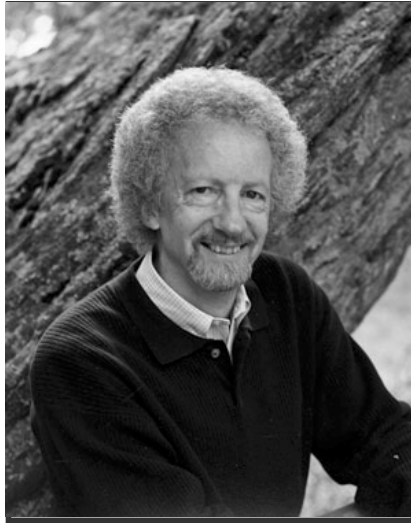


Moving Toward the Core of Faith

An Interview with Philip Yancey



Philip Yancey, one of the best-selling and best-loved Christian authors of our time, has explored the deep questions about faith for years. Yancey is the author of many books including The Jesus I Never Knew, Meet the Bible, Reaching for the Invisible God, Rumors of Another World, What's So Amazing About Grace? and Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference? and currently has sold more than 14 million books worldwide. He also writes frequently for Christianity Today where he is an editor at large. We were honored that he joined us for the anniversary celebration where I conducted this onstage interview.

—Sharon Gallagher

Philip Yancey: I usually interview people and get to ask the questions, so I don't know if I like this idea of being interviewed. But we'll see how Sharon does.

Radix: You've been a columnist in *Christianity Today* for many years and, for some of us, our favorite part of *C.T.* was hearing what you had to say on that back page of the magazine. Now you've recently announced that you've written your final column, which can't have been an easy decision.

Yancey: Yes, I started it 26 years ago, and I've written about 200 of those columns. A book usually takes a year-and-a-half or so of solid work, at least for me, and all that time I'm in a rut. The *Christianity Today* column was about the only spontaneous thing in my life, because I usually wrote it in one day. Often it was

about something I read the night before, or a trip I just returned from, or somebody I met. I liked that.

But I have devoted more of my time in recent years to travel. We take about four international trips a year, and they do eat into my schedule. Many times I'd come back thinking, "Oh, no, this column is due tomorrow," and it became almost an irritation: "Now what am I going to write about?"

Anytime something seems like a chore rather than a privilege, it should be reevaluated. It was hard to let go, but I felt it was time.

Radix: Your voice will be missed. I want to talk a little about your beginnings. In the first year of your life, your family was struck with tragedy. Your father was a polio victim who died after being taken off life support in faith that God would heal him, and that was at the instigation of

church elders. That early life-changing incident might have embittered some people and put them off faith entirely. But you've not only remained a person of faith, you've encouraged many of us in our faith. You're Billy Graham's favorite writer; you've even encouraged Billy Graham! But even as a child, it must have bothered you that those church elders were so wrong. How did you maintain your faith in those circumstances?

Yancey: Several times in talking with my publisher I've raised the possibility of writing a book called *Lies My Church Told Me*, but they've said, "No, we're not quite ready for that, Philip."

My church was wrong, profoundly wrong, about some very serious things, and that was certainly one of them. My father was going to be a missionary. He was 24 years old, had two young sons. My brother was three, I was one when my Dad got polio. He was in an iron lung, because he couldn't breathe on his own.

My parents already had a base of Christians who were going to support them in prayer and financially as missionaries. Those Christians felt, "Well, it couldn't possibly be God's will for this young, dedicated, 24-year-old man to die." They believed that he would be healed, and had him removed from the iron lung. And then he died.

I have lived my whole life under the impact of that on my mother, who was left with a tough set of circumstances to deal with—no training, not much education, in poverty. As I later looked at it, I thought, "Well, they were wrong theologically. They felt they knew God's will, and they were wrong. They didn't know God's will. Theology matters, ideas matter."

My church was wrong about other things, too. I've written openly about the blatant racism that was taught from the pulpit. They were wrong about science.

When you realize you've been deceived about something important,

I learned about the Creator by studying the shafts of glory that fill this world. I realized, God isn't a cosmic super-cop out to get me; God is a God of whimsy and humor and compassion and grace.

then, of course, you start questioning everything: "Maybe they're wrong about Jesus; maybe they're wrong about all these other things." Why did I hang on? I've often reflected on that question. There were just two of us, my brother and I, and my brother strayed and is still far from God—as he would say himself.

I was blessed by coming in contact with people who demonstrated the kind of person I wanted to be. Dr. Paul Brand was one of those people; some of my first books were with him. I almost have this vision of God looking down—of course, metaphorically—saying, "Okay, Philip, you've seen the worst that the church has to offer; I'm going to show you the best."

Dr. Brand was one of those people. I spent 10 years following him around, getting to know him and his faith. At his funeral I said, "I was given the charge of giving words to his faith, and in the process he gave faith to my words." For 10 years I was able to write about a person I truly believed in and could write with total confidence what he believed, even though I wasn't sure myself. In the process of doing that, my faith grew.

I was a journalist, and in the early days, I was editor of *Campus Life* magazine. We would interview two types of people: some whom I call "stars," and they would be the famous people: professional athletes, politicians, movie stars, people we put on the covers of our magazine.

Over the years, I've interviewed some really famous people. Then there's another group of people, like Dr.

Paul Brand, whom I call "servants." They usually don't have a light shining on them; they don't get a lot of attention. But I have been privileged to meet many of them in different parts of the world, people who work in garbage communities in Guatemala and the Philippines, or who spend 40 years translating the Bible to a tribe in Ecuador where only 400 people speak that language—those kinds of people.

When I looked at the "stars," my first instinct was to think, "Oh, wouldn't I love to be one of those people." But when I got to know them, I didn't really want to be like them. Some of them became stars because they didn't really like themselves very much. They weren't comfortable with themselves, so they became performers.

The other group of people, the "servants," who didn't get attention, worked in incredibly difficult environments.

Dr. Brand spent his life in India among leprosy patients, most of them in the untouchable caste. Nobody wants to live next to a leprosarium, so they gave him a gravel pit in the middle of a desert. The average temperature in the summer there was about 120 degrees. No air conditioning. But again and again, when I would get to know these servants, I would say, "Those are the people I want to be like." They have a sense of gratitude for life, a sense of compassion and love.

I came to see the truth of Jesus' most commonly repeated statement; in the Gospels He said—I'm para-

phrasing here—“You don't gain your life by acquiring more and more; you gain your life by giving it away.”

I also found that the church I grew up in had lied to me about God. My image of God from childhood was of this scowling, cosmic super-cop looking for someone who might be having a good time so he could squash them. Anything we did that was half-way fun was considered sin.

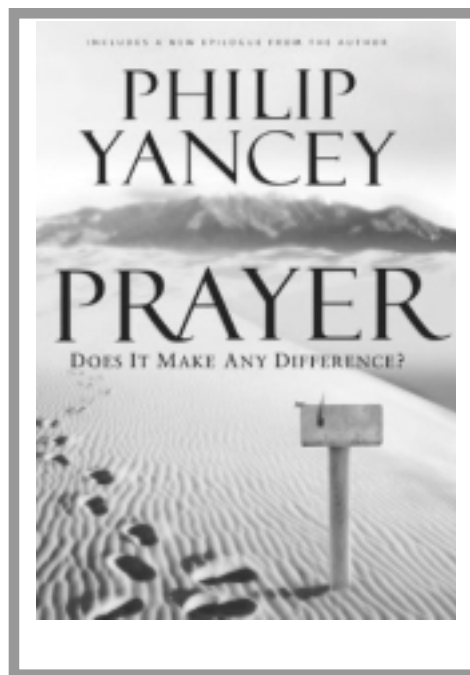
I now say that God used three things to bring me back to God. It wasn't a gospel tract; it wasn't the Bible; I knew the Bible inside and out. Instead, the beauty of nature, classical music, and romantic love, those three things brought me back, because as I experienced those, I realized that the church had deceived me about God.

You learn about an artist by looking at the art. I learned about the Creator by studying the shafts of glory that fill this world. I realized, God isn't a cosmic super-cop out to get me; God is a God of whimsy and humor and compassion and grace. I've been privileged to go back and pick up the stones and scrub them off and see what's worth saving and what's worth saying. I ended up probably not all that different theologically from the church I grew up in, but a lot different in understanding and attitude and spirit, I hope.

Radix: When did you first know that you wanted to be a writer? Do you remember what your first published piece was?

Yancey: As a boy I wanted to play second base for the New York Yankees. Or I wanted to be a fireman, you know, like all boys. I didn't go through life thinking, “I want to be a writer when I grow up.” In high school I did work for the newspaper and the yearbook, so I worked with words and gravitated toward English and literature classes.

I did have that introverted, observer's personality. I'd been burned, so I withdrew and made cal-



culated judgments of everybody around me. And that makes a good potential writer. If you are from a dysfunctional family, you should become a writer. Because then the things that drive you crazy become material.

When my family got together, I used to go away thinking, “How could I possibly spend a weekend with these people?” And then I started thinking, “I could never come up with the things they're saying.” So now when I'm at a family gathering, I run to the bathroom, pull out a pad of paper, and write things down.

When I was in grad school at Wheaton College, I needed a job. In those days, there were a lot of Christian organizations headquartered in Wheaton (many of them have moved to Colorado since). And the only place I could get a job was *Campus Life* magazine, which was a magazine for young people. I wrote brochure copy; I wrote ads for record albums. I did whatever they wanted me to do, cleaned out closets, organized a photo file.

It was a great training ground, because often people got *Campus Life* as a gift subscription from an aunt who was concerned about them spiritually. Johnny gets this magazine and wonders, “What is this

Christian stuff?” As a writer I've got about 10 seconds to get him reading, and then I have to keep him reading the rest of the article. I learned early on that the writer is not in charge. The reader is in charge, because the reader can shut you off. You can spend years working on the perfect poem, article, book, or whatever—but unless it keeps the reader's interest, you'll certainly never make a living at it.

Radix: You once wrote a column called “I Was a Teenage Fundamentalist.” You went to Columbia Bible College, where you met Janet, and were once disciplined because you were holding hands when you were engaged. At what point did you realize that you were no longer a fundamentalist?

Yancey: Actually, I think from high school days on, when I realized that the church had distorted and misrepresented reality to me. Fundamentalism is a tight house of cards, and if you pull one card out, they're afraid that the whole thing is going to collapse. So, no matter what it is—whether it's six-day creation, or a theory of race, or whatever, it's all in this tight, small box.

Growing up in that box, I kept seeing, “Well, that card's not true, and that card's not true, and that card's not true.” So I didn't buy the box. The early books I wrote have titles like *Where Is God When It Hurts?* and *Disappointment With God*. I was out there on the margins, circling warily.

Along the way I worked on a version of the Bible called *The Student Bible* and it was very helpful to spend three years doing nothing but studying the Bible. Then, gradually I moved toward more of the core of faith: *What's Amazing About Grace?*, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, and then, most recently, *Prayer*.

If you had said 20 years ago, “Philip, one day, you're going to write a book on prayer,” I wouldn't have believed it. But I have been privileged to write my life as it's happening, in

real time. And I keep thinking, “At some point, I’m going to cross the line and be written off.” When people write me and say, “You’ve crossed a line,” I respond, “I’m not radical. Jesus is radical.”

What I learned about fundamentalists is that they can’t argue with the Bible. They’re committed to the Bible. And if you really work hard at grounding the risky stuff in the Bible, they can reject what you say, but they’re also rejecting their own Bible when they do that. So I try to go where it takes me. Who is a fundamentalist? Someone said, “It’s an evangelical who’s very mad!” A lot of it is spirit and attitude, that whole black-and-white mentality, that house of cards. And I moved away from that a long time ago.

Radix: You’ve been writing for some years now, have a lot of award-winning books. My question is, has the way you write changed during that time?

Yancey: I’m grateful that the early days of my career were in an office environment, and I’ve stuck to that daily schedule—I was going to say nine to five; it’s really eight to six—that eight to six work schedule ever since. I’m at my desk at eight o’clock, and I stop a little before six o’clock.

When I write, I start with a pretty comprehensive outline, almost as long as the article or chapter itself. Because writing uses both parts of anyone’s brain, if you try to use both of them at once, it can be crazy. So I create an outline thinking, “This is the rational part of my brain, and this is where this article is going to go. I’ll start here, I’ll go here, I won’t go here, and I’ll end up there.” It makes perfect sense, and I’m sure that’s going to happen. Then when I actually sit down to write, forget the outline! But I couldn’t do the writing without it. For some reason, the outline frees me from that fear factor, “What am I going to say next?” It gives me confidence.

For the book *Prayer* I probably spent six months before I wrote a

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single word. I went to libraries and interviewed people. I had that whole preparatory period when I was trying to figure out, “What do I think about prayer?” I usually start a book with a list of questions, as I did with that one: Why pray if God already knows? Does it make any difference whether one prays, or a thousand pray? Why does God want us to keep praying? All those different questions. Then I’ll lock myself away and say, “OK, what do I think? What can I say with integrity that will help me answer those questions?”

After spending 40% of my time on preparation—including research, interviews, the outline—then comes the 20%, that middle day of composition, when all the trauma happens, all the paranoia, all the horror. There’s nothing on the paper or the computer screen and I have to come up with something. I pull every trick in the book: I promise myself that if I finish I can go skiing in the afternoon, eat ice cream, or do whatever it takes to get through that one day. I actually go out into the mountains, because I don’t want to inflict my psychosis on anyone else.

And then the last 40% of time I devote to cleaning up the piece. Getting ready to write, writing it, cleaning it up. I started as an editor, and I do spend twice as much time fixing what I wrote as I spent writing it. The last 40%, the editing stage, is the relaxing time where I can sit back and say, “I probably won’t make it any worse, but maybe I can make it a little better.” I feel good during that process. But, boy, that middle time is all pain.

Radix: When you did this research for the book, what was the most surprising thing that you discovered about prayer?

Yancey: One of the most surprising things was how Jesus prayed. We’re used to bowing our heads, closing our eyes, and being quiet when actually that’s pretty abnormal compared to the rest of the world. We just returned from Korea, and the church where I spoke has 65,000 members. They have eight services on a Sunday and several different campuses. So in a service you have about 5,000 people at a time. When they pray, all 5,000 pray at once at top volume, with tears streaming down their faces. It’s an amazing sound. You can hear 5,000 people sing at once in a megachurch, but to hear 5,000 people say different things at once in a language that you can’t understand to begin with—well, it’s a different experience.

In Jesus’ day the Jews prayed standing up, with their eyes open, their hands outstretched, looking up to heaven, which is very different from the way we pray today. I’m not saying one way is right or wrong; you asked me what surprised me.

Prayer is essentially being wide awake. It’s being awake to the world: to the needs of people around me, to the needs of justice, to the big things, and the small things. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus was praying, his disciples kept falling asleep. They weren’t awake to what was going on. The most momentous day in the history of the world was going on, and they were falling

asleep. Their eyes weren't open.

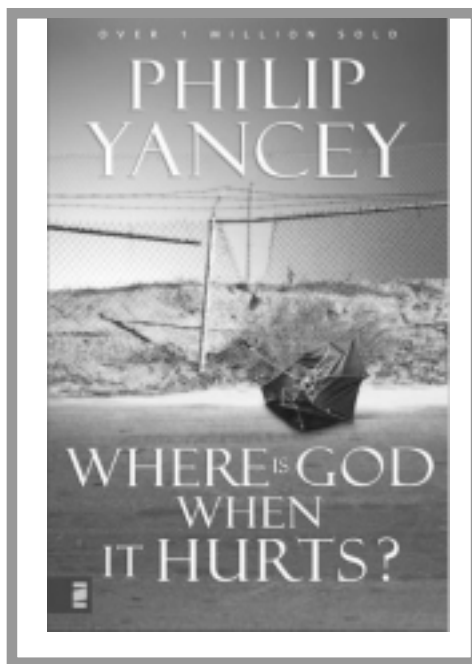
So prayer became, for me, a metaphor of being awake to the world. When we close our eyes, we shut out the world. We don't want to know about human trafficking, or global warming, or whatever. We just get so oppressed that we want to shut it out. Prayer is an intentional opening of our eyes, and asking God, "Open my eyes; make me wide awake." It's not an easy thing. I don't want to be awake sometimes; I want to sleep. It's more comfortable to sleep, to shut my eyes. But as Christians we are called to open our eyes.

I pray in the morning. And I usually do pray with my eyes open just because it's so beautiful, with squirrels and foxes and elk and everything running through the yard. I live in Colorado, a little place called Evergreen (this time of year it's "ever-white"). Why would I shut my eyes? I want to be awake to this world.

Radix: During the years since you were at *Christianity Today*, how would you say evangelicalism has changed from when you started there or at *Campus Life*, and now?

Yancey: If I didn't travel overseas, I would probably have a hard time being upbeat about the church and upbeat about evangelicals. We have so much to learn from other places. Sometimes I think the only reason—this is bad theology—that God puts up with the United States is because we bankroll a lot of good activity in the world. We also pollute things in the rest of the world.

But if you look at Christian history, most of it has been slow-moving and a church-state blending. So in Europe you have the Norwegian state church, the Danish state church, the German state church, the Italian Catholic Church, where the church gets involved in actual politics, not just church politics, but actual politics. Bishops appoint kings, and kings appoint bishops, and things



change very slowly. In many places in Europe, if you go to a worship service, you might as well have gone there 500 years ago. It's exactly the same: the same words, the same language, the same music. Nothing changes.

The United States has a free-market economy and the church reflects that. You can trace it through the revival days of Charles Finney and the camp meetings in Kentucky. The tradition was that the church is free from that relationship with the state. That's in our constitution, and I think it's a good thing.

In Colorado, where I live, outside of Denver there aren't many big towns. You go to these tiny little towns, they have maybe 500 people, and there's First Baptist Church, First Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church—and maybe an Episcopal church. A larger town may have a Second Baptist Church, Second Methodist Church. It's like Coke and Pepsi. You drive through those towns and think, "This is crazy! Why don't they just get together?" But that's America; that's what we do. We like options.

The churches here have taken on the best and the worst of America. The good part is, they evangelized the West. They went to these towns

that were full of crusty old miners and whores and converted them and founded churches. So here they are, still in 2010. That's American evangelicalism, light on its feet; if something doesn't work, the church reacts quickly. That's a characteristic of evangelicalism. America is still a creative idea source for the world. But we have a lot to learn from the rest of the world about taking our faith seriously; church isn't about feeling good and being entertained.

I'm an evangelical in most ways. I still would use that word; it means "good news." My job as a writer out of that tradition is to keep saying, "If it doesn't sound like good news, it's not the gospel."

Radix: Several years ago you had a very serious car accident. How did that affect your life?

Yancey: In February of 2007 I had been speaking in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and drove back on a remote road in Colorado when I hit a patch of ice. I was in a Ford Explorer when one of the tires went off the road and hit gravel, causing the vehicle to roll over five times. It stopped with its wheels on the ground, but was completely smashed. All of the windows had come out. I knew I was hurt. In the movies, as soon as you have a wreck like that, it bursts into flames. So I thought, "I've got to get out of this thing." So I staggered out and started looking around trying to find things—cell phone, skis, ice skates, my computer.

You could be on that road early on a Sunday morning for three hours and not see another car, but soon these Mormon missionaries came by. One of them happened to be the head of the ambulance corps for that county and he could tell I was hurt, so he made me sit down and he held my head.

I was taken to this little hospital that, amazingly, had a CAT scan machine—but they didn't have a radiologist. So they took all the CT pic-

tures and had to send them by satellite to Australia, where it was Monday. It took an hour to transmit the images, a lot of images, and an hour for the Australians to diagnose them. Then the doctor came in and said, "Mr. Yancey, there's no easy way to say this, but the images have come back, and you have a broken neck. The bad news is that it's right next to your carotid artery. If it has pierced the artery, you're bleeding, and we have a jet standing by to fly you to Denver. But the truth is, you probably wouldn't make it to Denver. So we're going to do another CAT scan with an arterial dye right away. Then, as soon as you get out, here's a cell phone, and I want you to call the people you love and tell them good-bye, just in case."

In all, I spent seven hours strapped down, unmoving. I trust God, the God I have learned to know is a trustworthy God, but I knew, "Okay, this may be it." So I called as many people as I could, before the battery ran down. As it happened, the artery had not been pierced and I didn't die. I spent 12 weeks in a neck brace, and in physical therapy.

How did it change me? It made me more careful about making choices—what to write, where to go, what speaking engagements to accept, things like that. It was a beneficial thing for my marriage. I knew what was most important. I became a calmer person, a little less rattled. Probably more humbled, more vulnerable. I couldn't carry my own suitcase for a long time; I was dependent on other people.

I think my voice as a writer started to change a little. I was always the searching pilgrim afraid to commit. Now I'm probably a little more steady in my faith.

I got another chance at life, a kind of resurrection. I remember walking around just dazed—I call it a "daze of grace"—just walking around thinking, "Wow, clouds." "That tree, that tree is so beautiful."

Radix: More recently, you and Janet were in Mumbai when the terrorist

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attack took place. What was that like?

Yancey: We had been in India for a couple weeks, and I had done a tour of five cities. In every case they put us in a nice downtown hotel, for tourists, because they didn't want us to get sick. Our last stop was in Mumbai. And they said, "There's a doctor we really want you to get to know. He does amazing work among AIDS patients. He's got a beautiful hospital; half of the people have to be non-paying, poor, and the richer people subsidize them. But it's outside of Bombay, Mumbai. Would you mind spending just one night with the doctor, and then we'll put you in a hotel?" I said, "Oh, sure, that's fine." So we did, and had a wonderful time getting to know this great doctor.

That morning I got up before light and went jogging, as I often do. When I came back, the whole family was gathered on the steps: "Are you okay? Are you okay?" I said, "Yeah, I just went jogging." And they said, "Get in here right away, because foreigners are targeted." I said, "What are you talking about?" The night before was when the terrorists had attacked 10 different sites, including five or six hotels. There's a good chance that we would've been in one of those hotels.

We were in India for another week or so after that, and it was very much

like 9/11 here with 'round-the-clock news. But unlike 9/11, which happened and then was over, this went on for more than 60 hours, with gun battles and wrenching stories. It was a very sobering time.

We ended up meeting that night, not in the downtown area—that was impossible; it was all blocked off—but we had a spontaneous meeting at the church in the suburb where the doctor lived, much as had happened at my own church on 9/11. At our church, people just came spontaneously. People said "Where do we go?" Well, they came to church. Hundreds of us came and met together, and prayed together, and cried together.

That night in India, I spoke to them, and reflected on what it had been like for us as a country, when the whole world was holding its breath wondering about the future of the United States, what else was going to happen because of a lot of rumors swirling around. And I told them that when I had been on this hospital gurney, the doctor came in, and he would try different things with a pin or pinching me. He would ask, "Does this hurt?" "Yes!" "Does this hurt?" "Yes!" And every time I said "yes," he would say, "Oh, good," because I had a broken neck and some nerves could have been severed. What the doctor wanted to hear is "Yes, I feel

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that," because a healthy body is a body that feels the pain of the weakest part.

I told the Indian congregation, "All day long I've been getting e-mails from the United States. America feels your pain, believe me. American Christians know what you're going through. We have gone through something very similar." That's part of what the Body of Christ means; what affects you affects me.

Remember that great scene when God chose Paul, knocked him off his donkey, and said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "You? I haven't done anything to you. It's these scumbag Christians down here I've been persecuting." Then Paul heard, "What you do to them, you do to me. They are my Body."

That's the message of the church universal, the global church. Why do we care about AIDS orphans in Africa? Why do we care about the Christians in Darfur who are being persecuted? Why do we care about a pastor imprisoned in China? Because we want to be a healthy body, and a healthy body is a body that feels the pain of the weak.

Radix: That's a great analogy. You have a book called *Soul Survivors: How 13 Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church*, and you talk about all of these interesting people. You wrote the book about six years ago, and I'm wondering, if you wrote the book now, and it was about *How 14 Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church*, is there anybody you'd add?

Yancey: Yes. A number of people have asked me, "What about C. S. Lewis? Shouldn't he be in there?" Well, of course, he should be in there. But there are a lot of books about C. S. Lewis. You know, we don't really need more comments on C. S. Lewis. (Although I must admit, the book I just turned in will include a whole chapter about C. S. Lewis.)

There were other people I wanted

to highlight, but didn't have enough information. Dame Cicely Saunders was one who came to mind. She was a social worker who noticed as she worked with hospital patients that when the staff knew a patient was dying, they were treated differently. They'd get a little coded mark on their chart. At that point, doctors wouldn't even enter the room; they'd just stick their heads in, and say, "How are we today, Mrs. Smith?"

Hospitals don't know what to do with dying people; they want to make people well. So Cicely Saunders thought, "This is a terrible thing." In those days, in Britain and in a lot of the U.S., they wouldn't even tell you that you were dying. She thought, "This is wrong; this is the last moment of your life. Shouldn't you have a chance to prepare for it?" So she came up with a plan called "Care for the Dying" and submitted it to the hospital. They said, "Well, who are you? You're a social worker. You don't know anything about patients. We listen to doctors. You should become a doctor."

In her 40s, she went to medical school and became a doctor. Then she formed the very first modern hospice, St. Christopher's Hospice in London. And when I interviewed her 25 years ago, there were at least 2,000 hospices associated with her model. She had become a Christian at a Billy Graham rally, and truly believed that it was her calling, her mission in life, to get people ready to die. Isn't that a human right? She changed the way

we all understand death.

Radix: I had never heard about her before, and I'm glad to know about her work. What is your next book with the C. S. Lewis chapter?

Yancey: When we left Mumbai it was still scary, a scary time. There was shooting in the New Delhi airport the day we left. We were on a United flight, because they were still flying, although KLM, British Air, and others had canceled their flights.

When the plane took off, we just kind of breathed, "We made it, we survived, we got out of there," and I started thinking, "I've had some interesting scrapes here and there." I started making a list.

For example, I was called to Virginia Tech the week after that tragedy. People said, "You wrote a book, *Where is God When It Hurts?* and that's what people are asking here. Could you come and speak on that topic?" I was still in the neck brace, not long after my own accident. I said, "I don't know if I can get permission to fly, but I'll try," and so I did.

Another time a guy called me and said, "Could you come speak at a camp next month? We have a hundred prostitutes we want you to speak to." That got my attention: a hundred prostitutes. He said, "We're having a conference for ministries working with women in prostitution. These are actually ex-prostitutes, and they're coming from 40 countries. We want you to talk to them about grace." I said, "Well, I should probably talk to my wife about going to a conference with a hundred prostitutes." Finally, I agreed, "I will come and speak to them, if you give me an afternoon where I can interview them about their lives."

On the plane ride back from Mumbai I came up with a list of 10 scenarios in which I was invited to speak and there was a story going on behind the story. I've never seen a book quite like this. It's a book of 20 chapters, where the first chapter tells



the story-behind-the-story, and then the next chapter is about what I said to those people.

That's the book, which will be called *What Good Is God? In Search of a Faith That Matters*. In it, I describe an image I'd used in an earlier book, the tabletop test. In Silicon Valley, they actually have something called the "tabletop test."

You can have the greatest netbook computer ever made—the sleekest-looking, with the most memory, and fanciest, brightest screen, but the question is, will it pass the tabletop test? Because somebody's going to be giving a presentation in their boardroom, and say, "Whoops!" and then it falls on the ground and crashes. If it doesn't pass the tabletop test, if it doesn't still work, it's not going to make it. Because this is not a drawing-board world; it's the real world.

The places I describe in this book became the tabletop test of my faith. It's one thing for me to sit in my solarium in Colorado with a view of snow-capped mountains and write about how good the world is as elk saunter through the yard. But what about when you've lost your child? What about when somebody comes into your classroom and shoots 32 students? What about those situations?

As you know, Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris go around saying, "God is not good; the church is the source of most evil in the world," that kind of stuff. Some very capable people respond by taking on their arguments one by one and showing how they are flawed.

But I'm a journalist. I'm not a philosopher, I'm not a logician, so I want to go out and see, what difference does our faith make in the world? Does this Christian faith we read about, preach about, and come together to worship about—does it pass the tabletop test in the world?

Radix: It sounds like a great book. We'll look forward to it. ■

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