

Crazy Love

OVERWHELMED
BY A RELENTLESS
GOD

FRANCIS CHAN
with danae yankoski

CRAZY LOVE

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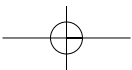
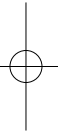
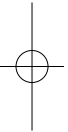
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FOREWORD

It is with great excitement and honor that I get the opportunity to introduce you to my friend Francis Chan. Francis is one of those rare people you come across in life who leaves you wanting to be better. You know, a better friend, a better neighbor, a better athlete (well maybe not athlete ... I can take Francis in most things involving competition). But most important, Francis leaves you wanting more of Jesus. If you are around Francis for more than thirty minutes, you soon realize that he is a man with great vision and resolve for the mission of Jesus. Some might say that Francis is a bit of an idealist in thinking that one life can really make a dent in the world. But I would say that Francis is the ultimate realist. Meaning, someone who believes that God is really who He says He is and that the true reality of this life is to follow Him wholeheartedly.

The book you have in your hand, *Crazy Love*, may just be the most challenging book outside of God's Word you will read this year. (And for a few years to come for that matter.) The status quo and norms of

the so-called “Christian” life that so many of us are used to experiencing are in for a shock! Isn’t it interesting that in Acts 11, at the end of verse 26, it says, “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” What I find interesting is the simple thought that the Christians didn’t name themselves. But rather, they were *called* (or named) “Christians” by those watching their lives. I wonder if it would be the same today. Could someone look at your life or look at my life and name me a Christian? A humbling question for sure.

Crazy Love is the perfect title for this book. When Jesus was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” he responded with “Love.”

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:37–40)

As Francis so brilliantly illustrates, the life that Jesus calls us to is absolute craziness to the world. Sure, it’s fine and politically correct to *believe* in God, but to really *love* Him is a whole different story. Yeah, it’s nice and generous to give to the needy at Christmas or after some disaster, but to sacrifice your own comfort and welfare for another may look like madness to a safe and undisturbed world.

I am challenged to the core by the pages you’re about to read. I am excited that you are diving into this much-needed book. I encourage you to face up to the convictions of *Crazy Love*. I know your heart and spirit will be stirred again for your First Love.

—Chris Tomlin,
songwriter and worship leader of Passion Conferences

PREFACE

*To just read the Bible, attend church, and avoid “big” sins—
is this passionate, wholehearted love for God?
—François Fénelon, *The Seeking Heart**

We all know something’s wrong.

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.

In this book I am going to ask some hard questions. They will resonate with what a lot of us feel but are generally afraid to articulate and explore. Don’t worry—this isn’t another book written to bash churches. 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.

I haven't always felt this way. I grew up believing in God without having a clue what He is like. I called myself a Christian, was pretty involved in church, and tried to stay away from all of the things that "good Christians" avoid—drinking, drugs, sex, swearing. Christianity was simple: fight your desires in order to please God. Whenever I failed (which was often), I'd walk around feeling guilty and distant from God.

In hindsight, I don't think my church's teachings were incorrect, just incomplete. My view of God was narrow and small.

Now I am a husband, a father of four, and the pastor of a church in Southern California. Until just a few years ago I was quite happy with how God was working in me and in the church. Then God began changing my heart. This took place largely during the times I spent reading His Word. The conviction I felt through the teachings of Scripture, coupled with several experiences in third-world countries, changed everything. Some serious paradigm shattering happened in my life, and consequently in our church.

The result is that I've never felt more alive, and neither has Cornerstone Church. It's exhilarating to be part of a group of believers who are willing to think biblically rather than conventionally, to be part of a body where radical living is becoming the norm.



This book is written for those who want more Jesus. It is for those who are bored with what American Christianity offers. It is for those who don't want to plateau, those who would rather die before their convictions do.

I hope reading this book will convince you of something: that by surrendering yourself totally to God's purposes, He will bring you the most pleasure in this life and the next. I hope it affirms your desire for "more God"—even if you are surrounded by people who feel they have "enough God." I hope it inspires confidence if you have questioned and doubted the commitment of the American church. I want to affirm your questioning, even while assuring you there is hope.

God put me in Simi Valley, California, to lead a church of comfortable people into lives of risk and adventure. I believe He wants us to love others so much that we go to extremes to help them. I believe He wants us to be known for giving—of our time, our money, and our abilities—and to start a movement of "giving" churches. In so doing, we can alleviate the suffering in the world and change the reputation of His bride in America. Some people, even some at my church, have told me flat-out, "You're crazy." But I can't imagine devoting my life to a greater vision.

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 live. 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.

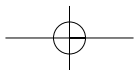
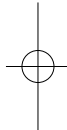
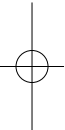
We are going to look at how the Bible calls us to live our lives. It is important that we not measure our spiritual health by the people around us, who are pretty much like us. To begin this journey, we’ll first address our inaccurate view of God and, consequently, of ourselves.

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 lukewarm, halfhearted, or stagnant 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. Jesus came humbly as a servant, but He never begs us to give Him some small part of ourselves. He commands everything from His followers.

The first three chapters are absolutely foundational to this book. Though parts of it may not be “new” material to you, allow these sacred truths to move you to worship. I pray that your reading of the next few pages will be interrupted by spontaneous and meaningful praise to God. Allow these words to communicate old truths to your heart in a fresh way.

After the foundation has been laid in the first three chapters, the last seven chapters call us to examine ourselves. We will address life in light of the crux of who God is. We’ll discover what is wrong in our churches and, ultimately, in ourselves.

Come with me on this journey. I don't promise it will be painless. Change, as we all know, is uncomfortable. It's up to you to respond to what you read. But you will have a choice: to adjust how you live daily or to stay the same.





CHAPTER ONE

stop praying

What if I said, “Stop praying”? What if I told you to stop talking *at* God for a while, but instead to take a long, hard look at Him before you speak another word? Solomon warned us not to rush into God’s presence with words. That’s what fools do. And often, that’s what we do.

We are a culture that relies on technology over community, a society in which spoken and written words are cheap, easy to come by, and excessive. Our culture says anything goes; fear of God is almost unheard of. We are slow to listen, quick to speak, and quick to become angry.

The wise man comes to God without saying a word and stands in awe of Him. It may seem a hopeless endeavor, to gaze at the invisible God. But Romans 1:20 tells us that through creation, we see His “invisible qualities” and “divine nature.”

Let's begin this book by gazing at God in silence. What I want you to do right now is to go online and look at the "Awe Factor" video at www.crazylovebook.com to get a taste of the awe factor of our God. Seriously—go do it.

Speechless? Amazed? Humbled?

When I first saw those images, I *had* to worship. I didn't want to speak to or share it with anyone. I just wanted to sit quietly and admire the Creator.

It's wild to think that most of these galaxies have been discovered only in the past few years, thanks to the Hubble telescope. They've been in the universe for thousands of years without humans even knowing about them.

Why would God create more than 350,000,000,000 galaxies (and this is a conservative estimate) that generations of people never saw or even knew existed? Do you think maybe it was to make us say, "Wow, God is unfathomably big"? Or perhaps God wanted us to see these pictures so that our response would be, "Who do I think I am?"

R. C. Sproul writes, "Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance, until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God."¹



Switch gears with me for a minute and think about the detailed intricacy of the other side of creation.

Did you know that a caterpillar has 228 separate and distinct muscles in its head? That's quite a few, for a bug. The average elm tree has approximately *6 million* leaves on it. And your own heart generates enough pressure as it pumps blood throughout your body that it could squirt blood up to 30 feet. (I've never tried this, and I don't recommend it.)

Have you ever thought about how diverse and creative God is? He didn't have to make hundreds of different kinds of bananas, but He did. He didn't have to put 3,000 different species of trees within one square mile in the Amazon jungle, but He did. God didn't have to create so many kinds of laughter. Think about the different sounds of your friends' laughs—wheezes, snorts, silent, loud, obnoxious.

How about the way plants defy gravity by drawing water upward from the ground into their stems and veins? Or did you know that spiders produce three kinds of silk? When they build their webs, they create sixty feet of silk in one hour, simultaneously producing special oil on their feet that prevents them from sticking to their own web. (Most of us hate spiders, but sixty feet an hour deserves some respect!) Coral plants are so sensitive that they can die if the water temperature varies by even one or two degrees.

Did you know that when you get goose bumps, the hair in your follicles is actually helping you stay warmer by trapping body heat? Or what about the simple fact that plants take in carbon dioxide (which is harmful to us) and produce oxygen (which we need to survive)? I'm sure you knew that, but have you ever marveled at it? And these same poison-swallowing, life-giving plants came from tiny seeds that were

placed in the dirt. Some were watered, some weren't; but after a few days they poked through the soil and out into the warm sunlight.

Whatever God's reasons for such diversity, creativity, and sophistication in the universe, on earth, and in our own bodies, the point of it all is His glory. God's art speaks of Himself, reflecting who He is and what He is like.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

—Psalm 19:1–4

This is why we are called to worship Him. His art, His handiwork, and His creation all echo the truth that He is glorious. There is no other like Him. He is the King of Kings, the Beginning and the End, the One who was and is and is to come. I know you've heard this before, but I don't want you to miss it.

I sometimes struggle with how to properly respond to God's magnitude in a world bent on ignoring or merely tolerating Him. But know this: God will not be tolerated. He instructs us to worship and fear Him.

Go back and reread the last two paragraphs. Go to the Web site www.crazylovebook.com and watch the "Just Stop and Think" fifteen-minute video. Close this book if you need to, and meditate on the almighty One who dwells in unapproachable light, the glorious One.



There is an epidemic of spiritual amnesia going around, and none of us is immune. No matter how many fascinating details we learn about God's creation, no matter how many pictures we see of His galaxies, and no matter how many sunsets we watch, we still forget.

Most of us know that we are supposed to love and fear God; that we are supposed to read our Bibles and pray so that we can get to know Him better; that we are supposed to worship Him with our lives. But actually living it out is challenging.

It confuses us when loving God is hard. Shouldn't it be easy to love a God so wonderful? When we love God because we feel we *should* love Him, instead of genuinely loving out of our true selves, we have forgotten who God really is. Our amnesia is flaring up again.

It may sound "un-Christian" to say that on some mornings I don't feel like loving God, or I just forget to. But I do. In our world, where hundreds of things distract us from God, we have to intentionally and consistently remind ourselves of Him.

I recently attended my high school reunion. People kept coming up to me and saying, "She's *your* wife?" They were amazed, I guess, that a woman so beautiful would marry someone like me. It happened enough times that I took a good look at a photograph of the two of us. I, too, was taken aback. It *is* astonishing that my wife chooses to be with me—and not just because she is beautiful. I was reminded of the fullness of what I have been given in my wife.

We need the same sort of reminders about God's goodness. We are programmed to focus on what we don't have, bombarded multiple times throughout the day with what we need to buy that will make us feel happier or sexier or more at peace. This dissatisfaction transfers over to our thinking about God. We forget that we already have everything we need in Him. Because we don't often think about the reality of who God is, we quickly forget that He is worthy to be worshipped and loved. We are to fear Him.

A. W. Tozer writes,

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.²

If the "gravest question" before us really is what God Himself is like, how do we learn to know Him?

We have seen how He is the Creator of both the magnitude of the galaxies and the complexity of caterpillars. But what is He like? What are His characteristics? What are His defining attributes? How are we to fear Him? To speak to Him? Don't check out here. We need to be reminded of this stuff. It is both basic and crucial.

God is holy. A lot of people say that whatever you believe about

God is fine, so long as you are sincere. But that is comparable to describing your friend in one instance as a three-hundred-pound sumo wrestler and in another as a five-foot-two, ninety-pound gymnast. No matter how sincere you are in your explanations, both descriptions of your friend simply cannot be true.

The preposterous part about our doing this to God is that He already has a name, an identity. We don't get to decide who God is. "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am' (Ex. 3:14). We don't change that.

To say that God is holy is to say that He is set apart, distinct from us. And because of His set apart-ness, there is no way we can ever fathom all of who He is. To the Jews, saying something three times demonstrated its perfection, so to call God "Holy, Holy, Holy" is to say that He is perfectly set apart, with nothing and no one to compare Him to. *That* is what it means to be "holy."

Many Spirit-filled authors have exhausted the thesaurus in order to describe God with the glory He deserves. His perfect holiness, by definition, assures us that our words can't contain Him. Isn't it a comfort to worship a God we cannot exaggerate?

God is eternal. Most of us would probably agree with that statement. But have you ever seriously meditated on what it means? Each of us had a beginning; everything in existence began on a particular day, at a specific time.

Everything, that is, but God. He always has been, since before there was an earth, a universe, or even angels. God exists outside of time, and since we are within time, there is no way we will ever totally grasp that concept.

Not being able to fully understand God is frustrating, but it is ridiculous for us to think we have the right to limit God to something we are

capable of comprehending. What a stunted, insignificant god *that* would be! If my mind is the size of a soda can and God is the size of all the oceans, it would be stupid for me to say He is only the small amount of water I can scoop into my little can. God is so much bigger, so far beyond our time-encased, air/food/sleep-dependent lives.

Please stop here, even if just for a moment, and glorify the eternal God: “But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations.... But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Ps. 102:12, 27).

God is all-knowing. Isn't this an intimidating thought?

Each of us, to some degree, fools our friends and family about who we really are. But it's impossible to do that with God. He knows each of us, deeply and specifically. He knows our thoughts before we think them, our actions before we commit them, whether we are lying down or sitting or walking around. He knows who we are and what we are about. We cannot escape Him, not even if we want to. When I grow weary of trying to be faithful to Him and want a break, it doesn't come as a surprise to God.

For David, God's knowledge led him to worship. He viewed it as wonderful and meaningful. He wrote in Psalm 139 that even in the darkness he couldn't hide from God; that while he was in his mother's womb, God was there.

Hebrews 4:13 says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” It is sobering to realize that this is the same God who is holy and eternal, the Maker of the billions of galaxies and thousands of tree species in the rainforest. This is the God who takes the time to know all the little details about each of us. He does not have to know us so well, but He chooses to.

God is all-powerful. Colossians 1:16 tells us that everything was created *for* God: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

Don't we live instead as though God is created for *us*, to do *our* bidding, to bless *us*, and to take care of *our* loved ones?

Psalms 115:3 reveals, “Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.” Yet we keep on questioning Him: “Why did You make me with this body, instead of that one?” “Why are so many people dying of starvation?” “Why are there so many planets with nothing living on them?” “Why is my family so messed up?” “Why don't You make Yourself more obvious to the people who need You?”

The answer to each of these questions is simply this: because He's God. He has more of a right to ask us why so many people are starving. As much as we want God to explain himself to us, His creation, we are in no place to demand that He give an account to us.

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?”

—Daniel 4:35

Can you worship a God who isn't obligated to explain His actions to you? Could it be your arrogance that makes you think God owes you an explanation?

Do you really believe that compared to God, “all the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing,” including you?

God is fair and just. One definition of justice is “reward and/or penalty as deserved.” If what we truly deserved were up to us, we would end up with as many different answers as people who responded. But it isn’t up to us, mostly because none of us are good.

God is the only Being who is good, and the standards are set by Him. Because God hates sin, He has to punish those guilty of sin. Maybe that’s not an appealing standard. But to put it bluntly, when you get your own universe, you can make your own standards. When we disagree, let’s not assume it’s His reasoning that needs correction.

It takes a lot for us to comprehend God’s total hatred for sin. We make excuses like, “Yes, I am prideful at times, but everyone struggles with pride.” However, God says in Proverbs 8:13, “I *hate* pride and arrogance.” You and I are not allowed to tell Him how much He can hate it. He can hate and punish it as severely as His justice demands.

God never excuses sin. And He is always consistent with that ethic. Whenever we start to question whether God really hates sin, we have only to think of the cross, where His Son was tortured, mocked, and beaten because of sin. *Our* sin.

No question about it: God hates and must punish sin. And He is totally just and fair in doing so.

Before the Throne

So far we have talked about things we can see with our own eyes, things we know about creation, and some of the attributes of God as revealed

in the Bible. But many facets of God expand beyond our comprehension. He cannot be contained in this world, explained by our vocabulary, or grasped by our understanding.

Yet in Revelation 4 and Isaiah 6 we get two distinct glimpses of the heavenly throne room. Let me paint a bit of a word picture for you.

In Revelation, when John recounts his experience of seeing God, it's as though he's scrambling for earthly words to describe the vision he was privileged to see. He describes the One seated on the throne with two gems, "jasper and carnelian," and the area around the throne as a rainbow that looked like an emerald. God, the One on the throne, resembles radiant jewels more than flesh and blood.

This sort of poetic, artistic imagery can be difficult for those of us who don't think that way. So imagine the most stunning sunset you've ever seen. Remember the radiant colors splashed across the sky? The way you stopped to gaze at it in awe? And how the words *wow* and *beautiful* seemed so lacking? That's a small bit of what John is talking about in Revelation 4 as he attempts to articulate his vision of heaven's throne room.

John describes "flashes of lightning" and "rumblings and peals of thunder" coming from God's throne, a throne that must be unlike any other. He writes that before the throne are seven blazing torches and something like a sea of glass that looks like crystal. Using ordinary words, he does his best to describe a heavenly place and a holy God.

Most intriguing to me is how John describes those who surround the throne. First, there are the twenty-four elders dressed in white and wearing golden crowns. Next, John describes four six-winged beings with eyes all over their bodies and wings. One has the face of a lion, one of an ox, one of a man, and one of an eagle.

I try to imagine what it would be like if I actually saw one of these creatures out in the woods or down at the beach. I would probably pass out! It would be terrifying to see a being with the face of a lion and eyes “all around and within.”

As if John’s description isn’t wild and strange enough, he then tells us what the beings are saying. The twenty-four elders cast their gold crowns before the One on the throne, fall on their faces before Him, and say, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” At the same time, the four creatures never stop (day or night) saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!” Just imagine being in that room, surrounded by the elders chanting God’s worth, and the creatures declaring God’s holiness.

The prophet Isaiah also had a vision of God in His throne room, but this time it is a more direct picture: “I saw the Lord seated on a throne.”

Wow. Isaiah saw that and lived? The Israelites hid themselves whenever God passed by their camp because they were too afraid to look at Him, even the back of Him as He moved away. They were scared they would die if they saw God.

But Isaiah looked and saw God. He writes that the bottom of God’s robe filled the whole temple, and that the seraphim appeared above Him. The seraphim each had six wings, similar to the creatures John describes in Revelation. Isaiah says they called out to one another, saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Then the foundations shook and smoke filled the house, which is similar to John’s description of flashes of lightning and peals of thunder.

Isaiah's description is less detailed than John's, but Isaiah shares more of his response to being in the throne room of God. His words reverberate in the wake of the smoky room and shaky foundation: "Woe is me... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." And then one of the seraphim brings Isaiah a piece of burning coal that had been smoldering on the altar. The creature touches Isaiah's mouth with the hot coal and tells him that his guilt is taken away.

Both of these descriptions serve a purpose. John's helps us imagine what the throne room of God looks like, while Isaiah's reminds us what our only response to such a God should be.

May Isaiah's cry become our own. Woe is me ... we are a people of unclean lips!



Perhaps you need to take a deep breath after thinking about the God who made galaxies and caterpillars, the One who sits enthroned and eternally praised by beings so fascinating that were they photographed, it would make primetime news for weeks. If you are not staggered, go to Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 and read the accounts aloud and slowly, doing your best to imagine what the authors describe.

The appropriate way to end this chapter is the same way we began it—by standing in awed silence before a mighty, fearsome God, whose tremendous worth becomes even more apparent as we see our own puny selves in comparison.