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Crazy Love: Overwhelmed By A Relentless God



Synopsis

Revised & Updated Edition! God is love. Crazy, relentless, all-powerful love. Have you ever wondered if we're missing it? It's crazy, if you think about it. The God of the universe "the Creator of nitrogen and pine needles, galaxies and E-minor" loves us with a radical, unconditional, self-sacrificing love. And what is our typical response? We go to church, sing songs, and try not to cuss. Whether you've verbalized it yet or not, we all know something's wrong. Does something deep inside your heart long to break free from the status quo? Are you hungry for an authentic faith that addresses the problems of our world with tangible, even radical, solutions? God is calling you to a passionate love relationship with Himself. Because the answer to religious complacency isn't working harder at a list of do's and don'ts "it's falling in love with God. And once you encounter His love, as Francis describes it, you will never be the same. Because when you're wildly in love with someone, it changes everything. Learn more about Crazy Love at www.crazylovebook.com.

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Customer Reviews

I'm a Christian in ministry who thought I was doing okay, until I read David Platt's Follow Me, and this particular one. God spoke and convicted me in a new way that stirred me up to live a more genuine Christ-following, self-dying life. How rewarding it's been to my spiritual life, in that God's renewed my love for Him, and He's opened up my eyes to a lot of major things I was ignorant about. I'd like to respond to those thinking that this book confuses people about being unconditionally loved by God, and WORKS. I don't think Francis is putting a lot of weight on works at all. If anything, he's challenging Christians to bear real fruit of being true disciples of Christ. It

seems very harsh and condemning, but it's the truth. FACT: truly following Christ is HARD, we gotta deal with it. God doesn't leave us there though! In our weakness He's made strong. Everything in our lives will point back to His glory, His strength, His life. If we LET HIM. Those who feel condemned, please don't. Conviction should drive you to your knees and you should ask God to reveal to you what you need to let go so you can follow HIM more earnestly. Honestly, these days, I would rather read harsh words coming from pastors, instead of grace being talked about so cheaply like it's a free-for-all, no cost, no obligation, no-strings-attached kind of thing. JESUS CHRIST paid a great price, let us remember that. If I'm not experiencing being changed from glory to glory by the Almighty God, and I still struggle with the same sin and complacency year in and year out, am I really a Christian? At the end, people may say this and that, God still used this book to awaken me from my complacency, and I thank God for Pastor Chan and his heart.

Great book. A lot of simple ideas... but truly impactful. I think the best part of the book was in Chapter 8. Francis Chan writes, "True faith is loving a person after he has hurt you. True love makes you stand out...who are the people you avoid or who avoid you? Who are the people who have hurt you or hurt your friends or hurt your kids? Are you willing to do good to those people? To reach out to them?" Later, he describes the needs around the world and says, "I believe that God wants His people, His church, to meet these needs." And "people who are obsessed with God have an intimate relationship with Him. They are nourished by God's Word throughout the day because they know that 40 minutes on Sunday is not enough to sustain them for a whole week, especially when they will encounter so many distractions and alternative messages." And finally, "how will you answer the King when He says, 'what did you do with what I gave you?'" Good questions we should try to answer!

Have Christians in America "missed it"? In other words, have we in the land of the free not fully grasped, appreciated, and embraced what it truly means to be followers of Jesus Christ? Francis Chan answers that question with an emphatic "yes" in his bestselling book, *Crazy Love*. It has caused quite a stir since its release in 2008. Better late than never, I decided to get a copy and read it for myself. Chan's critique boils down to this: "The goals of American Christianity are often a nice marriage, kids who don't swear, and good church attendance." In other words, not much else besides that. In the first two chapters, Chan talks about the greatness of God, and how He is far bigger, more holy, more loving, and more merciful than we realize. He then reminds us how short our lives are when compared to eternity, and hence how little time we have to do good works for

God's kingdom. Following are the next two chapters, where he profiles the lukewarm—those who say they are Christians, but the way they live runs counter to their confession of faith. Chan then describes what true love for God looks like—namely in acts of service towards others, especially those who are less fortunate. In chapter nine, the author profiles several people who are his ideal—that is to say, they have lived in such a way to demonstrate their radical love for Jesus. And in the final chapter, Chan issues a final challenge to his readers to truly live for Christ.

On the One Hand... Chan is right that in far too many instances, the lives of churchgoers are little different from their non-churchgoing neighbors, and that there is too little emphasis upon service and humility. He is also right that there is too little contemplation about the greatness of God. The author also has valid criticisms of American churchgoers, whom he says "feel secure because they attend church, made a profession of faith at age 12, were baptized, come from a Christian family, vote Republican, or live in America." Chan is also very careful about his motives. He wants it to be clear that he is not attempting to bash Christians. Rather, it is because he loves Christ and His bride, the Church, that he writes what he does. While Chan does make sweeping statements (more on this later), he tries to note that not everyone is called to the pastorate or mission field. But most importantly, he tries to stress that Christians should be doing more with a right motive: it should not be done out of fear, but out of a deep and heartfelt love for God.

On the Other Hand... Crazy Love is not without its problems. I will limit my criticisms to four points:

1. Chan often does not properly contextualize the Scriptures he quotes. For instance, he quotes Luke 14:12-14 at least twice: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." The clear impression given is that this was a stand-alone command given to all Christians. But the context tells a different story: this is in the midst of a passage where Jesus was invited to dine with the pharisees—and the passage is clear that they had sinful motives which contributed to our Lord's strong statement. Additionally, Luke 14:12 begins with, "And He said to the man who invited Him..." In other words, this is a word of admonishment to an individual; since Christ is God, He knows the hearts of men, and so He knew that the host's motives were not pure. Hence Christ rebuked him, and hence this is not a universal command to all believers. Of course, this is not to say that this passage has no bearing on our lives; it is in the Bible, and so it certainly has much to teach us about proper motives for giving and generosity. But as with any passage of Scripture, it is critical to teach what it is saying without divorcing it from its original context.

Chan also makes the very common mistake of using Christ's confrontation with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:21-25) as a

proof-text for professing Christians who don't serve others. In using this text, Chan commits a very common mistake: he assumes it's teaching something that it's not-i.e., that a rich man selling all that he has and giving it to the poor is in some sense a prerequisite to eternal life; rather, Jesus is confronting this man who had just said that he had kept all of God's commands from his youth. When he walked away from Jesus' challenge to give away all he had to the poor, he showed demonstrably that he could not even keep the First Commandment. As the saying goes, a text without a context is a pretext. In other words, if you wrench a verse out of its original setting, as Chan does quite often, you can make the text say whatever you want it to. In quoting these and other verses out of context, the author places unnecessary guilt on the backs of his readers.² In his chapter on "Profile of the Lukewarm," Chan makes some troubling, contradictory, and/or sweeping statements, and he uses some questionable teaching methods. For starters, he quotes Revelation 3:15-18 to prove Christ is speaking only about unbelievers: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see." Chan is emphatic that Christ is speaking exclusively to unbelievers; and given the above description, he may be correct that there were many in the Laodicean Church. However, he neglects to mention the very next verse, 19: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." In omitting this verse, Chan ignores a very crucial piece of evidence that Christ is also speaking to believers. This is so because verse 19 is consistent with Hebrews 12 and Proverbs 3, both of which speak of God's loving discipline towards His children (i.e., true believers). So then, perhaps this verse is speaking not just to unbelievers, but also to believers who have gotten stagnant. This would make sense, as we are going to find both in any local church. But Chan will not acknowledge this. Instead, he offers the following explanation for why he comes to such an abrupt conclusion: "In an earlier draft of this chapter, I quoted several commentators who agreed with my point of view. But we all know that you can find quotes to support any view you want to take. You can even tweak word studies in your effort. I'm not against scholarship, but I do believe there are times when we can come to more accurate conclusions through simple reading." Setting aside his shallow caricature of scholarship, why does his "simple reading" of Revelation 3:15-18 not include verse 19? To be clear, Chan may well be right about the state of Christ's audience. But as a pastor, Chan is required to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), and patiently walk his reader

through the passage, which he does not do. He continues: "Rather than examining a verse and dissecting it, I chose to peruse one Gospel in each sitting...I attempted to do so from the perspective of a twelve-year-old who knew nothing about Jesus. I wanted to discover what reasonable conclusions a person would come to while objectively reading the Gospels for the first time." Granted, there is something to be said for the simple reading of the Bible. But a book targeted at a popular audience is not the place to do it. It's obvious why: the author has no way of knowing how much, or if any, theological training his readers have had. Therefore, he should examine and dissect verses since he is purporting to teach what the Bible says on a vitally important topic. Chan also makes sweeping statements about those whom he considers to be lukewarm. There are many examples that I could point to from *Crazy Love*, but I will limit it to two. In one place, he states, "Lukewarm people will serve God and others, but there are limits to how far they will go or how much time, money, and energy they are willing to give." Granted, this may be an accurate description of some churchgoers. However, it does not take into account that some people have busy schedules; perhaps some parents have to work two jobs to make ends meet, have small children to tend to, or have to care for a sick relative or a special-needs child, and so are only capable of committing so much time, money, and energy. In another place, Chan declares, "Lukewarm people do not live by faith; their lives are structured so they do not have to. They don't have to trust God if something unexpected happens—they have their savings account. They don't need God to help them—they have their retirement account in place...They don't depend on God on a daily basis—their refrigerators are full and, for the most part, they are in good health." If this statement isn't legalism, it comes perilously close to it. Why is it his business if people have a saving or retirement account, or even a full refrigerator? While we should heed Luke 12:16-21 (Chan's proof-text), we should also heed 1 Timothy 5:8, which says that one who does not provide for his own "has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." In other words, while Chan is correct that Christians should be more giving of their time and resources, that does not mean that they shouldn't save ahead for their future. Having a savings or retirement account does not mean lack of trust in God—to the contrary, it is part of caring for one's family, and easing the burden on one's children when one gets older. Simply stated, giving to the poor and saving for the future need not be an either/or situation for the Christian, as Chan seems to be saying; rather, it should be both/and.³

While the author does cite some notable heroes of the faith for Christians to emulate, I was troubled by some of the people Chan chose to spotlight. For example, he writes approvingly of a man at his church who "donated his house to the church and moved in with his parents. He told me that he will have a better house in heaven, and that it doesn't really matter where he lives during this

lifetime."One wonders how that man's parents feel about this. Additionally, Chan highlights Shane Claiborne, a vocal leader of the Emergent Church--a movement with serious theological issues. Again, Chan does cite some worthy examples for believers to consider as heroes. But citing Claiborne as an example of Christlikeness without examining his teachings shows an appalling lack of discernment.⁴ There is not much Scriptural balance to the picture that Chan paints of the ideal Christian life. While he quotes verses about serving the less fortunate, nowhere is any mention made of 1 Timothy 5:16-25, which qualifies diaconal assistance--and even says that it should be denied in some cases. Neither is there any mention of Galatians 6:10, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." While this verse does not teach that Christians shouldn't help unbelievers, it does say that there should in some sense be a priority toward our fellow Christians. Lastly, there is no mention of verses like 1 Thessalonians 4:11, which tell us to "aspire to live quietly, work with your own hands, and tend to your own affairs" (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). In short, the call here is to live modest and unpretentious lives, work with excellence at our chosen vocations, and tend diligently to our own affairs. Further, it reminds us that rather than doing "something big" for God, Christian growth more typically takes place while doing the same mundane things over and over again: going to church to partake of the means that God has provided for growth, disciplining children--often on the same issue many times over, and working at your job to provide for your family. These verses provide helpful correctives to Chan's thesis of the "radical" Christian life. It is a pity that he does not mention them, and so not present a more balanced picture of the Christian life. In closing, American Christianity does need to be awoken from its slumber. I had heard that Crazy Love might be the book to do that. But while it had its moments--some of which were useful, convicting, and humbling--I have a hard time recommending it for the reasons cited above. Note: This is adapted from my blog, hoadleysnotes.wordpress.com.

I recommend this book to everyone. Really stirs you to seek after God and to reconsider your relationship with Him. Making Jesus number one in our life and glorifying Him is our priority no matter what we do. This book really hits that home.

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