

A Conversation with Francis Chan
Author of *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God*

Q: Tell us about the title *Crazy Love*.

A: The idea of *Crazy Love* has to do with our relationship with God. All my life I've heard people say, "God loves you." It's probably the most insane statement you could make to say that the eternal creator of this universe is in love with me. There is a response that ought to take place in believers, a crazy reaction to that love. Do you really understand what God has done for you? If so, why is your response so lukewarm?

Q: The emergent movement calls for a change in the church. How is your message and approach different?

A: As a pastor I hear a lot of emergent leaders talk about what is wrong with the church. It comes across as someone who doesn't love the church. I'm a pastor first and foremost, and I'm trying to offer a solution or a model of what church should look like. I'm going back to scripture and seeing what the church was in its simplest form and trying to recreate that in my own church. I'm not coming up with anything new. I'm calling people to go back to the way it was. I'm not bashing the church. I'm loving it.

Q: You begin your new book by saying that something is wrong with the American church. Do you think American church members agree with you?

A: At first I thought it was just me. Then I stood before twenty thousand Christian college students and asked, "How many of you have read the New Testament and wondered if we in the Church are missing it?" When almost every hand went up, I felt comforted. At least I'm not crazy.

I think it's far too easy to blame the American church without acknowledging that we are each part of the church and therefore responsible. But I think we all feel deeply, even if we haven't voiced it, that the church in many ways is not doing well. I get nervous when I think of how we've missed who we are supposed to be, and sad when I think about how we're missing out on all that God wants for the people He loved enough to die for.

Q: Why do you think so many Christians blame the church for their failures?

A: We all need to justify our actions. The easiest thing to do when we're not living how God wants us to is to blame someone or something else. It's not unique to the church. You see it everywhere, people blaming their parents, a chemical imbalance, whatever, rather than looking to themselves and changing who they are through the Holy Spirit. The same thing happens in the church. All of us who have the Holy Spirit have the potential to live a "crazy love" type of life, but it's easier to not live it and blame someone for that.

Q: So how do you recommend that we begin to address the church's problems?

A: We need to stop giving people excuses not to believe in God. You've probably heard the expression "I believe in God, just not organized religion." I don't think people

would say that if the church truly lived like we are called to. The expression would change to "I can't deny what the church does, but I don't believe in their God." At least then they'd address their rejection of God rather than use the church as a scapegoat.

We must begin by looking at how the Bible calls us to live our lives. It is important that we not measure our spiritual health by the people around us, who are pretty much like us. To begin this journey, we must first address our inaccurate view of God and, consequently, of ourselves.

But before we look at what is wrong and address it, we need to understand something. The core problem isn't the fact that we're half-hearted Christians. The crux of it all is *why* we are this way, and it is because we have an *inaccurate view of God*. We see Him as a benevolent Being who is satisfied when people manage to fit Him into their lives in some small way. We forget that God never had an identity crisis. He knows that He's great and deserves to be the center of our lives.

Q: So the change begins with an understanding of who God is?

A: Yes, that is square one. The very fact that a holy, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, merciful, fair, and just God loves you and me should be nothing short of astonishing. The wildest part is that Jesus doesn't *have* to love us. His being is utterly complete and perfect, apart from humanity. He doesn't need me or you. Yet He wants us, chooses us, even considers us His inheritance (Ephesians 1:18). The greatest knowledge we can ever have is knowing we're treasured by God.

That really is astounding beyond description. The irony is that while God doesn't need us but still wants us, we desperately need God but don't really want Him most of the time. He treasures us and anticipates our departure from this earth to be with Him—and we wonder, indifferently, how much we have to do for Him to get by.

Our love for Him always comes out of His love for us. Do you love this God who is everything, or do you just love everything He gives you? Do you really know and believe that God loves you, individually and personally and intimately? If we truly grasp the implications of the "crazy love" our God has for us, we would live life differently.

Q: You talk about believing in God without having a clue what's He's like. As a Christian, how is that possible?

A: Because we're taught so little about God, most people just want to know what God can do for them rather than desiring to know Him. When we present the gospel, we try to answer one question: How do I keep from going to hell? After that question is answered, we stop asking questions about God. With the American church being so concerned about converts, we don't take the time to present the God-centered universe to people. We don't try to dig deep into the truth of God. We need to learn the attributes of God before we know what He is like.

Q: Your church focuses an unusual amount of its resources on giving: to the poor, to the needy, to the outcast. Is this one of your church's responses to God's "crazy love"?

A: Absolutely. If one hundred people represented the world's population, fifty-three of

those would live on less than \$2 a day. Do you realize that if you make \$4000 a month, you automatically make *one hundred times* the average person on this planet?

Which is more messed up—that we have so much compared to everyone else, or that we don't think we are rich? That on any given day we might flippantly call ourselves "broke" or "poor"? We are neither of those things. We are rich. Filthy rich.

God's definition of what matters is pretty straightforward. He measures our lives by how we love. In our culture, even if a pastor doesn't actually love people, he can still be considered successful as long as he is a gifted speaker, makes his congregation laugh, or prays for "all those poor, suffering people in the world" every Sunday.

But Paul writes that even if "I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2-3). Wow. Those are strong and unmistakable words. According to God, we are here to love. Not much else really matters.

Q: What is a "giving church?" How do you practice this in your own church? Why do you think it's important for the American Church to get to this point?

A: To me, this has been the greatest thing for our church. I've seen God come through so many times in my personal life when I'm giving. With the church, we weren't as giving as I was personally. I would always ask: God, are you really gonna come through for the church? I wanted to put the message of love your neighbor as yourself into action. It's been an experiment and a step of faith. Cornerstone Community Church has been giving away 55% of everything that comes in and things are healthier than ever.

We committed one million dollars to Children's Hunger Fund with payments of \$250,000 every three months. During the summer, our funds were lean. I was thinking, where are we going to come up with the money for Children's Hunger Fund? I didn't make a plea during the offering or mention our situation to the congregation. That Sunday, we had an offering of \$251,000. It was immediate affirmation that God is saying, "This is exactly what I want you to do." It lifts the faith of all of our people, and our church has seen the hand of God. That's why I think it's so great to be a giving church.

Q: There is urgency in your message. Where does this come from?

A: Gosh, I think two things. One I'm doing funerals just about every week. A lot of these funerals are people younger than I am, and so many of them are unexpected. Seeing the shock of their loved ones and realizing God can take your life at any time gives me a sense of urgency.

The other is my upbringing. My mom died giving birth to me; my stepmom died when I was nine; my dad died when I was twelve. I learned that there might not be a tomorrow. I always want this to be the greatest message I'll preach in case I'm not here to give another one.

I have a sense of urgency built into me from my upbringing and going to so many funerals and seeing friends pass away. I can't help but be urgent in my message.

Q: You talk about being a lukewarm Christian. You make a bold statement that "churchgoers who are 'lukewarm' are not Christians...We will not see them in heaven." How do you explain this? How does grace play into this statement?

A: I explain it through the passage of Revelation 3 and look at the passage objectively. God says that the lukewarm will be spit out of His mouth, and that is drastically different than God embracing you and welcoming you into heaven. The lukewarm still need to be saved. How can we say a lukewarm Christian is saved?

Salvation has nothing to do with my performance. If I'm truly saved than my actions are going to show. All through the New Testament a person's faith is shown through his actions. New Testament teachings are clear that someone who loves God and doesn't obey God is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

It's not popular to question someone's actions and salvation, and Scripture tells us to test ourselves and see if we're really in the faith. I believe 100% in grace, that I did nothing, and I'm completely saved by the cross. By the grace of God we believe and are saved. If someone has the Holy Spirit in them, there will be fruit and there will not be a lukewarm life.

Q: Talk about living "you best life...later."

A: It's all about heaven. Hebrews 11 is all about martyrs who never got to see or experience the fulfillment until afterward. Scripture talks about life after this one. We're supposed to be storing treasures in heaven. Why would we store up things on earth? It's an issue of faith. There are very few Christians who say they don't believe in heaven, but their actions show that they don't. If we really believe that if we sacrifice things on earth that we will have an eternity of rewards, it's the only thing that makes sense.

Q: In one chapter you state, "dare to imagine what it would mean for you to take the words of Jesus seriously." What does this mean? Why do you think so many Christians would turn down this dare?

A: We've conditioned ourselves to hear messages without responding. Sermons have become Christian entertainment. We go to church to hear a well-developed sermon and a convicting thought. We've trained ourselves to believe that if we were convicted, our job is done. If you're just hearing the Word and not actually doing something with it, you're deceiving yourself.

I remember preaching on Luke 6 and I brought up the passage that says: "do good to those who hate you." I told the congregation to think of someone that hated them, and I asked: Are you willing to go do something good for them? Will you do that? Yes or no? I said, tell God right now, "No I will not do that." We're not willing to make that statement because we don't want to say that to God, but we're doing that everyday.

We don't think it through because we've developed a habit of listening to the Word of God and not obeying it. If we take Scripture literally and if we actually apply it, we won't have what our flesh desires, so we walk away sad or we run to the church where no one else is doing it, but they seem okay with that.

Q: What do you tell people who say that you are taking the Bible too literally?

A: If someone told me that I took the Bible too literally, I would really get them to question their own heart. I would ask them if they really believed that we're not supposed to take it that literally, or if it's the influence of other believers who say we're not supposed to. I like to get people to think for themselves and not just go with the flow. When believers are alone with the Word, they come to the same conclusion that I do. *Crazy Love* appeals to thoughts that all Christians have had when they're alone with God, and they realize that they are supposed to take Scripture literally. These are the things they should do.

Q: How does the American dream play into a lukewarm faith?

A: It's interesting when we talk about the American dream. In Luke 12, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool. There's this guy who is rich and has an abundance of crops. He builds bigger barns so that he can store it up. He says, "I have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry." Basically, he'll retire and enjoy himself, the American dream. God says, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you."

We shouldn't worry about our lives, what we'll eat, buy, or wear. God says the American dream is absolute foolishness. It's exactly what Christians are doing and defending. God could take your life at any time. Don't conform to the patterns of this world.

Q: Do you think God calls you to live a radical, crazy life?

A: It's not that this lifestyle should be crazy to us. It should be the only thing that makes sense. Giving up everything and sacrificing everything we can for the afterlife is logical. Crazy is living a safe life and storing up things while trying to enjoy our time on earth, knowing that any millisecond God could take your life. To me that is crazy, and that is radical. The crazy ones are the ones that live life like there is no God. To me that is insanity.

Q: So how does one begin to love God more? To love him radically?

The fact is, I need God to help me love God. And if I need His help to love Him, a perfect being, I definitely need His help to love other, fault-filled humans. Something mysterious, even supernatural must happen in order for genuine love for God to grow in our hearts. The Holy Spirit has to move in our lives.

It is a remarkable cycle: Our prayers for more love result in love, which naturally causes us to pray more, which results in more love...