

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANCIS CHAN

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, how can your response possibly be lukewarm?

Q: Many today are dissatisfied with Christianity as they have experienced it in the past. Some want to hold on to some form of

spirituality but don't want anything to do with the church. How is your critique different?

A: Over the years, I've heard a lot of talk about what is wrong with the church. The church has issues, and what I wrote in *Crazy Love* calls us as the church to change many of the bad habits we have developed over the years. But I don't ever want to come across as a person who does not love the church. I don't want to do away with the church; my goal is to look back to the church in the New Testament and ask how we can renew and purify our churches so they look more like God's intention for His church. I'm not trying to reinvent the church or the Christian life. I'm not saying anything new. I just want to see the church get back to where God wants it to be. My purpose in writing these things is not to bash the church, but to lovingly serve the church.

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

A: We all try to justify our actions. The easiest thing to do when we're not living the way 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, their education, the government, their medical problems, whatever, rather than looking to themselves and pursuing change 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: You talk about people in the church not having a clue of what God is like. How is this 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. Our belief in God needs to involve an accurate understanding of who He is and the implications of that for our lives.

Q: Talk about the church and giving. Why do you think it's important for the American church to focus on giving?

A: I have seen God come through so many times in my personal life when I'm giving. I would give beyond what made sense to give, and God would just continue to bless. But as a pastor, I began to see that our church finances weren't characterized by the same focus on giving. It was like we didn't trust God to come through for the church if we were overly generous with the money He gave us. So we decided to apply Jesus's command to love your neighbor as yourself to the church's finances and began to give away 55 percent of the money that came in. This was a huge step of faith for our church, but I truly believe that this made our church healthier than it had ever been.

We also made a commitment to give Children's Hunger Fund \$250,000 every three months. Over the summer, things got pretty lean financially, and I had no idea where that money was going to

come from. As our last Sunday approached, I decided not to make a plea for people to give or even to mention that we had to raise the money in order to keep our commitment. That Sunday, we had an offering of \$251,000. It was an immediate affirmation of God telling us, "This is exactly what I want you to do." It changes the mentality of a church to see God come through in impossible situations. A giving church is going to see His provision more than a stingy church.

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

A: For one thing, I've done a lot of funerals. For years I was doing at least one funeral just about every week. Many of these are for people younger than I am, and many of them are unexpected. Seeing the shock of their loved ones and realizing that God can take a person's life at any time gives me a sense of urgency.

My childhood also played into my urgency. My mom died giving birth to me, my stepmom died when I was nine, my dad died when I was twelve. I learned from an early age that tomorrow may never come. Every time I preach I want to make it the best message I've ever given in case I'm not here to give another one.

If you think about it, this type of urgency comes from the message itself. We don't need an excuse for urgency. Healing and redemption are available because of God's insane love and self-sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus sends us into the world to beg people to heed that message (2 Cor. 5:20). If that doesn't make us passionate, what will?

Q: 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’m just trying to look at Revelation 3 objectively. God says that the lukewarm will be spit out of His mouth, which is drastically different from God embracing you and welcoming you into heaven. The lukewarm still need to be saved. Does it make any sense to say that a person whom God will spit out of His mouth like so much tepid water is going to be saved?

We have to be clear that salvation is not based on performance. But when we are saved we are given the Holy Spirit, and the fruits of His saving works in our lives are going to show up in the way we live. 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 percent in grace. I believe that I did nothing; that I’m completely saved because of what Jesus did through the cross. By the grace of God we believe and are saved. But the Spirit does not lead people to live lukewarm lives.

Q: Talk about living “your best life later.”

A: It’s all about eternity. Hebrews 11 is all about martyrs who never got to see or experience the fulfillment of the promises. Scripture tells us that life does not end at death. We’re supposed to be storing treasures in heaven. Why would we store up things on earth? It’s an issue of faith.

We say we believe in an eternal reward, but our actions show that we don't. If our hope is in God and an eternity spent with Him, then our best life comes later, and we live now in the faithful expectation of the fulfillment of that promise. It's that simple.

Q: In one chapter you state, "Dare to imagine what it would mean for you to take the words of Jesus seriously." Give an honest answer: Do you think many Christians will take you up on this?

A: Unfortunately, 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're 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 who 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 every day. Passive disobedience is not as different from active disobedience as we sometimes think.

I'm sure that many people will read over those words and not respond because we've developed a habit of listening to the Word of God and not obeying it. But I also know that there are people out there who are convicted by the Spirit and want nothing more than to please God in everything.

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 just ask them to examine their heart in asking that. I would ask them if they really believed that we're not supposed to take it that literally, or if they're just following the influence of other people who say we're not supposed to. I like to get people to think for themselves and not just go with the flow. I really believe that *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. The other Christians in our lives should be pushing us to take the Bible more seriously, but unfortunately, they are often the very people who are encouraging us to relax and take it with a grain of salt.

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

A: In Luke 12, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool. This guy is successful 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” (v. 19). Basically, he'll retire and enjoy himself: the American dream. God says, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you” (v. 20).

We shouldn't worry about our lives, what we'll eat, buy, or wear. God says the American dream is absolute foolishness. Yet this bankrupt dream is being passionately pursued and defended by so many Christians! God could take your life at any time. Don't conform to the patterns of this world.

Q: Are you really advocating that we all live like religious fanatics?

A: The kind of life that I've described in *Crazy Love* shouldn't seem 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 your time on earth, knowing that any millisecond God could take your life. To me, that is crazy. The crazy ones are the ones who live life like there is no God. To me that is insanity.