposed free will, even higher than God's sovereignty
 - Over reaction to his upbringing in a legalistic, fundamentalist background, which he admits
- Sets the groundwork for false belief
 - Universalism
 - Social gospel
 - Equating love solely with charity
 - Substandard view of scripture
 - Misquoting and misinterpretation of scripture

Summary:

Just to get to the point, I believe Yancey is a prime example of the false teachers that Peter and John warned the church about in their letters, and I would caution against consuming anything he writes. Scripture indicates that false teachers are dangerous because they either ignorantly or knowingly pervert the gospel and grace in the guise of teaching it. I realize that's direct, but that's my observation by evaluating his message based on scripture.

Related to this point is the church-bashing that is increasingly popular among him and other "progressive," so-called evangelical authors – the approach is something like, “the way traditional churches have done ‘X’ is all wrong, but now I’ve found the key or the new revelation.” This approach turns the Bible into a Rubik’s Cube to be solved rather than the complete, written, inerrant word of God that is interpreted to all believers through the Holy Spirit. And it obfuscates and discourages us from knowing God better by knowing His word, which is knowable and understandable and truthful.

I've found this method is really just cover to justify rejecting unpopular Biblical truth. Specific to this approach is an agenda against a subset of the church simply because it teaches holy living and is audacious enough to call sin what it is; he expresses this philosophy implicitly and explicitly in his writings. In this regard, his misuse of scripture is egregious - he either selectively quotes out of context or completely ignores scripture that contradicts his points. And using secular films as the basis for teaching the sermon on the mount in a college course?

Based on his popular book about grace, how he handles scripture in this book, and his overall spiritual “philosophy,” I don't believe Yancey has anything biblically sound to communicate. I have read enough of his writing so that it's pretty clear to me that what he means by grace is not the Bible's definition, but being nice, tolerating anything except intolerance, denying the exclusivity of the gospel of Christ, failing to call people to repent of sin and believers to live holy lives, and bashing the evangelical church that sticks to the Bible. I imagine, by his definition of grace, that I am not being gracious, but I'd rather be true to God's word than a 20th-21st century reinterpretation of what the Bible says grace really is.

After reading this book, perhaps the title should be "The Jesus I Still Don't Know," because what he presents is not the Son of God revealed in scripture, but rather a 20th century distortion. His apparent God is not the God of the Bible, but a combination of (fallen) human reason, approval of others, intellectual questioning, and license rather than holiness. That's a false gospel, one that makes people comfortable in their sin,

promotes doubt about God's word, and ultimately leads to destruction. Therefore, he's off my reading list, and I strongly caution my friends against his writings.

Summer says

I really did like this book, so why only three stars? It was good, but I didn't really walk away with anything new or profound, which I suppose is a good and comforting thing. I enjoyed studying who Christ was on Earth, getting to know how he acted and talked with other people. I loved his references to other authors like Tolstoy, CS Lewis, Flannery O'Connor, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and others.

Perhaps the thing I enjoyed the most, which is odd, is how honest Yancey is about his thoughts and what he believes... and more importantly (to me), what he doubts. It seems as though he and I were raised in the same church, and I'd love to read more of what he's written since I'm pretty sure he approaches topics from a similar perspective as mine.

Was the book profound? No, but I'd kind of worry if he was trying to say something new. Was it good? Yes, it was.
