

CRAZY LOVE

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Preface

We all know something's wrong.

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. But I think we all feel deeply, that the church in many ways is not doing well.

I grew up believing in God without having a clue what He is like. I called myself a Christian and tried to stay away from all of the things that “good Christians” avoid. Christianity was simple: fight your desires in order to please God. Whenever I failed 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.

Until 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 largely during the times I spent reading His Word. The conviction I felt through the teachings of Scripture **changed everything. Some serious paradigm shattering happened in my life, and consequently in our church.**

It's exhilarating to be part of a group of believers who are willing to think biblically rather than conventionally where radical living is becoming the norm.

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

God put me in 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.

In so doing, we can alleviate the suffering in the world and change the reputation of His bride in America. Some people have told me “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 then they'd address their rejection of God rather than use the church as a scapegoat.

To begin this journey, we'll first address our inaccurate view of God and, consequently, of ourselves. We need to understand something. The core problem isn't the fact that we're lukewarm, stagnant Christians. The crux of it all is 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. **Jesus never begs us to give Him some small part of ourselves. He commands everything from His followers.**

Allow sacred truths to move you to worship.

After the foundation has been laid in the first three chapters, the last seven chapters call us to examine ourselves. 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 is uncomfortable. It's up to you to respond.

Chapter 1 – Stop Praying

What if I said, “Stop praying”? 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 in which spoken and written words are cheap 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. Let's begin this book by gazing at God in silence.

Why would God create more than 350,000,000,000 galaxies? Do you think maybe it was to make us say, “Wow, God is unfathomably big or perhaps “Who do I think I am”?

Did you know that a caterpillar has 228 separate and distinct muscles in its head? The average elm tree has approximately *6 million* leaves.

Have you ever thought about how diverse and creative God is? He didn't have to put 3,000 different species of trees within one square mile in the Amazon jungle, but he did.

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)?

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 are, His handiwork, and His creation all echo the truth that He is glorious.

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

There is an epidemic of spiritual amnesia going around, and none of us is immune.

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.

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.

Some mornings I don't feel like loving God. In our world, where hundreds of things distract us from God, we have to intentionally and consistently remind ourselves of Him.

We are programmed to focus on what we don't have, bombarded multiply 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.

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 is his deep heart conceives God to be like.

How do we learn to know Him?

We have seen how He is the Creator but what is he like? What are His characteristics? His defining attributes? How are we to fear Him? To speak to Him? This stuff is both basic and crucial.

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.

He is perfectly set apart, which nothing and no one to compare Him to. *That* is what it means to be "holy."

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. Have you ever seriously mediated on what it means?

He always has been. God exists outside of time, and since we are within time, there is no way we will ever totally grasp that concept.

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.

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 our thoughts before we think them.

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."

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 loves ones?

Psalm 115:3 “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. As much as we want God to explain himself to us, His creation, we are in no plane 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 just. 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. 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.

In Revelation 4 and Isaiah we get two distinct glimpses of the heavenly throne room.

The appropriate way to end this chapter is the same way we began 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.

Chapter 2 – You Might Not Finish This Chapter

You could die before you finish reading this chapter.

It's easy to think about today as just another day focused on family, think about your desires and needs. But there is nothing normal about today.

It's crazy that we think today is just a normal day to do whatever we want with. James writes, "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (4:13-14).

Do you really believe you could vanish at any minute? That perhaps today you will die?

Frederick Buechner writes, "Intellectually we all know that we will die, but we do not really know it in the sense that the knowledge becomes a part of us. We do not really know it in the sense of living as though it were true. On the contrary, we tend to live as though our lives would go on forever.

I'm a problem solver, so I have to focus on things that need fixing. God can see that my intensity and anxiety are ministry related. I worry because I take His work seriously.

Right?

But when there's that perplexing command: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). Notice that it doesn't end with "...unless you're doing

something extremely important.” No, it’s a command for all of us, and it follows with the charge, “Do not be anxious about anything” (v. 6).

When I am consumed by my problems I actually convey the belief that I think the circumstances are more important than God’s command to always rejoice. In other words, that I have a “right” to disobey God because of the magnitude of my responsibilities.

Worry implies that we don’t quite trust that God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what’s happening in our lives.

Stress says that the things we are involved in are important enough to merit our impatience, our lack of grace toward others, or our tight grip of control.

Basically, these two behaviors communicate that it’s okay to sin and not trust God because the stuff in my life is somehow exceptional.

Why are we so quick to forget God? Who do we think we are? I am still dumb enough to forget that life is all about God and not about me at all.

Many of us think and live like the movie of life is all about us.

Consider the movie of life...

God creates the world. (Were you alive then? Was God talking to you when He proclaimed “It is good” about all He had just made?)

Then people rebel against God (who, if you haven’t realized it yet, is the main character in this movie), and God floods the earth to rid it of the mess people made of it.

Several generations later, God singles out a ninety-nine-year old man called Abram and makes him the father of a nation (did you have anything to do with this?)

Later, along come Joseph and Moses and many other ordinary and inadequate people that the movie is also not about. God is the one who picks them and directs them and works miracles through them.

In the next scene, *God* sends judges and prophets to His nation because the people can't seem to give Him the one thing He asks of them (obedience).

And then, the climax: The Son of *God* is born among the people who *God* still somehow loves. While in this world, the Son teaches His followers what true love looks like. Then the Son of *God* dies and is resurrected and goes back up to be with *God*.

And even though the movie isn't finished yet, we know what the last scene holds. It's the scene I already described in chapter 1: the throne room of *God*. Here every being *God* who sits on the throne, for He alone is worthy to be praised.

From start to finish, this movie is obviously about God. He is the main character. *How is it possible that we live as though it is about us?*

We have only our two-fifths-of-a-second-long scene to live. I don't know about you, but I want my two-fifths of a second to be about my making much of God. First Corinthians 10:31 "...do it all for the glory of God." That is what each of our two-fifths of a second is about.

So what does that mean for you?

Frankly, you need to get over yourself. It might sound harsh, but that's seriously what it means.

Maybe life is rough right now, and everything feels like a struggle. God has allowed hard things in your life so you can show the world that your God is great and that knowing Him brings peace and joy, even when life is hard.

To be brutally honest, it doesn't really matter what place you find yourself in right now.

The point of your life is to point to Him.

Isn't life always fragile? It is never under control.

Turning inward is one way to respond; the other is to acknowledge our lack of control and reach out for God's help.

If life were stable, I'd never need God's help. I am thankful for the unknowns and that I don't have control, because it makes me run to God.

Brooke Bronkowski was a beautiful fourteen-year-old girl who was in love with Jesus. In junior high, she started a Bible study on her campus. She spent her babysitting money on Bibles so she could give them out to her unsaved friends.

“SINCE I HAVE MY LIFE BEFORE ME” By Brooke Bronkowski.

I have my life before me. I will give others the joy I have and God will give me more joy.

Brooke was in a car accident while driving to the movies. Her life on earth ended when she was just fourteen, but her impact didn't. Fifteen hundred people attended Brooke's memorial service.

I shared the gospel and invited those who wanted to know Jesus to come up and give their lives to Him. There must have been a least two hundred students on their knees at the front of the church praying for salvation. Ushers gave a Bible to each of them. Bibles that Brooke had kept in her garage, hoping to give out to all of her unsaved friends. In one day, Brooke led more people to the Lord than most ever will. It's good to think about death. Ecclesiastes wrote “...death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart” (7:2). ***Stories of people who died after living godly lives are stories with happy endings.***

Sadly, many people die while living selfishly. Their funerals are filled by individuals who stretch the truth in order to create a semblance of a meaningful life.

The truth is, some people waste their lives. This isn't meant to bash those who are gone, but rather to warn those who are alive.

When we face the holy God, “nice” isn't what we will be concerned with, and it definitely isn't what He will be thinking about. Any compliments you received on earth will be gone; all that will be left for you is truth. The church in Sardis had a great reputation, but it didn't matter. Jesus said to them, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1). All that matters is the reality ***of who we are before God.***

“His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

Perhaps that sounds harsh, but harsh words and the loving truth often go hand in hand.

You could be the next person in your family to die.

We have to *realize* it. We have to believe it enough that it changes how we live.

A friend has a particularly wise perspective on this subject. He was asked if he weren’t spending too much of his time serving and giving too much away. His gently but honest response was, “I wonder if you’ll say that after we’re dead.”

We need to stop living selfish lives, forgetful of our God. Our lives here are short.

Don’t let yourself forget. He is everything.

Chapter 3 – Crazy Love

You’ve heard God loves us. I believed this for years. The only problem is that it was a concept I was taught, not something I implicitly knew to be true. For years I “got” God’s love in my head, but didn’t fully understand it with my heart.

I don’t think I’m the only person who has misunderstood God’s love.

For me, it had much to do with my relationship with my own father. The concept of being wanted by a father was foreign to me.

My goal in our relationship was not to annoy my father. I would walk around the house trying not to upset him.

He died when I was twelve. I cried but also felt relief.

I think a lot of those emotions transferred to my relationship with God. For example, I tried hard not to annoy God with my sin or upset Him with my little problems. I had

no aspiration of being wanted by God; I was just happy not to be hated or hurt by Him.

My own love and desire for my kids' love is so strong that it opened my eyes to how much God desires and loves us.

My desire for my children is only a faint echo of God's great love for me and for every person He made.

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?" Mathew 7:11.

One word to describe my feelings about God in those first years of being a Christian, *fear*. I totally connected with passages like this one:

"He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. Isaiah 40: 22-24

Over time I realized that when we love God, we naturally run to Him—frequently and zealously. Jesus didn't command that we have a regular time with Him each day. Rather He tells us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." He called this the "first and greatest commandment" (Matt. 22: 37-38). The results are intimate prayer and study of His Word. Our motivation changes from guilt to love.

God longs for us to respond to His extravagant, unending love with true love expressed through our lives.

Fear is no longer the word I use to describe how I feel about God. Now I use words like reverent intimacy. I still fear God, and I pray that I always will. The Bible emphasizes the importance of fearing God. Our culture severely lacks the fear of God and many of us are plagued with amnesia. But for a long time, I narrowly focused on His fearsomeness to the exclusion of His great and abounding love.

Jeremiah 1 verses 4 and 5: “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’”

Don’t skim over this truth, really think about it. *God knew you and me before we existed.*

He determined what Jeremiah would do before he was even born. I questioned whether that was also true of me.

Then I remembered Ephesians 2:10, which tells us that we were created “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” That verse is meant for me and all others who have been “saved by grace through faith.”

God’s next words to Jeremiah assured me that I need not fear failure:

“Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the LORD. Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.” Jeremiah 1:6-10.

When Jeremiah voices his hesitation and fear, God-the God of the galaxies-reaches out and touches his mouth. Something a loving parent would do. I realized that I don’t have to worry God will ensure my success in accordance with His plan not mine.

Why when we constantly offend Him and are so unlovable and unloving, does God persist in loving us?

If God’s mercy didn’t exist, there would be no hope. No matter how good we tried to be, we would be punished because of our sins.

Isaiah 64:6 says, “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Our good deeds can never outweigh our sins.

The literal interpretation of “filthy rags” in this verse is “menstrual garments” (think used tampons...and if you’re disgusted by that idea, you get Isaiah’s point). Compared to God’s perfect holiness, that’s how our good deeds appear.

God’s mercy is a *free*, yet costly, *gift*. It cannot be earned. The wages of sin will always be death. But because of God’s mercy, sin is paid for through the death of Jesus Christ, instead of the death of you and me.

The very fact that a holy, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, merciful, fair, and just God loves you and me is nothing short of astonishing.

The greatest knowledge we can ever have is knowing God treasures us.

That really is amazing beyond description. The holy Creator sees you as His “glorious inheritance.”

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 we wonder, indifferently, how much we have to do for Him to get by.

If God is *truly* the greatest good on this earth, would He be loving us if He didn’t draw us toward what is best for us (even if that happens to be Himself)? **Doesn’t His courting, luring, pushing, calling and even “Threatening” demonstrate His love? If he didn’t do all of that, wouldn’t we accuse Him of being unloving?**

The greatest good on this earth is God. Period! God’s one goal for us is Himself.

Do you believe that God is the greatest thing you can experience in the whole world? Do you believe that the Good News is not merely the forgiveness of your sins, the guarantee that you won’t go to hell?

An important question to ask ourselves is this: Are we in love with God or just His stuff?

Imagine how awful it would feel to have your child say to you, “I don’t really love or want your love, but I *would* like my allowance, please.” Conversely what a beautiful

gift it is to have the one you love *look you in the eye and say, "I love you. Not your beauty, your money, your family, or your cat. Just you."* Can you say that to God?

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?

Chapter 4 – Profile of the Lukewarm

It is not scientific doubt, not atheism, not pantheism, not agnosticism, that in our day and in this land is likely to quench the light of the gospel. It is a proud, sensuous, selfish, luxurious, church-going, hollow-hearted prosperity.

He persists in loving us with unending outrageous love. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." Matthew 13:44

The man joyfully sold all that he had so that he could obtain the only thing that mattered.

In the United States, numbers impress us. We gauge the success of an event by how many people attend or come forward. We are wowed by big crowds.

Jesus questioned the authenticity of this kind of record keeping. In Luke chapter 8, **Jesus began speaking in parables—“so that” those who weren’t genuinely listening wouldn’t get it.**

Today, speakers are extra conscious of communicating in a way that is accessible to everyone. Speakers don’t use Jesus’ tactic to eliminate people who are not sincere seekers.

The fact is, He just wasn’t interested in those who fake it.

My caution to you is this: Do not assume you are good soil.

I think most American churchgoers are the soil that chokes the seed because of all the thorns. Thorns are anything that distracts us from God. When we want God and a bunch of other stuff, then that means we have thorns in our soil. ***A relationship with***

God simply cannot grow when money, sins, activities, favorite sports teams, addictions, or commitments are piled on top of it.

David Goetz writes, “Too much of the good life ends up being toxic.”

I will say it again: Do not assume you are good soil.

Has your relationship with God actually changed the way you live?

Are you satisfied being “godly enough” to get yourself to heaven, or to look good in comparison to others? Or can you say with Paul “want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Phil. 3:10)?

For a long time this verse had just too much Jesus for me. In my opinion, the verse should have ended after the word resurrection. The feedback I received from other Christians reassured me that this was a fine perspective, and it gave me little reason to strive to know Christ more. I was told I was good enough, “godly enough.”

The goals of American Christianity are often a nice marriage, children who don’t swear, and good church attendance. **Taking the words of Christ literally and seriously is rarely considered.** That’s for the “radicals” who are “unbalanced” and who go “overboard.” Most of us want a balanced life that we can control, that is safe, and that does not involve suffering.

Would you describe yourself as totally in love with Jesus Christ? Or do the words halfhearted, lukewarm, and partially committed fit better?

I am going to offer you a description of what halfhearted, distracted, partially committed, lukewarm people can look like. Take a searching, honest look at your life.

LUKEWARM PEOPLE attend church fairly regularly.

“The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. **There worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men’**” (Isa. 29:13)

LUKEWARM PEOPLE give money to charity and to the church...as long as it doesn't impinge on their standard of living.

“King David replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing’” (1 Chron. 21:24).

“As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on’” (Luke 21:1-4).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE tend to choose what is popular over what is right when they are in conflict. They desire to fit in. They care more about what people think than what God thinks of their hearts and lives.

“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:26).

“I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1).

“Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi’” (Matt. 23:5-7).

LUKEWARD PEOPLE don't really want to be saved from their sin; they want only to be saved from the penalty of their sin. Lukewarm people don't really believe that this new life Jesus offers is better than the old sinful one.

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not act. They assume such action is for “extreme” Christians, not average ones. *Lukewarm people call “radical” what Jesus expected of all his followers.*

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive your selves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).

“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:17).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE rarely share their faith. They do not want to be rejected, nor do they want to make people uncomfortable by talking about private issues like religion.

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven” (Matt. 10:32-33).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE gauge their morality or “goodness” by comparing themselves to the secular world. They feel satisfied that while they aren’t as hard-core for Jesus as so-and-so, they are nowhere as horrible as the guy down the street.

“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get’” (Luke 18:11-12).

LUKEWARD PEOPLE say they love Jesus, and He is, indeed, a part of their lives. But only a part. They give Him a section of their time, money, and thoughts, but He isn’t allowed to control their lives.

“As they were walking along the road a man said to him. ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’ He said to another man, ‘Follow me.’ But the man replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:57-62).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE love God, but not with all their heart, soul, and strength. They assure you that they try to love God that much, but the sort of total devotion isn't really possible for the average person; it's only for radicals.

“Jesus replied: ‘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” (Matt. 22:37-38).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE love other but do not seek to love others as much as they love themselves. Their love is focused on those who love them in return. There is little love for those who cannot love them back, much less for those who intentionally slight them.

There love is highly conditional and very selective, and generally comes with strings attached.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” (Matt. 5:43-47).

“Then Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous’” (Luke 14:12-14).

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.

“All these [commandments] I have kept since I was a boy,’ he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then comes, follow me.’ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus look at him and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a

camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:21-25).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE think about life on earth much more often than eternity in heaven. C. S. Lewis writes, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

“For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many lives as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. Any we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:18-20).

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE are thankful for their luxuries and comforts, and rarely consider trying to give as much as possible to the poor. Untold numbers of lukewarm people feel “called” to ministry to the rich; very few feel “called” to minister to the poor.

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me: (Matt. 25:34, 40).

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isa. 58:6-7).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE do whatever is necessary to keep themselves from feeling too guilty. They do the bare minimum, to be “good enough” without it requiring too much of them.

They ask, “How far can I go before it’s considered a sin?” instead of “How can I keep myself pure as a temple of the Holy Spirit?”

They ask, “How much do I have to give?” instead of “How much can I give?”

They ask, “How much time should I spend praying and reading my Bible?” instead of “I wish I didn’t have to go to work, so I could sit here and read longer!”

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:44-46).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE are continually concerned with playing it safe; they are slaves to the god of control. This keeps them from sacrificing and risking for God.

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich is good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share” (1 Tim. 6:17-18).

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE feel secure because they attend church made a profession of faith, were baptized, come from a Christian family, or live in America. Just as the prophets in the Old Testament warned Israel that they were not safe just because they lives in the land of Israel, so we are not safe just because we wear the label *Christian*.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

“Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation: (Amos 6:1).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE do not live by faith; their lives are structured so they never have to. They don't have to trust God if something unexpected happens—they have their savings account. **They don't genuinely seek out what life God would have them live—they have live figured and mapped out. They don't depend on God on a daily basis. The truth is, their lives wouldn't look much different if they suddenly stopped believing in God.**

“And he told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God’” (Luke 12:16-21; see also Hebrews 11).

LUKEWARM PEOPLE probably drink and swear less than average, but besides that, they really aren't very different from our typical unbeliever. They equate their partially sanitized lives with holiness, but they couldn't be more wrong.

“Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Matt. 23:25-28).

This profile of the lukewarm as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, is a call to “examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”

No one is totally immune to the behaviors described in the previous examples. However, there is a difference between a life that is characterized by these habits and a life that is in the process of being radically transformed. Take a serious self-inventory.

Everyone knows that if you sign up for the Marines, you have to do whatever they tell you. They own you.

Somehow this realization does not cross over to our thinking about the Christian life. Jesus didn't say that if you wanted to follow Him you could do it in a lukewarm manner. He said "Take up your cross and follow me." He also said, suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:31-33).

Jesus asks for everything. But we try to give Him less. Jesus said, Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again: It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. (Luke 14:34-35).

Jesus isn't just making a cute little analogy here. He is addressing those who aren't willing to give everything, who won't follow Him all the way. He is saying that lukewarm, halfhearted following is useless. He is saying that this king of salt is not even fit "for the manure pile."

Wow. How would you like to hear the Son of God say, "You would ruin manure"?

Lukewarm and uncommitted faith is completely useless.

Chapter 5 – Serving Leftovers to a Holy God

Of all the chapters, this one was the hardest for me to write. But I had to write this chapter.

We are going to look at scriptural examples of poor responses to God's gift of love.

As I see it, a lukewarm Christian is an oxymoron; there's no such thing. Churchgoers who are "lukewarm" are not Christians. We will not see them in heaven.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear,

so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Revelation 3:15-18

There is no gently rendering of the word *spit* in Greek. It connotes gagging, hurling, retching.

Jesus' call to commitment is clear: He wants all or nothing. The thought of a person calling himself a "Christian" without being a devoted follower of Christ is absurd.

Don't take my word for it. Read it yourself. The parable of the soils.

Is this idea of the non-fruit-bearing Christian something that we have concocted in order to make Christianity "easier"? So we can join the Marines, so to speak, without having to do all the work?

Jesus' intention in this parable was to compare the only good soil to the ones that were not legitimate alternatives.

Let's face it. We're willing to make changes in our lives only if we think it affects our salvation.

Our concern is more about going to heaven than loving the King. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15).

James 2:19 says, "You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." God doesn't just want us to have good theology; He wants us to know and love Him. First John 2:3-4 tells us, "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Call me crazy, but I think those verses mean that the person who claims to know God but doesn't obey His commands is a liar and that the truth really isn't in him.

Matthew 16:24-25, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

And in Luke 14:33, He says, "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

Some people claim that we can be Christians without necessarily becoming disciples. I wonder, then, why the last thing Jesus told us was to go into the world, making disciples of all nations, teaching them to *obey all* that He commanded. Notice He *didn't* add, "But hey, if that's too much to ask, tell them to just become Christians—you know, the people who get to go to heaven without having to commit to anything."

I do not want true believers to doubt their salvation as they read this. The scriptures demonstrate clearly that there is room for our failure and sin in our pursuit of God. I'm *not* saying that when you mess up, it means you were never really a genuine Christian. If that were true, no one could follow Christ.

The distinction is a posture of obedience and surrender, where a person perpetually moves toward Christ. **To call someone a Christian simply because he does some Christian-y things is giving false comfort to the unsaved. But to declare anyone who sins "unsaved" is to deny the reality and truth of God's grace.**

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 \$4,000 a month, you automatically make one hundred times more than 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're rich? We are rich. Filthy rich!

Whether we acknowledge our wealth or not, being rich is a serious disadvantage spiritually. William Wilberforce once said, "Prosperity hardens the heart."

God wants our best, deserves our best, and demands our best. Just ask Cain, upon whose offering God "did not look with favor" (Gen. 4:5).

For years I gave God leftovers and felt no shame. I simply compared myself to others. The bones I threw at God had more meat on them than the bones others threw, so I figured I was doing fine.

God gets a scrap or two only because we feel guilty for giving Him nothing.

The priests of Malachi's day thought their sacrifices were sufficient. They had spotless animals but chose to keep those for themselves and give their less desirable animals to God. They assumed God was pleased because they had sacrificed *something*.

God described this practice as *evil*.

Leftovers are not merely inadequate; from God's point of view (and lest we forget, His is the only one who matters), they're evil. Let's stop calling it "a busy schedule" or "bills" or "forgetfulness." It's called evil.

"But something's is better than nothing!" some protest. Really, is it? Does anyone enjoy token praise? I sure don't. I'd rather you not say anything than compliment me out of obligation or guilt. Why would we think God is any different?

In Malachi, God says, "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you, ... nor will I accept an offering from you" (NASB). God wanted the temple gates shut. The weak sacrifices of the laid-back priests were an insult to Him. He was saying that no worship is better than apathetic worship. I wonder how many church doors God wants to shut today.

Jesus' instruction to the people of the church at Laodicea. They were wealthy, but Jesus asks them to exchange their wealth for His gold that is refined through fire. Jesus asks them to give up what they thought was valuable, in exchange for what really matters.

Mark Buchana writes, "Physical sickness we usually defy. Soul sickness we often esign ourselves to."

Tim Kizziar said, "Our greatest fear as individuals and as a church should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter."

Many Christians flash around their "no trans fat" label, trying to convince everyone they are healthy and good. Yet they have no substantive or healthful elements to their faith. It's like the Laodiceans, who thought they had everything until Christ told them they were poor and wretched. They were all about declaring. We are wealthy, or we have good families, or we go to church every week. **It's not what you advertise that counts; it's what you are really made of.**

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" ever Sunday.

According to God, we are here to love. Not much else really matters.

So God assesses our lives based on how we love. But the word *love* is so overused and worn out. What does God mean by love? He tells us, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends....faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Do a little exercise with these verses, one profoundly convicting. Take the phrase *Love is patient* and substitute your name for the word *love*. Do it for every phrase in the passage.

By the end, don't you feel like a liar? If I am meant to represent what love is, then I often fail to love people well.

Following Christ is not a label we can display when it is useful. It must be central to everything we do and are.

If life is a river, then pursuing Christ requires swimming upstream. When we stop actively following Him, we automatically begin to be swept downstream.

Much of the American churchgoing population, while not specifically swimming downstream, is slowly floating away from Christ. It isn't a conscious choice, but it is nonetheless happening because little in their lives propels them toward Christ.

James writes, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead" (2:17). Many people who call themselves "Christians" in America lack manifestations of a vital and active faith.

This frightens me. It causes me to pray desperately and fervently for my congregation, for the groups of people I speak to, and for the church as a whole.

If he just showed up and said, “Follow me”? No explanation. No directions.

You could follow Him straight up a hill to be crucified. Or perhaps He would ask you to spend your time helping people who will never love you back and never show gratitude for what you gave up.

Consider this carefully—have you ever done so? Or was your decision to follow Christ flippant, based solely on feelings and emotion, made without counting the cost?

What scares me most are the people who are lukewarm and just don’t care. Many of us believe we have as much of God as we want right now. The fact is that *nothing* should concern us more than our relationship with God; it’s about eternity, and nothing compares with that.

We disgust God when we weigh and compare Him against the things of this world. It makes Him sick when we actually decide those things are better.

No wonder Jesus says He will spit lukewarm people out of His mouth?

This is vital, there is nothing more important or eternal: *Are you willing to say to God that He can have whatever He wants? Do you believe that wholehearted commitment to Him is more important than any other thing or person in your life? Do you know that nothing you do in this life will ever matter, unless it is about loving God and loving the people He has made?*

True faith means holding nothing back; it bets everything on the hope of eternity.

Taking-up-your-cross isn’t easy. **Jesus said the road is narrow and few will actually find it ... and fewer still among those who are rich. Like the parable of the sower, don’t assume you are the good soil; don’t assume you are one of the few on the narrow way.**

Chapter 6 – When You’re in Love

When you are truly in love, you go to great lengths to be with the one you love. Walking in the rain is romantic, not annoying. You’ll willingly spend a small fortune on the one you’re crazy about. When you are apart from each other, it’s painful. He or she is all you think about; you jump at any chance to be together.

In this book *God Is the Gospel*, John Piper essentially asks whether we are in love with God: The critical question, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there?

Paul writes, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (v.6). Is loving God—and, by extension, loving people—what you are about? Is it what being a Christian means to you? Do you live as though faith, demonstrated through love, really is the only thing that counts?

Why do so few people genuinely find joy and pleasure in their relationship with God? Why are the words of Psalm 63:1-5 not an honest reflection of our lives on most days?

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

Lukewarm living and claiming Christ’s name simultaneously is utterly disgusting to God.

When loving Him becomes obligation, few people want to hear from us about what we ourselves feel is a boring, guilt-ridden chore!

God wants to change us; He died so that we could change.

The answer lies in *letting* Him change you.

Jesus Christ didn’t die only to save us from hell; He also died to save us from our bondage to sin. John 10:10 says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” He wasn’t talking about the future. He meant now, in this lifetime.

I need God to help me love God.

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.

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

As we begin to focus more on Christ, loving Him and others becomes more natural. As long as we are pursuing Him, we are satisfied in Him. It is when we stop actively loving Him that we find ourselves restless and gravitating toward other means of fulfillment. **Jesus said, “In this world *you will have trouble*. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Life isn’t perfect when you follow Christ wholeheartedly; you will have trouble, Jesus says—it is pretty much guaranteed.**

But he has overcome the world. So take heart, keep on, fight the good fight, pray continuously, and do not grow weary.

...they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42

When I look at my relationship with God as a chore, a sacrifice, then I am getting glory—not God. I keep saying, “Look what I have sacrificed for God....” or “Listen to what I do for God. It’s hard, exhausting really....”

We are always the recipients of His great gifts. Not the givers. Never the givers.

The Bible is right—“It is better to give than to receive: (Acts 20:35).

God is the only true Giver, and He needs nothing from us. But still He wants us. He gave us life so that we might seek and know Him.

In Malachi 1:11 God tells the priests that if they don’t want to give Him excellence, others will. He certainly doesn’t need to beg or plead with us. We should be the ones begging to worship in His presence.

“...test Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows’” (Mal. 3:10).

This is the only place in the Bible where God invites His people to test Him to try to out-five Him. He knows it is impossible. **Nothing has strengthened my faith more than seeing God bless what I give back to Him, what I surrender at His feet.**

When we work for Christ out of obligation, it *feels* like work. But when we truly love Christ, our work is a manifestation of that love, and it feels like love.

Not one of us will ever be worthy. It is useless to attempt earning it. But there really is a God who forgives everything and loves endlessly.

Chapter 7 – Your Best Life...Later

You have a distinct choice to make: just let life happen, which is tantamount to serving God your leftovers, or actively run toward Christ.

Do you understand that it's impossible to please God in any way other than wholehearted surrender?

What does running toward Christ and pursuing Love look like in daily life?

The best place to look is in Scripture; and study the examples of those who followed God wholeheartedly. The best passage is probably Hebrews 11.

These people were far from perfect, yet they had faith in God. Noah spent 120 years building an ark. Having faith often means ***doing what others see as crazy. Something is wrong when our lives make sense to unbelievers.***

Christians today like to play it safe. We want to put ourselves in situations where we are safe "even if there is no God." But if we truly desire to please God, we cannot live that way.

The ultimate example of sacrifice and surrender is, of course, Jesus. Your attitude should be the same as His...

Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11).

John clearly tells us that “whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). Are you ready and willing to make yourself nothing? If your honest answer is yes, are those intentions manifested in your life?

How would my life change if I actually thought of each person I came into contact with as Christ?

Jesus is saying that we show tangible love for God in how we care for the poor and those who are suffering. He expects us to treat the poor and the desperate as if they were Christ Himself.

Ask yourself this: If you actually saw Jesus starving, what would you do for him?

This is how we know that love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? **Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.** This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. 1 John 3:16-20

John questions whether it is possible to truly have God’s love in you if you have no compassion for the poor.

God didn’t just give a little for us; He gave His best. He gave Himself. John is saying that it is no different for us: True love requires sacrifice. And our love is shown by how we live our lives: “Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

Another important element of giving is with our time. Most of us are so busy that the thought of adding one more thing to our weekly schedule is stressful. Instead of adding in another thing to our lives, perhaps God wants us to give Him all of our time and let Him direct it as He sees fit. In John 3:16 the connection between loving and giving evidently established.

Giving that is not motivated by love is worth nothing. As we love more genuinely and deeply, giving becomes the obvious and natural response. Taking and keeping for ourselves becomes unattractive.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have to little." 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Paul was asking the Corinthian believers to give to the impoverished saints in Jerusalem, the goal being that no one would have too much or too little.

The concept of downsizing so that others might upgrade is biblical, beautiful ... and nearly unheard of.

Dare to imagine what it would mean for you to take the words of Jesus seriously.

Dare to believe that those really are your brothers and sisters in need.

Do you believe that? Do you lie like you believe it?

After hearing this truth preached, a guy at my church 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. He is living like he believes.

Dream a little about what that might look like for you. Is it intimidating to think about giving radically and liberally?

"It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our final day".

When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples (Luke 9:3), He told them to "take nothing for the journey." Why not?

Jesus was forcing His disciples to trust Him. God would have to come through for them because they had nothing else to fall back on.

This place of trust isn't a comfortable place to be; in fact, it flies in the face of everything we've been taught about proper planning. We like finding refuge in what we already have rather than in what we hope God will provide.

God wants us to trust Him with abandon. He wants to be our refuge.

Walking in genuine intimacy and full surrender to God requires great faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

What are you doing right now that requires faith?

Life is comfortable when you separate yourself from people who are different from you. That epitomizes what my life was like; characterized by comfort.

But God doesn't call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust Him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if He doesn't come through.

Chapter 58 of Isaiah speaks powerfully to the present day.

We are each given different gifts and talents by our Master. The thing that matters most is how we use what we have been given, not how much we make or do compared to someone else. **What matters is that we spend ourselves.**

Chapter 8 – Profile Of The Obsessed

Obsessed: *To have the mind excessively preoccupied with a single emotion or topic.*

The idea of hold back certainly didn't come from Scripture. The Bible teaches us to be consumed with Christ and to faithfully live our His words. The Holy Spirit stirs in us a joy and peace when we are fixated on Jesus, living by faith, and focused on the life to come.

I know a lot of people who don't know Christ and are really nice people—nicer and more fun to be with, in fact, than a lot of Christians I know.

There has to be more to our faith than friendliness, politeness, and even kindness.

Jesus teaches in Luke's gospel:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even “sinners” love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even “sinners” do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even “sinners” lend to “sinners,” expecting to be

repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:32-36).

True faith is loving a person after he has hurt you. True love makes you stand out.

Amish people visited the shooter's family to say they had forgiven him.

It is just this sort of love that is crazy to the world: true love, a kind found nowhere but through Christ.

Oftentimes, my first response when someone does something to me—or worse, to my wife or to one of my kids—is retaliation. I don't *want* to bless those who hurt me or people I love dearly.

But that is exactly what Christ asks us to do. He commands that we give without expecting anything in return.

Do you give to those who would do you harm, if they could? To those who have already done you harm? This is Christ's love.

The love for equals is a human thing—of friend for friend, brother for brother. It is to love that is loving and lovely. The world smiles. The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing—the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world. The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing—to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints. And then there is the love for the enemy—love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer. This is God's love. It conquers the world.

We are consumed by safety. Obsesses with it, actually. I am questioning how we've made safety our highest priority. We've elevated safety to the neglect of whatever God's best is, whatever would bring God the most glory.

Would you be willing to pray this prayer? God bring me closer to You whatever it takes...

People who are obsessed with Jesus aren't consumed with their personal safety and comfort above all else. Obsessed people care more about God's kingdom coming to this earth than their own lives being shielded from pain or distress.

I decided to go buy some items to give away to those who needed them more than I do.

But it was embarrassing.

I realized that everyone I knew had enough. I needed to change that. I needed to go and intentionally meet people who don't live like I do. People who could never repay me.

First Timothy reaffirms that we are not to be controlled by money or to pursue it: Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:6-13).

People who are obsessed with Jesus live lives that connect them with the poor in some way or another. Obsessed people believe that Jesus talked about money and the poor so often because it was really important to Him (1 John 2:4-6; Matt. 16:24-26).

Sometimes I feel like when I make decisions that are remotely biblical, people who call themselves Christians are the first to criticize and say I'm crazy, that I'm taking the Bible too literally, or that I'm not thinking about my family's well-being.

When I returned from Africa, I felt very strongly that we were to sell our house and move into something smaller, in order to give more away. I do not remember a single person who encouraged me.

We ended up moving into a house half the size of our previous one, and we haven't regretted it. **My response to the cynics, in the context of eternity, was, am I the crazy one for selling my house? Or are you for not giving more, serving more, being with your Creator more?**

If one person "wastes" away his day by spending hours connecting with God, and the other person believes he is too busy or has better things to do than worship the Creator and Sustainer, who is the crazy one? If one person invests in the poor—which, is giving to Jesus Himself—and the other remodels a temporary dwelling who is the crazy one?

When people gladly sacrifice it is obvious that they trust in the promises of God. Why is it that the story of someone who has actually done what Jesus commands we call it radical when, to Jesus, it is simply the way it should be?

Obsessed people are more concerned with obeying God than doing what is expected or fulfilling the status quo. A person who is obsessed with Jesus will do things that don't always make sense in terms of success or wealth on this earth. As Martin Luther put it, "There are two days on my calendar: this day and that day" (Luke 14:25-35; Matt. 7:13-23; 8:18-22; Rev. 3:1-6).

The church in America loves to turn saints into celebrities.

Too many people start to believe that they really are something special.

A number of students told me I was their "favorite speaker." **I loved it. I thanked God for helping me speak so well.**

About three minutes into my prayer, I stopped. It hit me that the students were talking about me, not God. I was standing before a holy God and robbing Him of the glory that was rightfully His.

God says, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another. I realized immediately that any attention I received belonged to God.

It's pride, plain and simple, that keeps me from giving God all the glory and keeping some of it for myself. It is a battle we all fight.

One of the ways I know to fight against pride is through focused prayer.

A person who is obsessed with Jesus knows that the sin of pride is always a battle. Obsessed people know that you can never be “humble enough,” and so they seek to make themselves less known and Christ more known. Matt. 5:16

I work hard to serve God, but it isn't to prove my devotion.

I'm actually in love. Maybe that sounds corny to you, but I can't think of a more appropriate way to say it.

I question whether many American churchgoers are really in love with God because they are so hesitant to do anything for Him.

People who are obsessed with Jesus do not consider service a burden. Obsessed people take joy in loving God by loving His people (Matt. 13:44; John 15:8).

People are suffering!

I believe that God wants His people, His church, to meet needs. The Scriptures are filled with commands and references about caring for the poor and for those who cannot help themselves. The crazy part about God's heart is that He doesn't *just* ask us to give; He desires that we love those in need *as much as we love ourselves*. Matt. 22:39

Non-churchgoers tend to see Christians as takers rather than givers. When Christians sacrifice and give widely to the poor, that is truly a light that glimmers. The Bible teaches that the church is to be that light, that sign of hope, in an increasingly dark and hopeless world. Matthew 5:16

People who are obsessed with God are known and givers, not takers.

Obsessed people genuinely think that others matter as much as they do, and they are particularly aware of those who are poor around the world (James 2:14-26).

Most Americans think about life on earth way too much. Much of our time, energy, and money are channeled toward that which is temporary.

For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many lives as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven....

Grandma Clara, a real-life example of a person consumed with Jesus. I once attended a play with my wife and some of her relatives. During intermission, I leaned over and asked what she thought of the play. She said, "Oh honey, I really don't want to be here right now." When I asked why, she replied, "I just don't know if this is where I want to be when Christ returns. I'd rather be helping someone or on my knees praying. **I don't want Him to return and find me sitting in a theater.**"

Yes, we are called to "keep watch" (Matt. 24:42), but it's strange to see someone who takes that command, and so many others, seriously. It's convicting.

A person who is obsessed thinks about heaven frequently. Obsessed people orient their lives around eternity; they are not fixed only on what is here in front of them.

Here, O Israel: The Lord our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on you children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on you gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Within this command to love God with "all your heart and with all you soul and with all your strength," every fiber of humanity is addressed. **Our goal as people who follow Christ should be no less than becoming people who are madly in love with God.**

A person who is obsessed is characterized by committed, settled, passionate love for God, above and before every other thing and every other being.

God wants us to be open with Him.

God desires true intimacy with each of us, and that comes only when we trust Him enough to be fully transparent and vulnerable.

People who are obsessed are raw with God; they do not attempt to mask the ugliness of their sins or their failures. Obsessed people don't put it on for God; He is their safe place, where they can be at peace.

The average Christian in the United States spends ten minutes per day with God; meanwhile, the average American spends over four hours a day watching television.

Perhaps TV is not your thing. How much of your money is spent on yourself, and how much is directed toward God's kingdom? How much of your time is focused on God's work and purposes?

God doesn't want religious duty. God wants His Word to be a delight to us, so much so that we meditate on it day and night.

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 forty minutes on Sunday is not enough to sustain them for a whole week, especially when they will encounter so many distractions and alternative messages.

There are reasons that we are where we are and who we are, and they aren't random.

A person who is obsessed with Jesus is more concerned with his or her character than comfort. Obsessed people know that true joy doesn't depend on circumstances or environment; it is a gift that must be chosen and cultivated, a gift that ultimately comes from God (James 1:2-4).

We cannot start believing that we are indispensable to God.

I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.... Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill you vows to the Most High. Psalm 50:9-12, 14

There is no way we can contribute or add to God.

A person who is obsessed with Jesus knows that the best thing he can do is be faithful to his Savior in every aspect of his life, continually saying "Thank You!" to God. An

obsessed person knows there can never be intimacy if he is always trying to pay God back or work hard enough to be worthy. He revels in his role as child and friend of God.

Chapter 9 – Who Really Lives That Way?

The stories that follow are true. They tell of people who sought to live their lives fully surrendered to God. Some are still alive.

In his letter to the church in Sardis, Jesus said, “You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die....”

Jesus commended the few who were faithful. There are a few in every generation who offer examples worth following.

Jamie Lang

When Jamie was twenty-three years old, she flew from the United States to Tanzania with \$2,000 from her savings account. She planned to stay until she ran out of money, at which point she would come home.

Jamie was overwhelmed by all of the need that she encountered, so she started praying that God would allow her to make a radical difference in one person’s life. After about six months, she met an eight-year-old girl at church who was carrying a baby on her back. Jamie learned that the baby’s mother was dying from AIDS and that she was too weak to care for him. Jamie began to buy formula for the little boy, Junio, to provide him with the nutrition he desperately needed. At the time, he was half the size of a healthy baby.

Jamie fell in love with baby Junio. She wondered if she was being foolish—a barely twenty-four-year-old, single, white American entertaining thoughts of adopting a baby. Besides, she didn’t even know if Tanzania allowed international adoptions. Eventually, she discovered that the country *didn’t* allow international adoptions; however, because she had lived there for over six months, she could establish residency.

Before Junio’s Mom died from AIDS, she came to Jamie and said, “I have heard how you are taking care of my son, and I have never known such a love. I want to be saved.” Just before she died, she said, “I know that my son is taken care of, and I will see him in heaven someday. “

Jamie spent six months going through the adoption process and then five more months working with the American embassy to get Junio a visa. When she finally came home, she had been gone for a year and a half.

Junio is now five years old, totally healthy, and HIV negative. When Junio's mom was pregnant with him, she took a "morning-after pill" late in her pregnancy in order to abort him. But instead it induced premature labor, and because Junio was so small, no bleeding occurred during his birth. Thus, he did not contract HIV from his mother. What was intended to end his life, God used to save it.

Since adopting Junio, Jamie has gotten married, had a little girl, and is moving back to Tanzania with her family to work with Wycliffe to translate the Bible for a group that has never heard it before.

Rachel Saint

Rachel was born in 1914 in Pennsylvania, the only daughter among eight children. Her father was a stained-glass artist and their family often had very little food growing up.

When Rachel was eighteen, a kind, wealthy, elderly woman took Rachel on a trip to Europe and offered to make Rachel her heiress if she would be her companion for the rest of her life. While Rachel contemplated it, she knew she couldn't accept the offer of a comfortable life spent sipping tea and conversing.

After twelve years working at a hallway house for alcoholics, Rachel enrolled in linguistics school and became a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators in South America. She spent several years working with the Shapra Indians of Peru, but ultimately knew she was called to work with the Waorani Indians of Ecuador, who were notorious for spearing to death any outsiders immediately upon contact.

Eventually, Rachel was introduced to a Waorani woman, Dayuma, who agreed to teach Rachel the language of her people. For years Rachel studied the language and witnessed to Sayuma about Jesus Christ as she waited patiently for an opportunity to go to the Waorani without being killed. Rachel's own brother, Nate, a pilot for Mission Aviation Fellowship, had been killed by the Waorani people when they attacked him and four other missionaries. This only sharpened Rachel's desire to tell these people about the love of Christ.

After many years, Rachel finally went to meet and live with the Waorani people. She lived with them for twenty years. Over time, their culture of revenge and murder was transformed by hearing what they called “God’s carvings” (the words of the Bible). The Waorani people became her family. They gave Rachel the Waorani name Nimu, which means “star”.

Rachel eventually translated the New Testament into their language, and today she is buried with her people in Ecuador. At her funeral, as Waorani friend said, “She called us her brothers. She told us how to believe. Now she is in heaven.... God is building a *house* for all of us, and that’s where we’ll see Nimu again.”

George Mueller

George was born in Prussia in 1805 and was attending the University of Halle when he became a Christian. Up until then he had been infamous for his gambling debts, drunken stories, and escapades. But his life was transformed when he came to know Christ.

He finished school and left for England to be a preacher. He and his British wife eventually settled in Bristol, England, where they saw many orphans roaming the streets—uncared for, unfed, often sick, and virtually guaranteed death at a young age. At this time, writers like Charles Dickens and William Blake had not yet brought attention to the plight of these children, and nothing was being done to help them.

George and his wife decided to start an orphanage that would be entirely free of charge, and for which they would never ask any money or support. When they had needs, they would go to God alone, trusting that He would give them everything they needed.

Many people were incredulous, and so the Muellers’ purpose in starting the orphanage became twofold: The first was obviously to help the orphans; the second was to show people what it looked like to trust God for *everything*.

When the first orphan house opened, George and his wife, Mary, prayed for everything they needed. According to George’s meticulous records, God provided all that they asked for. By the time George died, in 1898, over ten thousand orphans had been housed and cared for in the five orphan houses they built.

During his lifetime, a million and a half pounds went through George's hands in the form of donations. He directed every cent toward those in need. After his death, a British paper wrote of George that he "robbed the cruel streets of thousands of victims, the jails of thousands of felons, and the poorhouses of thousands of helpless waifs." Another newspaper noted that it had all been accomplished by prayer alone.

Cornerstone Community Church

This year we committed to giving away 50 percent of our budget. Because we believe that when Jesus said to "love your neighbor as yourself," He wasn't kidding. If we really want to love our neighbors as ourselves, then it makes sense that we spend at least as much on them as we do on ourselves.

We had a beautiful plan for a new sanctuary that would have cost many millions of dollars. Now, however, we are in the process of getting permits to build an outdoor amphitheater that will seat plenty of people and save us about \$20 million.

I'm sure there will be days when it's uncomfortable outside but there will also be joy in knowing that we're sitting in the cold so that someone else can have a blanket.

I hope these life stories have done more than encourage you; I hope they have eliminated every excuse for not living a radical, love-motivated life.

Chapter 10 – The Crux Of The Matter

We have a God who is a Creator, not a duplicator.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

I wrote this book because much of our talk doesn't match our lives. We say things like, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and "Trust in the Lord with all your heart." Then we live and plan like we don't believe God even exists. But true faith means holding nothing back.

A friend of mine once said that Christians are like manure: spread them out and they help everything grow better, but keep them in one big pile and they stink horribly.

Which are you? The kind that reeks, around which people walk a wide swath? Or the kind that trusts God enough to let Him spread you out.

I was convicted by my lack of faith. I realized that my choices had situated me in a pile of stinking manure, and this motivated me to put myself in uncomfortable situations. I didn't "hear God calling me". I just chose to go. I obeyed.

Most of us use "I'm waiting for God to reveal His calling on my life" as a means of avoiding action. Did you hear God calling you to sit in front of the television yesterday? Or to go on your last vacation? Probably no, but you still did it. The point we are quick to rationalize our entertainment and priorities yet are slow to commit to serving God.

If we love, then we obey. Period. This sort of matter-of-fact obedience is part of what it means to live a life of faith.

I still struggle to stay focused on Jesus every day. But a couple of things help me keep going.

First, I remember that if I stop pursuing Christ, I am letting our relationship deteriorate. When I pray, I sometimes ask God to make it the most intimate time of prayer I've ever had.

Second, I remember that we are not alone. It reminds me that there is so much more to our existence than what we can see. What we do reverberates through the heavens and into eternity.

Try for a whole day to be conscious of heaven.

Our view of the Holy Spirit is too small. We have to remember that the Holy Spirit lives in us. It is individual people living Spirit-filled lives that will change the church.

The imperative part means that being filled with the Spirit isn't something we do once; rather, it is something we do always and repeatedly. And the passive element communicates God's necessary action in the process of filling.

How we believers live out our lives is a microcosm of the life of the church.

Part of your responsibility in the body of Christ is to help set the pace for the church by listening and obeying and living Christ. **You do not need to preach you simply need to live out in your daily life the love and obedience that God has asked of you.**

When people make changes in their lives, it carries greater impact than when they merely make impassioned declarations. The world needs Christians who don't tolerate the complacency of their own lives.

Is This What I Want to Be Doing When Christ Comes Back?

The Bible is clear that each of will stand before God and account for our lives:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Cor. 5:10)

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom. 14:10-12)

What will people say about your life in heaven? Even more important, how will you answer the King when He says, "What did you do with what I gave you?"

Now close this book. Get on your knees before God. And then live the life he has created and empowered you through the Holy Spirit to live.

May you be able to say at the end of your life, **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Q: You talk about what it means to be 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 statemet?

Sermons have become Christian entertainment. 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.

We've developed a habit of listening to the Word of God and not obeying it.

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

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